

# If God is So Good, Why Does He Let Me Hurt?

This is probably the biggest question, and the biggest obstacle to trusting God, in Christianity. It's a legitimate question, and it deserves a thoughtful answer that honors the amount of pain attached to it. Disclosure: I am writing this while beset by the most physical pain I've experienced since post-polio syndrome started attacking my body with the "unholy trinity" of pain, weakness and fatigue. It hurts to stand, it hurts to walk. Every single step.

Why does God allow it? And my pain is *nothing* compared to the horrific suffering of millions around the world. Doesn't He care? Why doesn't He stop it—surely He can. He could stop it all with a single word. So why does He let innocent people—especially children, for heaven's sake—suffer?

We need to put evil and suffering into perspective, and that means the Really Big Picture. Starting before the beginning of time. When all there was, was God: Father, Son and Spirit, engaged in a three-Personed "holy hug" that had no beginning and has no end. A continual celebration of love, adoration, respect, and delight in each other. At some point Father God decided to create mankind and draw us into His circle of love, adopting us as sons (Eph. 1:4-5) and creating a Bride for His eternal Son (Rev. 19:7), a fit companion who would reign with the Lamb (Rev. 22:5).

But God knew that all of human history would unfold between the bookends of the creation of mankind and the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. The God of light and life, of love and truth, knew that all those things are found only in Him; He knew that to reject Him meant choosing darkness and death, isolation and deception. He knew that Adam would rebel, that His perfect creation would crash and burn in the Fall, and that everything

would be infected and corrupted by sin. He knew that every human being would be born with a compulsion to reject Him, to live disconnected from Him, independent from Him—something like spiritual HIV+, insuring a death sentence. And sure enough, the mortality rate is still 100%.

God knew all this, and He created us anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

Because God is love, He created people to love, and He created people to love Him back. In order for us to choose to return His love, we needed to be free to choose NOT to love Him. God made us with the very real option to say no to Him, so that our yes would mean something. The alternative would be the equivalent to making a phone say, “Good morning, I love you.” The words might be there but there is no heart and no choice behind them—they are nothing more than the result of a programming code. God wanted real and actual love, and that meant that some people He made and dearly loved, could and would say no.

When people say no to God, they not only cut themselves off from relationship with Him, they open the door to all kinds of evil. Some of it comes from sinful human hearts; some of it comes from the demonic realm, angels who also said no to God and became devils. Evil was unleashed by Adam when he disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) and it has been causing havoc, pain and suffering ever since. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that this world plagued by pain and disease, deliberate meanness and selfishness, is not God’s original perfect creation. If it were, God would indeed be a horrible monster. He knew Adam would open the door to all kinds of evil and suffering, and He allowed Adam to do it anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

Why does God let people suffer?

God uses suffering to cleanse us, to mature us, to burn up

shallowness. (Please see my article [The Value of Suffering.](#)) [He uses pain](#) as His instrument to shape us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). God has no magic wand that instantly transforms us from something broken and dirty (and we are far more broken and dirty than we have any idea) into something whole and beautiful. There is no divine “Bibbity-Bobbity-Boo.”

Instead, the Son left heaven, wrapped Himself in human flesh, and came to earth where He lived a perfect, sinless life. Every day of His earthly life, He suffered as a human, limiting Himself to a body that would get tired, hungry, thirsty and dirty. What the first Adam messed up, Jesus the Second Adam corrected. Where Adam disobeyed the Father, Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8). Jesus suffered throughout His incarnation simply because of His limitations as a human, then suffered an unimaginably horrible death through crucifixion, made even worse because He absorbed all the sin of every human being who had ever lived, was living on the earth at that time, and would ever exist in the future. He took our sin into Himself, actually becoming our sin (2 Cor. 5:21), so that when He died, our sin died with Him. But the Father raised Him from the dead, and He is alive at His Father’s right hand right now in heaven.

This means that God knows what it means to suffer. There is no pain, no suffering we can endure, that God Himself did not experience even more during Jesus’ time on earth. This same suffering God promised, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). The Father knew He would send the Son to suffer, and the Son knew that’s what He would leave heaven for.

He did it anyway. Because He knew the end result was worth it.

