**Coddling of the American Mind**

*Drawing on the book The Coddling of the American Mind, Kerby Anderson examines the insanity on college campuses where students cannot handle ideas and people they disagree with.*

In this article we will talk about what is happening on college campuses, and even focus on why it is happening. Much of the material is taken from the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind.*

Greg Lukianoff was trying to solve a puzzle and sat down with Jonathan Haidt. Greg was a first amendment lawyer working with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). He was trying to figure out why students (who used to support free speech on campus) were now working to prevent speakers from coming on campus and triggered by words or phrases used by professors.

Greg also noticed something else. He has suffered from bouts of depression and noticed some striking similarities with some of the comments by students. He found in his treatment that sometimes he and others would engage in “catastrophizing” and assuming the worst outcome. He was seeing these distorted and irrational thought patterns in students.

After a lengthy discussion they decided to write an article about it for *The Atlantic* with the title, “Arguing Towards Misery: How Campuses Teach Cognitive Distortions.” The editor suggested the more provocative title, “The Coddling of the American Mind.” The piece from *The Atlantic* was one of the most viewed articles of all time and was then expanded to this book.

That book used the same title: *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Jonathan was on *Point of View* last year to talk about the book. The authors believe that these significant psychological changes that have taken place in the minds of students explain much of the campus insanity we see on campus today.

They point out that two terms rose from obscurity into common campus parlance. Microaggressions are small actions or word choices that are now thought as a kind of violence. Trigger warnings are an alert the professors now must use if they may be discussing a topic that might generate a strong emotional response.

Before we talk about some of the insight in the book, it is worth mentioning that though there is a psychological component to all of this insanity, there is also an ideological component. When the original article appeared, Heather MacDonald asked if “risk-adverse child-rearing is merely the source of the problem. For example, why aren’t heterosexual white males demanding safe spaces?” They all had the same sort of parents who probably coddled many of them.

It would probably be best to say that the mixture of psychological deficits also with the liberal, progressive ideological ideas promoted on campus have given us the insanity we see today. We have had liberal teaching on campuses for a century, but the problem has become worse in the last decade because of the psychological issues described in the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind.*
Three Untruths (Part 1)

The book can easily be summarized in three untruths that make up the first three chapters of the book. The first is the “Untruth of Fragility: What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Weaker.” Nietzsche’s original aphorism was, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” The younger generation has turned this idea on its head.

It is true that some things are fragile (like china teacups), while other things are resilient (and can withstand shocks). But they also note that some things are antifragile. In other words, they actually require stressors and challenges to grow. Our muscles are like that. Our immune system is like that. And university education is supposed to be like that. Students are supposed to be challenged by new ideas, not locked away in “safe spaces.”

Unfortunately, most young people have been protected by a culture that promotes what they refer to as “safetyism.” It has become a cult of safety that is obsessed with eliminating threats (whether real or imagined) to the point where fragility becomes expected and routine. And while this is true for the millennial generation (also called Generation Y), it is even truer for the iGen generation (also called Generation Z) who are even more obsessed with safety.

Part of the problem in these untruths is what they call “concept creep.” Safety used to mean to be safe from physical threats. But that has expanded to the idea that safety must also include emotional comfort. In order to provide that comfort, professors and students a few years ago introduced the idea of creating “safe spaces” for students. And in order to keep those students emotionally safe in the classroom, professors must issue “trigger warnings” so these students don’t experience trauma during a classroom lecture or discussion.

The second untruth is the “Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always Trust Your Feelings.” You can get yourself in some difficult circumstances quickly if you always trust your emotions. It is easy in this world to get frustrated, discouraged, and even depressed. Psychologists have found that certain patients can get themselves caught in a feedback loop in which irrational negative beliefs cause powerful negative feelings. We are seeing that on college campuses today.

Psychologists describe “the cognitive triad” of depression. These are: “I’m no good” and “My world is bleak” and “My future is hopeless.” Psychologists have effective ways of helping someone break the disempowering feedback cycle between negative beliefs and negative emotions. But very few adults (parents, professors, administrators) are working to correct mistaken ideas.

Three Untruths (Part 2)

In a college classroom, students are apt to make some sweeping generalization and engage in simplistic labeling of the lecture or reading material. In that case, we would hope that a professor would move the discussion by asking questions or even challenging the assertion.

Instead, many professors and colleges go along with the student comments. In fact, many even argue that any perceived slight adds up to what today are called “microaggressions.” In many cases, slights may be unintentional and actually wholly formed from the listener’s interpretation.

Here is how it develops. First, you prevent certain topics from being discussed in class. Next, you prevent certain speakers from coming to campus because they might present a perspective that aggrieved students believe should not be discussed. In the book is a chart illustrating how many speakers have been disinvited from universities. Five years ago, the line jumps up significantly.
The third untruth follows from that assumption. It is the “Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a Battle Between Good People and Evil People.” The authors argue that “the human mind is prepared for tribalism.” They even provide psychological research demonstrating that. But that doesn’t mean we have to live that way. In fact, conditions in society can turn tribalism up, down, or off. Certain conflicts can turn tribalism up and make them more attentive to signs about which team a person may be on. Peace and prosperity usually turn tribalism down.

Unfortunately, in the university community, distinctions between groups are not downplayed but emphasized. Distinctions defined by race, gender, and sexual preference are given prominence. Mix that with the identity politics we see in society, and you generate the conflict we see almost every day in America.

The authors make an important distinction between two kinds of identity politics. Martin Luther King, Jr. epitomized what could be called “common-humanity identity politics.” He addressed the evil of racism by appealing to the shared morals of Americans using the unifying language of religion.

That is different from what we find on college campuses today that could be called “common-enemy identity politics.” It attempts to identify a common enemy as a way to enlarge and motivate your tribe. Their slogan sounds like this: Our battle for identity and survival is a battle between good people and bad people. We’re the good guys and need to defeat the bad guys.

An Example: Evergreen State College

One good example of how these untruths play out can be found at what happened on a college campus in Olympia, Washington. The entire story is described in chapter five but also is featured prominently in the opening chapter of the book No Safe Spaces and in the movie with the same title.

Just a few years ago, Evergreen State College was probably best known as the alma mater for rapper Macklemore and Matt Groening, the creator of The Simpsons. That all changed with an email biology professor Bret Weinstein sent.

In the past, the school had a tradition known as the “National Day of Absence.” Usually, minority faculty and students leave the campus for a day to make a statement. But in 2017, the college wanted to change things and wanted white students and faculty to stay away from campus.

