

Flush It, Don't Eat it

Sept. 26, 2012

I used to have a family member who never had a cheerful or affirming thing to say. She was grumpy and judgmental, and nothing was ever good enough. But I learned an exceedingly valuable life lesson from her.

One day I realized that the way she treated me was like the solid waste that goes into toilets, if you know what I mean. I had a choice with how to handle it. I could internalize it, which would be like pulling out a spoon and eating it . . . or I could refuse to take it personally, and send it away by flushing it. There was a delightful sense of power the first time I told myself, "This is about her, not me," as I mentally reached for the handle and said to myself, "Flushhhhhh!" I couldn't help but smile at the freedom I felt.

I couldn't keep her brokenness, her own "heart garbage" from dumping on me, but I found a way to refuse to accept it and make it *my* heart garbage. Result: greater emotional health for me.

When I taught the high school girls' Bible study at my church, they would complain about the way the high school boys treated them. (Not abuse, just relational cluelessness.) I assured them that high school boys are not fully formed human beings yet, and they needed to finish growing up. But I also empowered the girls with this wisdom, instructing them how to mentally reach over, hit the handle and say to themselves, "Flushhhhhh!" Swearing them to secrecy within the Bible study, I suggested that if some boy said something dumb, the girls could look at each another and say, "FI!" for "flush it."

It drove the boys nuts. "Feminine Intuition?" "Nope! You'll never guess what it means, it's a secret!" The girls told me it really helped them to not take the boys' immature comments

personally; I told them that I was glad they were learning the lesson then, and they just might find it helpful for dealing with a parent, a future mother-in-law, or some other person whose hurtfulness they couldn't escape.

Jesus showed us this pattern; He knew how to keep Himself mentally and emotionally balanced even though He was surrounded by people who kept giving Him reason to “flush.” He never put His emotional eggs in their baskets—He never took their misunderstanding and their judgments personally (until the cross, when He absorbed every bit of our sin and judgments into Himself). Even during His torture and crucifixion, He kept releasing the hurts of people into the Father's hands, saying repeatedly, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Whether it's someone cutting us off in traffic, or dissing us in a group setting or a Facebook thread, or any other place where people's sinfulness and brokenness spews out on us, it's helpful to tell ourselves, “Flush it, don't eat it.”

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

“I Feel So Guilty That My Baby Was Born with a Birth Defect After I Had an Abortion”

I had an abortion when I was young. Several years later I gave birth to a child with a disability. My guilt knows no bounds.

I feel God is punishing my child with a life of suffering due to my horrible sin. I think of King David and how God punished his sin by killing his baby. At least his baby died and went to Heaven. My child will live and suffer all the days of their life. I know it's my fault. What can I do?

Thank you from the bottom of my broken heart.

Guilty Mom

I understand your feelings of guilt, but let me gently point out that you have connected the dots between your abortion and your child's disability as if one caused the other. Since the vast majority of post-abortal mothers deliver healthy babies after their abortion, this is not an automatic cause-and-effect relationship. In addition, many babies with disabilities are born to mothers who didn't have abortions.

Secondly, the nature and character of God is that He does not punish innocents for the sins of their mothers. Twice in the Old Testament, God corrects this wrong assumption; here's one:

"What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'?"

"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.

"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die."
(Ezek 18:2-4)

This passage teaches that the consequences of one's sins are borne by the one who sinned, not their children. (Now I will admit that there are effects of a parent's sins on a family, such as angry parents producing fearful children, but that's not the same as God punishing a child for the parent's sin.)

One of the reasons Jesus left heaven to come to earth as one of us, was to show us what the Father is really like. He knew

that we would paint the face of His Father out of the paint bucket of misunderstanding and fear that comes from our own warped perception of God. If you read the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, you'll see the true heart of the Father—and He's not the kind of God who would punish a child for their mother's sin.

This same Father allowed David to experience a deep brokenness from his sin of adultery by taking David's baby home to be with Himself. The God of Luke 15 is the same Father who disciplined His beloved David for his sin. God is not a vindictive, punishing God who takes pleasure in making His children suffer, but He knows what kind of discipline will best produce the beauty of Christlikeness in us.

Yes, your child will live with a disability all the days of their life. But let me assure you, as one who has lived with a disability almost from birth (so I have no memory of being strong and healthy), God has used my disability in mighty and profound ways. It has not been a punishment, even on my worst days; I have even gotten to the point, at age 59, of realizing that my disability is one of His greatest gifts to me. This has become my life verse:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:16-18)

It's easy, in our limited way of seeing things, to believe that suffering in any form is evil and to be avoided at all costs. This is not the way things work in the "real" world where Jesus is Lord. Suffering can accomplish very good and important things in our lives that we can't experience any other way. I wrote an article called ["The Value of Suffering"](#)

that is one of the best things I've ever written, which you may find helpful.

You ask what you should do.

Your heart is so tender and wounded, there is no doubt that you have confessed your sin over and over, so that part is done. But 1 John 1:9 has another wonderful part to it:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You have confessed your sin; because God is good, He has not only forgiven you, He has cleansed you from the stain of your sin. You are clean. It's all over. If you have trusted in Jesus' life, death and resurrection for you, you are a new creature and He is renewing you from the inside out.