God allows pain and suffering and evil because He has a plan, and He’s working His plan. The end result is that He is redeeming and restoring all the evil, pain and suffering of this sin-sick world. He will set all things right in the end. The last chapter of the Bible makes it clear that there is a

happy ending to what is NOT a fairy tale. What started out as a Three-Personed holy hug of the Father, Son and Spirit loving each other while still remaining one God, will be a hugely enlarged circle of love that includes millions, possibly billions of people God made in His image, marked "Mine," and drew into the divine circle to love and be loved forever.

At that point I believe we will agree, as we look back on evil, pain and suffering on earth, that it was so, so worth it.

This blog post originally appeared at [If God Is So Good, Why Does He Let Me Hurt?](#) on July 15, 2014

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## **"Is Soul Sleep Biblical?"**

I am writing to seek clarification on the rather thorny issue of life after death. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Paul outlines how the process of judgment will take place. He says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud cry of summons, with the shout of an archangel, and with the blast of the trumpet of God. And those who have departed this life in Christ will rise first." Isn't this a substantive indication of "soul sleep"? If what Paul asserts is anything to go by it means that after death the soul remains in somewhat a "holding cell" until the day of judgment regardless of the person's beliefs and tenets prior to death. An appendage would be 1 Samuel 28:1-14; I believe this passage also corroborates the "holding cell" school of thought.

Thanks for your letter. This is a very important issue. I am personally persuaded that the doctrine of "soul sleep" is

incorrect. When the Bible speaks of death in terms of “sleep,” it is speaking this way because the person’s body looks as if it were asleep. In other words, this way of speaking has to do with the body, and not the soul.

This is evident, I think, when one considers a passage like Luke 16:19-31. Both the rich man and Lazarus die, but their souls are very far from being “asleep” (in the sense of unconscious). The men in this story, although physically dead, are pictured as consciously awake and aware of their surroundings. Their bodies have died, but their souls are very much conscious in the afterlife.

This is also evident in Revelation 6:9-11. And it is further supported by the teaching (concerning believers) that when we die, we go immediately to be with the Lord. Here, remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “Today, you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Or consider Paul’s statements in passages like 2 Cor. 5:1-10 or Philippians 1:23. All of these passages indicate, I think, that believers are conscious and with the Lord in paradise between death and resurrection. Unbelievers, likewise, are also conscious (though they are in torment and separated from the Lord).

Hence, the Bible seems to teach that we continue to experience some form of personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection.

I hope that these passages from Scripture will help to clear up this issue for you.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted July 2014

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# **“Your Answer About OT Prophecies of Jesus’ Resurrection Are Troubling”**

You responded to a question written by someone titled, [“Where are the OT Prophecies of Jesus’ Resurrection?”](#) Your answer is troubling. In Acts 13:32 God the Holy Spirit through Luke makes it expressly clear that He did prophesy in the OT regarding Christ’s resurrection. You answered that there are no prophecies in the OT about Jesus’ resurrection. Summed up: Your answer is in contradiction to Acts 13:32. Resolution?

I do (in fact) believe that there are OT predictions concerning the resurrection of Christ. The issue I was wrestling with in my response, however, is whether any of these predictions are “explicit” or “specific.” I state this quite clearly in my original letter:

“I do not think there are any specific predictions of Jesus’ resurrection in the OT.”

And although I could always be wrong, it doesn’t seem to me that the predictions are of this sort. It is only after His resurrection that we can clearly see that these passages were intended to refer to the resurrection of Christ. Prior to this, however, it does not seem to me that it was clear from the OT that the Messiah would be raised from the dead. This is certainly not something that the Jews of Jesus’ day (including Jesus’ own disciples) were expecting. This is quite clear, I think, if you look at those passages in which Jesus predicts His resurrection to His own disciples (e.g. Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; etc.). Indeed, the apostle John tells us quite explicitly that he did not believe until he saw some evidence

of Jesus' resurrection. And (speaking for himself and the other disciples) he specifically tells us why:

"For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

In other words, \_\_\_\_\_, in spite of all the OT prophetic evidence AND Jesus' repeated predictions that He would rise from the dead after being crucified, the disciples did not understand any of it. It was still not clear to them. They were not expecting the death and resurrection of their Messiah and they were initially quite surprised by it all.

So while I agree that there are OT predictions of the resurrection of Christ, I just don't see that these predictions are explicit in the sense of telling us directly, "The Messiah will be raised from the dead," etc. Of course, if you can point one out to me that is explicit in this sense, I would be very grateful.

