

“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

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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

Posted April 2013

“Let Me Tell You About How I Know God Has a Sense of Humor”

I was reading Sue Bohlin's blog post [Does God Has a Sense of Humor?](#), and I have something to add. My name, Talitha, is from Mark 5:41. It means “Little Girl.” My mother told me that when she was pregnant with me, God told her to name me Talitha. Oh, and the kicker? I'm five-foot, and 108 pounds, roughly. God DOES has a sense of humor!

Love it! Thank you so much for sharing your story—and for making me smile!

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

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Spiritual Exoskeleton

March 27, 2013



I was crippled by polio at six months old, paralyzed from the waist down on my left side. In order to stand or walk at all, I was fitted with a steel-and-leather brace from hip to shoe. This brace provided the external support I needed to stay upright and to walk. I was blessed to regain some use of my leg, and my muscles slowly grew stronger. I was able to go to a half brace; then, when I learned to lock my knee, they took away the brace altogether because the strength and support became internal rather than external.

I am grateful for the way my brace gives me a picture of grace-filled accountability. One of the reasons God wants us to live in community is because sometimes we need an external support system that provides structure and support while we learn new ways of thinking and living. That external support system, a "spiritual exoskeleton," can take many forms.

It's friends who ask how they can pray for you and then follow up with shame-free, no-condemnation questions about how you're doing.

It's giving a trusted friend your car keys and debit card for

safe keeping when you are struggling with the temptation to go off by yourself to indulge in destructive choices.

It's knowing you need software to block your computer access to pornography, and asking someone else to choose the password.

It's asking a friend to check up on you and ask how you're doing at keeping a particular promise or fulfilling an obligation.

It's inviting someone to text or call when you're being tempted. Even at 2 a.m.

It's being transparent, such as showing an accountability partner your bank records or cell phone records.

It's the wisdom of AA and other recovery groups who strongly suggest that an addict seeking to become an overcomer attend ninety meetings in ninety days.

It's discovering that seeking God through participating in a liturgical church's daily worship and prayer services can produce the spiritual fruit of greater intimacy with Him.

It's encouraging others in choices and habits that will help them grow spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. Asking, "What book(s) are you reading right now?" "What are you wrestling with or learning from God right now?" "What one thing would you like to be different a month (or three) from now, that I can pray for you about?" It's living out the truth of Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

All these means of external support can become the beauty of internal strength as we "grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). The "spiritual

exoskeleton” can become the internal “supporting ligament,” not to mention core strength, of self-controlled people.

Here’s to being able to take off the braces of our lives—but first, we give thanks for them!

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

Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters, and Attitudes

Last month, an engine fire disabled the cruise ship Carnival Triumph in the Gulf of Mexico. Almost no electricity, only one working elevator, and worst of all, a handful of working toilets for 4000+ people. Crew members handed out bio-hazard bags to set inside trash cans as ad hoc commodes, then collected them from hallways. Suddenly, the luxury vacation turned into a nightmare for a lot of people, especially those on the lowest floors and those in inside cabins.

No one had any control over their circumstances. They only had control over their attitudes. Some screeched their rage at Carnival, threatening that they would “own” the company after their lawsuits were filed. Others, with grace, remarked that they had a three-day wonderful cruise followed by a four-day camping trip. Some passengers set up a “tent city” on the pool deck, moving their mattresses and bedding to an outdoor location away from the growing stench of human waste. Others left their hopelessly dark cabins to set up their new digs in the now-worthless elevator lobbies.

No one was seriously hurt and everyone made it back safely to the U.S. (the huge ship was towed to Mobile, Alabama).

Now, I am a self-professed “cruise queen.” It’s my favorite kind of vacation, and I’ve been on that ship twice. If I’d been on that cruise, I would have been one of the people most affected by the loss of power, since the handicap accessible room cabins are on a lower floor, and the ship is too big for me to navigate without a scooter—which is useless when the batteries run down and you can’t recharge them, not to mention the elevator problem. So I thought about how choosing one’s attitude makes all the difference in any situation. A lot.

One of my most vivid memories showed me how true this is.

Before my mother died, I went to Las Vegas with her and my sister for a family wedding. My sister Julie and I decided we wanted to go on the roller coaster at New York, New York. To our surprise, Mom indicated she wanted to go too. I had never seen our mom as a roller coaster kind of person . . .! I sat next to her, with Julie in front of us. It was fine when the lap bar was locked in place, but she looked at me quizzically when the workers secured us in heavy-duty shoulder harnesses.

