

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—anonously—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.

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 vane 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.

Posted May 2015 | Updated Jan 2017

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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.

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, naïve 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.[{1}](#) 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.[{2}](#)

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.[{3}](#) 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” (Gen. 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](#),^{4} 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.^{5} God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.^{6}

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.^{7} 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,^{8} a gift that 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."[{9}](#) 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."[{10}](#) As I minister to sexually broken people,[{11}](#) 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.[{12}](#) In fact, God says to offer not even a *hint* of sexual immorality.[{13}](#) That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you're not physically touching another person's body doesn't mean it's not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.[{14}](#)

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?[{15}](#) 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.[{16}](#)

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!”[{17}](#) In fact, God wants married couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.[{18}](#)

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

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.[{19}](#) Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies,[{20}](#) 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.”[{21}](#)

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.

Notes

1. Waylon Ward, *Sex Matters: Men Winning the Battle* (McKinney, Texas: Allison O'Neil Publishing Company, 2004), 7. This book can be ordered through Waylon's Web site, www.mercymatters.com.

2. Ibid., 8.

3. Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 6:15-16.

4. Eric Elder, *What God Says About Sex* (Inspiringbooks.com, an imprint of Eric Elder, 2006). Contact www.WhatGodSays.com for more information.

5. Hebrews 13:4.

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. SoS 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.

10. SoS 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

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 Cor. 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.

14. Matthew 5:28.

15. Elder, *What God Says About Sex*, 37.

16. Colossians 1:29, Ephesians 6:10.

17. SoS 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

19. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 16.

20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

21. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 17.

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Orlando's Coincidence?

Bizarre

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.

Verbal Abuse: A Biblical Perspective

Kerby Anderson offers a distinctly Christian view of this important topic. Taking a biblical perspective moves this problem from strictly emotional to its full implications for our spiritual lives.

I would like to address the subject of verbal abuse for two important reasons. First, our behavior is often a great indicator of our worldview. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he

thinks within himself, so he is." What a person thinks in his or her mind and heart will be reflected in his or her words and actions. Verbal abuse and physical abuse result from a worldview that is clearly not biblical.

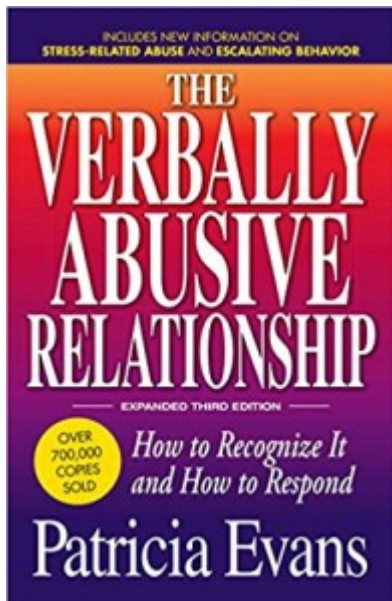
Second, I want to deal with verbal abuse because of the incredible need for Christians to address the subject. Ten years ago I did a week of radio programs on this topic, and I have received more e-mails from men and women who read that transcript than any other article. They were grateful that I addressed the subject. Since there are some new books and web sites, I wanted to update the original article.



Most of us know someone who has been verbally abused. Perhaps you are involved in a verbally abusive relationship. It is also possible that no one even knows your circumstances. Verbal abuse is a kind of battering which doesn't leave evidence comparable to the bruises of physical battering. You (or your friend) may be suffering in silence and isolation.

I want to tackle this very important issue in an effort to understand this phenomenon and provide answers. First, we should acknowledge that verbal abuse is often more difficult to see since there are rarely any visible scars unless physical abuse has also taken place. It is often less visible simply because the abuse may always take place in private. The victim of verbal abuse lives in a gradually more confusing realm. In public, the victim is with one person. While in private, the abuser may become a completely different person.

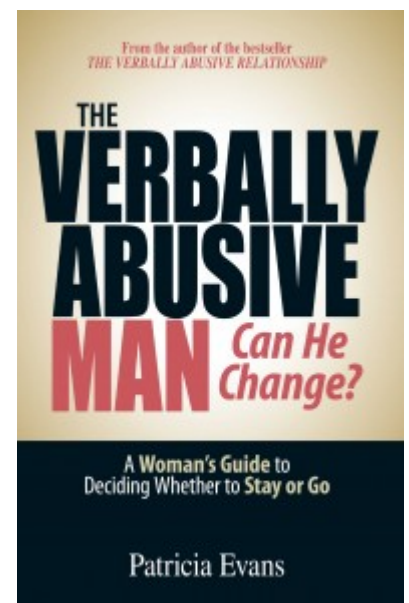
Frequently, the perpetrator of verbal abuse is male and the victim is female, but not always. There are many examples of women who are quite verbally abusive. But for the sake of simplicity of pronouns in this program, I will often identify the abuser as male and the victim as female.



One of the first books to describe verbal abuse in adults was Patricia Evan's book *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.^{1} She interviewed forty verbally abused women who ranged in age from 21 to 66. Most of the women had left a verbally abusive relationship. We will use some of the characteristics and categories of verbal abuse these women describe in this book.

