

# Is it Time to Change Your Filter?

Life doesn't just happen to us; we experience it and interpret it through a filter. That filter, like a pair of glasses, consists of beliefs and values we might not even realize we hold.

The same event could be experienced and interpreted in different ways by different people because of their different filters: for example, getting a flat tire. One person might get out of the car, see the flat, and start to rage: "What the \*\*\*\* is this? Why does this kind of \*\*\*\* always happen to me? You stupid tire!" This response is the result of a filter that believes life should be good and easy, that nothing bad should ever happen to her. This unrealistic expectation is a setup for massive disappointment and anger when life doesn't cooperate.

Another person might see the flat and think, "Oh bummer! Well, Lord, thank You for protecting me from a dangerous high-speed blowout. Please help me here—would You send a road angel to help me change out the spare?" This very different response is the result of a filter that recognizes we live in a fallen world where unfortunate and even bad things happen, but God is still good and we can call on Him to help us at any and every time.

We can't change life or the things that happen to us, but we can change our filter to bring it into alignment with biblical truth.

You might need to change your filter if:

- You consistently see the glass half-empty instead of half-full; if you always put a negative spin on any news you hear. [Check out Philippians 4:8]

- You see any comment other than glowing praise as a personal attack that threatens your well-being, and you aggressively growl back. [Check out Philippians 2:3]
- You dismiss other people's answers to prayers, and blessings they receive, as yet more proof that God loves everybody but you. [Check out Romans 8:38-39]
- You evaluate everything in terms of how you feel about it. You are nice to your spouse or your co-worker only when you feel like being nice; you don't repent if you don't feel repentant; you don't spend time with God if you don't feel like it; you are obedient when you feel like being obedient, etc. [Check out 2 Corinthians 10:5-6]
- You view everything in terms of the here-and-now, temporal, earthly sphere, and ignore the eternal, spiritual dimension. [Check out 2 Corinthians 4:18]
- You get uncomfortable when people bring spiritual conversations into Monday through Saturday because they only belong to Sunday. [Check out all references to the Lord Jesus Christ]

What do you think. . . is it time to change your filter?

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/is\\_it\\_time\\_to\\_change\\_your\\_filter](http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/is_it_time_to_change_your_filter)  
on Aug. 16, 2011.

---

# Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life. Like It or Not.

Recently I have been engaging in an email conversation with a lady who is deeply burdened by the sinful choices and ungodly thinking of a young man dear to her. As we have talked about what she can do, our conversation turned to prayer. Yesterday she asked, "How does intercessory prayer make/change/mediate the young man's own will? How does the person we pray for 'get the message'? How can we pray for God's will to be done when it is against the will of the person we're praying for? How does our prayer help the person to *want* God's will for themselves? How does my intercessory prayer help the person I'm praying for yield their own will and turn it over to God's will?"

I answered, "You're asking about the mechanics of how something spiritual works, and I don't know that the Word gives us that kind of information. But think about how *you* have changed *your* thinking about anything. How did you go from being dead in your trespasses and sins, to being alive in Christ? How did you go from caring more about yourself than anyone else (because sinful humanity is inherently selfish) to having a desire to pray selflessly for others?"

"I would suggest that God gave you enlightenment, showing you more and more truth, at the same time drawing you into His own heart. You started gravitating toward what was true, and Jesus said, 'I am the truth.'

"At the same time, God never violated your will, allowing you to freely choose to turn to Him in faith and in choices that matured you. How those work together, I don't think anyone understands."

Ah. Mystery. We keep running into it, don't we? And that makes

sense, since God is so other, so immense, so brilliant—do we really expect that we would be able to figure out how the spiritual realm works, much less figuring out God Himself? But with our modernist, Western, scientific mindset, we are set up to disdain mystery (and all things supernatural). The progression of scientific knowledge and understanding has stripped the apparently mystical and miraculous from things like how babies are conceived and how illness spreads. Our culture's misplaced confidence in science to solve all problems extends to mystery; we tend to think, "Oh, we just haven't figured it out yet. . .but we will."

We want to know *how things work*, and there's nothing wrong with that. I think that wrestling with that question is one way we can love God with our minds (Matt. 22:37). But there are also going to be times to choose to be content with mystery, and let it serve its role of pointing us to the One who delights to weave mystery into life like a divine tapestry.

This blog post originally appeared at

[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/ah\\_sweet\\_mystery\\_of\\_life\\_like\\_it\\_or\\_not](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/ah_sweet_mystery_of_life_like_it_or_not).

on Aug. 2, 2011.

