

Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit

24% of American Christians believe in reincarnation, the idea from Eastern religions that there is a merry-go-round of birth/life/death/reb



irth, over and over again. This has spawned a fad of “past lives regression,” discovering aspects of previous incarnations. Wiki-how even offers instructions on [“How to Remember Your Past Lives.”](#) There’s a book called *Past Lives of the Rich and Famous*. Supposedly, Whitney Houston’s strong attachment to the gospel came from a moment in a previous life where she saw Jesus hanging on the cross. Liz Taylor used to be a Benedictine abbess in medieval Switzerland. Michael Jackson was the son of a royal courtesan in 100 B.C. Burma. And Marilyn Monroe was captured by a band of gypsies in the 1600s.

Not so fast. The Bible swats down the possibility of reincarnation: “It is appointed for man to die once, and then comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). That means that there are no past lives (but lots of opportunity for self- or demonic deception).

With one notable exception.

Jesus truly did have a past life, a life with no beginning, before He was born as a human being.

Philippians 2 tells us that “He emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” I

cannot begin to imagine what it was like to leave behind aspects of being God when He became one of us. Instead of enjoying omniscience (all-knowing), He limited Himself to only what He would learn experientially and by listening to the Holy Spirit. Instead of enjoying omnipresence (being all places at once), He limited Himself to one place at one time. Instead of enjoying omnipotence (all-powerful), He limited Himself to expressing the Father's will through dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lived out, and showed us, what perfect, sinless Adam was like before the Fall.

Recently I've been meditating on the unthinkable sacrifice of leaving behind omniscience and becoming an embryo in Mary's womb. He experienced life as every other baby ever has, first through the muffled filter of His mother's body. Then the shock of emerging from the warm cozy darkness and drawing His first breath of air. For the first time in eternity, God breathed air! He learned what hunger was, and He learned what it was to be dependent on His mother to be fed.

He experienced life as a baby, learning language. He learned to recognize His mother's voice and His earthly father's voice. That prepared Him to learn to recognize His heavenly Father's voice. He grew into a toddler, and the very God who designed the human body to walk, had to learn how to walk Himself. He grew into a boy, and learned to read. The very God who had splintered the language of man at Babel had to learn Hebrew letters and words so He could read the Scriptures that He Himself had breathed through the minds and pens of men hundreds of years before. He learned spiritual truth with a human mind, reading the scrolls with human eyes. He learned the history of mankind and of His own people through the Scriptures.

He submitted Himself to His earthly parents, who had the unimaginable task of teaching Jesus His true identity: "Child,

you are the Son of God, born of a virgin birth. Your heavenly Father is Your actual Father. You are the promised Messiah, the long-awaited Anointed One. You are the Savior of the world.”

When He hung out in the temple at age twelve, amazing the teachers by His teachable spirit and the questions He asked, He had clearly owned the truth about His true identity: “Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49)

By the time He was an adult, He had grown in understanding about His previous life in heaven: “And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed” (John 17:5).

Part of the glory of Christmas is remembering that Jesus truly did have a “past life,” which He left behind for a time because He thought we were worth the sacrifice. And reincarnation—that false teaching of false religion—is the counterfeit to the miracle of Christmas: the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Christ by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!

Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the Virgin’s womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.

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on December 17, 2013

Sit and Brine a While

I brine a turkey for Thanksgiving. When the bird sits in a salty, savory water bath overnight, it absorbs the flavors of the brine and the chemical composition of the turkey is changed to make it juicier. Delicious, juicy turkey—what's not to love?

Except when you learn the hard way that all giant brining bags are not created equal, and your bag opens up in the refrigerator, spilling a gallon of brine all over the fridge and the kitchen floor. Which my rock-star husband cleaned up without complaint because he's just wonderful that way.

Our Thanksgiving turkey was still delicious because the remaining brine did its magic on the bottom half of the turkey, and then I turned it in the morning for a few more hours of brining before roasting it.

That day a godly, wise friend of mine snapped a picture of her Bible open, with 1 Thess. 5:16-18 highlighted ("Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"), and posted it to her Facebook with the insightful comment, "I need to 'brine' in this truth. I need to soak in it, it needs to change me, make me more tender..."

Amen!

That is how we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2)—by "brining" in the truth of God's word. Memorizing it, meditating on it, and being very practical in how we choose to develop a perspective that agrees with what God has revealed.