Years later, she wrote a second book, *The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?*^{2} In that book she makes the claim that some men can change under certain circumstances. That led to the subtitle of her book, "A Woman's Guide to Deciding Whether to Stay or Go."

Is there hope that some abusers can change? Yes, but the key to healing is for the person being abused to recognize verbal abuse for what it is and to begin to take deliberate steps to stop it and bring healing. Since the abuser is usually in denial, the responsibility for recognizing verbal abuse often rests with the partner.



Characteristics of Verbal Abuse

What are some of the characteristics of verbal abuse? Here is a list as outlined in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.^{3}

1. Verbal abuse is hurtful and usually attacks the nature and

abilities of the partner. Over time, the partner may begin to believe that there is something wrong with her or her abilities. She may come to feel that she is the problem, rather than her partner.

2. Verbal abuse may be overt (through angry outbursts and name-calling) or covert (involving very subtle comments, even something that approaches brainwashing). Overt verbal abuse is usually blaming and accusatory, and consequently confusing to the partner. Covert verbal abuse, which is hidden aggression, is even more confusing to the partner. Its aim is to control her without her knowing.

3. Verbal abuse is manipulative and controlling. Even disparaging comments may be voiced in an extremely sincere and concerned way. But the goal is to control and manipulate.

4. Verbal abuse is insidious. The partner's self-esteem gradually diminishes, usually without her realizing it. She may consciously or unconsciously try to change her behavior so as not to upset the abuser.

5. Verbal abuse is unpredictable. In fact, unpredictability is one of the most significant characteristics of verbal abuse. The partner is stunned, shocked, and thrown off balance by her mate's sarcasm, angry jab, put-down, or hurtful comment.

6. Verbal abuse is not a side issue. It is *the* issue in the relationship. When a couple is having an argument about a real issue, the issue can be resolved. In a verbally abusive relationship, there is no specific conflict. The issue is the abuse, and this issue is not resolved. There is no closure.

7. Verbal abuse expresses a double message. There is incongruence between the way the abuser speaks and her real feelings. For example, she may sound very sincere and honest while she is telling her partner what is wrong with him.

8. Verbal abuse usually escalates, increasing in intensity,

frequency, and variety. The verbal abuse may begin with put-downs disguised as jokes. Later other forms might surface. Sometimes the verbal abuse may escalate into physical abuse, starting with “accidental” shoves, pushes, and bumps.

Categories of Verbal Abuse

What are some of the categories of verbal abuse? Here is a list as outlined in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.[{4}](#)

The first category of verbal abuse is *withholding*. A marriage requires intimacy, and intimacy requires empathy. If one partner withholds information and feelings, then the marriage bond weakens. The abuser who refuses to listen to his partner denies her experience and leaves her isolated.

The second is *countering*. This is the dominant response of the verbal abuser who sees his partner as an adversary. He is constantly countering and correcting everything she says and does. Internally he may even be thinking, “How dare she have a different view!”

Countering is very destructive to a relationship because it prevents the partner from knowing what his mate thinks about anything. Sometimes the verbal abuser will cut off discussion in mid-sentence before he can finish his thought. In many ways, she cannot even allow him to have his own thoughts.

A third category of verbal abuse is *discounting*. This is like taking a one hundred-dollar item and reducing its price to one cent. Discounting denies the reality and experience of the partner and is extremely destructive. It can be a most insidious form of verbal abuse because it denies and distorts the partner’s actual perception of the abuse.

Sometimes verbal abuse is disguised as jokes. Although his comments may masquerade as humor, they cut the partner to the quick. The verbal jabs may be delivered crassly or with great

skill, but they all have the same effect of diminishing the partner and throwing her off balance.

A fifth form of verbal abuse is *blocking and diverting*. The verbal abuser refuses to communicate, establishes what *can* be discussed, or withholds information. He can prevent any possibility of resolving conflicts by blocking and diverting.

Accusing and blaming is another form. A verbal abuser will accuse his partner of some wrongdoing or some breach of the basic agreement of the relationship. This has the effect of diverting the conversation and putting the other partner on the defensive.

Another form of verbal abuse is *judging and criticizing*. The verbal abuser may judge her partner and then express her judgment in a critical way. If he objects, she may tell him that she is just pointing something out to be helpful, but in reality she is expressing her lack of acceptance of him.

These are just a few of the categories of verbal abuse. Next we will look at a number of other forms of verbal abuse.

Other Forms of Verbal Abuse

Trivializing can also be a form of verbal abuse. I discuss this in more detail in [my article](#) on why marriages fail.^{5} It is an attempt to take something that is said or done and make it insignificant. Often the partner becomes confused and believes she hasn't effectively explained to her mate how important certain things are to her.

Undermining is also verbal abuse. The abuser not only withholds emotional support, but also erodes confidence and determination. The abuser often will squelch an idea or suggestion just by a single comment.

Threatening is a classic form of verbal abuse. He manipulates

his partner by bringing up her biggest fears. This may include threatening to leave or threatening to get a divorce. In some cases, the threat may be to escalate the abuse.