“Mom,” I asked, “You *DO* know that this thing goes upside down, right?”

Eyes wide open, she said, “*WHAT???!?!?*”

And we were off.

Mom did not have a good time. Every time I looked at her, she had her lips tightly pursed and her eyes narrowed. Julie and I were whooping and hollering with fun, and Mom was miserable. Mom was experiencing the exact same thing we were, but she had a very different attitude about it.

They take your picture while you’re on rides like this, and I asked playfully, “Mom, you want our picture as a souvenir of

our trip?" She growled, "NO!" And I laughed. . . and bought it.



Attitude is everything!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/cruise_ships_roller_coasters_and_attitudes on March 18, 2013

Self-Care: Stewardship, Not Selfishness

Remember the safety demonstration on airplanes? "In the unlikely event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting children." Every time I fly, I am reminded that taking care of one's own basic needs is not selfish; it enables us to give selflessly to others. Consider what would happen if a mother first put oxygen masks on her children, but lost consciousness before donning her own because she waited too long. Quite traumatic to her children,

right?

We can't give to others what we don't possess ourselves. That includes mental and emotional energy, love, grace, and compassion. If we're running on empty, and have nothing to give, that is neither loving nor kind.

God's gift of the Sabbath in the Old Testament (Ex. 16:29), and His invitation to enter His Sabbath rest in the New (Hebrews 4), is His intention for us to be blessed by recharging our batteries, feeding our souls, refilling our tanks. It's a form of self-care. That's going to look different for various people, but it's all God's provision of what He knows we need.

For my husband, self-care means walking our dog, listening to his music on these walks, working out, and getting off by himself. For me, self-care is enjoying a cup of high-quality coffee first thing in the morning while I meet God in His word, leaving my phone in another room and unplugging from the world for several hours, and getting to a place where I can drink in the beauty of crystal-blue Caribbean water. Both of us have learned that we emerge from a time of self-care ready to focus on other people and the tasks before us. Self-care enables us to be self-forgetful, which is a wonderful place to be!

In the gospels, we see the Lord Jesus' self-care as getting up early to spend time with His Father. He would no longer think of ministering in His own strength than we could successfully complete a road trip without stopping to refuel our gas tank. I think hanging out with His dear friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus may have been a form of self-care as well.

If God has created our bodies, minds and souls and thus they belong to Him, then we are responsible for taking care of them. Caring for His creation honors God and fulfills the duty of a steward: "Now what is sought in stewards is that one be

found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

Self-care is not selfishness, it is stewardship. How are you caring for God’s treasure that is you?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/self-care_stewardship_not_selfishness on Feb. 26, 2013.

Happy Birthday to Jesus-in-Me!

Happy Birthday to Jesus-in-Me!

Today is my spiritual birthday. 40 years ago I woke up in the morning a sophomore in college, disengaged with God, ignoring Him like I had for years, but when I went to bed that night my entire world and eternity had changed forever. In the middle of the day, a classmate handed me a flyer, inviting me to a performance of an illusionist/magician, André Kole. I was intensely interested, being a fan of illusion, but when the flyer revealed the event was sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, I said to myself, “Forget it.” I was *not* interested in hanging with Jesus freaks! But as the day wore on, it felt like there was a string tied around my heart, drawing me to that evening’s performance.

So I went.

And André Kole used magic to illustrate spiritual principles that made sense to me, especially when he talked about every human being having a God-shaped hole in our hearts that we try to stuff with anything *but* God: good grades, reputation, relationships, appearance, money, attention, achievements. He

explained how God had sent Jesus to earth to show us what He was like, and then Jesus died on the cross to deal with our sin once and for all. Three days later God raised Him from the dead and He's still alive today, unlike the founder of any other world religion. If I trusted in Jesus, He would come to live inside me forever and He, being God, would fill that God-shaped hole and I could experience the "abundant life" He came to bring us (John 10:10). I remember thinking, "YES!!" and threw open the door of my heart to Him, placing myself in Jesus' hands and trusting Him with my life and my future.

I had no idea what that meant. I just knew it was right.