Professor Weinstein argued in an email that there is a difference between letting people be absent and telling people “to go away.” And he added that he would show up for work. When he did, he was confronted by a mob of students. When the administration tried to appease the demonstrators, things got worse.

Weinstein has described himself as a political progressive and left-leaning libertarian. But his liberal commitments did not protect him from the student mob. The campus police warned him about a potential danger. The next morning, as he rode his bike into town, he saw protesters poised along his route tapping into their phones. He rode to the campus police department and was abruptly told: “You’re not safe on campus, and you’re not safe anywhere in town on your bicycle.” Weinstein and his wife eventually resigned and finally received a financial settlement from the university.

The Evergreen students and faculty displayed each of the three great untruths. The Untruth of Fragility (What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker) came from a faculty member who supported the protesters and addressed some of her faculty colleagues in an angry monologue. She warned, “I am
too tired. This [blank] is literally going to kill me.” A student at a large town hall meeting verbalized her anxiety and illustrated the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning (Always trust your feelings). She expressed, “I want to cry. I can't tell you how fast my heart is beating. I am shaking in my boots.”

And the whole episode illustrates the Untruth of Us Versus Them (Life is a battle between good people and evil people). The students and faculty engaged in common-enemy identity politics by labeling a politically progressive college and liberal professors as examples of white supremacy. One student (who refused to join the protest) later testified to the college trustees, “If you offer any kind of alternative viewpoint, you’re the enemy.”

**What Can We Do?**

The book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, identifies many disturbing trends on college campuses that are beginning to spill over into society. What can we do to stem the tide?

Obviously, the long-term solution to the insanity on campus and in society is to pray for revival in the church and spiritual awakening in America. But there are some practical things that must be done immediately.

First, college administrators must get control of their campus. The riots at some of these universities resulted in violence and property destruction. Often the campus police and even the local police failed to take action. Sadly, the university administration rarely took action afterwards.

Some form of deterrence would have prevented future actions on the University of California, Berkeley campus. Instead, the inaction established a precedent that likely allowed the conflict at Middlebury College. Students not only shut down the lecture, but they assaulted one of the campus professors. Once again, no significant action was taken against the students and outside agitators. The problem will get worse if there is no deterrence.

Second, professors must get control of their classrooms. Students cannot be allowed to determine what subjects cannot be taught and what topics cannot be discussed. The authors of this book are concerned about the tendency to encourage students to develop extra-thin skins just before they enter into the real world. Employers aren’t going to care too much about their feelings. Students don’t have the right not to be offended.

Third, we need to educate this generation about free speech. One poll done by the Brookings Institute discovered that nearly half (44%) of all college students believe that hate speech is NOT protected by the First Amendment. And since many students label just about anything they don’t like as hate speech, you can see why we have this behavior on college campuses. More than half (51%) of college students think they have a right to shout down a speaker with whom they disagree. A smaller percentage (19%) of college students think it is acceptable to use violence to prevent a speaker from speaking on campus.

Finally, the adults need to make their voice heard. We pay for public universities through our tax dollars. Parents send their kids off to some of these schools. We should not tolerate the insanity taking place on many college campuses today.

The authors have identified certain concerns that colleges and universities need to address. They remind us how hostile the academic world has become, not only to traditional Christian values, but also to mere common sense. We need to pray for what is taking place in the college environment.

**Notes**
The Thought Police Are Here

Recently, in the same week, I watched two strikingly polar opposite events unfold on my Facebook feed. One was the long-awaited, long-prayed-for birth of a precious baby girl whose daddy had left homosexuality and repented of a gay identity as he pursued intimacy with Christ. After several years of sexual sobriety and spiritual growth, he was actually quite surprised to find himself starting to be attracted to girls. I remember him saying, “If you think puberty is rough the first time, you should try it at 28!” I was privileged to watch him weep with gratitude through his wedding to a beautiful lady, and pray for him as he became a pastor of an inner city church. And finally, after a failed pregnancy and several failed adoptions, God gave him and his wife the desires of their heart when their little one was born.

This happened the same week that Amazon banned a number of books offering hope for people struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions or gender confusion, people like my friend. A gay activist convinced Amazon that the books by a clinical psychologist who had successfully treated hundreds of men who did not want to be gay, and other books presenting a biblical view of sexuality, are dangerous. He said they cause LGBT people to hate themselves and inflict grave psychological damage. Because no one should be able to say there’s anything wrong with same-sex relationships and behavior.

It’s really not any different than if a coalition of distilleries, vintners and brewing companies went after Alcoholics Anonymous to shut them down, proclaiming that it’s dangerous and even wrong to support people who want to stop drinking. And there’s something wrong with people not wanting alcohol to control or even destroy their lives, because drinkers are who they are and they need to embrace this reality.

Critics use the pejorative labels “gay cure” or “conversion therapy” to shut down the voices of those offering help to those who want it. No reputable therapist, counselor, or pastoral care person will attempt to force change on someone who doesn’t want it, but what about those who do want help? What about another friend of mine, who sought help when he was deep in the weeds of his gay life? When I asked what made him reach out for help over 20 years ago, he answered, “God-induced misery. If the Holy Spirit truly lives within, there is no peace, there is no stability, there is no hiding. As James says, The double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

But technology has allowed “the Thought Police” to shut down the voices they don’t like, like those of my friends. The stewards of high tech hold the power to decide what they want people to hear and see.
• John Stonestreet’s recent Breakpoint commentary[1] relates how Facebook deleted a pro-lifer’s post quoting Saint Augustine, about focusing on the sins of others to avoid examining our own. Facebook says St. Augustine’s comment violated community standards.

• YouTube has restricted a quarter of Dennis Prager’s conservative videos, including one on the Ten Commandments (because it mentions murder).

• Smarter Every Day’s resident engineer (and winsomely outspoken Christ-follower) Destin Sandlin created three powerful videos explaining how YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are being manipulated to control what we see.[2]

• A single pro-LGBT activist convinced Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Google to remove the Living Hope Ministries app, grossly misrepresenting LHM’s mission and activity as dangerous and even “life-threatening.” The app was filled with expository teachings of various books of the Bible, weekly devotions, and personal testimonies of God’s transformational work. The app had happily resided on all platforms for more than three years.

This app was removed for supposedly being life-threatening to LGBTQ youth, yet the same hosts offer more than a dozen pro-gay apps that are designed to encourage sexual exploration and provide a means for individuals to hook-up for anonymous sex—an activity that has proven to be dangerous and even life-threatening.[3]

These are examples of the Thought Police in action.

This is why it is more important than ever before for our thinking to be more shaped, more informed by the truth of the Word of God than by the gatekeepers of Big Tech.