Recently my husband entered the fray of hostility in the comment section of an online magazine article featuring his role in vetting the science textbooks that the Texas State

Board of Education would be voting on adopting. It's quite the assault to be called ugly names and have one's intellect and character impugned by people who cannot understand how a scientist can entertain any possibility of the supernatural and still call himself a scientist.

I walked by his computer and found a number of index cards next to his laptop on which he had written several scriptures. Before he put his fingers to the keyboard to respond to commenters, he was reminding himself to focus on the unseen and eternal, not the visible and fleeting, and to choose to speak truth that honors God instead of giving into fear and anger or hurt.

Ray was brining in God's Word. It blessed me deeply.

Recently, our friends at Igniter Media created a marvelous video about preparing to be with family, which was shown in the worship services at our church. Our pastor said it was his favorite of all the videos they had produced, because it shows how spiritual transformation happens.

This is what brining looks like.

Bon Appetit!

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blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/sit_and_brine_awhile on
Dec. 4, 2013

Killer Question

The best critical thinking “power tool” I’ve ever discovered is a set of [four “Killer Questions.”](#) They’ve been around since Socrates, but after my friend Dr. Jeff Myers of [Summit Ministries](#) introduced them to me a few years ago, they have totally changed the way I process everything I hear:

1. What do you mean by that?
2. Where do you get your information?
3. How do you know it’s true?
4. What if you’re wrong?

I use the #1 question the most. “What do you mean by that?” is a clarifying question that invites the other person to define their terms and make sure you’re both talking about the same thing. This is a helpful question to keep in mind even when reading the newspaper, a website, or people’s Facebook posts—especially political and religious statements—because our society seems to be getting less and less able to articulate what we really mean. Or think.

For example, if someone tells me, “I don’t believe in God,” it’s good to gently probe about the kind of God they claim they don’t believe in: “What do you mean by ‘God’?” Often what people reject is actually an untrue caricature of God, a harsh, condemning, unloving and unreasonable deity who just might remind them of all the things they don’t like about their earthly fathers! In that case, I can assure them that I don’t believe in that god either—and then I might get a chance to talk about the true God of the Bible who reveals Himself as an eternally loving Father, Son and Spirit who invites us into the divine life of light, love and goodness.

The question “What do you mean by that?” is powerful for preventing misunderstandings. A friend of mine who was on the pastoral staff of a church had a number of conversations with

a new attender. When the woman told him about how her life was falling apart, he shared the good news of Jesus with her, and invited her to put her trust in Him. She asked a number of questions about what it meant to become a Christian. Afterwards, she called the church to lodge a complaint that he had been inappropriate with her.

The church leadership immediately suspended him. He knew that something was very, very wrong with the situation but couldn't get traction with the complaint. It finally turned out that when the woman had asked what would happen if she refused to trust Christ, he regretfully told her that she would spend eternity separated from Him, which the Bible calls hell. Offended, she considered his answer inappropriate and called to complain. But no one had asked her, "What do you mean by 'inappropriate'?" The church leadership had assumed the worst instead of simply asking for clarification. If they'd asked, they would have discovered that my friend had merely shared the gospel.

Another friend of mine, at nineteen years old, told her pastor that she was pregnant. His first response was to fire her from working in the nursery, which she loved, because they wouldn't want visitors thinking the church condoned sexual sin and teenage pregnancy. He never asked a single question. If he had just asked, "Wow—what do you want to tell me about this?" she would have told him that she'd been acquaintance-raped. But because of her dysfunctional family patterns, she had been robbed of her voice to speak up against injustice. Over twelve years later, she's still suffering the emotional wounds of his judgmental punishment.

Recently, a high school nurse told me that one of her girl students said she was a lesbian. The nurse asked her own version of "What do you mean by that," and inquired how she'd come to that conclusion. The student said, "I didn't have a boyfriend in sixth, seventh or eighth grade, so that makes me a lesbian." My friend was able to speak truth to this confused

young girl because of asking good questions.

Where might you find a good place to use this powerful Killer Question this week?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/killer-question/ on October 8, 2013.

A Holy Limp

I got polio at eight months old. Every step of my life, I have walked with a limp. It was a source of great shame to me growing up because of people's stares. And my limp was probably the biggest reason I hated polio and hated how I saw myself, as the "ugly crippled girl."

One day, as I studied the scriptures, God gave me a divine "lightbulb moment." As I read in Genesis 32 about Jacob wrestling all night with God, the same Lord who touched his hip, asked me, "Do you see the souvenir I gave Jacob from his night with Me?" Jacob walked the rest of his life with a limp. He had been touched by God and it changed the way he walked.