So at this point, you can tell God, "Thank You for forgiving me, thank You for cleansing me, thank You for redeeming my sin and turning something evil into something good. Thank You for being bigger than my sins, and being able to turn things around in ways I cannot imagine. With Jesus' help, I receive the assurance that You have forgiven me and will use my child's disability for great and glorious purposes. Help my heart catch up with my head on this. Help me to see that You allowed me to go down that dark path into sin because You are able to redeem even the worst things we do."

I pray for you, _____, for the peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7) to anoint you like warm oil and soak down deep into your heart.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Posted Sept. 2012

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Does God Have a Sense of Humor?

Sure He does! Where else would we get ours, since we are made in His image, and a sense of humor is such a delightful gift?

Humor, though, is culturally rooted (with the exception of mother-in-law jokes, which are apparently universal in any culture on the planet!). That's why most of us Westerners find it difficult to understand that Jesus was really a funny fellow. For instance, it's easy for us to imagine Him intoning solemnly, "Blind guides! You strain out a gnat yet swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:28) Not only is it a funny mental image, but Jesus was making a pun that is completely lost in translation. The Aramaic word for gnat is *galma*, and the word for camel is *gamla*. If we'd been there as onlookers, we would have howled.

So maybe some more modern examples, closer to home, will serve to show that our God has an absolutely delightful sense of humor.

My dear friend Holly told me this story:

One time I was reading a story in which the author tells the reader that God delights in wooing us and that we can even ask Him to give us a love song. After all, Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that He will quiet us with His love and rejoice over us with singing. So why not ask Him for a love song?

I was thinking about that one day while waiting for my lunch order. I was sitting outside a café in the beautiful sunshine, when two girls walked up to the outdoor picnic benches I was at, put down their purses and went inside to order their lunch.

I smiled at them as they walked inside, and then went back to pondering what kind of love song God could possibly give me. Would He honor the request right away, if at all? Maybe He'd send a bird chirping a beautiful song. Maybe He'd just splash a beam of sun right across my lap. Maybe He'd . . . oh, never mind. It's just silly to think about these things.

But . . . the author did say that God delighted to do these kinds of things.

Well, here goes nothing.

"God, would you send me a love song?" I squeaked out meekly.

No sooner had the words left my lips when this girl's cell phone started ringing in her purse loud enough for me to hear the ring tone. Over and over again it just kept repeating this phrase from a song by The Doors: "Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name? Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name?" I laughed and laughed and laughed! That crazy God with a GREAT sense of humor and perfect timing!!

Holly's friend Sheila read that story and responded with this:

God is definitely funny. This morning I was praying that I wouldn't step on the dead mouse in the attic today, and I "heard" the reply, "How about tomorrow?" I laughed out loud."

I never thought of God as witty like that, but why not?

This is my all-time favorite, told to me by Angie herself:

When she was mothering three young children, she was struggling with a number of severe stressors when she sensed God calling to her. Literally. In her spirit, she heard Him say her full name: "*Angela*." Only her mother and God call her Angela. So she knew He wanted her to do something and whatever it was, she knew she didn't want to do it.

She heard, “Angela,” and she pretty much held up her hand to the Lord and said, “Talk to Moses.”

Some time passed, and she heard His voice again: “Angela.” Again, she said, “Talk to Moses.”

More time passed. And then one day she was cooking dinner, stirring the pasta into boiling water, when she distinctly heard His voice again: “Joshua 1:2.”

Oh boy.

She turned off the stove, told her son to watch his younger siblings, grabbed her Bible and went to her room to read, “Moses My servant is dead. You, however, arise and go . . .”

Now that’s funny. I don’t care who you are!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/does_god_have_a_sense_of_humor on September 9, 2012.

“What’s My Purpose in Life?”

A dear younger friend of mine recently posted this question on a forum:

“Do you feel that you have a great mission or purpose in life?”

“I do feel like I’m made for something more than this, but whatever it is I can’t reach it, or find out what it is. I do feel as though I have a great purpose or mission in life—I’m sure I do!!! Why can I just not figure it out?”

“Was I born in the wrong time? My roommate says that I’m like a young person who thinks they were meant for more. She says hardly anyone here has a great life of purpose and I just have to accept reality. 99% of the people are just normal people—that there are not that many characters, priests, prophets, or heroes.

“Does everyone go through life never figuring out what their great purpose is? There has to be a purpose beyond just surviving. Roommate says that my problem is that I think I’m born to be a superstar, a saint or a hero. She thinks I’m just unrealistic, and what I expect from and of myself is unrealistic. I think she’s a pessimist. I want to do something big. I don’t want a mediocre life.”

Similar to [C.S. Lewis’ argument](#) that our longings correspond to God’s plan for the fulfillment of those longings (such as experiencing hunger because food exists for us to eat, and experiencing fatigue because there is such a thing as sleep), I think my friend’s longing for the something bigger and something more, her disdain for a mediocre life, is indeed shaped by God’s call to love and serve Him in large and glorious ways. But we may have been waylaid by the “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” gospel, since many 20th-century Westerners seem to have directed their focus to finding out this wonderful plan rather than on God Himself.