For example, we need to embrace the truth of 1 Corinthians 6, describing the first century church that had former homosexuals in it:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (vv. 9-11, emphasis mine)

I keep thinking about personal friends of mine, and their families, that the Thought Police don’t want the world to know about: men and women who have turned from a gay identity to finding their identity in Christ, who have reconciled their faith and sexuality to honor and glorify God in it. Some have developed an attraction to their now-spouse, and are happily living faithful lives of service in their churches and in the world. Some report that their same-sex attractions haven’t changed, but instead of a blaring, controlling force, they have retreated to white noise in the background of their lives. Their stories are real, and life-giving, and fulfilling.

But you won’t know about it if the Thought Police have their way.

Notes

1. www.breakpoint.org/2019/07/the-point-saintly-censorship/
2. www.smartereveryday.com/
“My Daughter Says She’s a Boy—What Do I Do?”

A real question from a real mom: “Sue, my daughter insists she’s a boy. She has rejected all things feminine since she was a toddler. Now as a 15-year-old she says there’s a mismatch between her brain and her body. She wants “top surgery” (a double mastectomy) and testosterone to bring her insides and outsides into alignment. She says God made her this way and He doesn’t make mistakes so she is embracing a transgender identity. What do I do?”

Oh sister. I am so sorry. I can only begin to imagine the pain, the chaos, and the conflict this is causing in your family.

Let’s start with, what do we know is true?

1. God loves her. She is very dear to Him. He made her in His image and likeness. He sent His Son to give His life for her, proving once and for all how infinitely precious she is. And He may just be especially tender toward her, when we consider Isaiah 42:3—“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;”
2. The Creator God made her a girl. He has plans and purposes for her as a female.
3. She’s only 15, and her pre-frontal cortex won’t finish developing for another 10 years. She’s not in a position to judge accurately the long-term effects of choices she makes today.
4. You are an adult, and you can see the long-term effects. It’s essential that you not cave to pressure.
5. This issue is so rife with conflict and political correctness that everything I’m about to say will make someone furious.

What do you do? Well, first, you love her well. You stay focused on the wonderful gifts and talents and personality that you appreciate about her, and you keep affirming her for these aspects of who she is. Her sense of self, her sexuality, is not WHO she is, it’s HOW she is. For right now.

Like any child or teenager (or adult, for that matter), she longs for her parents’ acceptance—but acceptance is not the same as approval. Acceptance means acknowledging their experience, and their perception of reality, without endorsing the conclusions they come to or the choices they make. (Consider that God accepts us, Romans 14:18 and 15:7, but He certainly doesn’t approve of everything we do!)

Loving her well means listening in order to communicate that you are seeking to understand her. It means showing compassion. Believing that one is transgender is hard. Those with internal conflicts about their gender are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, a sense of not belonging, and often have thoughts of suicide. She needs your tenderness.
What else do you do? **Educate yourself about this issue**, so you can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) to your daughter and to friends and family as this comes into the light.

**Gender Dysphoria is a thinking disorder, not a body disorder.** If your daughter announced she were a cat, or a unicorn, how would you deal with that? Dr. Phil McGraw teaches that the first test that one’s thinking is rational is that it has to be grounded in objective fact[^1]. Our sex—male or female—is an objective truth that becomes apparent at birth. God, who knits us together in our mother’s womb where we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13-14), is the one who chooses and then reveals His plan for our gender. That is objective fact. If someone thinks or feels that they are something other than what God has made them to be, it’s their thinking that is skewed, not their body. Unfortunately, our culture is very good at elevating feelings above objective truth, and that is at the core of the transgender issue.

I think that when children and adolescents claim to be the opposite sex, it’s really about **not fitting into gender stereotypes**. You said your daughter “rejected all things feminine” since she was very small. That was about pink and purple sparkly princess dresses and bows in her hair, right? And she hated them? I respectfully suggest it wasn’t femininity she was rejecting, it was a certain KIND of femininity, the stereotype we as a culture (particularly a culture infected with Disney princess images) label feminine. God also delights to make sporty, athletic, very physical and competitive girls who don’t really care for frilly, girly-girl clothes. They can have a hard time playing house because nobody wins! These girls are still sensitive and compassionate, still emotional and verbal, but they’d rather be outside climbing trees and throwing perfect spirals to the neighborhood boys. These are not inferior girls, they’re not lesser-than girls, they’re just not in the majority. They are girls who love sports and are good at it, or girls who don’t care for dresses or nail polish, or girls who just don’t get the superficiality of many of their girl peers. They are the kind of girl God made them to be. When they are supported and celebrated for the kind of girl they are, their sense of disconnect with their femininity can decrease as their awareness of God’s good creation of femininity increases.

Please see my post **The Gender Spectrum** for more information.

Sometimes, **the impact of various kinds of abuse** can make a girl think that it is neither good nor safe to be a girl. They can convince themselves that if they were a boy, they could protect themselves and they wouldn’t be at risk because boys don’t get abused or molested. (Which, of course, is not true!) The solution is not to impersonate a boy and mutilate her body, but to get help processing the deep soul wounds of abuse and molestation.

Just as depressed people can often take comfort and refuge in the idea of ending their pain through suicide, those who experience a sense of misalignment with their birth sex can put their hopes in transitioning to the opposite sex through cross-hormone therapy and ultimately surgery. But very few are aware of the testimonies of those who regret doing this. Walt Heyer of [sexchangeregret.com](http://sexchangeregret.com) has recently released a book, *Trans Life Survivors*, comprised of letters and emails from people who are very sorry for what they did to their bodies: the ongoing medical problems and the deep sense of loss at mutilating their bodies.[^2]

I know you are afraid of your daughter committing suicide because that is the drum that is constantly beaten by the pro-trans side: “If you don’t cooperate with your child’s plans to transition, there’s a high suicide rate when kids are not supported in their preferred gender identity.” That is a bone-chilling fear, one my husband and I personally know in our family. But you should know two things: first, it’s not necessarily true. See the article “The Suicide Myth” here: [www.transgendertrend.com/the-suicide-myth](http://www.transgendertrend.com/the-suicide-myth) Second, we do know that the suicide rate is 20 times higher in those who DO transition.
In a commentary titled “Sex Reassignment Doesn’t Work: Here’s the Evidence,” Ryan T. Anderson writes,

When ‘the tumult and shouting dies,’ it proves not easy nor wise to live in a counterfeit sexual garb. The most thorough follow-up of sex-reassigned people—extending over 30 years and conducted in Sweden, where the culture is strongly supportive of the transgendered—documents their lifelong mental unrest. Ten to 15 years after surgical reassignment, the suicide rate of those who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery rose to 20 times that of comparable peers.” {3} (Emphasis mine)

This means that the risk of suicide is far greater in those who transition, than those who don’t.