It was a holy limp.

In that moment, I saw that there was nothing inherently shameful about a limp if God gave one to His beloved Jacob.

Certainly, this doesn't magically transform a limp into something beautiful and good—after all, it means something is wrong. But God can, and does, bring something beautiful and good out of the limps of our lives.

Over the past few years of walking with hurting people, I have come to see how God uses my limp to connect with those whose

hearts are still scarred and limited by the wounds they've received. As I wrote to a dear friend who left behind decades of life as a gay activist when she trusted Christ, and who still has to submit her feelings to Jesus every day of her life:

"You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of my earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side.

"I know that may sound weird, 'glorifying God in our limping,' but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him."

Connecting the dots between my physical limp and my friend's emotional limp encouraged her greatly. Just as I was deeply encouraged by the godly response of my pastor, [Todd Wagner](#) of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, to the news that he has cancer in his foot. He wrote to his church family:

"So grateful for the prayers so many of you have offered on my behalf. I covet them for both wisdom in dealing with sarcoma (the cancer affecting my body) but especially sin (the cancer constantly waging war with my soul). There is no greater kindness than your earnest prayer for me. . . . In the coming weeks I will be watching, monitoring, imaging, praying, continually consulting with caring docs, and trusting in a good and sovereign God Who is never asleep. Having to trust my perfect Father with one more thing is no burden—it is a blessing. Anything that reminds me of His goodness and my futility is a gift. Thank you for praying with me... may my every decision honor my King and may my every step—whether

with two feet or one, with cancer or without – find me running hard in His way. Pray for my health... but double down on the health of my walk with Him over my ability to walk physically. If He will allow me both I rejoice. ***If the days ahead allow for only one, I would gladly choose to limp in this life over anything that would compromise my running toward His presence in faithfulness.*** (Habakkuk 3:17-19)” (Emphasis mine)

Can you imagine how Todd’s last sentence made my heart soar?

But it doesn’t end there. Watermark’s worship pastor, [Jon Abel](#), “plays with a limp.” Several years ago, when mowing his lawn, his lawnmower blade sliced off his finger—his wedding ring finger, which he uses every day as a guitar player. The trauma of losing his finger, with the attendant threat of losing his livelihood, forced him to come face to face with the question of whether a good and loving God was in control. Jon’s godly response to this trial, which is documented in this short YouTube video, is one reason he is one of my favorite worship leaders of all time.

I recently learned from my sister—on Facebook, of all places!—that the doctors told my mother I would never walk. Mom decided they were wrong, and worked patiently with me every day, exercising my once-paralyzed leg in the bathtub as she taught me the ABCs and who knows what else.

I don’t know why my mother didn’t tell me this fact, but I do know this: *limping means I can walk!*

I am grateful for the gift of perspective. Whether it’s my polio-caused limp, or Todd’s possibility of limping from losing a foot, or Jon’s limited ability to play guitar from a once-severed finger, I just know that if God can be more glorified from our limps than from physical perfection, we’ll take the holy limp every time.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/a-holy-limp/ on November 15, 2013

Recalibrating Our Phones, Our Minds

November 5, 2013

At 2:00 a.m. Sunday morning, most of us in the U.S. reverted back to standard time. Something almost magical happened to our smartphones, tablets, computers and TV cable boxes: the time automatically jumped back an hour.

When we travel across time zones, our smartphones automatically recalibrate to the correct time because they are informed by the cell phone system, which is always aware of what time it is in every location.

I recently landed in Germany, and when I turned my phone back on and watched the numbers flip from 2:10 a.m. to 9:10 a.m., it occurred to me that regular time in God's word has the same effect on our minds. If we approach God's word with a submissive, teachable spirit, it recalibrates our wrong thinking, bringing it into alignment with reality and truth.

One of my dear friends lived 25 years of her life as a gay activist before she met Christ. She told God that she was going to spend a year gathering the information she needed to prove to Him and everyone else that He had made her gay and there was nothing wrong with it. As she started reading His word daily, she found herself slowly changing her view of gender, sexuality, and her identity. It took less than a year

for her to come to the point of saying, “OK, I was wrong. I choose to reconcile my faith and my sexuality by submitting to God’s intention and design.”