So it seems to me that the resolution to your difficulty, \_\_\_\_\_, is to read your sources a bit more carefully in the future.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

Posted July 2, 2014

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# Transgender Children

How should we think about the growing number of children being told they are transgender? A recent YouTube video from parents of a six-year-old transgender child named Ryland went viral, with well over six million views in just a couple of weeks. A beautiful little girl announced she was a boy, *insisted* she was a boy. Her parents' research apparently was limited to LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) sources, and they decided to raise her as a boy, cut her hair like a boy, dress her like a boy, and use male pronouns to feed her illusion that she is a boy. The internet exploded with enthusiastic praise for this family.

How should we think about situations like this from a biblical perspective?

That's the key: we need to understand that this is really a worldview issue. Perspective is crucial. Where you start makes all the difference. If you leave God out of it, starting with the person trying to make sense of the feeling that one's body is not aligned with their internal sense of gender, then confusion is inevitable. If people feel free to define themselves as they wish, then sex and gender can be seen as elastic or fluid—and manipulatable. It's the modern-day expression of an Old Testament phenomenon that never worked out well, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" in the times of the Judges (Judges 17:6).

But if you start with God as creator, with the right to choose a baby's gender, then that makes a huge difference. When baby Ryland's birth was announced with a happy, "It's a girl!"—God was speaking His intention for her identity and her life.

Sometimes children try on alternate identities—girls saying they are boys, boys saying they are horses. Parents are responsible for modeling logic and wisdom (not to mention life experience) in their response to this kind of proclamation.



When Ryland started screaming “I’m a boy,” it was a perfect opportunity to ask some critical thinking (and critically important) questions: “What is a boy?” “Why don’t you like being a girl?” Their video says that Ryland “began to show aversion to anything feminine.” This, of course, is the story of many girls whom God created as tomboys, who don’t like the stereotypical pink-girly-girl attributes our culture labels as feminine. The problem is not an aversion to pink frills; the problem is a too-narrow definition of femininity. [Please see my post [The Gender Spectrum](#).]

If Ryland’s parents continue down the path of other parents who enable their children to feed the unrealistic fantasy that they can choose to be anything they want, including the other gender, that will include giving Ryland powerful hormones to suppress puberty, and other powerful hormones to cause her body to mimic maleness: muscle mass, a stubble, a deeper voice, more body hair. But as one girl who stopped taking testosterone [put it](#), “This is not who you are. You are hiding behind a chemically induced mask.” No hormones or surgery can turn Ryland into a male. Nothing will change her XX chromosomes. Most boys grow up to become fathers, but she can never father a child. She is NOT a boy, she will NEVER be a man. It is neither loving nor wise to cooperate with confusion, which will only get worse with age.

When adults tell a child “you are transgender,” and the child then parrots that idea, both the parents and the child get something right and something wrong. The something right is an awareness of a heartbreaking brokenness, which is what can happen in a fallen world. The something wrong is the diagnosis of *what* is broken: it’s not their body, it’s their feelings. Transgender transition and therapy try to change the part that is healthy (one’s body) and bring it into alignment with what is broken (one’s thinking and feeling).

To return to a biblical perspective: God says, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Regardless of

what the situation, whenever our thinking and feelings are out of alignment with God's intention, we need to submit our will and our thinking to the transforming power of God. What does that look like? Speaking the truth to oneself, encouraged by other truth-speakers. In the case of those struggling with their gender: "God made me female (or male), and I choose to trust that He is good and He knows what He's doing. I surrender my beliefs and feelings about femaleness (or maleness) to Him. I choose to pursue intimacy with Him over my own sense of self, and allow Him to change me from the inside out."

It's not easy, but it's always the right thing to choose the truth over an illusion. Over a lie.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/transgender\\_children](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/transgender_children) on  
June 17, 2014.

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## **"What Does the Bible Say About Tattoos?"**

I have a few family members who have recently gotten tattoos. I was wondering if there was any mention in the Bible about this being a good thing to do or a wrong thing to do? I thought that at one time I read something about it being wrong. And if it is wrong how can I address the issue in a decent way to people I love and care for who are not Christians?

Actually, yes the Bible does address the subject of tattoos.

Lev. 19:28 says, "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD."

If your loved ones are not Christians, they may or may not care that God specifically addressed this issue in the Bible. If they do, knowing God said not to do it might be enough. If not, you might mention that there must be a good reason for God to forbid His people to permanently mark their bodies this way, and it turns out there are several.