Name-calling can also be verbal abuse. Continually calling someone “stupid” because she isn’t as intelligent as you or calling her a “klutz” because she is not as coordinated can have a devastating effect on the partner’s self esteem.

Verbal abuse may also involve *forgetting*. This may involve both overt and covert manipulation. Everyone forgets things from time to time, but the verbal abuser consistently does so. After the partner collects himself, subsequent to being yelled at, he may confront his mate only to find that she has “forgotten” about the incident. Some abusers consistently forget about the promises they have made which are most important to their partners.

Ordering is another classic form of verbal abuse. It denies the equality and autonomy of the partner. When an abuser gives orders instead of asking, he treats her like a slave or subordinate.

Denial is the last category of verbal abuse. Although all forms of verbal abuse have serious consequences, denial can be very insidious because it denies the reality of the partner. In fact, a verbal abuser could read over this list of categories and insist that he is not abusive.

That is why it is so important for the partner to recognize these characteristics and categories since the abuser is usually in denial. Thus, the responsibility for recognizing verbal abuse and doing something about it often rests with the partner.

We have described various characteristics of verbal abuse and have even discussed the various categories of verbal abuse. Finally, I would like to provide a biblical perspective.

A Biblical Perspective of Verbal Abuse

The Bible clearly warns us about the dangers of an angry person. Proverbs 22:24 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man." And Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."

It is not God's will for you (or your friend) to be in a verbally abusive relationship. Those angry and critical words will destroy your confidence and self-esteem. Being submissive in a marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:22) does not mean allowing yourself to be verbally beaten by your partner. 1 Peter 3:1 does teach that wives, by being submissive to their husbands, *may* win them to Christ by their behavior. But it does *not* teach that they must allow themselves to be verbally or physically abused.

Here are some key biblical principles. First, know that God loves you. The Bible teaches, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

Second, deal with your feelings of guilt. You may be feeling that the problems in your marriage are your fault. "If only I would do better, he wouldn't be so angry with me." The Bible teaches in Psalm 51:6 that "Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place." Even though you may have feelings of guilt, you may not be the guilty party. I would recommend you read [my article](#) on the subject of false guilt.[{6}](#)

A related issue is shame. You may feel that something is wrong with you. You may feel that you are a bad person. But God declares you His cherished creation. Psalms 139:14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

A key element in this area of verbal abuse will no doubt be confrontation of the abuser. It's important for you to realize that confrontation is a biblical principle. Jesus taught about this in Matthew 18:15-20. I would recommend that you seek help from a pastor or counselor. But I would also recommend that you gather godly men and women together who can lovingly confront the person who is verbally abusing you. Their goal should be to break through their denial and lovingly restore them with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1).

But whether you confront the abuser or not, I do recommend that you seek out others who can encourage you and support you. If the abuser is willing to confront his sin and get help, that is good. But even if he will not, your hope is in the Lord and in those who should surround you and encourage you.

Notes

1. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1996).
2. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2006).
3. Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, 81-84.
4. Ibid., 85-104.
5. Kerby Anderson, "Why Marriages Fail," Probe, 1998, probe.org/why-marriages-fail/.
6. Kerby Anderson, "False Guilt," Probe, 1996, www.probe.org/false-guilt/.

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Pornography – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at pornography from a biblical worldview perspective. He clearly chronicles the physical, emotional and spiritual harm created by pornography and lays out the scriptural warnings to protect us from its degrading effects.

Pornography has been tearing apart the very fabric of modern society, but the problem has been made much worse with pornography's proliferation through the Internet. Studies show that 40 million adults regularly visit Internet pornography sites.[{1}](#) To put that in perspective, that is ten times the amount of people who regularly watch baseball.

When I first started writing about pornography in the 1980s, it was already a multi-billion dollar-a-year business mostly promoted through so-called "adult bookstores" and pornographic magazines. With the development of videos, DVDs, and the Internet, pornography has become ubiquitous.



The wages of sin are enormous when pornography is involved. Revenue from Internet porn exceeds by nearly a 2 to 1 ratio, the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.[{2}](#) And sales of pornographic material on the Internet surpass the cumulative sales of all other products sold online.[{3}](#)

The current estimate is that there are over 4 million pornographic websites representing almost 400 million pages of pornographic material.[{4}](#)

Pornography is not just something a few men view in the late hours in the privacy of their homes. At least 70 percent of porn is downloaded during work hours (9 am to 5 pm). A percentage of those who do so admit to accessing pornography at work.

And pornography also affects those in church. According to *Leadership Journal*, 40 percent of pastors admit to visiting a pornographic website.[{5}](#) And at one Promise Keepers Convention, 53 percent of men admitted to visiting a porn site the week before.[{6}](#)

The impact pornography is having on young people is alarming. It used to be that when you would ask someone when they first saw pornography they would tell you a story about seeing a porn magazine at a friend's house when they were in middle school or high school. Now a child in grade school has already seen images that were only available in an adult bookstore a few years ago. At one time these images were inaccessible to youth; now they are merely a mouse click away. The average age of first exposure to Internet pornography is 11 years old. And the largest consumer of Internet pornography is the 12-17 age group.[{7}](#)

How should we define pornography? What is the effect on individuals and society? And what is a biblical perspective on this? I deal with each of these questions in detail in my book, *Christians Ethics in Plain Language*.[{8}](#) In the next section, we address some of these questions.

