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 the spirit realm, just as Balaam's donkey (Numbers 23) 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.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mad_at_god on August 14, 2013.

Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn't

July 17, 2013

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 want 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.

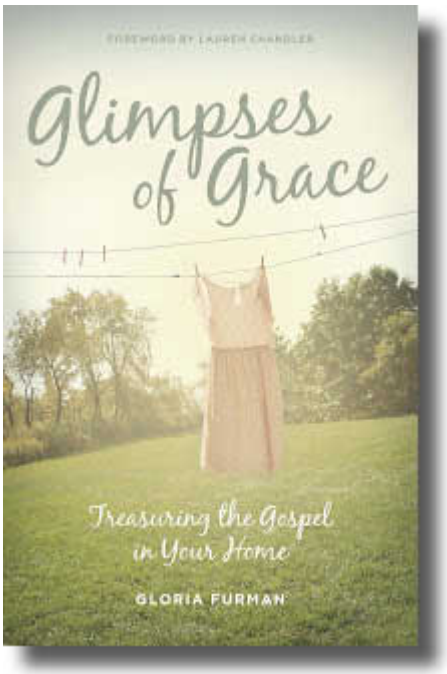
This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt

Glimpses of Grace: Knocking Down Mental Walls

One of the most spiritually dangerous mistakes we can make is to compartmentalize our thinking into separate sections: Facts/values. Sacred/secular.

Worst of all, God/real life.

If Jesus truly is Lord—and His word says He is—then there is not so much as a solitary atom, much less an entire compartment, where He does not belong. So I love, love, love it when writers and speakers help us tear down mental and spiritual walls to help us live life as a unified whole. And now there's a new voice to help women think biblically and rightly about how we glorify God in our homes.



This week marks the release of Gloria Furman's book *Glimpses of Grace: Treasuring the Gospel in Your Home*. I've never read a book that so thoroughly explores the way God's grace can so fully and vibrantly radiate into even the most mundane and seemingly unimportant parts of life.

This, on top of the fact that Gloria is a mom of three little

ones with a fourth on the way, a pastor's wife, living in Dubai—and her husband Dave's physical strength is severely compromised, which of course means life is harder for Gloria. So yeah—I'm impressed. But Gloria's bio doesn't hold a candle to her wisdom, her grasp of theology, and what I especially appreciate, a breathtaking level of transparency and authenticity that eloquently communicates, "I'm messed up and I desperately need Jesus, but let me show you how He's so good!"

Her great, dry sense of humor is studded throughout the book, such as: "I need God's grace and something baked with peanut butter and chocolate." What's not to love?

Some of my highlighted passages, which I wanted to share with you:

• When I attended a marriage conference taught by Paul Tripp, he said something that devastated me. Tripp said, "If God doesn't rule your mundane, then he doesn't rule you. Because that's where you live."

• God can use the ordinary moments in your life to glorify himself by conforming you into the image of his Son. That is precisely what he intends to do. Dirty dishes in the sink or red crayons smushed into an electrical socket by a curious toddler are not just worrisome ordeals in your otherwise uneventful day. They're opportunities to see glimpses of grace.

• Jesus apparently believes that the most satisfying thing for us in all eternity is to behold his glory in his very presence. He is not absent from our noisy, chaotic lives. He is with us, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). And if he's with us even to the end of the age, then he is with us even to the end of our carpooling route. He's with us even to the end of the meat in the fridge when grocery day isn't for another four days. He's with us even to the end of a

long night of waking with a crying baby. He's with us even to the end of a party that we'd rather not be at or be hosting, for whatever reason. He's with us even to the end of a hectic morning of rushing around trying to get out the door. He's with us even to the end of a dreadful day when nothing seemed to go as planned.