---

## Feelings: A Lousy Idol

It's so easy to look down our 21st-century noses at the "primitive" peoples of biblical times, especially Israel's problems with idolatry in the Old Testament. "WE don't bow down before idols and false gods," we think. "That was when people were less evolved intellectually and spiritually, but we modern people are so much better than that."

I'm wondering if God agrees. I don't think so.

I think that idolatry is at least as rampant in our society, but it's more pervasive because it's so subtle; the idols we worship aren't physical, tangible items. We could create a long list of the abstractions we worship, but today I just want to focus on one.

Feelings.

Our culture treats feelings as if they were an inerrant internal compass that always points to truth and reality. "Follow your heart." "What does your gut say?" "You can't help who you fall in love with."

High school and college students flunk out because they don't **feel** like getting out of bed and going to school. Then they become people who lose their jobs because they don't **feel** like going to work.

Young people of all ages dress, act, and talk in ways that will make them **feel** popular and accepted by their peers.

Married people find themselves attracted to someone other than their spouse, and they feed the marvelous feelings of infatuation because it makes them **feel** so alive and magical.

We indulge bodily appetites, whether for sweets or drink or overeating or sexual pleasure, because they **feel** so good and because refusing to indulge them **feels** so bad.

The materialism porn of magazines and newspapers starts an internal burning desire to buy and to accumulate. It **feels** so right to go out and get what we want! If we don't have the money, we put it on credit because, hey, "I should have what I want."

We are happily addicted to our comfort because we believe that **feeling** comfortable is a basic right of life. So we don't give ourselves away in service projects or missions trips or going

without in order to use the money for someone who has less than we do, because then we wouldn't **feel** so comfortable.

Why is this? Why do we make our feelings into idols?

I believe it's because the toxic ["pickling brine"](#) of our culture puts a much higher emphasis on the immediate, the here-and-now, of the physical world (which our feelings are part of). The majority of Christians, the research shows, think just like the non-Christian world around us, and that includes ignoring the unseen, eternal world and focusing on the visible, temporal world.

When we recalibrate our focus to include the unseen sphere of life, we are aware of the spiritual dimension of life and not just the physical. It makes us more balanced people. We can put feelings in their place: they are like lights on the dashboard of our car, indicating what's going on "under the hood." But if we focus on the dashboard lights while we drive, instead of on the road, we'll run off the road—or worse, crash. We can acknowledge them but refuse to let them lead us.

For example, Hebrews 12:2 tells us that the Lord Jesus "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." He focused on the eternal (the joy set before Him) instead of the temporal (the shame of the cross). Corrie Ten Boom wisely said, "Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it." This lady really understood how to put feelings in their place. This survivor of the WWII death camps also said, "Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart."

Feelings are not evil; we have feelings because we are made in the image of a passionate God who experiences a robust range of feelings. But they *are* fallen because everything about us is fallen ever since sin entered the world.

That's why feelings make lousy idols.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/feelings\\_a\\_lousy\\_idol](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/feelings_a_lousy_idol)  
on May 10, 2011.

---

## Funeral Myths

I went to a friend's funeral yesterday where I heard a number of things to add to my running mental list of "funeral myths." With the ever-increasing degree of Bible Illiteracy, combined with the growing number of believers who are "cultural captives," more conformed to the culture than to Christ (please see my earlier blog ["Are You a Pickle?"](#)), it's not surprising that people would have unbiblical beliefs about death, heaven, and God.

Several songs were played at my friend's funeral. One is called "Borrowed Angels," which started like this:

They shine a little brighter, they feel a little more  
They touch your life in ways no one has ever done before  
They love a little stronger, they live to give their best  
They make our lives so blest, so why do they go so soon?  
The ones with souls so beautiful  
I heard someone say—

There must be Borrowed Angels, here in this life  
They come along, into this world, and make this world bright  
But they can't stay forever  
Cause they're heaven sent  
And sometimes, heaven needs them back again

No, people are not "borrowed angels." God created the angels

before He created mankind. We are very different from angels; they were created to serve God and serve us, and we are created to be drawn into and enjoy the love, fellowship, joy and delight of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They made us in Their image (Genesis 1:26), which elevates us above angels. People and angels are two different kinds of creation, and one does not become the other.

Which brings me to another myth I heard yesterday: that Valerie is now “our guardian angel.” While this may be a comforting thought to those gripped by loss, no she’s not. She’s enjoying unhindered, face-to-face worship of Jesus and fellowship with those who now live in heaven.

Do we have guardian angels? The Bible doesn’t give a definitive answer on that, although the Lord Jesus did say, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). And Psalm 91:11 promises, “For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (from my article [Angels: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly](#) at Probe.org).