Definition and Types of Pornography

How should we define pornography? Pornography has been defined as material that "is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal." Hardcore pornography "is sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose."[{9}](#)

Another important term is obscenity. In the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Miller v. California*, the justices set forth a three-part test to define obscenity:[{10}](#)

(a) *The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to*

the prurient interest.

(b) The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and

(c) The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

What are the types of pornography? The first type of pornography is adult magazines, which are primarily directed toward adult male readers. The magazines with the widest distribution (*Playboy* and *Penthouse*) do not violate the *Miller* standards of obscenity and thus can be legally distributed.

The second type of pornography is video. Videocassettes or DVDs are rented or sold in most adult bookstores and the Internet. They have become a growth industry for pornography.

The third type of pornography is motion pictures. Ratings standards are being relaxed, and many pornographic movies are being shown and distributed carrying R and NC-17 ratings. Many of these so-called "hard R" rated films would have been considered obscene just a few decades ago.

A fourth type of pornography is television. As in motion pictures, standards for commercial television have been continuously lowered. But cable television poses an even greater threat. The Federal Communications Commission does not regulate cable in the same way it does public access stations. Thus, many pornographic movies are shown on cable television.

A fifth type of pornography is audio porn, which includes "Dial-a-porn" telephone calls, the second fastest growth market of pornography. Although most of the messages are within the *Miller* definition of obscenity, these businesses continue to thrive and are often used by children.

A sixth type of pornography is "cyberporn," or Internet

pornography. Virtually anyone can download and view hard-core pictures, movies, online chat, and even live sex acts through the Internet.

Addiction to Pornography

Victor Cline, a psychologist, documented how men become addicted to pornographic materials, then begin to desire more explicit or deviant material, and finally act out what they have seen.[{11}](#) He maintained “that memories of experiences that occurred at times of emotional arousal (which could include sexual arousal) are imprinted on the brain by epinephrine, an adrenal gland hormone, and are difficult to erase. This may partly explain pornography’s addicting effect.”[{12}](#)

Other research showed that biochemical and neurological responses in individuals who are aroused release the adrenal hormone epinephrine in the brain, which is why one can remember pornographic images seen years before. In response to pleasure, nerve endings release chemicals that reinforce the body’s own desire to repeat the process.[{13}](#) Kimberly Young, an authority on Internet addiction, found that 90 percent of those who became addicted to cyberporn became addicted to the two-way communication functions: chat rooms, newsgroups, and e-mail.[{14}](#)

Psychologists identified a five-step pattern in pornographic addiction. The first step is *exposure*. Addicts have been exposed to pornography in many ways, ranging from sexual abuse as children to looking at widely available pornographic magazines.

The second step is *addiction*. People who continually expose themselves to pornography “keep coming back for more and more” in order to get new sexual highs. James L. McCough of the University of California at Irvine said that “experiences at times of emotional or sexual arousal get locked in the brain

by the chemical epinephrine and become virtually impossible to erase.”{15}

A third step is *escalation*. Previous sexual highs become more difficult to attain; therefore users of pornography begin to look for more exotic forms of sexual behavior to bring them stimulation.

A fourth step is *desensitization*. What was initially shocking becomes routine. Shocking and disgusting sexual behavior is no longer avoided but is sought out for more intense stimulation. Concern about pain and degradation get lost in the pursuit of the next sexual experience.

A fifth step is *acting out fantasies*. People do what they have seen and find pleasurable. Not every pornography addict will become a serial murderer or a rapist. But many do look for ways to act out their sexual fantasies

In my book *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I discuss in further detail the issue of pornographic addiction as well as describe the social and psychological effects of pornography.

Social Effects

Defining the social effects of pornography has been difficult because of some of the prevailing theories of its impact. One theory was that pornography actually performs a positive function in society by acting like a “safety valve” for potential sexual offenders.

The most famous proponent of this theory was Berl Kutchinsky, a criminologist at the University of Copenhagen. His famous study on pornography found that when the Danish government lifted restrictions on pornography, the number of sex crimes decreased.{16} Therefore, he concluded that the availability of pornography siphons off dangerous sexual impulses. But when the data for his “safety-valve” theory was further evaluated,

many of his research flaws began to show.

For example, Kutichinsky failed to distinguish between different kinds of sex crimes (such as rape and indecent exposure) and instead merely lumped them together, effectively masking an increase in rape statistics. He also failed to consider that increased tolerance for certain crimes (public nudity and sex with a minor) may have contributed to a drop in the reported crimes.