• God's efficacious grace could be described in terms of the different ways you put pajamas on a baby. My son prefers to streak after he takes baths. He even tries to climb out of the tub early before everyone is soaped up and rinsed in order to increase his odds of getting to run around in his birthday suit. . . . But it's all fun and games until a naked baby has an accident on the carpet, so I quickly chase him down to put on his diaper. Some nights he runs away shrieking and hides under tables and behind chairs trying to avoid the inevitable. Some nights he quietly lies on the bed while I diaper him, and he might even stretch his legs into the pajamas I hold up. Either way, whether I have to wrestle his clothes onto him or he peacefully submits to the work I am doing, that boy has never gone to bed without a diaper and pajamas on. Of course, we should love to submit to God's efficacious grace as he purposes to make us more like Christ! But sometimes we're like a naked baby hiding behind the couch, reluctant to hold still and thankfully allow God to work in our hearts and get us ready for what he has next.

• We're destined for joy forever because of Christ's exquisite hospitality in opening a way to God through his own body. We can serve others with gladness, knowing that the carrots we peel and the diapers we change are as unto the Lord. . . . When we show hospitality in this way, we can see how "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may about in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). Our role is to serve with the strength God supplies, and it's God's role to do with our service whatever he pleases. He supplies the

strength, and in his abundant hospitality he also gives us joy! God's grace in Christ is for us to enjoy and share with others. When I have this grace in mind, I can see my possessions and others' needs in light of eternity.

• My disgusting kitchen floor and its propensity to absorb filth is a picture of our hearts. No matter how hard we scrub, we cannot erase our iniquity. The shame of our sin is like the phantom stain on a shirt that reappears after you've dried it. The stain is deep in the fibers of the shirt, and when the right temperature of heat is applied, the stain rises to the surface of the fabric. The stain is permanent.

• Not making an idol out of our homes is tricky. I've personally experienced what it feels like to be obsessed with the idea of organization in my home. I thought I was being driven by the maxim "God is a God of order and not chaos." I thought that if everything had a place, then my heart would feel at peace because strict orderliness is godly. But instead of worshiping God, I just wanted to be in control. I was worshiping my image and thought it wouldn't be so bad if others admired me, too. . . .I've also had struggles with the idol of self-expression, seeing my home primarily as an extension of myself. If something was out of place or not just so, then I felt it reflected poorly on my personhood or character. Again I was serving my own image—not God's.

• Jesus is the sovereign Lord over every square centimeter in your home—from the pipes to the television to the mattresses. He is Lord over it, and he desires that you use what he's given you to glorify him. That doesn't mean that your home needs to be perfect by the world's standards or even by your own personal standards, but consecrated by God's standards. . . . In Romans 12:1-2 we see a description of what it means to set ourselves apart for God: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to

> present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Since Jesus is lord over all things and God is subjecting all things under his feet (1 Cor. 15:27), including our homes, by his grace we use our homes to worship him.

See why I loved this book? Let the gospel permeate every square inch of your heart and your home. I bet *Glimpses of Grace* can help.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/glimpses-of-grace-knocking-down-mental-walls/
on June 4, 2013.

Headed to the Courtroom

June 18, 2013

Yesterday I was selected to serve on a jury for a trial that is anticipated to last three to four weeks. The jury selection process was an all-day affair, lasting over twelve hours and creating quite a sense of camaraderie in the process.

I keep thinking about the three major take-aways from this experience.

First, the multiple defense attorneys for the four defendants (thus the long trial) repeatedly reminded us that the American

justice system is built on the foundation of "presumed innocent until proven guilty." And that is a very, very good thing, as horror stories emerge from countries where instant "justice" is meted out in cutting off or crushing limbs of those accused of stealing. And in countries where "mob justice" is part of everyday life. (See my blog post When God Does Nothing About Injustice.)

But it's not like that before God. Not a single one of us can protest innocence. Not only is every single one of us a sinner from conception (Ps. 51:5), but God knows every thought we think before we ever act on it. A totally holy, perfect God knows that we may be innocent of crimes before other men, but we are not innocent before Him.

Except that Jesus swapped His perfection and righteousness for our messed up guilt. It's like the judge coming down from his elevated seat, taking off his robes, and saying to a defendant that was just declared guilty, "I'll be taking your punishment for you." Amazing.