At yesterday’s funeral, people stood up to make comments about our friend. One distraught lady concluded her remarks with an angry, “God, You’d better take good care of her.” My heart went out to her, not just because of her grief but because she doesn’t know that God is good and doesn’t need to be cajoled, much less threatened, into caring for His beloved daughter. Sometimes people get angry with God for taking someone home earlier than they want, and the anger comes from a sense of betrayal—as if God doesn’t have the right to determine the length of a person’s life. Yet Psalm 139:16 says, “All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.” None of us lives a single day more, or less, than God had determined before He even created us. *A loving God is in control*—and that extends to the days of our birth and our death.



The man who conducted the funeral told a story about how they used to keep a little girl in their family in line by threatening that Valerie would get after her with her spanking switch. "Well now Valerie's not here," he told us, "so we tell the little girl, "Valerie's got her spanking switch with her in heaven and when you get up there she's gonna bust your butt."

Uh, no.

Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Valerie's not busting any butts in heaven, and part of the good news is that God isn't either!

When my aunt died, someone tucked a deck of cards under her hands in her casket because Aunt Maggi loved to play cards and they were sure she was having a great time up in heaven playing pinochle with her brothers. When my mother died, several relatives comforted each other by laughing about how Mom had finally joined the great heavenly card party. This is another myth about heaven, that it's a lot like our human activities on earth, only better. People who believe this myth usually have no concept of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, or they wouldn't be willing to settle for images of unending card games and fishing and bowling tournaments.

What funeral myths have *you* come across?

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/funeral\\_myths](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/funeral_myths)  
on April 12, 2011.

---

# “Why Are Bikinis and Short Skirts Immoral?”

Sue, do you ever wear a bikini? Or have you ever worn one? And couldn't a lot of the old biblical rules for dress be mostly for those people back in biblical times? And please tell me this: Is there a certain length when a woman's dress or skirt becomes immoral? For example, are all skirts and dresses above the knee immoral? Just curious.

*Sue, do you ever wear a bikini? Or have you ever worn one?*

I take it you ask such an intensely personal question because of my answer to email [Is It a Sin to Wear a Bikini?](#). No, I don't wear a bikini, and I never have.

*And couldn't a lot of the old biblical rules for dress be mostly for those people back in biblical times?*

What “old biblical rules for dress” would those be?

Actually, what we find in terms of “biblical rules for dress” are principles that transcend time and culture. Basically,

1) Men should dress like men and women should dress like women, and not blur the lines of gender (Deut. 22:5).

2) Women should dress modestly (1 Tim. 2:9-10). (For great insight into the transcending principle behind Paul's prohibition on braided hair, gold, pearls or expensive clothes from this verse, see this recent post by my friend and fellow Tapestry blogger Sandra Glahn: [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sandra\\_glahn/not\\_with\\_braided\\_hair...or\\_pearls\\_](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sandra_glahn/not_with_braided_hair...or_pearls_))

3) We should do everything in love, which includes choosing

dress and behavior that will not cause each other to stumble. Causing a brother to stumble by lusting is not loving.

There is nothing about these principles that is limited to biblical times.

*And please tell me this: Is there a certain length when a woman's dress or skirt becomes immoral? For example, are all skirts and dresses above the knee immoral?*

People wiser than me have said that the answer to this question depends on the culture, because styles and morals changes over time and geography. There are moral absolutes (like not murdering) and there are relative morals, which would include dress. For example, some monks at the University of Dallas related to my colleague Todd Kappelman that several of them were teaching in Papua New Guinea where both the temperature and the humidity were very high. The young women students sat in the classroom dressed only in some kind of skirt. Toplessness would have been shameful in the U.S., but in a stifling tropical location, the natives thought nothing of it.

The men, too, wore only abbreviated loincloths and strings. On one occasion, the monks went to visit a group of men who were "doing laundry"—their loincloths were hanging on the line and they were lounging around naked. Like our response to being caught in the shower when someone comes to the door, they each quickly grabbed a cord and wrapped it around his waist. Then they were no longer embarrassed, even though their genitals were exposed. That's the way that culture works.

So, since styles and times change, we have to look at the heart issue that reveals one's motive in choosing the way we dress. If a woman chooses garments in hopes of making men look at her admiringly in a sexual way, or if she chooses clothes in hopes of making other women compare themselves to her and be jealous, then I would say that is sinful because it falls

short of God's desire for us to honor Him and love each other.

That means there is no absolute line, particularly in relation to the knee, that defines morality.