Be aware of the power of social media. One of my heroes is Collin Karchner, who is “on a crusade to save teens from social media’s potential destruction to their self-esteem and mental health, and empowering parents to reconnect with their kids.” (savethekids.us) I am amazed at the number of young lives he is saving by showing them how destructive social media can be, and the good that happens when teens cut themselves off from the negativity online. The destructive forces of social media certainly manifest in the growing numbers of kids and teens thinking they are transgender.

Recently, my colleague Kerby Anderson had me on his Point of View radio program talking about Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria, which is a part of social contagion. He posted this article on the ministry website: pointofview.net/articles/rapid-onset-gender-dysphoria/

Tumblr is a magnet for young girls, who are extremely vulnerable to the ideas and images on social media, and it is egregiously pro-trans. You should know about this social contagion phenomenon on that platform here: 4thwavenow.com/tag/tumblr-trans-contagion/

As I said above, educate yourself. But know that the pro-trans activists have been extremely successful at shutting down the voices of those concerned about the full-steam-ahead transgender agenda. You’ll have to do some digging.

Check out the work and the writings of psychologist Dr. Kenneth Zucker, who counseled over 560 children and teens with gender confusion at his clinic in Toronto over 35-40 years. He found that when kids were able to go through puberty naturally, Gender Identity Disorder (a phrase he coined) resolved in 98% of boys and 80% of girls. This is profound! Apparently, there is something about the rush of the correct hormones during puberty that resets things internally in the vast majority of adolescents. The best treatment for those who feel at odds in their body is to wait and watch.

You should also know about Dr. Paul McHugh, for many years the Psychiatrist-in-Chief at Johns Hopkins University, who shut down the sex change clinic when he found that post-surgically, the patients still had their neuroses. In the article “Surgical Sex,” he wrote,

“When I became psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins, I realized that by doing sex-change operations the hospital was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We would do better for these patients, I thought, by concentrating on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia.” {4}

Be very skeptical of anything from WPATH, World Professional Association for Transgender Health. They are completely uninterested in providing any balance to their reports or articles, and their poorly designed studies have no control groups. (For more information, watch this video from pediatric endocrinologist Dr. Quentin Van Meter, “The Terrible Fraud of ‘Transgender Medicine’” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mtQ1geeD_c )
My last suggestion is the most important. **PRAY.** This is a spiritual warfare battle. The enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), and he is coming after our kids like nothing we’ve ever seen before. I have seen numerous people snatched from the enemy’s claws as God does “spiritual cataract surgery,” allowing them to see what they were blind to before, because of the faithful prayers of faithful parents and family members. Pray that the Lord will strengthen and protect your daughter from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Pray for the eyes of her heart to be enlightened so she can see the truth about herself (Ephesians 1:18).

Pray and don’t give up.

Notes

1. drphilintheblanks.com, Living by Design Worksheets.
2. sexchangeregret.com/bookstore/

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/my_daughter_says_shes_a_boy–what_do_i_do on June 11, 2019.

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**Princess Warrior, First Responder**

One of my favorite things to talk about is the Gender Spectrum, because I think it provides a very helpful understanding of people. Instead of a single spectrum with masculinity on one end and femininity on the other, I believe God has created a masculinity spectrum and a separate femininity spectrum.

The masculinity spectrum runs from the rough and tumble, athletic and physical kind of males on one end, to the sensitive, artistic, creative kind of males on the other—and everything in between. Although Western civilization tends to equate masculinity with the rough and tumble guys, I think that is a stereotype that gets in the way of appreciating the divinely created range of masculinity.

The femininity spectrum runs from the girly-girl on one end to the tomboy girl on the other. And just as with the masculinity spectrum, Western civilization tends to equate femininity with the stereotype of pink-loving, cosmetic-wearing girls who twirl in dresses to be admired. God delights to make plenty of females who are gifted athletically, are often natural leaders, and don’t really care for the stereotypical appearance-oriented manifestations.

My belief is that Jesus Christ is the whole masculinity spectrum all at once, and as boys and men grow in Christlikeness (which is the goal of spiritual maturity), they will take up more bandwidth on the spectrum. Rough and tumble guys grow in sensitivity and compassion, and sensitive/artistic/creative men grow in their physicality and willingness to initiate and lead.

It seemed to me that a similar growth into taking up more bandwidth should happen on the
femininity spectrum as well, as spiritual and emotional growth would produce a fuller-orbed experience of God’s beautiful intention for His beloved female image-bearers.

I have certainly observed this happening in fully devoted followers of Christ. I have seen tomboy girls become more comfortable in their feminine skin, especially those who didn’t particularly like being female because of abuse or a lack of connection with other girls growing up. It’s been good to see women who protected themselves with a hardened, tough outer shell grow softer and more trusting of the Lord and other women. But I’ve wondered, what happens when girly-girls start taking up more bandwidth on the femininity spectrum? How do they grow and change?

One of the things I love about my tomboy girl friends is their fiercely protective willingness to fight—bullies, injustice, evil. Most of them are not in the least interested in protecting their non-existent manicures or messing up their fancy, fussy outfits (since they don’t own any). Some of them grew up with a burning desire to defend the defenseless, and they were frustrated at the unfair rule that girls weren’t supposed to fight. And some of them felt shamed for this supposedly unfeminine passion.

Instead, in our culture, girls are usually expected to fall in love with Disney princesses and see themselves as a princess. Now, there’s nothing wrong with being royalty. In fact, when I tell my story of trusting Christ and entering into His family, I share my childhood dream to grow up to be a princess. It was a major lightbulb moment of my life to realize that I am now a child of God, who is the King of Kings, and the female child of a King is a princess! Then I pull out my tiara and pop it on my head. I totally own the princess identity.

But one day I realized that the Bible’s call to engage in spiritual warfare is not gender-related in the least. Every believer is called to don the armor of God and do battle with demons with the Lord’s protection and in His strength (Ephesians 6:1-18). The person who does warfare is a warrior, right?

Voila—the opportunity to be a princess warrior! Or a warrior princess, either one works, satisfying both ends of the femininity spectrum. Justice-fueled protectors who want to go to war or even just fight the bully on the school bus have every biblical invitation—it’s actually a command!—to give themselves fully to the God-given desire to fight in a way that glorifies God. Girly-girls fulfill a larger vision for femininity when they move beyond a self-oriented focus on looking good, shopping, disdaining sports, and the domestic arts, and give themselves to standing firm against evil and serving others in intercessory prayer.