My second takeaway is gratitude for the teaching and experience in filtering life through a biblical filter. I am especially grateful for the wisdom of Proverbs 18:17—"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." All of us potential jurors were strongly encouraged to use common sense, and evaluate carefully everything we would hear. And (not surprisingly), the defense attorneys asked us not to draw any conclusions until we had heard everything. Those could be just platitudes, but since I know that God's Word said it first, it is my determined course of action.

The third takeaway is the importance of embracing God's right to put a long trial on my calendar. He is God; He has the right to interrupt my plans and put whatever He wants on my schedule. I had an idea of what I would be doing during the day over the next month, but God had different plans. I choose

to trust Him and keep letting go of my impatient, wrong-headed belief that I should get to decide my agenda.

Then in one breathtaking moment, I had a paradigm shift that erupted in a heartfelt "Oh, *thank* You Lord!": the realization that this is nothing compared to the way a cancer diagnosis crashes into one's schedule, with a very different set of unwanted appointments on it. I'm pretty sure my sister Nanci, fighting breast cancer, would swap her chemo treatments with my courtroom dates in a heartbeat.

So the adventure with God continues . . .

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/headed-to-the-courtroom

Honor Thy (Very Flawed) Father and Mother

July 30, 2013

Someone asked me about how to resolve the biblical command to "Honor thy father and mother" (Ex. 20:12) with the fact that these people may have had huge and damaging flaws. I suggested googling the phrase "honoring your parents" for some insight. Below are some links I found helpful.

But as I told her, one aspect of honoring flawed parents is to understand that the best (or even only) way you might be able to honor them is from a distance, emotionally and physically. You can give yourself permission to do that.

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering

what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm's way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it's entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don't deserve your trust.

Honoring flawed parents means you have healthy boundaries so that you know where you end and they begin. It means you learn how to protect yourself so that they can't steamroll over you; it also means you have realistic expectations about what they can and cannot give you or do for/to you. (You may need some help adjusting your expectations.) For instance, in our family there is a family member who has never, ever said the words "thank you." I mean, not even if you pass the salt, or do something they specifically asked! (I think this qualifies as "flawed," don't you?) It is unrealistic to expect that to change. It is an exercise in futility to expect anything different than a lifelong pattern of non-communication. Honoring this person means letting go of the futile hope to ever hear something as simple as "thank you," much less the more profound "I'm proud of you" or even "I love you"! Honoring this person means letting go of unrealistic expectations so we don't set ourselves up for continued disappointment and heartache. (An excellent book is *Boundaries* by Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud, and I taught a 7-week study on this book which is available here on Bible.org.)

Finally, let me share with you the insight of Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*:

> *"To honor our parents means to be thankful for for their existence and to respect their actual role as givers of life in the sequence of human existence. Of course in order to*

honor them in this way we need to be thankful for our own existence too. But we also will usually need to have pity on them. For, even if they are good people, it is almost always true that they have been quite wrong in many respects, and possibly still are.

"Commonly those who have experienced great antagonism with their parents are only able to be thankful for their existence and honor them, as they deeply need to, after the parents have grown old. Then it is possible to pity them, to have mercy on them. And that opens the door to honoring them. With a certain sadness, perhaps, but also with joy and peace at least. One of the greatest gifts of The Kingdom Among Us is the healing of the parent-child relation, 'turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers' (Mal. 4:6)."

Honor My Mother And Father? How Should I Treat My Abusive Parents?
www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html

What Does It Mean to Honor Your Parents? (in this case, when a parent has dementia)
http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/honor_thy_very_flawed_father_and_mother

“What About ADD and Medication for Kids?”

My son has ADD. It’s a real struggle and at this point in time I am not wanting to put him on medication. Others have felt that medication would help him. I know Christ has given us a promise of a sound mind which we pray daily and also for the mind of Christ. I want to do what is best for him and am starting to get confused because with everything we are doing his struggles don’t seem to be letting up for him and I would hate to have let him struggle especially in school unnecessarily. What are your thoughts on this issue of ADD and medication?

We have an e-mail answer about chemical imbalance that you may find helpful.