1. To quote my brother-in-law, who became enamored of "body art" when he was younger and sports seven large tatoos on his body—which he now despises—"Permanent is a long, long time." The majority of people who get tattoos regret it later.

2. Tattoos are exceedingly painful and expensive to have removed.

3. Some tattoo inks have metal in them, so if one's health is threatened, an MRI can be complicated (and there can be some discomfort) by a tattoo.

4. On a more spiritual note, God may not want us to permanently mark our bodies because it is disrespectful to the body He fashioned and gave to us to steward. The fact that a tattoo cannot be undone (completely) reflects the sad truth that some decisions are one-way and we box ourselves into a corner. Tattoos make a statement physically, but God intends that the purity and beauty of our LIVES make the statement, rather than "I was young (or drunk, or on drugs) and did this to myself." (Yes, I am biased, I will cheerfully admit. <grin>)

Now, the New Testament doesn't repeat this prohibition, and it's not a moral issue like sexual sin or lying or stealing which are still wrong and forever will be, so I don't think it's a sin anymore. Many people believe this is an area where we have Christian liberty, the freedom to do something that used to be prohibited.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries  
August 2001

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Several e-mails arrived shortly after this article was posted, pointing out the fact that this prohibition against tattoos was part of the Levitical code, but Christians do not live under the Old Testament laws. Otherwise, we would be sinning to:

- Shave off beards and sideburns
- Wear crew cuts
- Wear linen/wool blends
- Not take a bath after intercourse
- Circumcise baby boys on any day other than the eighth
- Attend church sooner than 33 days after the birth of a baby

I appreciate being shown the need to explain the fuller picture.

The person who wrote merely asked if the Bible said anything about tattoos, and it does, and I pointed out some good reasons for that prohibition. However, it is also true that we do not live under Old Testament laws, and most of the Levitical prohibitions and requirements no longer apply because we live under a new covenant of grace. (I hasten to add here that the *moral* prohibitions, such as those against any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage, including homosexuality, are still firmly in place.)

Thus, while the Bible did prohibit tattoos in the Old Testament, it is not a sin to get one today. Dumb, maybe, but not sinful. <grin> (That's a joke. Please don't send me e-mails if you have one and like it. You have complete freedom

in Christ to do anything He gives permission for you to do.)

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. . .And then this appeared in "Dear Abby," which I thought was well worth sharing:

**Dear Abby:** You have printed letters about tattoos, so I thought you might get a kick out of my experience. Two summers ago, my sister "Julie" confided that her daughter, "Whitney," had decided to get a tattoo before returning to college. Julie was upset about it, but could not change her daughter's mind because Whitney is on a full scholarship and didn't need anyone's approval. Julie asked if I could talk Whitney out of it, and I racked my brain trying to think of something to say that would sway her. A few weeks later, our families got together to celebrate Julie's 50th birthday. Whitney was there with her boyfriend. After we all had enjoyed ice cream and cake, I took Whitney and her boyfriend into the living room and popped in a videotape of a party my husband and I had thrown during the disco craze of the 70s. There we were in our leisure suits, gold chains, permed hair, platform shoes and having a great time.

Whitney and her boyfriend were rolling on the floor with laughter. They couldn't believe that "look" was actually the craze at the time. "Yes," I said, "that was the style. But as times changed, styles changed, and what was once 'in' was soon 'out.'"

At that moment, Julie and her husband walked into the living room dressed in retro clothes and wigs. They were followed by Grandma and Grandpa, who had applied fake tattoos to their arms and shoulders. Whitney was stunned to see her conservative grandparents so out of character.

It was then that we reminded Whitney we had been able to buy different clothes and change our hairstyles when the fad was over, but tattoos are forever.

Disco clothes and wigs: \$85

Fake tattoos: \$30

The look on Whitney's face: priceless!

(To date, no tattoos for Whitney.)

Signed,

Creative in Las Vegas

**Dear Creative:** Your letter: a gem. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. You made your point with an object lesson that was far more effective than any lecture would have been.

June 2003

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Addendum, September 2014

I'd like to add this YouTube video addressing the question of tattoos from my wise pastor, Todd Wagner of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas:

[See also "What About Body Piercing?"](#)

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# The Commencement Address I'll Never Get to Give

*May 20, 2014*

Graduations mean commencement addresses. Most of which are eminently forgettable, containing feel-good charges to go do great stuff and change the world. But in my experience, they're always given by men, who are some kind of celebrity.

I am neither.