Recently, though, I had another lightbulb moment when the women’s director at my church, addressing a “Leaders of Leaders” equipping time, told us that we are first responders. Invoking the image of 9/11 when firefighters ran into the burning buildings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, she pointed out that we are also first responders when we deliberately walk into spiritual burning buildings to rescue those trapped by faulty, unbiblical thinking. We’re first responders when we’re willing to have hard conversations with those struggling with where scripture teaches unpopular and uncomfortable standards. We are first responders when we’re willing to walk people in conflict through the steps of biblical conflict resolution (Matthew 7:3-5, 18:15-17). We are first responders when we are willing to reach out and love the unlovely and difficult. We are first responders when we are willing to walk a woman through spiritual warfare material to identify places she has given the enemy a foothold in her life and help her take back internal real estate that should belong to Jesus.

So, regardless of where a woman finds herself on the femininity spectrum, she can glorify God as she trusts Him to expand and grow her into a more well-rounded follower of Christ. Even (and especially) if that includes pink nail polish and spiritual firefighting gear.
How Bad is This Conversion Therapy Thing?

As pro-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) voices and values grow louder and more insistent in the culture, what about those people of faith who experience same-sex attraction and don’t want it? What are they supposed to do with feelings and desires at odds with their faith? How are they supposed to learn to reconcile their faith and their sexuality?

The cultural narrative has become, “LGBT represents normal, healthy variations in human sexuality, so everyone should support and celebrate all forms of sexual diversity. And if you don’t, we’re going to punish you, shame you, and squelch your voice.”

Part of the punishing and shaming includes outrage over “Conversion Therapy.” A growing number of states outlaw it. What makes it so bad and why are people so angry about it?

What is Conversion Therapy?

Conversion Therapy is usually defined as therapy designed to change a person’s sexual orientation. But is that what it really is? Therapy is a shortened form of the word “psychotherapy,” which means the treatment given by a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist, a social worker, or a licensed counselor. So Conversion Therapy isn’t therapy without a professional counselor of some kind, with the goal of changing someone’s sexual orientation.[1] But do a Google search for organizations being labelled as doing (or even promoting) Conversion Therapy—which will include a number of churches—and you’ll find neither element happening.

Conversion Therapy is the current buzzword that instantly communicates something that smears hate, shame, judgment and probable suicidality in those who undergo it, forced or not. It is not acceptable to say there’s anything wrong or unhealthy about any form of “sexual diversity.” Those that do—for example, anyone who holds to a biblical, traditional view of marriage and sexuality—are labeled as haters, bigots, prudes, outdated . . . and wrong.

Anne Paulk, director of Restored Hope Network, describes it as “an ideological term used by the
GLBTQ activist community and their supporters who seek to link compassionate spiritual care and talk therapy with horrible, clearly disreputable practices”.[2]

These “disreputable practices” include stories of some extremists who used torture, pain and punishment to try and exorcise homosexuality from people. Most notably and recently, the movie *Boy Erased* purports to show the true story of a teenage boy whose parents sent him to a strict camp that left heartbreaking wounds on his soul. (It should also be noted that the producers took a number of creative liberties to produce the most dramatic moments of the film, none of which actually happened per the book.) The cultural narrative lumps extremists with all those engaged in helping those with unwanted homosexuality, painting them all with a broad brush of condemnation.

**Helping Those Who Want the Help**

A number of ministries and churches actively seek to help those who don’t want their same-sex feelings or their discomfort with their gender. Or, even if they don’t fight against their feelings, they want to live lives honoring to God despite their desires, which means not giving into them. These ministries and organizations neither offer nor promise conversion of homosexual attractions into heterosexual ones. That would be like offering to make someone stop loving chocolate and start loving kale. Not gonna happen, right?

But they can teach what God’s word says about sexuality, discipleship, and living a life pleasing to God. They can help people (note: choose to, not be forced to) submit every area of their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ, including sexuality. There are many who define and identify themselves by their sexuality; God’s word calls us to define and identify ourselves by our relationship to Him.

Human sexuality is a complex, many-layered issue comprised of a lifetime of experiences, perceptions, habits, and ways of thinking. There’s nothing simple about it. It has also, for every one of us, been impacted by the Fall and the pervading presence of sin.

**But Is Change Even Possible?**

Ever hear the pejoratively-used phrase “Pray away the gay”? That’s as effective as praying away fat. A prayer like, “Please Jesus make me stop wanting people/things/food I shouldn’t” has never worked because He doesn’t have a magic wand. He says to all those who want to be His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). That means saying no to ourselves and to our flesh, the part of us that operates independently of God. The apostle Paul instructs us in Romans 12:2 to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . .” Cooperating with God to renew our mind means submitting our thoughts and habits to Him, “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The call to surrender every part of us, including our sexuality, as the way to obey and honor God, is a difficult one, and it takes community. It takes the support of other Christ-followers to walk alongside us, pray for us, speak God’s truth to us, encourage us, challenge us, restore us when we stumble and fall, and help us keep going.

Change is not only possible, it is the mark of things that are alive. And it is the fruit of the gospel. Lasting change comes not from human effort but from supernatural transformation as we surrender to the work of God in our lives. We experience change as we are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christlikeness produces change in how we think, what we believe, how we see ourselves and others, our behavior, and finally—like the caboose on a train—our feelings. But there’s no point in trying to change the feelings apart from the rest of the process.

Discipleship is often what’s happening in ministries and churches that are smeared with the label of
“Conversion Therapy,” being lied about and attacked by people who can’t abide any position other than their own.

Next time you see the term “Conversion Therapy,” know that it’s not about shutting down bad therapists. It’s about shutting up people who agree with God about sexuality.

1. I am indebted to the amazing Joe Dallas for his crazy-great analysis and tender compassion concerning this issue, particularly this article: joedallas.com/2018/11/13/dances-with-snakes/

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/how_bad_is_this_conversion_therapy_thing on February 19, 2019.

Why Every Christian Student Needs Mind Games

You’ve probably heard or read that the vast majority of young Christians are leaving the church after they graduate from high school. But they don’t have to “graduate from God” after they get their diploma.

There are several reasons young adults leave the church, and many of them jettison their faith as well. The biggest reason is that their questions and doubts—which started in junior high school—were not answered by their parents or youth leaders.

Another reason is that don’t believe Christianity is true. Immersed in a cultural brine of religious lies and deceptions, they don’t know what the truth is and why biblical Christianity blows the false ideas and religions away.