I would also point you to an excellent answer on the ["Got Questions"](#) website:

*Whether or not to wear a bikini is a question many women struggle with, but for a Christian woman, the issue takes on additional implications. The Bible tells us that God calls women to modesty, which means to not draw attention to themselves: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). God also calls us to purity: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). The question is whether or not a bikini is consistent with modesty and purity.*

*Another issue to consider is that God calls all people to control their thought lives, so as women, we should not cause men to lust: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-29). When we cause men to look upon our bodies lustfully, we are inducing them to commit the sin of lust and this is displeasing to God.*

*A further consideration is that our bodies, like our minds and hearts, belong to God and are to be used for His glory, not our own. Romans 12:1 tells us, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship." When we offer our bodies to God as*

*“living sacrifices,” we are saying in effect, “My body is yours, Lord. Use it for your glory.” It’s hard to imagine a bikini-clad body being used for God’s glory. [Sue’s note: This is not talking about the husband-wife relationship, where there is total freedom to dress to please and arouse one’s spouse in private. See the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament.]*

*Of course, wearing a bikini in a private location, like a fenced-in back yard is probably acceptable, providing there is no visual access to the yard by the neighbors. According to the verses above, we have the responsibility not to put the males around us in a position that they might lust or have impure thoughts (see also Matthew 18:7).*

[www.gotquestions.org/Christian-bikini.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-bikini.html)

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

© 2011 Probe Ministries

---

**“How Does the Bible Support Your View That God Intends for Males to Grow into Masculinity and Females to**

# Grow into Femininity?"

Your article ["What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People and Hermaphrodites?"](#) makes this statement: "The biblical view is that God's intent for every male is to grow into masculinity, and for every female to grow into femininity." What Bible passages support that contention?

I would define masculinity as the characteristics of being male, and femininity as the characteristics of being female, per God's intention. I would also suggest that as a culture, we have a too-narrow idea of what it means to be male and to be female. I think that masculinity is a [spectrum](#) from the rough-and-tumble, athletic-loving male to the sensitive, artistic, musical, aesthetic-loving male, and everything in between. I think that femininity is a spectrum from the girly-girl to the tomboy/jockette, and everything in between, and it pleased God to make both male and female, masculine and feminine, in His image. That's a VERY wide range!

But there is a difference between male and female, between masculinity and femininity. When people of one gender long to be the other other, and indulge the fantasy of being or becoming the other, there is a hatred and contempt for the gender that they are—and that means something is wrong. God chose their gender, which means it is good; to hate what God has made means someone's thinking is skewed and needs to be adjusted, to come into alignment with God's.

I say this to lay a foundation for the scriptures that answer your question: I believe that "male and female" and "masculine and feminine" mean the same thing. When they don't, I believe, it's because we have adopted a too-narrow understanding of masculinity and femininity.

From the beginning, the binary nature of "male and female" has been God's design and God's intent:

Genesis 1:27: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Genesis 5:2 "He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created."

Genesis 6:19 "And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female."

Then, in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus reiterated this truth:

Matthew 19:4 "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female. . ."

Mark 10:6 "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female."

Then there's this:

Deuteronomy 22:5 "A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."

The point of this law, like that of many other OT laws, is to underscore the importance of not blurring distinctions, of maintaining boundaries between separate things. One of the reasons for this importance is so that God's people would think clearly about reality. The differences between male and female are God-designed and good, because He reveals His glory differently through men and through women. (Note throughout the Psalms the way God reveals Himself to be a God of strength and protection, masculine glories, as well as a God of nurture and caring, feminine glories. Our masculinity and femininity both come from the heart of God.)

Scripture also teaches that God's plan and design is for things and people to grow to the mature forms of what they are

(references to animal husbandry; parables of crops growing; God's intention for us to grow to maturity [Ephesians 4:13]). Apples do not grow up to be corn, and lambs do not grow up to be bulls. Boys grow up to be men, girls grow up to be women.

My husband the scientist points out from Psalm 139 that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," as God knits us together in our mother's womb. Part of that is genetics, which is that God determines if we are male or female. These days, some people are unhappy with their gender as if it were a mistake or a joke, but God has made that determination for His glory and our good.

Thanks for asking.

Sue Bohlin

© 2011 Probe Ministries

---

## **Why We Love Celebrity**

(April 26, 2011) So I guess there's going to be a royal wedding "across the pond" on Saturday. Just like when the groom's mum and dad got married, there will be pre-dawn wedding watching parties over here in the States (since for some reason, the Brits couldn't be talked into waiting for American prime time, I suppose).

The royal festivities have put Kate Middleton, about to become "Princess Catherine," in the celebrity spotlight. And oh, how we love our celebrities! Celebrities are people who are famous, sometimes simply because they are celebrities and not because they've done anything especially noteworthy.

Technology makes it possible to feed our insatiable hunger for



“celebrity news.” 24/7 news channels have to fill their time somehow when there isn’t any *real* news, so they create news by reporting on people’s divorces and pregnancies, what’s happening in the entertainment world, and show pictures of unrealistically and artificially beautiful women strutting and posing in their gowns on a red carpet somewhere.