Another dear friend recently asked me about gambling, since she had allowed nearby casinos to consume large chunks of her income. It had never occurred to her to investigate what God says about it, and when I offered her a link to an [article](#) on that topic on the Probe.org website, she was astonished. She now sees all money as God’s money, of which He entrusts some into her hands to steward wisely.

At Probe Ministries, we regularly receive emails from people who fear they have committed [the unforgivable sin](#), begging for reassurance. It is a joy to provide biblical wisdom and urge them to let go of their fears. (Bottom line: people who have hardened their hearts to the point of taking themselves beyond receiving forgiveness, don’t ask questions about it!)

I know a number of people whose lives are being wrecked by unremitting anger toward others. Once they submit to God’s commands to [forgive](#) those who have sinned against us, they find they don’t have to be angry anymore.

I will never forget how the truth of God’s word crashed into my college-age wrongheaded thinking about sexuality when I trusted Christ as a sophomore. I had *so much* wrong! A wise friend handed me a cassette tape by Josh McDowell called [“Maximum Sex”](#) that changed everything for me, because it was full of God’s truth.

Romans 12:2 urges us to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Marinating ourselves in God’s word is the key to that transformation. You just might find the numbers flipping in your own mind!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/recalibrating_our_phones_our_minds

The 3 As: Attention, Affection and Affirmation

Wise people have observed that we all have legitimate, God-given needs for “the 3 As”: attention, affection and affirmation. God intends for children to receive them from their parents first, laying a foundation of a healthy sense of self, then from their peers.

The Attention need is met by being there, listening, watching, engaging and interacting. Ever hear the famous line, “Daddy, watch me!”? One wise father told another whose daughter kept clamoring for him to look at her as she played in the back yard, “If you don’t watch her now, soon she’ll look for another guy to give her the attention she wants from YOU.”

The Affection need is met both physically and verbally. We all need hugs and safe touch. And most boys need the rough-housing kind of physical affection from their dads that says, “You belong in the world of males.” We need to hear the verbal affection of “I love you,” terms of endearment, and other forms of communicating love.

The Affirmation need is met by validating people’s feelings, efforts, skills and gifting. Noticing and commenting when they do things right—or even try. It communicates, “I am for you” and “I believe in you.”

Jesus received the Three As at His baptism. His Father and the Spirit showed up [attention], and the Father pronounced, “This is My beloved Son [affection] in whom I am well pleased [affirmation]” (Matthew 3:17).

Much unhealthy, dysfunctional behavior is driven by trying to

get these three needs met, usually without realizing what is driving us. Unfortunately, it's getting harder than ever to get these needs met because of two things proliferating in our culture.

First, families seem to be growing more fractured and more dysfunctional than ever before. Fatherlessness is at epidemic stage. The National Fatherhood Initiative cites the U.S. Census Bureau's statistic that one out of three American children live in homes without their biological father.^{1} Parents in the home are often stressed, overwhelmed, and so self-focused, whether on selfishness or mere survival, that many children feel like they are on their own. Plus, the people God intends to fill their children's emotional tanks with attention, affection and affirmation—parents—are often scrambling to try to get their OWN tanks filled. So there is a sense of disconnection at home.

Second, smartphone technology has moved into the hands—and heads—of the majority of Americans. Over half of adults own smartphones, and a recent report from the Pew Research Center revealed that 78% of young people ages 12-17 now have cell phones, and nearly half of those are smartphones.^{2} That means continual connection to the internet. That means billions of text messages daily, which have virtually replaced phone calls for many people, especially youth.^{3} The camera on most people's cell phone means that many people view life's experiences, from wedding processions to grade school concerts to street fights, through a 3-to-4-inch screen held away from the body.

In short, we're doing life through a screen.

And that screen is an additional layer of disconnection between people. Technology has created a superficial degree of counterfeit connection, and relationships are suffering. People think they're connected to other people through their phones, but in reality they're connected to their phones and a

counterfeit kind of “life.”

God knew what He was doing when He stressed the importance of staying in connection, continually engaging with each other: I count 41 “one anothers” in scripture.^{4} He knew what He was doing when He instructed believers to make sure and keep meeting together to encourage one another (Heb. 10:24).

God put needs for the Three A’s inside us, and He intends for us to meet them through connection to other people. Please, hug somebody. Tell them they’re important and valuable. Be there for them.

And you might want to put down your phone.

Notes

1.

www.fatherhood.org/media/consequences-of-father-absence-statistics Accessed 09/10/13.