A third reason is that they caught their unbiblical beliefs and practices from their parents and other adults in the church. It turns out that Mom and Dad were almost as pickled in the cultural brine as their kids!

But Probe offers a great way to push back on these reasons.

Our summer Mind Games camp is a total—immersion, life—changing week of instruction in worldview and apologetics designed to build students’ confidence that Christianity is true, and why Christianity is true. We lay the foundation of three major worldviews to give them understanding of how other people think and why Christianity is better because it matches reality. Then we teach them why they can be sure that God exists, why the Bible can be trusted, and how we can know that Jesus is God and the only way to heaven.

After these basics, campers learn how biblical principles apply to issues they need to grapple with: truth and grace about LGBT, how faith and science work together, why a good God allows pain and evil, the value of suffering, how to watch a movie with their brains turned on, genetic engineering, understanding Islam, and more.
But it’s not just lectures. Plenty of free time is built into the schedule for processing what they’ve learned and developing friendships with other campers. The relationships that students form at Mind Games is one of their biggest takeaways. With a max of 40 participants, everyone can enjoy connecting to other campers, and many of the friendships endure year after year.

The biggest reason for leaving the church is unanswered questions and doubts. Probe staffers assure students that Mind Games is a safe place to ask any question—anonymously—and address any doubt. Many of the questions campers come with, are answered during the week in our lectures and discussion times. Whether in large group or the many opportunities for one-on-one conversations with Probe teachers, campers have many ways to get help wrestling with obstacles to their faith.

For over twenty years, Mind Games alumni have grown into leaders on campus, in public service, in the military, and in the church. The fruit of their time with us is “fruit that lasts” (John 15:16).

Mind Games Camp 2019 is June 16-22 at Camp Copass in Denton, Texas, in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Some scholarships are available. Check out videos and much more information at Probe.org/mindgames.

Can you think of a high school student who doesn’t need Mind Games?
We can’t either.

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**Gay Men to Lead Boy Scouts: Gates’ Failure to Render Genuine Leadership**

*This week the Boy Scouts of America have announced they will welcome transgendered youth into the program. This culture-following trend began when the BSA allowed gay scouts, then gay leaders. This shows a serious leadership gap, according to Eagle Scout, former Scout employee, and volunteer Byron Barlowe.*

Boy Scouts will now be subject to gay adult leadership if BSA (Boy Scouts of America) president Robert Gates’ advice is taken. Gates, who once held our military’s top position as Secretary of Defense, declared the inevitability of ending the ban on openly gay Scout leaders while addressing the BSA national annual meeting in Atlanta Thursday, May 21, 2015.

Does anyone really doubt that Gates’ position will be made official, especially given recent advances for gay rights at the states’ level, with the Girl Scouts, in Ireland’s national referendum vote three days later and most likely via the United States Supreme Court this June? I wager it’ll be only a few months before it’s official BSA policy.

The question for Mr. Gates: How does bowing to the rapidly changing poll numbers on this issue constitute leadership? Don’t heroes often have to stand alone? Even if Gates holds convictions that
would dictate openness in his personal dealings, his stated premise for lifting the long-time ban on
gay Scout leaders that stands to affect tens of thousands of youth is flawed: that the proverbial train
has left the station and the organization needs to cover its rear guard, to go with the inevitable flow
of gay rights, to kowtow to pressure from within and without. Pure pragmatism on parade. And
entirely inappropriate and unrespectable.

**Brave New World vs. “A Scout is Brave”**

Part of the Scout Law every Boy Scout for 105 years has memorized and recited reads, “A Scout is
trustworthy . . . brave . . . reverent . . .” But the BSA has done a 180-degree flip on the topic of
homosexuality, having won a Supreme Court case against a gay membership push as recently as
2000. *The Opinion of the Court in Dale v. Boy Scouts of America*, written by Chief Justice Rehnquist,
reads, “The Boy Scouts asserts that it ‘teach[es] that homosexual conduct is not morally straight!’” in
its defense of denying avowed homosexual and gay activist James Dale leadership privileges with a
Scout troop.

*Oh, what a difference fifteen years makes when one bases decisions on the swiveling wind
gane of a degrading culture.*

To his credit, Dr. Gates called for individual chartering organizations—representing 70 percent of
Boy Scout Troops and Cub Packs—to decide for themselves how to implement such a policy. Yet, in
the same speech, Gates cites the refusal of a New York Council to abide by current BSA policy in
hiring gay leaders as a realistic reason to change the national policy. Which is it? Gay men get the
right to lead, or troops and packs get to say no? We see where that is going in the courts and in
culture with Christian photographers, bakers and T-shirt makers: inescapable pressure to succumb.

**Live Up to High Standards of Scouting**

I’m holding President Gates to a high standard here. Sure, he’s been pressured by his own big
business (read: big donor) board members like Randall Stephenson of AT&T and James Turley of
Ernst & Young to eradicate the BSA’s longstanding policies against gay participation at every level.
Though it may not compare to high stakes, national level non-profit boardroom politics, I lost my job
as a BSA District Executive by holding to the principles of Scouting (and my biblical faith). When
asked to misrepresent the number of Cub Scout Packs in local schools at a BSA Council in North
Carolina, I refused. Threats didn’t move me despite my 23-year-old, first-job fears. Call me naïve.
Then explain that to a boy. It would be refreshing to see Mr. Gates stand up to power himself.

Even if I agreed with gay rights claims concerning the private youth training organization, I’d object
to the hypocrisy of its leader. Gates’ recent declaration, as with the BSA’s 2013 decision to enroll openly gay Scouts, is modeling
another dereliction of duty. Yet “duty to God,” others and self has always formed the three-legged
stool of values on which Scouting stood. God is not confused on this issue, nor was the Scouting
program for a full century.

**If This Goes, Scouting Will Forever Be Altered**

I write “values on which Scouting stood” in past tense advisedly. As I was quoted via the *Los Angeles
Times* syndicate while demonstrating against the policy change to allow openly gay Scouts in 2013,
this is the end of Scouting as we have known it. Another prediction: A sharp decrease in numbers
following that decision will be surpassed if the BSA allows admittedly gay leaders. As an Eagle
Scout, father of an Eagle Scout, former volunteer Scouting leader and BSA local executive, I can no
longer support in any way the Boy Scouts of America. I’ll support other youth programs.
This conviction grieves me, but borrowing from the Christian reformer Martin Luther, here I stand and I can do no other. No, this episode does not rise to the level of religious reformation; however, the gravity of such social slides will change the cultural landscape for as long as our Republic stands. The gay advocacy heavyweight Human Rights Campaign is right when it celebrates Gates’ announcement as a huge victory in its drive for full acceptance of homosexuals across the culture, given that the BSA is “one of America’s most storied institutions.”