I don’t see anywhere in scripture where we are called to find our purpose in life. I think God just wants us to obey what He’s already given us. When we do a search for the phrases “God’s will” or “will of God” in the Bible, we know for sure God wants us to do things like give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), be sanctified and avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3), silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good (1 Peter 2:15), and sometimes, suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong (1 Peter 3:17).

All the “one anothers” in the Bible are commands, so those are God’s will as well. So our purpose in life is to please Him through obedience, which should grow out of our awareness that He loves us and made us for Himself.

Because we are made in the image of God, our purpose in life is to put Him on display. We—our bodies, our minds, our humor, our gifts and talents—are a display case for the glory of God. I think the specifics of how we go about that don’t matter as much as we seem to think they do. Desiring to be truthful and transparent in serving as display cases for the treasure within matters more, I believe.

According to John 15, it is the Lord’s pleasure—and thus His purpose for us—that we bear *much* (as opposed to *some* or *more*) fruit in us. That means Christlikeness; that means the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). So whether we are engaged in paid work or evangelizing on street corners, changing diapers or driving in traffic, putting Jesus on display is the most important thing. To do that, we need to continually immerse ourselves in His presence and His word, and hang around His people who are also immersing themselves in His presence and His word.

Right along with spiritual fruit is the topic of [spiritual gifts](#). Finding God’s personal purpose for us will involve discovering which of the spiritual gifts He has given each one of us, and using them to build up the body of Christ and bless others. (They are found in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.)

And finally, 2 Corinthians 2 offers a delightful word picture of Christ-followers serving as “a sweet aroma of Christ to God” the Father, as well as bringing the fragrance of knowing Christ to people who are either being saved or perishing. That, too, is part of our purpose in life. I think that if we focus on what God has already told us pleases Him, obeying the

commands He has already given His children, we'll get to the point of looking in the rear-view mirror of life and discovering, "Oh, *that* was my personal purpose! Cool!"

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/whats-my-purpose-in-life on Aug. 14, 2012.

Permission Givers

Recently I was shopping in a store clogged with shoppers seeking Grand Opening bargains. I wanted three of an item; as one of the stockers opened a box for me, another lady said, "The limit is six, right? Give me six!" Suddenly I wanted to have six as well. She had given me permission to buy more than I intended. It was like she whipped out a permission slip and handed it to me. And I took it. This lady had no idea what she did!

We often function as "permission givers" in each other's lives. It's part of living in community. We give each other permission not just for things we do, but how we think. And that's why we need to be careful what we're giving permission for. That was Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 10 when he warned the believers that they could end up giving permission to eat meat that had been offered to idols, which was sold at cut-rate prices in the meat market, to other believers for whom it would be sin because of their weak consciences.

We can give permission for evil as well as for good.

Right now, the top three best-selling books are the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy, which is female erotica. Verbal porn. Many people are enthusiastically hitting the LIKE button on

Facebook whenever anyone mentions it, each one giving permission to others to read it. In Dannah Gresh's blog ["I'm Not Reading Fifty Shades of Grey,"](#) she mentions a friend who "regretfully can't get the images out of her head." (And that's why I'm not reading it either.)

We can give permission for others to endorse what the Bible calls sin by reassuring each other that we've outgrown the ancient, outmoded values that were given for our protection. We can give permission to continue building an addiction to sexual sin like using pornography by reassuring each other that "everybody does it." And it starts early; my friend has been intentional about teaching her 11-year-old son to choose purity, warning him that others will want to show him dirty pictures. Sure enough, last month in the bathroom of a boy scout camp, another 11-year-old offered to show him his porn collection on his cell phone.

But let's talk about giving permission for *good!* That's where this social dynamic can really shine!

For over a decade, I have participated in an online support forum, and I did a search for my posts using the word "permission."

- "I wish someone had asked me when I was growing up what it was like to be handicapped, to be stared at, to be different. It would have given me permission to find and use my voice, instead of living in bondage to shame that wasn't mine."
- After people responded to a post that I also shared here, ["What Would You Say to Your 8-Year-Old Self?"](#), I affirmed posters for the really powerful truths they would want to say to their younger selves. "Now—will you give that same little self permission to receive that truth? And ask the Holy Spirit to seal it to your heart?"
- One of the young women I mentor gave herself permission to agree that there *would* be a last time for destructive

behaviors that she repeatedly fell into: sinful relationships, indulging in drugs, and self-injury. That permission-giving opened the door to believing that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead was available to her for living in sobriety.

• A number of us encouraged a young lady terrified of doctor visits, who confessed her irrational fear of the crinkly paper on the exam table. I uploaded a “permission button” and wrote, “I give you permission to sit in a chair in the exam room till the very last second.” It was amazing how comforting that was!



Permission

• “Denying pain doesn’t make it go away, just harder to access because you try to bury it. Give yourself permission to feel pain. You don’t have to do it by yourself—invite Jesus into it, grab a hold of His hand, and hang on for dear life.”