Why are people so taken with celebrity, anyway?

I think it is yet another reflection of the brokenness of our fallen world. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

I believe God hard-wired us to worship Him because He is the source of life and all that is good, beautiful, and true. I think He created us as worshiping creatures because He knew it would “fill our tanks” and deeply bless and nurture our souls to pour out adoration and worship on One so infinitely worthy of praise. In the same way that we love to see great beauty in spectacular sunsets and want to share it with someone else, in the same way that we love falling in love, in the same way that we love being part of a crowd when our team is winning—we were created to long for a connection to the transcendent, especially the transcendent God.

God creates us for Himself; He creates us to love us and draw us into intimate fellowship with Father, Son and Spirit. Our natural response to that kind of unimaginably huge and powerful love is worship.

But then sin entered the world, and the Fall distorted and messed up everything. Instead of relating rightly to our Creator and the Lover of our souls, upright with faces upturned in love and adoration, we were bent and twisted. After the fall, when we reach out, we are no longer reaching up—because of our “bentness,” we reach out to other parts of the creation. (See also: idolatry) Yet we are still hard-wired to worship.

So we worship each other.

And celebrities, distant and unattainable, function well as objects of worship since we usually don't see how they are flawed and fallen just like everyone else. Like us.

Cue hordes of screaming, worshiping fans at rock concerts and movie premieres.

Cue tears of loss and sorrow when a movie star gets married and takes himself out of the pool of eligible bachelors that fuel girls' fantasies of marrying "Prince Charming."

Cue "entertainment news" anchors reporting breathlessly about the latest Hollywood gossip and speculations as if TV, movie and music stars were more important than other people.

Celebrity, I submit, is broken, misdirected worship of the creature instead of the Creator. It is yet another way in which we see the brokenness of a fallen world.

But there will come a day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11). There will come a day when Jesus will come with the clouds, and every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7). And we will worship rightly.

Because Jesus is the *ultimate* rock star.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/why\\_we\\_love\\_celebrity](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/why_we_love_celebrity)  
on April 26, 2011.

---

**“Do Non-Christians Have**

# Spiritual Gifts?"

I love your ministry and I find myself going to your website a lot as I prepare for Middle School Sunday School lessons. I am going to be teaching on spiritual gifts to teenagers. My 14-year-old son asked a very astute question. He says he knows some very "gifted" non-Christians at school and wondered if the spiritual gifts are only for those who have been born again or if our purpose in life is intertwined with our spiritual gifts. For example, a non-Christian singer who has been given an excellent voice but is not using it for God.

Thank you for the blessing of encouragement! I'm so glad our website is valuable to you!!

I think one's theology determines the answer. I know lots of people say that spiritual gifts are only given to the born-again believer as if God has nothing to do with people before they trust Christ.

I don't think it works that way though; I think that since God reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Who created us for the purpose of bringing us into the circle of Their love and delight and pleasure and fellowship, that a case can be made that God is everyone's loving Father ("one God and Father of all," Ephesians 4:6)—but unbelievers don't recognize it. That doesn't make Him NOT our Father; it doesn't make Jesus NOT "the Savior of all men, but especially of believers" (1 Timothy 4:10); it doesn't make the Holy Spirit NOT the giver of good gifts. So I think God lavishes all kinds of gifts on all people, but they are especially expressed more fully in those who are consciously connected to Him. I keep hearing stories from Christians who saw evidence of their spiritual gifts even before they were Christians; after they came into the Kingdom, they knew what they were.

Now there are also natural talents, which are different from

spiritual gifts. Singing, for example, is a talent, not a spiritual gift. For one thing, it's not on the lists in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Secondly, you can lose a singing voice, but Romans 11:29 says that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

Have you seen the spiritual gifts evaluation my husband Ray and I put together?

[www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/](http://www.probe.org/how-do-you-determine-your-spiritual-gift/)

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

© 2011 Probe Ministries

---

## **“I’m 15 and I’m Afraid I’m Gay”**

Dear Mrs. Bohlin,

I really need your help, I am 15 and frightened of being homosexual. About one and a half years ago I was at an all-girls summer camp where a girl told me she had decided to become bisexual. I didn't know why but this upset me a lot. I had two weeks of camp left, and I was terrified that everyone was gay, finally I became scared that I was gay. I hadn't really thought that I was attracted to girls before, but I used to be a tomboy and envied all the “girly-girls”. Ever since I went to camp and that happened my fear has gotten worse and worse, I haven't told anyone for fear of being told that I was. I heard about the “ex-gays” and read a few articles of yours. I don't know what to do. Please help me I'm very scared, all I want is to live again normally. I've been

**raised Christian and my parents are divorced. I'm sorry to bother you, but I need your advice. God bless you.**

\_\_\_\_\_, I'm so glad you wrote to me!