But I have a few thoughts on practical life lessons that newly-minted graduates might use.

“Hey graduates, congratulations. You made it to the cap-and-gown stage. Not without a lot of help and prodding and prayers and frustration from your parents though, right? Thank them. There’s not a single thing you are or do or have that they didn’t have a part in. Thank them again.

“Speaking of thanking, one of the most important habits you can ever form is gratitude. Especially toward God. He is continually blessing you with everything from the ability to draw your next breath, to your ability to remember your name, to your ability to walk or drive and think and talk and get a job or more education. Thank Him for all those things. Regularly stop and ask yourself, “What would I really miss tomorrow if I didn’t give thanks for it today?”—and then thank the Lord for it. A grateful heart is not a complaining heart, or a critical heart, or an entitled heart. Believe me, it will make you a much better person to live with, or work with, or play with, or just be with.

“You’ve just finished many years of schooling, and you may have been indoctrinated with a bunch of hooey about how wonderful and special you are because of some well-meaning self-esteem curriculum. You may have thrown away dozens of ribbons or trophies you received just for showing up. Those days are over, because that was never real life. Self-esteem and self-confidence are only gained one way, the hard way: working hard to meet a challenge and not give up until you succeed. You earn self-confidence by doing, not by reciting platitudes in a mirror.

“If you haven’t read Dale Carnegie’s book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, read it. It’s a classic of how to understand people and how they like to be treated. The reason

it's so true is that the book fleshes out the second great commandment, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'

"For example, when you see a service person, like a waitstaff or toll booth attendant, call him or her by name. One's name is the sweetest sound on earth to each person, and service personnel are often treated as if they were invisible. Using someone's name says, 'You are *not* invisible to me, and I honor you for your service.' Prospective employees and spouses have been known to disqualify themselves because of the way they treated people with disrespect or contempt when out in public.

"Everyone has an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says 'Please encourage me.' Most people have an invisible speech bubble over their heads that says, 'Do I matter? Please show me I matter.' Every single person you will ever meet is infinitely valuable as the handcrafted masterpiece of the Creator God, and they deserve to be honored and respected simply because God made them and He loves them.

"Some final pithy words to the wise.

"Listen to your body. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it will tell you what it needs.

"Learn to recognize the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and follow them.

"Pray for your future spouse. He or she is out there somewhere. Your prayers WILL make a difference.

"If you wonder if you should be doing something, you probably shouldn't. If the thought, 'Should I be doing this?' even enters your head, it's an alarm.

"Don't believe everything you think.

"When you're on a road trip, never pass up an opportunity to use the restroom. Consider taking some disinfectant and a roll of paper towels with you, and leave it cleaner than you found



it.

“And finally, do one good thing every day that no one will see but God. It will build your character and make deposits in your heavenly bank account that you’ll forget about, but He won’t.

“The Lord bless you and keep you. Your real education is about to begin.”

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/the-commencement-address-ill-never-get-to-give/](https://blogs.bible.org/the-commencement-address-ill-never-get-to-give/)

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## Boy Scouts: Let’s Hear It For Masculinity

Ceremonies make me cry. Any ceremony, no matter how cheesy. But some ceremonies are deeply meaningful and important, which is how I about cried off all my makeup recently at a Boy Scout Court of Honor where the son of my Probe colleague Byron Barlowe received his Eagle Scout rank.

Understanding God’s gift of gender is a big deal to me, and I viewed the ceremony through that grid. I saw the glory of healthy, godly masculinity on display, particularly the goodness of men teaching boys to be men.

I saw men serving others through leadership and modeling. The long-term commitment of many volunteer years in this particular troop showed that the leaders understood the value of faithfulness and persistence over time. Each Eagle Scout recipient was featured in a video that included remarks by the scout, each of his parents, and his troop mentor, and the many

thank-yous to the men who gave of themselves as leaders pointed to their servant leadership.

Boys who had earned badges and who had advanced in rank were rewarded with a badge, affirmation and applause. (Which included the [left handshake](#), which I now know, thanks to Uncle Google, is a worldwide scouting thing.) Nobody gets badges and pins, much less the coveted Eagle scarf and pin, without working hard for them, a powerful antidote to the “everybody gets a trophy for showing up” mentality. It was a good reminder that true self-esteem and confidence don’t come by speaking feel-good affirmations into a mirror; they are earned the hard way by accepting a challenge and working through it to achieve a goal. But none of the boys who earned badges and rank advancement did it on their own. It took cooperation with and encouragement from others to achieve these things. The men were teaching boys that “no man is an island,” that God intends for men to do life in community, learning to ask for and accept help from others even as they offer help to others.