As SecDef, Gates ended the ambiguous “Don’t ask, don’t tell” doctrine, a decision that opened doors for openly gay service men and women to serve freely despite fears of sexual chaos. Our former CIA Director and, again, Secretary of Defense Gates now holds the top leadership post among a younger group of Americans. On this issue he has led neither members of the armed forces nor impressionable and sexually vulnerable adolescent Scouts.

Once again, Gates’ ethics reek of pure pragmatism: “We must deal with the world as it is, not as we might wish it to be. The status quo in our movement’s membership standards cannot be sustained,” he said to the assembled Scouting leaders.

Never mind high ideals. The wind has blown, the ship has sailed and we must get on board or be left behind (or at least sued heavily). Oh, such bravery.

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**When a Church Tells a Member, “It’s Not OK to be Gay”**

Watermark Community Church in Dallas (where my husband and I are members) was recently dragged into the media when a former member published a letter to the church on the one-year anniversary of his membership being revoked. After several years of fighting his unwanted same-sex attractions, the young man got weary of the battle and embraced a gay identity—and a boyfriend. The church pleaded with him to repent (turn 180 degrees) and submit to the Bible’s commands to sexual purity, but he would not. So the church sent him a letter which the young man made public.

Within hours, a firestorm erupted on social media, TV media, and print media.

Predictably, the church’s counter-cultural beliefs and stance were misrepresented out of people’s inability (or refusal) to understand biblical values and truths. It would be easy to come away with a very skewed perception of this situation, which is why it’s important to use discernment in reading or hearing anything about this controversial subject.

Recall the wisdom of Proverbs 18:17: “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.” It’s important to remember there’s another side of every story, and to hold judgment until one’s discernment kicks in.

It started when the former member’s Facebook post was picked up by the *Dallas Morning News*. His title was “Watermark Church Dismissed Me for Being Gay,” and the paper chose the title
“Watermark Asks Homosexual Member to Leave Church.” It sure sounds like the church kicked him out, doesn’t it? But that’s not what happened. The church responded, “Watermark makes a distinction between attending our church [Sue’s note: which the former member was welcome to do] and being a formal member of our church. We don’t remove someone’s formal status as a member for struggling with sin—whether that sin is pride, materialism or sexual sin. Every member of Watermark needs God’s grace to stand firm in the midst of temptation and His forgiveness for the times we fall short.”

Jacqueline Floyd, a Dallas Morning News columnist, wrote a scathing column criticizing Watermark.

Ms. Floyd:
“A lot of people are upset that an institution that professes love for all its members would exile someone because of his sexual orientation.”

And they should be! But that’s not what happened. Pastor Todd Wagner’s response:

“Following the example of Jesus, Watermark loves and welcomes people of all backgrounds, economic statuses, ethnicities and sexual struggles. Also following his example, we encourage people to turn away from sin and to follow Jesus. We have many members and several staff who struggle with same-sex attraction or for whom same-sex sexual activity is a part of their past. We count it a privilege to labor with them in their desire to resist temptation, and we rejoice with them as they experience forgiveness and new life in Christ. Their stories are powerful and serve as beautiful testimonies to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.” [Emphasis his]

Ms. Floyd:
“He tried for years to conform to church requirements that he alter his essential nature, ‘repent’ his sexual orientation, undergo a form of ‘conversion therapy’ that research as well as mainstream psychology and counselors have denounced as harmful and pointless.”

This makes sense if you believe the culture’s sexual mythology that says being gay is one’s “essential nature,” as if a gay identity were the most important thing about an individual. (Consider how unbalanced it would be if we switched out the standard for how well someone can sing, declaring that one’s “essential nature” was one’s ability to carry a tune—or not. How awfully narrow and unnecessarily limiting that would be, as if every other aspect of one’s giftings and temperament, interests and abilities paled in comparison to their singing voice!)

The church does not require that anyone “alter their essential nature,” but it does align itself with scripture, acknowledging that we are all born sinful and broken, with a tendency to rebel and disobey against God:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.” (Romans 3:10b-12)

Our true “essential nature” is that we are both infinitely precious and valuable because we are made in God’s image, but also fallen and sinful. That “essential nature” can’t be altered by ourselves, but it can be transformed by God. That is the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
I don’t know if anyone at Watermark mistakenly urged this brother to repent of his sexual orientation as if he had chosen to be same-sex attracted, but we certainly do exhort everyone to renounce and repent of all sexual sin (which means anything outside of marriage between one man and one woman). Concerning “conversion therapy,” Watermark doesn’t have that. What we do have is a call to discipleship, asking people to be “all in” with Jesus, obeying His word and pursuing intimacy with Christ. That intimacy usually produces heart change, which means transformation from the inside out, where therapy is an attempt to bring about change from the outside in.

Ms. Floyd:

“Trying to ‘change’ someone’s sexual orientation is about as useful as trying turn a turtle into a duck. When this witch-doctor alchemy predictably failed to work, the church blamed him—and revoked his membership. Not in person. They mailed him a letter.”

Lots of people believe that sexual orientation is fixed and unchangeable. That’s because if a lie is repeated loud enough and long enough, people will accept it as truth. Change is possible, and feelings (because that’s what we’re talking about here) are fluid. We see change happening in the first-century church; 1 Corinthians 6:11 says to former homosexuals, “And such were some of you.” I have seen change happen before my own eyes, for 18 years of involvement at Living Hope Ministries. And if that’s not enough, google “Lisa Diamond Sexual Fluidity” for some intriguing academic research that cites that change happens.

But then it sure sounds cold to mail someone a letter revoking his membership. And it would be—if it had happened like that. The letter was just the final formal communication, the period at the end of a series of anguished, face-to-face conversations.

See why it’s so important to remember that “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him”?

The letter from our own former member needs to be read with discernment as well:

“I spent years battling against my own homosexuality. When I wasn’t able to change, you turned your back on me.”

I’m sure there were some people mistakenly thinking and hoping that his same-sex attractions were a matter of choice that could be changed on demand. “Everstraights,” especially men, have a hard time imagining what it’s like to be drawn to the same sex, and can easily burden those who are, with unrealistic expectations.