• “You have permission to break a promise you never should have made in the first place, what has been called ‘foolish vows.’ For example, when you promise you will never leave or abandon a friend where the relationship has turned unhealthy and sinful.”

• “Please give yourself permission to think of [a certain person] as an illegal, immoral, harmful substance like crack cocaine that you just cannot have even a tiny bit of, because there’s no such thing as a tiny bit of a life-controlling, life-dominating, life-destroying substance.” “The Holy Spirit knows every single thing we need to let go of [in forgiveness]. Each memory is like a splinter He wants permission to remove. But you have to cooperate with the process, thus the need to give Him permission.”

• “Give yourself permission to mentally fire your sister as the supposedly ‘older and wiser’ sister. She may be older, but she’s not wiser, and you don’t have to follow her advice when it is not wise because it’s informed by the world, not by

God.”

- And finally, “Give yourself permission to become comfortable with new habits you’d like to form, such as stopping in the middle of the conversation to pray. And praying out loud. And using new expressions like ‘The Lord bless you!’ And even something as prosaic as wearing a wrap instead of a sweater, or wearing a hat. Give yourself permission to step outside your comfort zone and practice this new thing you want to become comfortable with, and tell yourself, ‘It’s OK to not be comfortable with this yet. I’ll get there eventually.’”

What have you given—or received—permission for?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/permission_givers on July 2, 2012

The Stink of Self-Pity

When I got polio as an infant in 1953, just before the vaccine was developed, my parents were instructed by the doctors and the therapists that the very worst thing that could happen was for me to wallow in self-pity, and to never let me go there. Maybe they all thought that if no one ever talked about the huge assault of this life-changing trauma, it would never occur to me to think about it, and so I’d never end up in the Self-Pity Mudpuddle. So what was modeled to me, and which I dutifully followed, was a constant response of denial.

So I grew up wondering, but never able to put into words, why it was that no one seemed to understand how really, really rotten it was that I have to live my entire life with a

disability, with restrictions, with growing weakness and fatigue and pain.

Fast forward to a recent mini-vacation in Cozumel with my sister and her husband. I have a lightweight travel scooter that enables me to zip around, covering distances too great for me to walk, even with my cane. Well, one night we left the scooter outside our bungalow door while we charged the battery inside, but during the night there was a torrential downpour. Scooters and rain, I learned, are mortal enemies. It was dead. I called the front desk to ask for a golf cart to come get me to take me to the resort restaurant for breakfast, but no one came and it was too far to walk.

At one point, my husband Ray lovingly said, "You know you can't go into town without your scooter, and there are no wheelchairs here." (He knows me well; well-trained in denial from toddlerhood, it's easy for me to say, "Oh, it'll be fine"—and then later I am in excruciating pain after walking. He needs to speak the truth in love to me so I don't overdo things.)

Hit with the realization that I couldn't walk to breakfast, much less be able to go shopping with my sister, something I'd looked forward to for MONTHS, I was confronted again with the loss of mobility and the loss of independence that a scooter provides.

So I sat there, choosing to stay present in the feelings that overwhelmed me, paying attention to what I was feeling: Sadness. Grief. Loss.

Tears.

I invited Jesus into my feelings and looked to Him to help me process them well.

And then I wondered, *Am I feeling self-pity too?*

You know, the worst of all sins for polio survivors?

That's when the lightbulb came on. I realized that self-pity isn't a primary feeling like sadness, grief and loss. Self-pity is a secondary event, a choice to respond to legitimate negative feelings. But it's not the only choice. I could also choose to respond with trust that God knows my pain, He sees and understands, and I can trust Him to redeem every scrap of my pain and my grief—for His glory and my good.

I suddenly saw self-pity as analogous to the stink of body odor. When we're hot or we exercise, our bodies are designed to release excess heat through sweat, which doesn't smell. It's natural—it's God's gift to us. But if we let the sweat linger without showering, if we don't process it by bathing, bacteria multiply and excrete what DOES stink.

To draw the analogy out further, experiencing grief and sadness is natural and not sinful at all. There's no stink to those legitimate feelings that come from life in a fallen world. But when we don't bring our feelings to the Lord, allowing Him to cleanse and purify them as we trust that He is good and He loves us even when we hurt, they can disintegrate and start to stink.

So I sat there, for the first time seeing the line between sadness and self-pity. Sadness happens because of the effects of sin in a fallen world; Jesus was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). But self-pity springs from the wrong belief that "I don't deserve this. Life should treat me better than this. Garbage always happens to ME while good things happen to others". . . *ad nauseum*.

I think we can avoid self-pity by seeking to respond with truth: "I deserve nothing but hell. Life in a fallen world is just painful, and this is my share today. Bad things happen to everyone, and good things happen to everyone, and the difference is the willingness to look for and see them. God is

still good even though He has allowed pain into my life, and I can trust Him that there is a purpose for my pain.”

By the way, we had to replace the dead scooter, but in His goodness, the Lord prompted some dear friends to pay for it as a gift. Now *that* feeling was on the opposite end of the spectrum from self-pity!