Proving cause and effect in pornography is virtually impossible because, ethically, researchers cannot do certain kinds of research. As Dolf Zillman said, "Men cannot be placed at risk of developing sexually violent inclinations by extensive exposure to violent or nonviolent pornography, and women cannot be placed at risk of becoming victims of such inclinations."[{17}](#)

Nevertheless, a number of compelling statistics suggest that pornography does have profound social consequences. For example, of the 1,400 child sexual molestation cases in Louisville, Kentucky, between July 1980 and February 1984, adult pornography was connected with each incident and child pornography with the majority of them.[{18}](#)

Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography to arouse themselves before and during their assaults.[{19}](#) Police officers have seen the impact pornography has had on serial murders. In fact, pornography consumption is one of the most common profile characteristics of serial murders and rapists.[{20}](#)

Professor Cass Sunstein, writing in the *Duke Law Journal*, said that some sexual violence against women "would not have occurred but for the massive circulation of pornography." Citing cross-cultural data, he concluded, "The liberalization

of pornography laws in the United States, Britain, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries has been accompanied by a rise in reported rape rates. In countries where pornography laws have not been liberalized, there has been a less steep rise in reported rapes. And in countries where restrictions have been adopted, reported rapes have decreased.”[\[21\]](#)

Biblical Perspective

God created men and women in His image (Gen. 1:27) as sexual beings. But because of sin in the world (Rom. 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom. 1:24-25).

Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. Pornography also distorts God’s gift of sex which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2-3). When the Bible refers to human sexual organs, it often employs euphemisms and indirect language. Although there are some exceptions (a woman’s breasts and womb are sometimes mentioned), generally Scripture maintains a basic modesty towards a man’s or woman’s sexual organs.

Moreover, Scripture specifically condemns the practices that result from pornography such as sexual exposure (Gen. 9:21-23), adultery (Lev. 18:20), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13), incest (Lev. 18:6-18), and prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18).

A biblical perspective of human sexuality must recognize that sexual intercourse is exclusively reserved for marriage for the following purposes. First, it establishes the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:4-6). Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The use of the word “know” indicates a profound meaning of sexual intercourse (Gen. 4:1). Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19). Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation (Gen. 1:28).

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned (1 Cor. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 4:3). Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned (Matt. 5:27-28).

Moreover, Christians must realize that pornography can have significant harmful effects on the user. These include: a comparison mentality, a performance-based sexuality, a feeling that only forbidden things are sexually satisfying, increased guilt, decreased self concept, and obsessive thinking.

Christians, therefore, must do two things. First, they must work to keep themselves pure by fleeing immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and thinking on those things which are pure (Phil. 4:8). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7). Christians must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). Pornography will fuel the sexual desire in abnormal ways and can eventually lead to even more debase perversion. We, therefore, must “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Second, Christians must work to remove the sexual perversion of pornography from society.

Notes

1. Mark Penn, *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes* (NY: Twelve, 2007), 276.
2. Ibid., 277.
3. George Barna, *Boiling Point: Monitoring Cultural Shifts in the 21st Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 223.
4. Truth in Porn, www.truthinporn.org.
5. The Leadership survey on Pastors and Internet Pornography, 1 January 2001, <http://ctlibrary.com/9582>.
6. *Today's Christian Woman*, September/October 2003.
7. Truth in Porn.
8. Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), chapter 11.
9. Michael McManus, ed., *Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill,

1986), 8.

10. *Miller v. California*, 413 US 15, 47 (1973).

11. Victor Cline, *Where Do You Draw the Line?* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974).

12. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children* (New York: Morality in Media, 1990), 11.

13. J. L. McGaugh, "Preserving the Presence of the Past," *American Psychologist*, February 1983, 161.

14. Kimberley Young, Paper presented to 1997 convention of the American Psychological Association. A full treatment can be found in Kimberley Young, *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction-and a Winning Strategy for Recovery* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1998).

15. Quoted in Kenneth Kantzer, "The Power of Porn," *Christianity Today*, 7 February 1989, 18.

16. Berl Kutchinsky, "The Effect of Easy Availability of Pornography on the Incidence of Sex Crimes: The Danish Experience," *Journal of Social Issues* 29 (1973): 163-81.

17. Dolf Zillman, "Pornography Research and Public Policy," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, ed. Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (New York: Academic, 1989), 387-88.

18. Testimony by John B. Rabun, deputy director of the National Center for Missing and Exploited children, before the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice of the Senate Judiciary Committee, 12 September 1984.

19. W. Marshall, "Pornography and Sex Offenders," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*.

20. *The Men Who Murdered*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, August 1985.