Also, the Lord has given me great peace about the validity of the analogy between the physical assistance I need as a polio survivor to use a cane for walking and an electric scooter for large places, and the physical (chemical) assistance that a weakness in brain chemistry needs in order to function well. There is no shame in using my cane to help me walk, and there should be no shame in using chemical assistance in using meds to help your son’s brain function better. Part of God’s charge to Adam and Eve was to exercise dominion over the earth, which includes research and development of technology. I bet you didn’t anguish over giving him immunizations when he was a baby, which was also the outworking of that same charge to have dominion over the earth.

When I helped in classes at my kids’ school, there was one little boy whose mom put him on Ritalin and whose dad, who said “No kid of mine is going to take that sissy stuff!”, wouldn’t give it to him when he was caring for the boy. This precious little boy told me, “I wish I had my ‘smart

medicine.'" The meds made it possible for him to concentrate and to do much better in school (and thus feel better about himself).

I don't see any contradiction between having the mind of Christ and taking medication that enables your son to be clearer and not have to struggle so to EXPERIENCE the mind of Christ. One is a spiritual issue and the other is physical. If you get nothing from this e-mail other than a sense of permission to give it a whirl and see if it helps, great! <smile> You can always take him off it later. It's not a sin issue, it's a "let's try and see if this works" issue. . . which, in my experience as a parent, is how much of parenting works since kids don't come with manuals!

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Is "Lord of the Rings" OK for Christians to Read?"

Some young people in our church are reading some books called *Lord of the Rings.* Are these books suitable for Christians or are they ungodly books like that Harry Potter series? Apparently the teens think they are "harmless entertainment" from what I understand and they really enjoyed the Trilogy (read all 3 books). Please give me at least a sort of detailed explanation on where you all stand one way or another.

Dear _____,

We really ought to have an article on the Lord of the Rings trilogy. . .

It was written by a solid Christian, J.R.R. Tolkien, with a strongly Christian worldview. It is a tremendous blessing that something so biblical in its understanding has received the attention from Hollywood and the movie-going public that this trilogy has, and it has triggered further interest in reading the books that inspired the movies. We are completely behind the *Lord of the Rings* books.

I would like to point you to a helpful article by one of my personal heroes, Gene Edward Veith, who wrote an essay on LOTR in *World* Magazine: www.worldmag.com/world/issue/12-08-01/national_1.asp

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Published July 2004

Addendum, Feb. 2013:

Our friends at LeaderU.com created a marvelous Special Focus with the release of the LOTR movies that features links to excellent articles:

Lord of the Rings: True Mythology
Is *Lord of the Rings*, the most popular in the UK of all works in England's great literary legacy, based in pagan myth or Christian themes—or both? Dig into the story behind the stories and their master storyteller in our Special Focus.

When Ex-Gays Return to a Gay Identity

I recently received an envelope in the mail with no return address and no personal note, just copies of three articles about men who used to be part of Exodus International, who used to identify themselves as "ex-gay," and now repudiate that part of their histories. It is consistent with emails and blog comments I have received pointing this out, and asking if that doesn't negate my position that homosexuality is changeable.

No. The fact that some people, denouncing something they used to support, now represent themselves as proud gays and lesbians, doesn't change anything. Just as people who lived in sobriety from alcohol and drugs for years have been known to get sucked back into their addictions, it isn't surprising that some would get weary of the struggle against their temptations and stop fighting.

Some people gave up earlier than others, hoping and expecting that if they just kept living "the straight life," their feelings would catch up with their resolutions. They kept waiting for homosexual desires and temptations to disappear, and they didn't. So they decided that they were done with trying to pretend to be something they weren't. I'm good with not pretending; I'm a huge believer in authenticity and transparency.

But if someone continues to experience same-sex attraction even if they don't act on it, does it mean they're gay, as the culture insists?

What the culture says—if you ever have same-sex feelings, it means you're gay—doesn't matter compared to what God says.