2.

www.pewinternet.org/Media-Mentions/2013/More-youth-use-smartphones-as-route-to-Web.aspx Accessed 09/10/13.

3.

www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-number-of-texts-sent-2013-3 Accessed 09/10/13.

4. www.mecf.net/one_anothers.html Accessed 09/10/13.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_3_as_attention_affecti_on_and_affirmation on Sept. 10, 2013.

“Are Aliens Really Evil Angels? Why Did They Take the Book of Enoch Out of the Bible?”

I was just wondering if so-called aliens are evil angels from the old times, or where do they fit into God's plans. I already know they have been here since the beginning of time and they are behind this new world order supporting the devil. I figured out that myself and the people are working for them and cover up lots of stuff in exchange for weapons and greed but in the end they will be the fools. Just wondering if I'm right and why did they take the Book of Enoch out of the Bible—what else are they hiding? They're trying to fool people into thinking they're God, but they hold a more insidious agenda. People need to know the truth! Am I right or wrong?

Thanks for writing to Probe.

1. We suggest that aliens actually do not exist, but demons (evil angels) successfully role-play aliens to deceive people. Satan has been a deceiver since he first approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the evil angels who rebelled along with him have been deceiving people ever since.

We have a couple of articles on aliens you may find helpful to shape your understanding on aliens from a biblical perspective:

[UFOs and Alien Beings: A Christian Response](#)

[Are We Alone in the Universe? A Biblical View of Aliens](#)

2. The Book of Enoch was never IN the Bible, so it was never taken out. One of our theologians answered a question about

that book here: [“What Can We Know About Enoch?”](#)

Since you are curious about what is true (good for you!), let me encourage you to read this short answer to the question, [“How did the Church Recognize Which Books Were Inspired by God?”](#).

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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Think You Can Get Away With It?

Aug. 27, 2013

Several years ago I began to notice how many people buy into a disturbing fantasy.

First, I watched a dear friend jump into a sinful and dangerous relationship. She tried to numb her guilt through drugs, alcohol and self-injury, in escalating amounts of each. She ended up losing her job and her freedom—first in a hospital, then a psych ward, and then months in a rehab facility that consumed every penny of her considerable savings. Later she confessed to me, “I thought I could get away with it.”

This summer I served over a month on a jury for a drug conspiracy trial. (I blogged about that [here](#).) After we found all four defendants guilty, the judge came to talk to us and

answer our questions. We learned that a large number of co-conspirators indicted along with these defendants had all pled guilty. The judge confirmed to us that these four had “rolled the dice,” hoping to persuade a jury that they were unjustly charged. Why didn’t these men plead guilty? They thought they could get away with it.

Thinking we can get away with it happens a lot, from speeding to not declaring everything on our tax returns to the U.S. government monitoring its citizens’ phone conversations.

And this fantasy—this LIE—goes back a long way. All the way to the Garden of Eden, when the serpent scoffed at God’s rule about not eating from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “Surely you will not die!” (Gen. 3:4) In today’s language: “C’mon, you can get away with it!”

But, being sneaky, the enemy of our souls (and his minions who are the spirits who actually tempt us with lies) uses first person to make us think his thoughts are actually our own, so we are not aware of the source of our temptation: “I can get away with this.”

God has something to say about this lie. One of my favorite Bible verses, particularly when my sons were small, is Numbers 32:23: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

There were three four-year-olds on our street including my son. One of them, a heartbreakingly sexually precocious little girl, said to Kevin one day, “Let’s go behind this bush next to my house, take off our clothes and kiss.” When he said no, she insisted, “It’s okay. Jordan (the other four-year-old) and I did it yesterday, and no one will know.” Kevin said, “But God will see us, and He’ll tell my mommy!”

Back to God’s opinion. Jesus said in Mark 4:22, “Everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light.” In Luke 12:3, He said, “Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the

light, and what you have whispered in private rooms will be proclaimed from the housetops.”

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

No, we *can't* get away with it. That's a truth that can keep us out of a lot of trouble!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/think-you-can-get-away-with-it/

Mad at God

I knelt down next to my bed, ten years old, and once more poured out my heart to God. “God, *please heal me!* You know how much I hate having polio, I hate limping, I hate going to physical therapy every week, I hate the surgeries, I hate the way people stare at me because of how I walk. I hate that no one could love me with polio. I hate this, God! I know You can take it away—please let me wake up tomorrow morning all healed and restored!” Once again, I fell asleep, hopeful that God had heard me and He was able to snap His fingers or wiggle His nose or however He did miracles. And in the morning, once again, I discovered that during the night *God had done absolutely nothing.*

And I was FURIOUS!