When God made you a female, He made you more emotional than analytical, more intuitive to other people than most males, and very relational. This means you are open to being influenced by other people, especially when you were only 13. For someone to tell you she had decided to label herself as bisexual at the very beginning of puberty, when you both have a LOT of growing, maturing, and learning about yourselves ahead of you, no wonder you were upset! That's way too much pressure to process information and label oneself at the beginning of adolescence. Which is a time of intense confusion to begin with, totally apart from the whole sexuality issue!

It makes sense you'd be scared that you were gay, for the same reason that when people take health or medical classes that cover different kinds of illnesses, it's typical to think they're experiencing the symptoms of a bunch of them. It's typical to be susceptible to ideas, especially at a time in your life where you "try on" all kinds of identities and values and beliefs to see if they fit.

If you were a tomboy, it's because God loves tomboys and that's why He makes you that way! It's our culture that incorrectly limits femininity to only the "girly-girl" end of the [femininity spectrum](#). Femininity also looks like jeans and t-shirts, tree-climbing, sports- and outdoor-loving girls. It makes sense for you to envy girly-girls because they are a different kind of girl than you are, but they aren't a BETTER kind of girl than you are! It makes sense because of the false message that tomboys are inferior to girly-girls. Nope! If God won't agree with it, it's not true!

Now for another part of the equation: what we know from talking to literally thousands of gay-identifying folks over

the years is that envy drives a lot (if not most) of same-sex attraction. Both guys and girls are drawn to whatever they feel they lack. Instead of saying, "This means I'm gay," it would be far wiser, and true to God's design, to say instead, "Hmmm. I see where I need to work on myself so I become the kind of person I admire, or to develop the kind of attributes I admire."

I was teaching at Probe's [Mind Games conference](#) for high school juniors and seniors when I said that many people who are afraid they're gay, or who think they might be, need to give themselves grace to finish growing up. Being attracted to same-sex peers is part of normal adolescent development, complete with intense crushes, but all we hear in the culture is, "If you like other girls (or boys), it means you're gay." No, it doesn't. It means you haven't finished growing up yet. One of the students came back the following year as an alumnus and come up to me in private to tell me, "When you said this last year, it was the first time I'd ever heard it. I was able to relax and just give myself permission to finish growing up. And you know what? In the past year, I have! I find myself attracted to girls now, instead of being so stuck on my attractions to other guys. Thanks for speaking truth to us."

Let me encourage you to bundle up your fears and your feelings and hand them to Jesus, who loves you more than you can possibly imagine, and He will help you sort through them. In fact, the more you concentrate on your relationship with Him, the better every other part of your life will become. In fact, I respectfully urge you to pray every day, "Jesus, show me how You love me," and then pay attention to the little intimate ways in which He says, "I sure do love you, \_\_\_\_\_!" When you know God loves you, that gives you a confidence in yourself that nothing else can even come close to. And it helps you sort out the rest of life, and put people in their proper perspective.

Relax and give yourself time to finish growing up without the

unnecessary complication of being paralyzed by fear that you're gay. God doesn't make anyone gay; He DOES make people to be relational, and the more we do life in community, with friends who will love and accept just as we are, we can grow into emotionally healthy adults.

So. . . how does this hit your heart? Does it make sense?

Warmly,  
Sue

© 2011 Probe Ministries

---

## **“Why Doesn't God Answer Prayers to Take Away Gay Feelings?”**

I was reading your [article](#) about Gay Teen Suicides and Bullying, about how some people pray and pray for God to take away their gay feelings and there is a reason that he doesn't that they don't know about. I'd like to know what that reason is. My best friend committed suicide when we were both 18 because he couldn't accept that he was gay. I learned to accept it and now I'm 36 and quite happy. Luckily, I have found a church that accepts me for who I am and I know that God loves me as does Jesus but I am always curious to hear the ideas and opinions of Christians on what the supposed cure for this condition might be.

First of all, \_\_\_\_\_, I am so very sorry to hear of your best friend's suicide. I'm sure that has left a wound on your soul that troubles you to this day.

I want to VERY respectfully suggest that “accepting one’s gayness” is not the best solution to the grief and sadness that comes bound up in realizing one has same-sex desires. That would be like seeing the “check engine” light on your car and deciding to learn to live with it. I know the culture’s pro-gay message is that there’s nothing wrong with homosexuality so just accept it, but that’s not God’s position. Which leads me to answer your question: why would God not take away someone’s gay feelings?