21. Cass R. Sunstein, "Pornography and the First Amendment," *Duke Law Journal*, September 1986, 595.

Your Work Matters to God

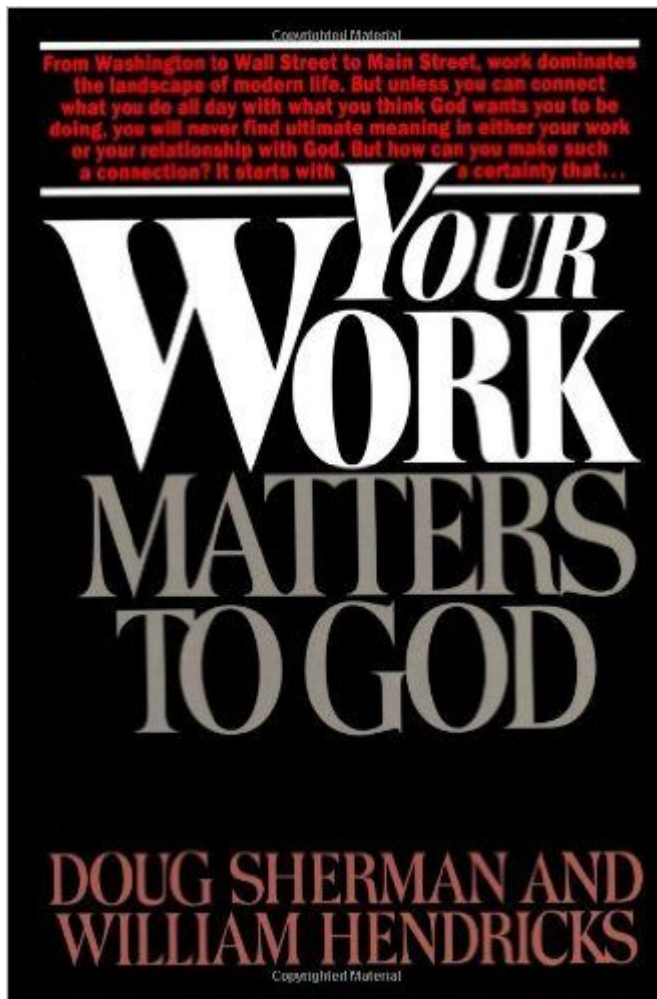
Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.





In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*,^{1} Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, “Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence.”^{2}

First, let’s explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other *real* dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you’ll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, “Who am I, and why am I important?” That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You’re suddenly a “nobody,” and you are not important because you are

not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, "What impact will this have on my career?"

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life.^{3} He wants us to have a biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work.^{4}

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

In this article, we're examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don't really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn't charge them with, "Go and make disciples of all nations which aren't in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies." No, He said, "Here's the garden, now cultivate it." He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe *only* eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won't

last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you're wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother's womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: *time*. It's okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness *now*, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn't eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there's everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, "Real work is serving God, and then there's what others do" (which sets us up for condescension), or "Real work is serving God, and then there's what I have to do" (which sets

us up for false guilt and a sense of “missing it”).

It’s an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we’re making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It’s unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what’s going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn’t lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our *only* priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory.[{5}](#) Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we’ll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!

How God Wants Us to See Work

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here's a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It's helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn't notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, "I see you. And I appreciate what you're doing." Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world *before* sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God's good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's

what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift![\[6\]](#)

Being happy in our work doesn't depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

Why Work is Good

In this article we're talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God's work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn't contribute to what He doesn't want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God's gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people's physical needs. Other jobs meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.
2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to

exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, "If one will not work, neither let him eat!"[{7}](#)

3. Through work we meet our family's needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."[{8}](#)

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. [{9}](#)

5. Through work we love God. One of God's love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.[{10}](#) We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that's why our work matters to God.

Notes

1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.

2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.

3. Philippians 1:21

4. Romans 12:1, 2

5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14

6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, The Message.

7. 2 Thess. 3:10

8. 1 Tim. 5:8

9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

10. Matthew 22:37-39

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LGBT and Political Correctness

Everything about the subject of LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) identity and sexuality is colored in some way by political correctness. PC thinking embraces all beliefs and positions (except orthodox Christianity), and seeks to validate any and all self-expression (as long as it differs from biblical morals). One of the most amazing demonstrations of PC thought is this video, in which a short Caucasian male asks students at the University of Washington how they would respond if he told them he was a 6'5" Asian woman. The students were more committed to his right to be whatever he said he wanted to be, no matter how silly it sounded, than

what was objectively true:

So much of PC thought in our culture today reminds me of the Hans Christian Andersen tale of a vain emperor who cares about nothing except wearing and showing off his luxurious clothes. He hires two weavers—two scammers—who promise him the finest, best suit of clothes made from a magic fabric that is invisible to anyone who is hopelessly stupid or unfit for his position.

Neither the emperor nor his ministers can see the fabric themselves, but they pretend that they can for fear of appearing unfit for their positions. Finally the weavers report that the suit is finished. They mime dressing him, and the emperor marches in procession before his subjects.

The townsfolk, who of course cannot see the (imaginary) fabric, play along with the pretense, not wanting to appear stupid or unfit for their positions. Then a child in the crowd, too young to understand what was going on, blurts out the truth for all to hear: “The emperor’s not wearing any clothes!” The townspeople try to hush him up, even though what he’s saying is the truth.

Political correctness is often about maintaining an illusion and hushing up the people who speak the truth. Those who speak out the truth, like the little boy, are shamed with the intention of silencing them. This certainly happens in the arena of sexuality and identity, where the illusion is that sex is the highest pleasure and the most important aspect of life, and everyone has a right to express their sexual feelings however they want.