This blog post originally appeared at http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_stink_of_self-pity on June 19, 2012.

Just Say the Magic Words

June 11, 2012

One of my friends is doing the hard work of facing the devastating effects of childhood abuse and various unspeakable horrors. She knows that she needs to accept the full impact what happened to her in order to grieve it and forgive the people who wounded her so she can walk in freedom. But one of her friends recently gave her some disheartening counsel: “Oh, there’s a spirit of grief harassing you. You don’t need to go around digging up the past like you’re doing. Just speak your inner healing into existence! Declare that you are healed and whole in Jesus’ name!”

This lady has bought into the dangerous (and unbiblical) “word of faith” theology (WOF) that puts faith in one’s words instead of in God Himself. It’s a religious version of “wishing will make it so,” having morphed into “speaking will make it so.” This wrong thinking can range from an unfortunate misunderstanding of the Scriptures to a blasphemous

presumption that creatures can create reality by the power of their words—just like God did when He spoke creation into existence by the power of His word.

It's certainly an appealing idea, bypassing the hard soul work of [grieving and forgiving](#) to get to the prize of a healed heart at peace. Just say the magic words, like waving a magic wand, and POOF! you're healed! Who wouldn't want to go that far, far easier route?

Shortcuts don't work. They do, however, result in major disappointment when people are taught [unrealistic expectations](#) of God about promises He never made. One of the most basic principles of Bible reading and study is that "context is king." We must never wrench verses out of their surrounding paragraphs, chapters, and books. And if we come up with an understanding or application of a verse that is contradicted by other passages in scripture, we need to jettison our wrong thinking.

So, for example, if someone points out Isaiah 53:5 to my friend, which says "by His stripes we are healed," and promises she can claim healing of any and every pain or ailment, what happens when nothing happens? This wrong-headed promise tempts people to conclude that God is not good, and He is not faithful, because He didn't keep His word. But that cannot be the meaning of Isaiah 53:5 since the supposed promise of immediate healing is contradicted in other scriptures such as 2 Cor. 12:7-9, where Paul tells us that God said no to his pleas for healing from his thorn in the flesh, promising instead that His grace was enough. Claiming inner healing without submitting to the process of facing the full impact of what happened to her so that she can release it to the Lord not only isn't truthful, it doesn't work like that.

WOF taps into legitimate longings for a life free from want, from sickness and death, from pain, which are promised to believers in Christ in the new heavens and new earth. But it

illegitimately promises that life NOW. It's simply a matter of praying in faith, believing *not* in God's goodness, but the power of one's own prayers. Our own words. That's a form of idolatry.

But this theology is not consistent with reality, which means it cannot be of God. One night I was at an event where there would be a drawing for some jewelry. I watched several people lay hands on the blingy stuff and say, "I claim this in Jesus' name." Guess what—none of them won the drawing. What happened? It's the same dynamic as when believers on both sides of a football game claim victory for their team in Jesus' name. God cannot grant two opposite requests—or, in this case, demands. (He's not much into demands of any kind, actually.)

God deals with truth, not fantasy and illusion. WOF violates the scriptural principle of embracing truth, such as the psalmist's powerful statement in Ps. 51:6, "You desire truth in the innermost being." Another friend, Cathy, was dying of cancer, but she refused to believe what the doctors said. She insisted right up to her last breath that she was believing health for herself, and would not talk to anyone about funeral arrangements or even what to do with her house and her possessions because that would be faithless. But she wasn't putting her faith in God, who was actually calling her home, but in her wishful prayers.

Beware of spiritual shortcuts, especially those that are created by your own words. If there were such a thing, don't you think Jesus would have bypassed the Cross?

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

Responding To President Obama's Same-Sex Approval

President Obama recently gave public support to gay marriage. How do we respond from within a biblical worldview?

Some Christians have used this news event to highlight the way the church is blowing it on the opportunity to be “Jesus with skin on” to the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgender) community. This sentiment is especially prominent among people under forty who often have good friends who identify as gay.

There are two different issues that need to be kept separate: how the church treats gay-identifying *people*, and the church's position on the culture-affecting issue of gay identity and so-called gay marriage. The first provides an opportunity to display a welcoming attitude of grace, which says, “We're glad you're here like the rest of us messed-up sinners who desperately need Jesus. He loves you and accepts you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way. Come embrace holiness with us as we learn it together.” (And this message is just as true for drug and porn addicts, as well as Pharisaical holier-than-thou folks addicted to judgmental moralism.)

The other is about refusing to budge on what God has said about sexual sin, which does not change. Homosexuality is no more right, holy or acceptable today than it ever was in Bible times. Neither is heterosexual fornication, adultery, or pornography-driven lust. It's not just that sex outside of God's plan for marriage (which is limited to one man and one woman, per the created intent in Genesis 1 and 2) breaks His law—His rules are given as a gift to keep us from breaking our hearts.