First, because everyone has an area of weakness that makes it easier for us to recognize our need for God and depend on Him more fully, which is His design and intent for us. Some people have physical trials; others struggle with a weakness for alcohol, drugs, or other forms of self-medication. Some struggle with same-sex attractions. Whatever our area of weakness, this is the very avenue by which God can reveal Himself to be strong, to be *enough* for us. And it is the best way for God to develop us into the people He made us to be, permeated with Christ like character and maturity.

So often, people pray and ask God to relieve their symptoms and make their lives easier (and this, of course, goes way beyond asking God to take away gay feelings. It’s something we all do). Being broken and fallen people, when we pray for that, what we’re really asking is, “I want You to make me comfortable so I won’t need You.” But Jesus doesn’t answer this prayer because there is something so much bigger than our comfort at stake; He wants our hearts. He wants our dependent trust. He wants us to repent of the sin and separation from Himself that results in our brokenness. He wants to heal the real brokenness, not just the *symptom* of the brokenness. True brokenness is our broken relationship with God.

The struggle (against same-sex feelings) itself is not an evil. The struggle can be a holy instrument in God’s hand if we let it. Please read through to the end of my answer for more on that.



Secondly, it's helpful to understand the bigger picture of why someone has attractions for someone of the same sex in the first place. No one is born gay; we are such complex creatures, being made in the image of God, that feelings, attitudes and beliefs are shaped over time by our life experiences, and filtered through our temperaments. This is complicated by the fact that we live in a fallen world that has been poisoned by sin, which is separation and independence from God. Fallen people love each other in fallen ways, or not at all.

The three-Personed God (One God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit), who have enjoyed love and fellowship with each other for all eternity, created us in Their image (Gen. 1:26). This means we are created for relationship: to connect and bond with others in ways that would make us feel loved and secure. Living in a fallen world means that sometimes, we don't connect and bond with the people God intends to love and accept us, and there are serious repercussions from that.

After listening to people's stories in literally thousands of intake interviews, my friend Ricky Chelette of [Living Hope Ministries](#) has identified several common denominators that provide perspective to same-sex desires:

- Little boys are born at some point on a gender spectrum that ranges from the rough-and-tumble athletic boy to the emotionally sensitive, artistic and/or musical, aesthetically gifted boy. Little girls are born at some point on a feminine gender spectrum that ranges from the girly-girl to the tomboy jockette. Our spot on the gender spectrum is God's choice for His glory and our benefit. Most male same-sex strugglers are on the sensitive end of the spectrum.
- God's intention is for babies to bond first with Mom, then with Dad, then with same-sex peers, then with opposite-sex peers. Learning to exercise our "attachment muscles" is an essential part of becoming emotionally healthy. Most Moms

don't have any trouble bonding with their babies. (But when something disrupts the process, it seriously messes people up.)

- When emotionally sensitive little boys are born into a family with a rough-and-tumble, emotionally insensitive Dad, the little boy can find himself more comfortable identifying with Mom and her emotionally sensitive femininity than with his Dad. It's as if Dad speaks Spanish and the little sensitive boy speaks Chinese. They may *want* to communicate with each other, but they don't speak the other's language. Unless the "Spanish-speaking" Dad purposes to learn Chinese to relate to his son on his level, there can be a disconnect between the two.

- There's a point in a toddler boy's development where he should realize, "I'm a boy. I'm more like Dad than like Mom." When Dad involves his son in his world and communicates love and acceptance to his son, he comes to believe that he belongs in the world of males with his Dad.

- The wise author Toni Morrison says that a child knows he's loved when he walks in a room and his parent's eyes light up. All children are created with the need to receive "the three A's": attention, affection and affirmation. When a Dad pays loving attention to his son, when his eyes light up when his son enters the room, when Dad affirms his son for who he is and not just what he can do, a boy will probably feel secure in his Dad's love and acceptance. But if there is a disconnect between a Dad and his son, if the Dad thinks it's too much trouble to try and connect with a son in ways that the son can receive, there will be a father-shaped hole in the little boy's heart. A rough-and-tumble boy can try and fill that hole with all kinds of activities and risky behaviors to earn his Dad's attention, affection and affirmation. An emotionally sensitive boy can easily detach himself from Dad and connect himself more strongly with Mom, or detach from everyone. Both kinds of boys are at risk for trying to get a legitimate need

met in unwise, illegitimate ways.