Battling one’s homosexuality is incredibly difficult, and I can appreciate that many, many people pray hundreds of times, “God, I beg You, take this away!” That prayer is like mine growing up: “God, please! Heal me!” It’s like the apostle Paul’s prayer, recorded in 2 Corinthians 7b-9:

“I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Paul pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, but God had something better. I pleaded with God to remove my thorn in the flesh, but He had something better. My same-sex attracted brother, our former member, pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, and He had something better for him as well, but my brother decided to embrace his flesh instead. He wrote,

“I am who God made me to be. I cannot change my sexual orientation, and nor would I
want to. I now have internal peace and happiness unlike ever before.”

No, God did not make anyone same-sex attracted. Based on the thousands of men who have come through Living Hope, I would say God probably made him to be sensitive, artistic, creative, relational, and gifted. But not gay.

It’s not surprising that he now senses “internal peace and happiness unlike ever before.” He quit battling his flesh, the part of us that lives independently from God. The relief that comes from giving into temptation can feel like peace and happiness, for a while. It can feel like freedom. But it comes at a cost. There is no true intimacy with Jesus when we are indulging our flesh. There can be a faux intimacy, the echoes of having walked with Him in obedience and abiding trust. But true intimacy can only happen in the light:

“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7)

So I pray for my brother, and I pray for all of us to develop discernment as we process the war of worldviews about sexual ethics. It won’t be easy.

[Note: If you want a blessing and strong but grace-filled instruction about church discipline, please watch Todd Wagner’s response to this issue from the Watermark platform, “Why Good Leaders Have Always Written Letters to the Church They Love”: http://www.watermark.org/plano/message/4320]

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue.bohlin/when_a_church_tells_a_member_its_not_ok_to_be_gay on October 18, 2016.

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What God Says About Sex - A Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we lose sight of God’s perspective, sex can degrade into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Pickle Principle

It’s not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any
idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naive and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God’s gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world’s perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.

Counselor Waylon Ward offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls “the Pickle Principle.” In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture, absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world’s sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure. Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together. It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It’s like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His “pickled people” out of the world’s brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

**Sex is God’s Invention! The Purpose of Sex**

Sex is God’s idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men’s and women’s body parts to complement each other. He created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife, we can express and enjoy God’s two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called *What God Says About Sex*, Eric Elder says that intimacy really means “into-me-see.” It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, “warts and all,” to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive “till death do us part.” The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart. God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.
Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God’s intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another’s love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very other beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God’s intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.

So . . . What Does God Actually Say?

A lot of people believe the Bible says, “Sex is fun and it feels good, so don’t do it.” Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God’s great idea in the first place! But God’s view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world’s perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage. As I said above, sex is so powerful that it’s like the difference between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what’s best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God’s own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special, a gift that can we can only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents “ghosts” in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires,” which means “until the time is right.” As I minister to sexually broken people, most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It’s for adults. Married adults.

God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it’s ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality. In fact, God says to offer not even a hint
Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God has created for me? This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn’t build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I’m about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with His supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, “Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!” In fact, God wants married couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.

**Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much**

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin. Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies, but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It’s pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, “In the counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you.”

The pickling brine of our culture’s increased sensuality says, “If it feels good, do it. You’re entitled.” But while this belief about sex may feel good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn’t meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He’s doing, and we do well to follow.

2. Ibid., 8.


6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated “sexual immorality”), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. Song of Solomon 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.


11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries (www.livehope.org), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don’t struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse is a common denominator.

12. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.


17. Song of Solomon 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.


20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.


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Orlando’s Bizarre Coincidence?

My phone dinged Sunday morning, June 12, with Facebook’s notification that three of my friends were safe in regard to the Orlando shooting. I had no idea what that meant, but fortunately social media makes it easy to find out what’s happening in the world within seconds. My heart sank when I learned of the largest mass shooting in American history at a gay nightclub, with 49 dead and 53 injured. I couldn’t even begin to wrap my mind around the pain and horror inflicted on the victims and their families and friends.

Then I learned about the very different kind of pain and horror that also happened in Orlando two days later, when an alligator snatched a two-year-old boy and won the wrestling match with the boy’s father, pulling the toddler under the water and drowning him—in preparation, one might assume, to make a meal of him later.

I shared the horrifying news with students at Probe’s Mind Games camp, where we were teaching that week. Three of the campers are from Orlando, and I learned that Floridians just know that alligators are everywhere, and they take precautions. When Aimee heard that the incident had happened on one of the Disney World properties, she asked, “Where’s the family from? I bet not Florida. [It was Nebraska.] We know about alligators. You can’t see them, but they can see you. Even in four inches of water.”

It is certainly possible that the back-to-back nightclub shooting and the alligator snatching both happening in Orlando was just a bizarre coincidence. But I wonder if one is a physical representation of a spiritual reality about very real warfare that happens in the unseen spirit realm.

Alligators are predators. They’re always looking for something to kill and eat. I couldn’t help but be reminded of 1 Peter 5:8, “Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.”

I am absolutely sure that our enemy the devil was actively prowling at the Pulse nightclub. Jesus said that the devil comes to “steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10), and he was successful at all three the morning of June 12. As I looked at pictures of all the people who died that day, I saw young men and women who were someone’s sons and daughters, someone’s nieces and nephews and grandchildren, someone’s friends and co-workers, their lives snatched by a horrible predator.

I thought about the parents and loved ones of gay-identifying people who faithfully pray that God will open the eyes of their beloveds in “the far country” of sin and self-indulgence (Luke 15) to see
the destructive path they are on and repent. I thought about the parents and loved ones I know personally, with whom I join my prayers for God to protect their children in the far country before the heartless, evil predator snatches them like the alligator grabbed little Lane Graves.

Disney has been changing their signs, from the polite request “No Swimming Please” to the explicit “Danger: Alligators and Snakes in Area.” People need to know when they are exposed to dangerous predators, right?

It’s true in the spiritual realm as well. Sexual and relational brokenness often leads to sin that opens people to attacks of our enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, always on the prowl looking for someone to devour. Just as real as the alligators in what’s supposed to be “The Happiest Place on Earth.” Celebrating and encouraging what God calls sin—especially any kind of sexual behavior outside of marriage between a husband and wife—is like erecting a sign at the Seven Seas Lagoon that says, “Come on in, the water’s fine.”

But it’s not. Whether people wade into the shallows or dive into the deep, they are making themselves an offering to the predator, right in his territory.

Like a lion or alligator, the enemy of our souls is on the prowl, seeking to steal, kill and destroy.

Just ask the parents of the ones who died at the Pulse nightclub. Or the parents of little Lane Graves.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/orlandos_bizarre_coincidence on June 28, 2016.