God calls us to make choices every day that contradict and

violate our feelings and temptations, but which we choose because they are the right thing to do. From the basics of the Ten Commandments to the ultimate example of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, He calls us to choose obedience and behavior that honors Him and other people despite our feelings. What if we don't *feel* like telling the truth? Don't lie anyway. What if we don't *feel* like not killing the person who really ticks us off? Don't murder anyway. What if we don't *feel* like remaining faithful to our spouse? Don't commit adultery anyway.

So what if someone doesn't *feel* like stewarding their sexuality in purity and self-control? Regardless of the nature of the temptation, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, God calls us to possess our own body in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:4).

Sadly, some men who had come out of homosexuality have left their wives and children to return to living as gay men. This isn't really much different from men who leave their wives and children for another woman. Succumbing to temptation, regardless of who tempts us, is still sin. Heartbreaking, home-breaking sin.

We're hearing people saying, "I'm not ex-gay anymore because trying to be ex-gay doesn't work. 'Pray away the gay' (a rather offensive term used by scoffers) doesn't work. Trying hard to be straight doesn't work. 'Claiming my healing' doesn't work. I'm done."

And they're right.

What doesn't work:

Name-it-and-claim-it theology, the religious version of "wishing will make it so." Trying to speak reality into existence, as in "I am no longer gay because I'm a Christian," doesn't work because we don't create reality through our words. Only the Creator God can do that.

Casting out the demon of homosexuality. While there is always a demonic component to idolatry and unrepentant sin, homosexuality is not caused by a demon, any more than bigotry, selfishness or gossip are.

Trying harder, praying harder, reading the Bible, begging God to make the gay feelings to go away. These human efforts are the religious equivalent of mowing the grass to get rid of dandelions. (For a completely different approach—grace—check out True-Faced.)

What does work:

Laying aside one's sexuality as the measure of identity. "Who I really am" according to our flesh is always going to be at odds with "who God says I am" according to His word. Seeking a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the spiritual disciplines moves us toward reframing our faulty identity, no matter who we are or what we struggle with. We need to choose to find our identity in what God says about us—most importantly, receiving and owning the truth that He says, "You are My beloved child in whom I am well pleased."

Looking at the contributing factors that shaped the same-sex "hole" in one's heart (and the lies connected to them) to process them in light of God's love and sovereignty, and then forgive the people who inflicted the wounds.

Choosing to learn to live with a tension: our flesh wants things that are dishonoring to God, dysfunctional and dangerous, but God calls us to do the right thing anyway. Regardless of our desires and feelings. Right from the beginning, He told Cain, "[I]f you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it" (Gen 4:7). God didn't say to Cain, "I know, you're angry because I didn't accept your offering. That's who you are, an angry soul. Go and let your anger

explode!" In the New Testament, we read, "The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need" (Eph. 4:28). God didn't say to the thief, "I know, you feel compelled to take what doesn't belong to you. That's who you are, a stealing soul. Go and act on your desires to steal!"

Now we have people saying, "I am attracted to the same sex. Since everyone says I am defined by my feelings, I now realize that's just who I am." And God does not say to them, "I know, you are gay/lesbian/transgender/bi-sexual. That's who you are, so go act on it!" God calls everyone to the same standard: sexual holiness and integrity, which means keeping all sex within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman.

Adjusting one's expectations. Accepting the truth that one's attractions and desires may always be warped to some degree; they may always remain an area of weakness that can drive the disciple to a deeper level of dependence on God, which is essential for growing in relationship with Him. That may mean learning to live with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-10) instead of insisting that the only culturally acceptable change is a 180-degree shift in attractions from homosexual to heterosexual.

There is no "easy button." Submitting to the process of sanctification means crucifying the flesh, and that's *hard*. For any Christ-follower. And that's where lasting change happens—as we are made into the image of Christ (Gal. 4:19), as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). And that might, or might not, extend to our feelings. Regardless of who we are.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/when_ex-gays_return_to_a_gay_identity on May 7, 2013.

Why Didn’t God Prevent the Boston Bombings?

The problem of why a good God would allow evil and suffering is probably the biggest problem people have with Christianity. It certainly rises—or perhaps roars—to the surface after horrific events such as last week’s bombings in Boston.