Jesus said He came to bring a sword (Matt. 10:34), and this issue is one of the areas of conflict He was bound to cause because His standard of holiness, and His call to live in it, is at odds with the human desire to do what we want regardless of what God thinks. Is homosexuality a sin? This is a simple question, but it needs a complex answer. Same-sex attraction (SSA) is usually not a choice; it's something people discover, usually with pain and horror. (Females, naturally more relational, can cultivate it and be emotionally seduced toward lesbianism, though, even with no previous leanings that way.)

But does it "fall short of the glory of God," one way Scripture defines sin (Rom 3:23)?

Certainly.

Same-sex attractions are a corruption of God's intention for healthy personal and sexual development, the result of the Fall and of living in a fallen world. I get this. I have lived with polio ever since I was six months old. I didn't choose this disability, but is it a sin? It certainly falls short of the glory of God, and polio is part of living in a fallen world. It's one of the ways I experience the infection of sin. I did not choose the fallen-creation consequence of polio, yet I have to deal with it. My *responses* to it can be sinful, just as those who experience unwanted SSA have to deal with the fallen-creation consequence of homosexuality, but their responses to it can be sinful.

(By the way, there is no evidence of a genetic cause for homosexuality. The "born that way" myth cannot be supported biologically. But there are good reasons that many people end up with same-sex feelings; for more information, please read my articles in the [homosexuality section](#) of the Probe website, as well as articles on the Living Hope Ministries website at www.livehope.org.)

When people give in to the temptations of SSA and engage

sexually with other men or other women, God's word has a very serious word for it: *abomination* (Lev. 18:22). But it's important to understand that the abomination is the act, not the people.

President Obama referred to the golden rule (treat others as you want them to treat you) as his rationale for supporting gay marriage:

[Michelle and I] are both practicing Christians and obviously this position may be considered to put us at odds with the views of others but, you know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it's also the Golden Rule, you know, treat others the way you would want to be treated. And I think that's what we try to impart to our kids and that's what motivates me as president and I figure the most consistent I can be in being true to those precepts, the better I'll be as a as a dad and a husband and, hopefully, the better I'll be as president.[{1}](#)

In 2008, in defending his current position against same-sex marriage but for civil unions, he said concerning people who might find his position controversial, "I would just refer them to the Sermon on the Mount, which I think is, in my mind, for my faith, more central than an obscure passage in Romans."[{2}](#)

Two things strike me about this. First, he's not consistent about his application of the golden rule; he's pro-abortion-but of course he doesn't want to be hacked to pieces without anesthesia, which is precisely what certain abortion procedures entail.

Second, choosing the golden rule over "an obscure passage in Romans" shows he doesn't understand that "the entirety of [God's] word is truth" (Ps. 119:160). Both the Golden Rule and the Romans 1 passage are true; it's not a choice between the

two. Since he used to give lectures on Constitutional law at the University of Chicago, I doubt that he would ever use the term “an obscure phrase in the Constitution,” because obscurity is about one’s perception of importance, not the actual importance of a matter. To a Constitutional lawyer who respects the document, every phrase of the document is important. To a serious [true] Christ-follower, every word of His scriptures is important.

The issue of same-sex marriage isn’t about people’s right to live in committed relationships, to do life together. It’s about demanding society’s approval for “[the façade of normalcy](#).” It’s about demanding approval for what God has called an abomination (the sexual act, not the people engaged in it).

Ryan Anderson wrote in the *National Review Online*,

“What’s at issue is whether the government will recognize such unions as marriages – and then force every citizen and business to do so as well. This isn’t the legalization of something, this is the coercion and compulsion of others to recognize and affirm same-sex unions as marriages.”[\[3\]](#)

American culture is definitely moving toward normalizing homosexuality, but from God’s perspective it will never be normal or natural (Rom. 1:26-27). And it’s God’s perspective that matters.

Notes

1. www.dennyburk.com/president-obamas-scriptural-defense-of-gay-marriage/
2. www.wnd.com/2008/03/57975/
3. bit.ly/LGZ1z1

The Keys to Emotional Healing

– Part 2

In [part 1](#), I talked about grieving as a necessary part of emotional healing. The other part is forgiving, separating ourselves emotionally and spiritually from the offense so that we can continue to be healthy toward the offender. As I said last time, forgiving is like pulling out the soul-splinter that is causing pain and the emotional “pus” that accumulates from unresolved pain and anger. (Grieving discharges this emotional pus.) Forgiving releases the person who hurt us into the Lord’s care, for *Him* to deal with.

We see this modeled by the Lord Jesus during the crucifixion process, when He repeated over and over, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). With each fresh offense, He released the offender into His Father’s hands, refusing to succumb to the sin of unforgiveness.

Let’s say you do something to hurt me. It’s like tossing a potato at me. I catch the potato and discover it’s a *hot* potato. I could continue to clutch the potato to my chest, screaming in pain and yelling at how much it hurts and how awful you are to do this to me, going on and on, “IT HURTS! IT HURTS! OHHH THIS IS HORRIBLE, TERRIBLE, AWFUL PAIN! HOW DARE YOU DO THIS TO MEEEEEE!”

Or I could let go and let it drop to the floor.