In the midst of all this male-glory, I loved that each boy advancing in rank was called forward with his mother, given a pin to place on a ribbon worn over her heart, and directed to give her a hug. When one of the scoutmasters was honored for achieving a leadership rank that he had worked on for many months, his wife was asked to come to the platform to assist with the ceremony, and he asked for the whole family to come up. All nine children. In this troop, boy scouts are not just about boys and men. Their connections and commitments to family are also valued, another glory of godly masculinity.

At one point, one of the scout leaders was at the microphone calling scouts and their mothers forward. His own son and his wife, carrying a toddler boy, stood on stage to receive their pin. As soon as the toddler saw his daddy, he started jumping excitedly and reaching for his father with uncontainable joy and delight in his daddy, who took him into his arms with a big smile. Later, I told this leader something I heard

recently from an experienced therapist who wrote *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*: even with boys on the emotionally sensitive, artistic, creative end of [the gender spectrum](#), the ones more at risk for taking a gay identity when they get older, if a little boy lights up and runs to his father when he comes home (or, as in this case, when he sees him unexpectedly), that boy is in a good, secure place emotionally. A warm and positive connection with his father is the best foundation for emotionally and gender-secure boys.

And that is one of the benefits of Boy Scouts for any boy, especially the fatherless or the badly fathered. When a boy receives attention, affirmation and affection ([the Three As](#)) from father-figures, he gets what he can only get from men, and which he needs to grow up to manhood. Even if a boy's dad is not around, those needs can be met by other men who can introduce him to the world of men in safe, healthy, godly ways. (And that is why the idea of gay scout leaders is scary: men who lack gender security cannot impart to boys what they don't own. They are still looking to get their own need for the Three As met, and that unmet need can so easily turn into predation. Even if they don't intend that initially.)

The final highlight of the evening was the scoutmaster's comments and charge to each of the two Eagle recipients. His grasp of the meaning and application of God's word, combined with his personal knowledge and understanding of each young man's character and story, was one of the most excellent manifestations of a pastor-teacher I've ever seen. The newly-minted Eagles were blessed by a man soaring in his position and responsibility as a spiritual leader as he pointed them, not to himself, but to Christ, and urged them to follow hard after Him. This is what godly leadership looks like.

I have long seen that women cannot imprint masculinity on a boy's heart; we can confirm it, we can affirm it, we can clap and cheer for it, but we cannot imprint it. We don't have what it takes, because God gives *men* that privilege.

And I am so, so glad He does.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/boy\\_scouts\\_lets\\_hear\\_it\\_for\\_masculinity](http://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/boy_scouts_lets_hear_it_for_masculinity) on May 6, 2014.

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## The Power of “Witness”

*April 25, 2014*

The day after Easter, our beloved Golden Retriever Calvin, only seven years old (that’s mid-life in dog years) had to be put to sleep because of cancer that had been sucking the life out of him. When our son and his wife moved from Texas to California, they were forced to leave him behind because their housing does not allow dogs, and Calvin became my husband’s dog.

Calvin was the exact same shade of red as our Irish Setter, who died seventeen months ago. When we had to put Pele down, there was another big red dog in the house.

But not yesterday. Or today.

And it’s painful.

Ray has always connected in a deep and special way with his dogs, and God has used them to “love on” him, as they say here in the South. So the loss of two beloved four-footed family members in less than a year and a half struck a deep blow of grief to his soul.

I looked forward to his return home so I could just **be with** him. I knew I couldn’t say anything to make him feel better.

[Nothing makes a grieving person feel better](#). But there is comfort in the ***being there*** for someone in pain.

Or in stress. The next morning a friend and I went into a courtroom with another mutual friend to support her in a legal hearing. Several times, our friend said how much she appreciated us ***being there with her*** and for her.

I am mindful of the week of comfort Job's friends brought to him when they sat ***with him*** in his misery, saying nothing in words but everything with their silent, supportive presence (Job 2:13).

I am also mindful of the good news of the Incarnation, the Son leaving heaven to come into our darkness and misery of life in a fallen world, coming as Immanuel: God ***with us***.

And I am mindful of the big "no accident" of the timing of our painful loss: the day after Easter, when we celebrate Immanuel's resurrection from the dead, Who is forever alive and, as He promised, He is ***with us*** always (Matt. 28:20).