- Most little girls don't have trouble connecting with Mom, but if Mom is not warm and nurturing (or if something happens to disrupt the relationship), they can live with a mother-shaped hole in their heart. A Dad's role is to support and cherish his daughter's femininity, regardless of what form it takes. If he remains distant and unsupportive, or if he treats her like a son, she can have serious questions about her feminine identity: "If Dad doesn't think I'm okay, then I'm not." Or, if there *is* no Dad, she can be wracked with doubts about herself; a Dad's attention, affection and affirmation is huge in a little girl's life as well. Girls can have a father-shaped hole in their heart as well.

- From four to ten years old, the next stage of development is for boys to learn to attach to other boys and girls to attach to other girls. Both sexes usually have intense "BFF" (best friends forever) friendships that are not romantic or erotic, they are just emotionally intense as they learn to exercise their friendship attachment muscles. If a boy doesn't learn to make these connections with buddies, he will continue to walk around with a "buddy hole" in his heart. If a girl doesn't learn to make these connections with other girls, she will walk around with a "girlfriend hole" in her heart. And since nature abhors a vacuum, and because we are all fallen creatures, we will try to stuff all kinds of things into the holes in our hearts.

- At puberty, sex hormones flood the body and hit the mother hole or father hole or friend hole in the heart. That aching desire to connect and attach, the painful longing to be nurtured and to bask in attention, affection and affirmation ("the three A's"), then gets sexualized. If the adolescent boy or girl fantasizes about the object of their affections accompanied by masturbation and orgasm, brain chemicals get released that act like emotional super-glue. Physical (synaptic) connections are made between the object of

affection and sexual pleasure, and then strengthened with repetition. When someone buys into the lie that “if I feel it, it must be true,” the end result can be a homosexual identity.

- (This last point is not limited to same-sex strugglers by any means.) When people experience the trauma of abuse or neglect, when they don't get their God-given emotional needs met, they stop growing emotionally. They shut down inside. Their bodies keep growing but inside, they are still the emotional age of the point when they stopped growing. Although this sounds like an insult, it's actually a simple descriptor: many people are emotionally four to ten years old. (Ever see road rage?) This is why wounded people tend to live lives driven by drama, self-centeredness, a lack of self-discipline, and emotional dependency (which is relational idolatry).

Why doesn't God take away homosexual feelings? Because they are not a separate part of the person like a nasal polyp or an infected appendix that can be cut out to restore health. Feelings are a part of us. They are the *product* of beliefs, actions, and the way one sees life and reality. Feelings are like the caboose on a train; they trail along at the end, pulled by the parts that do the work.

God will not “zap” us because to do so would be to eradicate who we are. He will not remove feelings because feelings are part of the *imago Dei*, the image of God. He made us, He loves us just as we are, and He wants to work with us to transform our thinking and our understanding of who He is, who we are, how life works, and what is true. Romans 12:2 says, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” When we change the way we think and the way we do life, our feelings will eventually change. (Not necessarily 180 degrees, but some degree of transformation is part of the power of the Gospel!)

Homosexual feelings come from legitimate, unmet longings for connection, for the “three A's.” God wants us to be connected to other people; He created us to function best in community.

He wants us to experience His love, and the love of other people, in the context of relationship. God wants us in HIS community of believers, and the church is a second chance to be in a different family. He wants to meet our needs for connection and relationship through healthy God-honoring friendships. Many people testify that their same-sex longings decreased as their security as a man or as a woman grew because of belonging to the world of men or the world of women in God's family. As they took their place in the Body of Christ with their new (church) family and friends, the longings and desires shifted to age- and gender-appropriate feelings. They finished growing up.

But even in those who did not experience a shift in orientation, they still report having a home with God's people, with relationships that help fill the hole in their hearts.

Let me suggest a related but less emotionally charged illustration. In his excellent book *Changes That Heal*, Dr. Henry Cloud writes,

*It is not unloving for God to say no, even to our healing. He knows that sometimes we need to work out our healing instead of his doing it for us. For example, if I am depressed because I don't bond with others, for God to "heal" my depression would prohibit me from learning how to bond and becoming loved. He may then say no to my prayer for healing from depression for my benefit. We like Job, must trust God's no and his timing. It does not mean that he doesn't love us. It may mean that he wants something better for us.*

I believe that God says "no" to zapping away homosexual feelings because He has something better. He is passionate about growing us up to maturity (Eph. 4:13-15). There is no shortcut to maturity; it means struggling through to connect, attach and bond with healthy people until we finish growing

up.

Some years ago, someone sent this email about the value of struggling:

*A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared, he sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole.*

*Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and it could go no farther.*

*Then the man decided to help the butterfly, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily, but it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings.*

*The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.*

*Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of his life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings.*

*It was never able to fly.*

*What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening, were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.*

*Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If God allowed us to go through our life without obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as what we could have been, and we could never fly.*

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

© 2011 Probe Ministries