There is relief in release, to be sure, but the problem with merely letting go is that we can pick it back up again. Biblical forgiveness means “sending away,” with the Old Testament image of a scapegoat to help us understand. Once a year, the priest would place his hands on the head of a goat,

symbolically transferring the sins of the entire nation to the goat, send it away into the wilderness, then release it. (Lev. 16:7-10)

We do need to let go of the offense and the offender, but the real power in forgiveness is *sending it away* to Jesus for Him to deal with.

If someone tosses a metaphorical hot potato at us, instead of simply letting it drop to the floor where we could pick it up again, we need to imagine Jesus standing there with His hands outstretched, inviting us to give our "hot potato" to Him. He has asbestos hands!

Forgiveness means we acknowledge the offense against us, and then transfer the offender over to God in our hearts. But for forgiveness to be real and true, we need to face the impact of the other person's sin or hurt against us and *grieve* it before we can truly let go of it and send it away to Jesus. Otherwise, it's like going to the emergency room with a broken bone and telling the doctor, "I want you to fix my bone from the other side of the room without touching me."

In the real world, if I continued to clutch a hot potato to myself, it would cool down and no longer cause pain. But in the emotional realm, if we continue to clutch an offense to our hearts, it hardens into something like cement, and a wall is built between the offender and us. And between us and God. And between us and everyone else. Unforgiveness is spiritually and emotionally dangerous. One of my family members hung on to every offense of her entire life, real or perceived, and never let go. With every year she became more and more bitter, cold and hard-quite unlovely and unlovable, apart from the power of God. She died with a heart so diminished and shriveled that her death was nothing but a relief for the rest of us.

When we forgive the ones who hurt us, we send their offense to Jesus, who already paid the penalty for their sins and

woundings against us. The best exercise I've ever encountered to help people forgive is called "the Jesus Jail," which you can find [here](#) courtesy of my friend Chuck Lynch, author of the book *I Should Forgive, But. . .*

Grieving and forgiving: the two powerful components of emotional healing. May you experience the grace of God in tearing down emotional strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4) to walk in the freedom of healing.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_keys_to_emotional_healing_-_part_2 on April 24, 2012.

Redeeming The Hunger Games: From a Christian Worldview Perspective

Although not explicitly anti-Christian, The Hunger Games presents a very disturbing future world where children are forced to fight one another to the death. Sue Bohlin presents solid, biblically based concepts on how we are to consider movies in general and redeeming questions we should ask of this movie if one chooses to see it. Viewing movies with the intent of understanding the worldview behind the movie can help us present our Christian worldview in a way that communicates with the people around us.

Should Christians read (or see) *The Hunger Games*? Some people make strong arguments for avoiding any contact with the books

or movie. No one will lie on their deathbed and say, “Oh, how I regret missing *Hunger Games*.” But this is the latest “big thing” to hit our culture; is there a way for Christ-followers to redeem it and not simply consume it as entertainment?

This separatist (and unrealistic) position confirms an unhealthy false dichotomy between “things of the world” and “things of the spirit realm.” We need to see the world as one reality where Christ rules over all and has something to say about everything. It would be better to ask, “How does the Bible relate to *Hunger Games*?” It would be better to compare biblical truths and biblical values to any body of work people are reading or viewing or listening to, the way that we can better judge the crookedness of a stick by laying it next to a straightedge.

Developing our critical thinking skills protects us from absorbing and internalizing ungodly ideas, creating yet more “cultural captives” who are more conformed to the surrounding cultures than the Word and character of God.

“It’s just a story. . .”

Many people dismiss concern over blockbuster novels and movies by saying, “Come on, it’s just a story, it’s *fiction!*” But we need to be *more* careful about how we process ideas and images that come through story, since most people’s defenses are down with this genre, and they just absorb the story without thinking or analyzing. That’s a major contributing factor to cultural captivity in the church—people have been absorbing the ideas and values of the culture through music, TV, movies, books, and even just personal conversation, without comparing them to what God says.

When people take in and digest *Hunger Games* as mere entertainment, their unthinking discernment puts them in the

same category as the Capitol spectators who have no concept of the atrocity of human beings being sacrificed for their diversion. But if you are deeply troubled by its depiction of the broken reality of life in a fallen world, if you are able to think about the implications of the story, then you are interacting with the books and movie with wisdom.

I think the best way to build wisdom and develop critical thinking is by asking questions that help us evaluate what we read or see.

For example, something is terribly wrong in the world that author Suzanne Collins paints in *Hunger Games*. Our souls rebel against the evil, the sense of “not right-ness” in it. We need to ask ourselves (and others), *What is the “terribly wrong”?* *And where did that sense of right and wrong come from?* I suggest that the visceral reaction comes from the imprint of God, the *imago Dei*, on our souls. The rightness of the image of God on our souls contrasts painfully with the crookedness of the dystopian world of *Hunger Games*.

The presence of evil and sin in the books is not bad in and of itself; as in the Bible, they are never glorified or promoted. The result is that most readers/viewers react along moral lines: murder and betrayal are bad, sacrifice and loyalty are good. This is a legitimate and edifying use of literature and film.