***With us*** in pain.

***With us*** in loss.

***With us*** in stress.

Praise God for the power of "witness"!!

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_power\\_of\\_witness](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_power_of_witness)

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# The Dark Underside of Female Friendships

Cherry and Beth met in a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group at their church, hitting it off immediately. They loved the mutual connection with another mom, understanding the stresses and joys of having small children about the same age. Their weekly play dates became the highlight of each girl's week. They would chat on the phone every day, comparing notes on what they would be fixing for dinner or what great, repeatable golden nuggets their toddlers spouted. That morphed to texting each other throughout the day, at least once an hour.

The intense sense of connection, of feeling heard and understood and valued, grew to be like an emotional drug for them. Over time, they realized they felt closer to each other than they did to their husbands. They preferred each other's company to anyone else's—including their husbands'. Texting throughout the day felt like a lifeline, a continual source of reassurance that all was right with the world. Eventually, caring for their children, the very thing that had brought them together in the first place, started to feel like an unwelcome burden that interfered with their first love—each other. Anyone and any thing that came between them was cause for resentment and annoyance . . . when it didn't make them outright angry.

This was not normal female friendship. What started out as a lovely gift from God was corrupted into emotional dependency, which Lori Rentzel\* defines as "When the ongoing presence and/or nurturing of another is believed necessary for personal security." Emotional dependency happens when one or both people are looking to a person to meet their basic needs for love and security, rather than to God (relational idolatry). It is characterized by a desperate neediness of the other.

Emotional dependency (the other ED) is at the core of most lesbian relationships and a lot of homosexual relationships, but it is not limited to these. Husbands and wives can be emotionally dependent on each other, and so can women friends. When friendship spills over the retaining walls of what is healthy into an enmeshment with another person—when they put all their emotional eggs in the other's basket, so to speak—the relationship has become broken and unhealthy.

My favorite anthem to emotional dependency is Barry Manilow's *Can't Smile Without You*, which sounds romantic until you think about how unhealthy it is:

You know I can't smile without you,  
I can't smile without you,  
I can't laugh  
and I can't sing,  
I'm findin' it hard to do anything.  
You see, I feel sad when you're sad,  
I feel glad when you're glad,  
If You only knew what I'm going through,  
I just can't smile without you.

Do you see how sick that is?

Emotional dependency feels like, "My happiness, my sense of security, is completely wrapped up in you giving me '[The Three As](#)' I need: attention, affection and affirmation. And if you withhold any of these from me, I will feel insecure, unloved and abandoned."

When people feel insecure, they feel powerless. And when they feel powerless, they usually resort to some kind of control to get their power back. Manipulation is the glue that holds emotionally dependent people together, since the desperate neediness (remember, "I can't smile without you"?) drives people to do desperate things to make sure the other person is tied to them at the heart. Such as sending close to 100 texts

in a single day, to make sure the other person responds to them. And getting paranoid and angry (“Why aren’t you answering my texts? I can tell you read them, my phone tells me you read them, why are you avoiding me? What did I do? Why aren’t you answering me? TALK TO ME!!!!”). Such as giving gifts and anything else designed to bind the giver to the recipient. Such as using guilt to force the other person to engage (“You’re the only person in the world who understands me! You’re the only real friend I’ve ever had. If you leave me I will be completely and utterly alone!”).

The good news is that when friendships have overflowed healthy boundaries into emotional dependency, people can repent of their relational idolatry (making another person more important than God) and step back into balance. The other good news is that every aspect of unhealthy, emotional dependency on a person, is healthy dependency on God. One of my friends told me, “This was life changing for me, to realize that I could redirect my unhealthy energies to Jesus and it would make me a much better disciple!” Contacting Him 95 times a day through prayer (no texting necessary) is healthy. Feeling desperately needy toward Jesus is healthy. Giving gifts to Jesus to bind one’s heart to Him is healthy. Saying, “If you leave me I will be completely and utterly alone” is true-but praise God, He has assured us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

When I have spoken on this topic in churches, I hear, “I expected that the dark underside you’d be talking about was gossip or something. I never would have expected THIS. Wow. I see how it can happen so easily.”

Forewarned is forearmed, I trust.

\*Lori Thorkelson Rentzel’s little booklet Emotional Dependency, published by InterVarsity Press, is an invaluable and highly practical resource for understanding this issue.



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