In order to think rightly about political correctness, we need

to know what's really going on—what is fueling the illusion. (Which is why it's so important to understand worldview!) Recently I was privileged to address a Christian high school chapel on this topic, and I told the students that they were born into a cultural brine that is shaping and pickling their thoughts about sexuality and identity, just like the college students on the video. They needed to know how our culture got to the place it is today so they have a chance to refuse the pickling process.

In 1989, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen wrote a manifesto for normalizing homosexuality, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. Their very specific, very achievable goals now describe American culture. (Please note, the bolded words are Kirk and Madsen's words, not mine):

1. **Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and often as possible.** This would desensitize people to the issue of homosexuality so it would become an always-present, no-big-deal aspect of American culture.
2. **Portray gays as victims and not as aggressive challengers.** Two main ways to achieve this: propagate the “born that way” mythology, and portray homosexuals as victims in an anti-gay society.
3. **Give protectors a just cause.** Fighting discrimination, or what is portrayed as discrimination, makes people feel good about themselves as they defend the underdog.
4. **Make gays look good.** Particularly in media such as TV and movies, make the gay characters as good-looking, charming, smart, witty and winsome as possible.
5. **Make the victimizers look bad.** Make the “anti-gays” look so nasty that average Americans will want to dissociate themselves from such types.

Every one of these goals has been attained, and this is the culture we now live in. In order to be aware of the PC thought that shapes how most people think, we need to be aware that

the entire society has been manipulated.

What earned Probe Ministries a spot on the Southern Poverty Law Center's list of hate groups is our website content about homosexuality, which agrees with the biblically orthodox position that same-gender sexual behavior, like every other violation of God's intention for sex to be limited to the marriage bed of one man and one woman, is wrong. As [my pastor](#) says, "Truth sounds like hate to those who hate the truth." There are so many cultural lies about God's design for sex and identity that when we proclaim God's truth in a culture that embraces lies, we get called hateful and discriminatory.

In order to think biblically, we need to know the difference between the culture's lies (politically correct thought) and God's truth:

CULTURE'S LIE: Who I am is a sexual being. Whether it's a culture or an individual, when God is left out of the equation, sex is elevated to the #1 most important spot because it's so powerful and a source of such intense pleasure (or can be). So people define themselves by their sexuality.

GOD'S TRUTH: Who I am is God's beloved creation. Made in the image of God, created for intimacy and fellowship with Him, my worth proven by what the Son was willing to pay for me: His very life.

CULTURE'S LIE: Sex is a need and a right for everyone to experience. Many people believe it is on the same level of necessity as food, water and sleep.

GOD'S TRUTH: Sex is so powerful it is to be contained only within marriage between one man and one woman. The mingling of bodies and souls through sex is deeply spiritual as well as physical. God's prohibitions against sex outside of marriage are His gift to us, meant for our protection from the painful consequences of sexual sin. They are like guard rails on a treacherous mountain road, intended to keep us from going off the cliff to pain and destruction.

CULTURE'S LIE: I create my own identity depending on what I feel. Untethered from a connection to God as Creator, people live out the sad, repeated description of Israel in the book of Judges, where “all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” (Judges 17:6, for one).

GOD'S TRUTH: My identity is who my Creator says I am. All of us exist because God wanted us and hand-crafted each of us (Psalm 139). Feelings are real but they're not reliable. Jeremiah 17:9 instructs us on why our feelings can't be trusted: “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”

CULTURE'S LIE: Gender is whatever we want it to be. Biological sex has been separated from gender (how one feels about maleness and femaleness). (Personally, this strikes me as illegitimate as proclaiming that the white keys on a piano are bad and the black keys are good.) Facebook currently offers 58 choices of gender.

GOD'S TRUTH: God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; *male and female* He created them. (Gen. 1:27) The first words in the room when a baby is born are still, “It's a girl!” or “It's a boy!” Gender is still binary because God still creates male and female.



CULTURE'S LIE: I can create my own reality. For example, recently a man abandoned his wife and seven children, announcing his chosen identity of a 6-year-old girl.

Another man, deciding his identity is a female dragon, cut off his ears and nose, dyed his eyes, and inserted horns in his forehead.



GOD'S TRUTH: There is objective truth and objective reality because God is real and true. We do not have the freedom to dismiss what is objectively true and real; 2 + 2 will always be 4, not 7 or 200, and gravity will always be operational on the planet. These things are real and true because a real and true God rooted His creation in His own nature.

CULTURE'S LIE: "Born this way." This lie has so much traction because it's repeated so often people assume it to be true.

GOD'S TRUTH: No Evidence. There is actually no scientific evidence of a gay gene or any other determiner of same-sex attraction. **Identical Twins Studies:** In identical twins (who share the same DNA), when one identifies as gay or lesbian, the other one only identifies as gay or lesbian about 11% of the time. If homosexuality were a genetic issue, the correspondence would be 100%.

American culture continues to pump out the illusion—the fantasy, the myth—that sexuality is the most important thing about life and about us, and that sexual identity and expression is where life is found.