Life became a perpetual surprise box as God started making changes in me from the inside out. To my delight, I discovered that all the things I really liked about myself then, and even moreso as forty years have unfolded, were the things that God put in me. He gave me a depth of joy that I didn't know was possible. He planted spiritual gifts in me that were the manifestation of His Holy Spirit shining through the window of my life: gifts of shepherd/teacher, of encouragement, of word of wisdom, all of which came straight from His heart into mine. He continued to shape the personality and temperament He had given me with maturity and seasoning. He made my heart a big pipe through which He poured His love into other people.

I remember one time a couple of months into my new life, discovering a different kind of fellowship with other Christ-followers and a love for God's word as I started being taught the Bible and learning to teach others what I was learning, wondering if this cool new life would last or if it was just some sort of fad. I didn't know that God was *transforming* me, giving me a taste for His life and His kingdom that would spoil me for any counterfeit the world had to offer. He opened my eyes to be aware of the spiritual realm, not just the physical realm I lived in, and enlarged my understanding to



include the Big Picture of life on earth and in eternity. I learned that my life wasn't about me at all, it was about Jesus, and because He loved me, He had drawn me into His life, His circle of delight and fellowship with His Father and His Spirit—that I was now included into the “holy hug” of Father, Son and Spirit who had adopted me, and I was now a daughter of the King—which makes me a forever princess! Forty years later, I still revel in that gift, and I love to pull out a tiara and pop it on my head when I'm sharing my story of grace with people.

When I was a little girl I just wanted to be happy when I grew up. Who doesn't, right? But what I discovered is that God had His definition of happy—blessed—plus so much more. He gave me Himself, and all the good things of life are found in Him.

Happy birthday to Jesus-in-me! My heart is overflowing with unspeakable gratitude!

This blog post originally appeared at
http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/happy_birthday_to_jesus-in-me on Feb. 12, 2013

Don't Judge Me?

The 14-year-old daughter of a friend recently responded to her mother's correction with, “Don't judge me, Mom.” The same week, a friend of mine asked my opinion on something, and as I was mentally running it through the grid of “what does God say about this in His word,” she said, “Now, don't you go judging me!”

Tolerance and acceptance—the *new* tolerance, which says that

every value, belief and behavior should be embraced as equally valid—are the highest values of our culture. Which makes judging the most hideous and unacceptable of sins.

Now, to be fair, there is a lot of ugly judging in the world. Before a friend became a Christ follower, she was on the receiving end of a lot of hateful judging when she would protest at gay rights events, hearing “You’re going to hell!” and other ugly epithets. People who didn’t know her at all made judgments about her character and her destiny. I have personally received my share of hate mail from strangers accusing me of not being a Christian because I disagree with them on a cherished position.

But if we get pulled over for speeding, and the officer points out that we were going twenty miles over the speed limit, nobody says, “Don’t judge me, officer!” He’s not judging our character, he’s comparing our behavior to the law.

Judging is assuming you have all the facts and making an assessment of condemnation out of ignorance. It’s about smugly believing “I’m right and you’re wrong. You are lesser-than.”

There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to be familiar with “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus’ call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother’s eye (Matt. 7:5)? That’s about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another’s sin, not to ignore other people’s behavior.

But then there’s the “big daddy” passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with

sexually immoral people-not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. Judging doesn't mean condemning, though; often it's a matter of comparing one's behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of one's choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

Comparing someone's beliefs and actions to a standard can be a loving thing to do. A lady working in an after-school program noticed that one little girl was clearly not doing well on her homework, but she also seemed to not be working very hard at it. The teacher said, "I think your brain is switched off! May I touch your head? I think I can find the switch and turn it back on!" The wide-eyed little one gave permission and the teacher said with a smile, "Oh, here it is! Right under one of your braids! Let's turn your brain back on!" What a lovely, eloquent way to call a child to live up to her potential without shaming or judging her for being lazy or stupid.

Challenging someone to be better than they are can be a gift. One of the best-ever movie lines is in "As Good As It Gets" when Jack Nicholson tells Helen Hunt, "You make me want to be a better man." When parents ask their children at report card time, "Did you do your best? Only you can know," they are giving them a chance to honestly compare their ability to their potential. It honors another to say something like, "I

think you'll be happier with yourself if you live out your gifting" rather than shaming them with something like, "What a loser." Now *that's* shaming.

And judging.

And ugly.

And unlike Jesus.

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