Questions to Ask

My colleague Todd Kappelman, an accomplished literature and film critic, suggests several thoughtful questions to ask about films and books:

- *How important is life to the director/writers etc.? Are the tough issues dealt with or avoided?*
- *Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your*

interpretation?

- *Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.*
- *Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?*
- *Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted?*[{1}](#)

Christian thinker Leland Ryken proposes three more questions that the Christian ask when interpreting a work of art:

- *Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? (The answer may be mixed for a given work.)*
- *If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints?*
- *If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic?*[{2}](#)

Our good friend Dan Panetti from Prestonwood Christian Academy has assembled a deeply insightful white paper for parents to use in talking about *Hunger Games* with their children, to help them build a biblical worldview analysis of something students are intent on reading or seeing anyway. (And it's not just older students, either. One of my friends' eight-year-old son

insisted on going to see the movie. His mother told me, “He was attracted by the movie trailers and he knew people reading the book. He was enticed by the action, but kids killing kids did bother him [but not that much].”)

I am grateful for Dan’s generosity in allowing us to share his questions in this article, and to make his entire PDF document available for you on our website [here](#). Below are three of the nine major themes he highlights for discussion. I invite you to read through his paper to sharpen your own critical thinking skills!

And that’s how we redeem *The Hunger Games*.

The Hunger Games Trilogy Parent Book Discussion

by Dan Panetti, Prestonwood Christian Academy – Plano, Texas

Substitutionary Atonement

The most important theme of this book, in my opinion, is the concept of substitutionary atonement (or penal substitution).

God made him who had no sin to be sin [or be a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Corinthians 5:21

Katniss voluntarily takes the place of her sister Primrose as the “tribute” from District 12—essentially Katniss took the place of Primrose replacing her sister’s life with her own. Compare this story to the story of the sacrifice of Jesus in our place. While Katniss is willing to give her own life to protect her younger sister, Jesus was willing to give His life as a ransom for ours...while we were yet sinners—still IN rebellion against His Father! While Prim was young, “innocent” and weak and Katniss was far more skilled and able to defend herself; it was Jesus who was perfect and sinless dying for us!

Violence

The primary complaint aired about *The Hunger Games* (both the books and the movie) related primarily to the violence; and, yes, the books and movie do have a violent theme and depictions. The first question is whether the violence is appropriate or simply gruesome for effect. Both Collins (the author) and those responsible for the movie do a remarkable job of actually restraining the emphasis on the violence. This does not mean that the books and movie are appropriate for all ages—quite to the contrary. But in discussing this concept with your own children you can point out the fact that there are times in human history when people have had to stand up and fight for what they believe in. Engraved into the wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial is the statement, “Freedom is not free.” Katniss lives under an oppressive government and is forced to fight not only to protect herself and those she loves, but in the second and third book she fights for an ideal of something that is greater than just herself. Later we will discuss the ideals of the Founding Fathers of our nation and their decision to throw off an oppressive government agreeing to pledge their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Unlike previous generations, this generation is not as familiar with the cost of freedom born by those who give their lives in service to our nation. *The Hunger Games* reminds us that there are some things that are worth fighting for—and even dying for – meaning there will be a certain level of violence along the way.

Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again. ~ Ronald Reagan

Ethical Dilemmas

One of the most fascinating aspects of *The Hunger Games* is the presentation of numerous ethical dilemmas – questions where you could ask yourself, “What would I do if I were in that situation?”

Examples of ethical dilemmas for conversation purposes:

Is lying wrong? Is lying always wrong? Would you be willing to lie to protect the life of another person? Would you be willing to lie to save your own life?

Obviously Katniss finds herself faced with these fascinating ethical dilemmas and she has choices to make. Whether she is inside the arena fighting for her life or leading a rebellion against President Snow and the oppressive government, Katniss is often faced with the choice of either having to lie or someone (including herself) having to pay the ultimate price of their lives!

Is killing wrong? Is killing another person always wrong? Would you be able to kill another person to save the life of someone you loved? Would you be able to take the life of another person to save your own life?

Again Katniss finds herself faced with these difficult situations. At the end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta decide that they would rather die than kill one another—and although Katniss hopes that those in control would rather have two victors than none, the reality is that both Katniss and Peeta take the poisonous berries with the intent of killing themselves.

Katniss struggles with this dilemma when she makes an alliance with Rue and when she remembers that Thresh let her live when he could have killed her. Why is it so difficult for Katniss to take the life of another while others in the arena appear to be so cavalier and nonchalant about it?

If you want to discuss more about ethical dilemmas, I suggest

you read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie tem Boom. Corrie and her family were Dutch Christians who helped hide numerous Jews during WWII. Eventually Corrie and her family were arrested and sent away to concentration camps – her father and sister both died in a concentration camp.

As Christians we should look to God's Word for guidance in making decisions about life. Psalm 119:105 reminds us that God's Word "is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path." Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Wise counsel is also strongly encouraged in Scripture. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."

Notes

1. www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies2.htm
2. www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies3.htm

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See Also:

[The Hunger Games: A hunger, a game or a calculated viewing option for Christians?](#)