Many people resonate with philosopher David Hume’s syllogism:

- If God is all good, he *would* defeat evil.
- If God is all powerful, he *could* defeat evil.
- But evil is not defeated.
- Therefore, there is no such God.
- God is either impotent or malevolent.

But when we read through the entire Bible and see the larger picture, there is a good response to Hume’s argument:

- If God is all good, he would defeat evil.
- If God is all powerful, he could defeat evil.
- But evil is not *yet* defeated.
- Therefore, God *will* defeat evil.
- God is all good, all powerful, and merciful.

Many people have pointed out that the reason people do horrible things is that we are free to do them, just as we are free to do good, loving and wonderful things. That freedom is a gift from God. He had to make us free to say “no” to Him in order that we would be free to say “yes” to Him. When my friend presses a button on her iPhone to ask the artificially intelligent agent a question, Siri responds with pre-programmed answers.

“I love you, Siri.”

“Oh. Stop.”

“No really! I love you, Siri!”

“I bet you say that to all your Apple products.”

“Will you marry me?”

“You should know that you’re not the only one who’s asked.”

There’s no love there. Just a robotic answer. Robots are not what God wanted; He wanted to lavish love on us and invite us into the circle of divine mutual love and delight and affection and grace that the Father, Son and Spirit have enjoyed for all eternity.

So why didn’t God prevent the Boston Bombings? Because He has given people the right to make significant choices, even hurtfully horrible choices. But He is still more powerful than the evil in our hearts. He is even now redeeming the pain and suffering of what happened in Boston in ways we cannot see. He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)

The fact that He didn’t prevent the bombings doesn’t mean He wasn’t actively preventing even more pain and suffering. For example, the bombing suspects were stopped before they could cause more death and pain. Millions of people in Boston (including my own son and his wife) were protected from the mayhem. And just like the 9/11 accounts, there are stories circulating of God’s protection in action. One man crossed the finished line of the Boston Marathon seconds before the bombs exploded. Joe Berti escaped the explosion, but his wife and friends were ten yards from the bomb; they were hit by shrapnel but were relatively unhurt, while a woman next to them had a leg torn off from the knee down. When they returned home, Joe was driving near West, Texas when he heard and felt the detonation from the nearby fertilizer plant explosion.

(bit.ly/15qbDVp)

Frank Turek has a helpful video that explores some of these ideas:

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/why_didnt_god_prevent_the_boston_bombings on April 23, 2013.

"What's the Difference Between Lesbian Relationships and Heterosexual Marriage?"

How are the dynamics of lesbian relationships different from a marriage's? A lot of marriages have issues and "skeletons in the closet" too. So just generally speaking, how are they different? Maybe more drama, more desperation in lesbian relationships? And what is the fundamental reasoning you have reached that may cause the difference?

Ever since you wrote, I have been thinking about your question and talking to people with lots of experience, including a dear friend who was a gay activist for decades and in a long-term relationship with another woman for twelve years.

The core problem is trying to force a same-sex relationship, where the God-designed complementarity is missing, into a marriage-like relationship that is designed for balance. There isn't any. The strengths and weaknesses of male and female are simply missing, so all you have are the same strengths and same weaknesses.

For example, we women are created to be relational; men are more task-oriented by design. Together, this means that things get done in a context of people's hearts mattering. In lesbian relationships, it's ALL about the relationship. And since a part of lesbianism is a deep core of insecurity, women are driven by fear to protect the relationship at all costs, lest the other one even *think* of leaving. This means binding the other to oneself with gifts, favors, music, shared everything including finances, and constant contact throughout the day (and panic when the other doesn't respond immediately).

I have a ball consisting of magnets that fit and hold together by magnetic attraction. The orientation of the pieces in relation to each other matters because some pieces are drawn to each other, but if you flip one of the pieces, the magnetic polarity causes them to repel each other. You can make them touch, but you have to apply some kind of force to hold them together. God designed males and females to be attracted to each other and to hold together naturally, like the north and south poles of magnets, in large part because of our differences. When same-sex couples try to forge an intimate, romantic/sexual relationship, it's like two north poles or two south poles of a magnet, so they have to use some kind of force to keep them together. This is why manipulation is the glue of emotionally dependent relationships. One long-time lesbian said, "We don't have partners, we have prisoners."