Beware: *the emperor has no clothes!*

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/lgbt_and_political_correctness on May 18, 2016.

3 Life Hacks That Will Revolutionize Your Relationships

Ever hear of “life hacks”? Little tips and tricks to make your life easier, like running a sticky note between your keyboard keys to collect crumbs and computer lint. Here are three life hacks that will act like relational lubricant.

“When you said/did X, I felt Y. Did you mean to communicate that?”

Instead of assuming we know someone’s motives and thinking, we need to clarify that we understand what they intend. Sometimes things just come out wrong, not at all what is meant, and it’s easily misinterpreted.

“When you gave me permission to take comp time after I worked all weekend, I sensed you were giving it begrudgingly and you weren’t happy about it at all, like I had broken an unwritten rule or expectation. Did I read you right?”

“When I asked you about _____, it seemed that you got really quiet and shut down. It felt like you were shutting me out. Is that accurate, or am I missing something?”

“When I asked you to unload the dishwasher, you rolled your eyes and sighed. It’s the only thing I’ve asked in two days, but it sounded to me like you were upset. As if it were an

unfair burden to place on you. Is that what you meant to communicate?"

The other person might respond with, "Yeah, I was upset and felt put-upon, but really I have no right to be. I'm sorry for reacting so badly." Or they might say, "I did? I don't remember tha—oh wait, you know what? I had just heard such-and-so on TV and it disgusted me. My body language was in response to what was going on in the other room. Sorry, I didn't hear you at all."

It's always a good idea to clarify what's going on. And not assume you can read the other person's mind. Only God can do that.

Own the Plank in Your Eye

Whenever there is a conflict, it's the result of clashing perspectives or motives or interpretations. According to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:3, the first step to resolving conflict is to take responsibility for our part in it. It's amazing how hostilities can de-escalate when someone steps up to the plate and takes responsibility for their contribution to a problem.

Even if our part is only 5%, we're 100% responsible for that 5%. And even if we're sure we haven't done anything wrong, we can acknowledge the possibility that we may have said or did something that was misinterpreted, and we can own that.

It's natural to expect the other person to then take responsibility for their part in the conflict, but alas, very often that doesn't happen. They will just let you take the blame/credit all by yourself even though you know perfectly well the other person was at fault at well. That's okay. When

you live for an Audience of One, it's always right to do the right thing, trusting God to work out the justice part. Guilty parties never get away with it forever.

It's not just a life hack, it's supernatural, divine direction from the One who designed people and intended us to be in relationship. Own your part in a conflict—and watch the tension deflate like letting air out of a balloon.

How to Apologize

The specifics on this life hack came from [one of the best blog posts](#) in the history of the internet. There are four parts:

1) I'm sorry for _____. . .: Be specific. Show the person you're apologizing to that you really understand what they are upset about.

Wrong: *I'm sorry for being mean.*

Right: *I'm sorry for being unkind when I said you were fat and ugly.*

2) This is wrong because _____: This might take some more thinking, but this is one of the most important parts. Until you understand why it was wrong or how it hurt someone's feelings, it's unlikely you will change. This is also important to show the person you hurt that you really understand how they feel. I can't tell you how much of a difference this makes! Sometimes, people want to feel understood more than they want an apology. Sometimes just showing understanding- even without an apology- is enough to make them feel better!

Wrong: *This is wrong because you are hyper-sensitive.*

Right: *This is wrong because I hurt your feelings and made you feel bad about yourself.*

3) In the future, I will _____: Use positive language, and tell me what you WILL do, not what you won't do.

Wrong: *In the future, I will not say that.*

Right: *In the future, I will keep unkind words in my head.*

4) Will you forgive me? This is important to try to restore your friendship. Now, there is no rule that the other person has to forgive you. Sometimes, they won't. That's their decision. Hopefully, you will all try to be the kind of friends who will forgive easily, but that's not something you automatically get just because you apologized. But you should at least ask for it.

I love these four steps, and I would add eye contact to the mix.

These four steps to apologizing are powerful because they are biblical.

1. "I'm sorry for" means you are confessing, or agreeing with the other person, that you did something wrong. Biblical prayers of confession are very specific in naming the sins committed, such as idolatry, adultery, and murder. Apologizing to another person needs to be just as specific.

2. "This is wrong because" reveals that you understand of why it's a problem. David prayed for that kind of self-awareness in Ps. 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me

and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”

3. “In the future, I will” is a commitment to repent and choose a better, more righteous behavior than the one being renounced and forsaken. Zaccheus gave an example of this in Luke 19:8-“Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.’”

4. “Will you forgive me?” is a humbling, difficult question to ask. Putting ourselves in the “one-down position” of asking for forgiveness risks exposure and shame-after all, the other person may say no-but forgiveness was extraordinarily important to Jesus. “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Matt. 6:14-15)

Apologizing the right way is probably the most powerful way to restore a strained or broken relationship.

God created us for relationships and for community. These three life hacks can go a long way toward make them run more smoothly.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/3_life_hacks_that_will_revolutionize_your_relationships on April 5, 2016