“You're *God!* This is an easy one for You! What's wrong with You that You won't do something so easy as healing me???” Then, my little ten-year-old heart gasped, “I'm mad at God! People aren't supposed to get mad at God!” And I gathered up my explosive anger and stuffed it into the emotional basement

of my heart, along with all the other times I had begged God to heal me . . . and His silent inactivity kept saying no.

Once I trusted Christ as a college student, a wise woman saw my heart full of anger, bitterness and resentment, and prayed that God would show me my heart, knowing that my anger at God was a far bigger problem than legs that don't work right. Remembering this ten-year-old memory, and the awareness there were a lot more just like it, was an answer to her prayer.

So I prayed, "God, I don't have a clue what to do. My heart is full of anger, bitterness and resentment. I am angry at You, Lord, because You won't give me what I want. I've never heard a message on 'What to do when you're so mad at God you want to spit in His face.' Please show me what to do about it."

God understands why we get angry at Him, just as a parent, possessing adult perspective, understands why a child gets angry at her. That adult understanding allows the parent to experience—and to show—grace toward a child tormented by angry confusion and a juvenile sense of entitlement to what he or she wants. Just as a child can't possibly see the big picture, much less a parent's motive and intention, that's why we get mad at God.

It's about what we can't see. And God understands.

He knows we cannot see anything but the pain and frustration of the moment. We can't see the reason(s) God is allowing us to suffer. We can't see the greater evil that a loving heavenly Father is preventing us from experiencing through the lesser evil of pain in that moment. Or season. We can't know what's going on in the spirit realm, just as Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22) saw the angel of the Lord blocking their path with a sword but Balaam didn't, and he unrighteously punished the donkey.

We can't see the eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17) and beauty that God is creating in our souls through our pain and suffering, and He usually doesn't tell us. But He did tell my friend Ann. In prayer one day she had a body memory of being sexually assaulted by a man who had paid her father for the right to have access to his little girl. She asked Jesus about what felt like a heavy blanket over her during the abuse. He gave her a mental picture of Himself lying protectively on top of her, taking into Himself much of the violence of the assault. Ann saw that before the man could even touch her, he had to go through Jesus as her shield, protecting her from the worst of the assault. In answer to her heart's cry of "Why?", the Lord told her, "You are My precious gem. My Father's hand is on the chisel, creating unimaginable beauty in you. He has used every assault on you to create yet another facet of a brilliant jewel. I promise, when you see yourself in heaven, you will say, 'It was totally worth it.'"



Now, I do realize that many people would gladly choose a less highly polished gem over the pain of abuse and suffering, but this was deeply encouraging to my wise and mature friend. I have watched God use her in mighty ways to minister hope and comfort to others in pain because of her willingness to relinquish her anger at what happened to her and trust God to bring good out of evil, to work all things together for good in her life (Rom. 8:28).

When I prayed, "God please show me what to do about my anger," He answered by teaching me about His sovereignty. I learned that a good and loving God is always in control, and nothing can touch me without His express permission. His perfect love and purpose for me—and His kingdom—is a shield around me (Ps. 28:7). By the time anything reaches me, whether it is a polio virus that crippled me for life or the disappointment of living in a fallen world, it has His fingerprints all over it.

He taught me that all the available facts are not all the facts. He taught me that I can only see a tiny sliver of the whole picture that He sees, and I need to trust His goodness with what I don't see.

There's more to the story, but you can read that [here](#).

What do we do when we're so mad at God we want to spit in His face? Repent of the wrong belief that we see the whole picture, and choose to trust the God who sees everything and has a purpose in it.

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Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn't

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Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven't needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical "us/them"

dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted "gay to straight" change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but "flesh management," using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding values, which until recently was still found on their "About Us" page:

*While we have never met anyone who "chose" to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. **Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.*

We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God's creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a

relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

What I see here is a statement pointing to God's standards, God's intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one's sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can't stop being sinners and can't stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, "I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader's Conference except this past year, and have always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God's truth, and encouraging people not so much to be "straight" but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: 'Proclaim God's Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.' Nothing has changed for us."

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you what it *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It doesn't mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It doesn't mean that there isn't any help for those dealing

with this issue, either for themselves or a loved one.

- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.

- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who

are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

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