Most lesbian-identifying women are plagued by a yawning "hole" in their hearts, either a mommy-shaped hole or a best-girlfriend shaped hole. Thus, the attraction, unlike with magnets, is the hope of getting an aching emotional need met. A friend of mine who has been walking with same-sex-attracted people for decades calls that aching emotional need "giant sucking funnels." Another friend referred to it as "two ticks, no dog." And one of my friends met a fifty-something woman at

a gay bar who actually said, “I want you to be my mommy.” They try to stuff other women into that hole, and it never works. That’s because once a girl’s legitimate developmental needs are not met at their appropriate stage in life, there is no way for another human being to fill such a large hole. But God can, and I have seen Him do it, through His people and through personal intimacy with Jesus.

My friends who came out of the lesbian community tell me that they’ve never seen healthy lesbian relationships. Women in long-term relationships present a well-crafted façade to the world. When the women split up, everyone is shocked, because there was one dynamic for public, and then the reality of what went on behind closed doors. Usually that means one person controlling the other, one person caretaking the other, and not a mutuality of equals. It’s more a matter of a major power differential. The biblical concept of husband and wife as equals before God, each contributing something intrinsically different to the relationship, is missing in lesbian relationships. This is especially true for those who get into longer-term relationships, where there is usually an age gap because women are hoping to fix the mother-daughter brokenness inside them. One of my friends watched her mother get into what became a long-term relationship with another woman, and over the years has listened to her mother complain bitterly about the way she’s treated. She is still saying, decades into the relationship, “I’m miserable but I don’t know how to live without her, so I’ll just stay.”

One day I was looking at a sculpture I have of a circle of friends, arms around each others’ shoulders. It reminded me of the dynamic of a husband-wife marriage, where they are face-to-face in a circle of two as they get established as a new family unit in society, and then they enlarge the circle by bringing children into it. By contrast, lesbian relationships are like two lovers face-to-face in their “us only” circle of two, excluding all others, jealous of outside friendships and

suspicious of all other relationships as a threat to the circle of two. The relationship is inherently sterile; they cannot bring children into the circle without engaging (one way or another) in God's "one male, one female" requirement for creating new human beings.

Another difference in the dynamics of husband-wife marriages vs. lesbian relationships is that when men and women work on getting emotionally healthier, bringing their marriage into alignment with God's Word, it strengthens the marriage and builds oneness between two very different, very "other" people. When two lesbian women work on getting emotionally healthier, it means de-tangling and disengaging from the enmeshment that defines their relationship and tries to erase the boundaries of who they are individually. If they bring their relationship into alignment with God's Word (Rom. 1:26), they will no longer be lesbian partners.

I do need to add a disclaimer, that there has been a major age-related sea change. What I've just said is true of women 30-35 and older, but some things are drastically different for younger women who identify as lesbians. Like the other people their age, they grew up in a far more sexualized culture than ever before, and they grew up in a world of ever-increasing approval of lesbian behavior (thanks to the proliferation of pornography, for one big reason). Many girls experimented in lesbian relationships and sex simply because of peer pressure and the messages of the culture: "How will you know if you like it or not unless you try? You owe it to yourself!"

However, just like with their older counterparts, these relationships are still volatile, intense, drama-filled, and very difficult to extricate from. Jealousy and manipulation (especially guilt) are major dynamics. Regardless of the age, same-sex romantic and sexual relationships are not God's intention or design, so they don't work well.

You asked about my fundamental reasoning for my conclusions;

simply observing, week after week after week for 14 years, what these girls and women report about their relationships and how hard it is to come out of a lesbian identity, is quite the education. Especially when I compare it to what I know of God’s word combined with the experience of enjoying a balanced, healthy marriage for 38 years.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

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