Glee’s Pro-Gay Theology

Feb. 28, 2012

Recently, the wildly popular TV show Glee’s Valentine’s Day episode featured a group of religious students called the “God Squad” discussing whether they should accept money to sing love songs to gay people (their term). The writers had students spouting pro-gay theology that was doubtless quite persuasive to the majority of viewers who don’t know the truth that counters the propaganda.

“They say that one out of every ten people are gay, and if that’s true than that means one of the twelve apostles might have been gay.”

That’s a very old, very inaccurate statistic from Alfred Kinsey. A more accurate estimate is in the 2-3% range. The idea that one of the twelve might have been gay is sheer speculation with no grounding in truth and no evidence for it, but it certainly planted the idea in the minds of millions of people to normalize it.

“The Bible says it’s an abomination for a man to lay down with another man. But we shared tents in Cub Scouts, and slept next to each other all the time. So that would make Cub Scouts an abomination.”

No. No, it wouldn’t.

What the Bible actually says is, “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22). This passage is talking about same-sex intercourse, not guys in sleeping bags sharing a tent.

Further, it’s always important to look at the context of any verse. That same chapter contains prohibitions against sexual activity we still condemn today: incest, bestiality and adultery. Those who want to dismiss verses prohibiting same-sex relations as archaic usually (but not always!) won’t take a pro-incest, pro-adultery, or pro-bestiality stance. Neither should it be okay to take a pro-homosexuality stance.

My friend Randy Thomas had a powerful “lightbulb moment” concerning this verse. He writes,

“The Father brought back the memory of Ron, the first man I thought I loved, and me together as a couple. In my memory we were in an embrace and I saw the Lord standing next to us. We were oblivious to His presence and He was grieving. His grief was so bitter I could see Him shaking with tears as He looked upon us. I was immediately struck with grief that God was so grieved. It’s a grief I will never forget.

“At that point I felt the Spirit asking me, ‘Randy . . . what is the sin?’ The only Scripture I knew was Leviticus 18:22 (that’s only because it was on the signs that the Christians held up at pride parades and outside of clubs). I told the Lord that I didn’t like that Scripture. But He persisted, ‘What is the sin?’ I thought through the verse again: ‘When one man lies with another as a woman it is an abomination before the Lord,’ (emphasis mine). The word ‘it’ jumped out at me. I sensed the Spirit asking, ‘What is “it”?’

“I answered, ‘A gender neutral pronoun?’ I was a little surprised that in the middle of this powerful time the Holy Spirit would be giving me an English pop quiz. I felt Him say,
‘EXACTLY!!!’

“Then my world fell apart over one little word. ‘It’ meant that I was not the abomination, Ron was not the abomination. It was the abomination – the act itself was keeping Ron and me looking toward each other and not to God for fulfillment of who we were and what God intended. For the first time in my life I knew that God is aware of every secret and not-so-secret thing I have done. Instead of sending hellfire and brimstone, He sent a grieving Savior to pay the price of my ignorance and sin.

“He forgave and redeemed me.”

“You know what else the Bible says is an abomination—eating lobster, planting different crops in the same field, giving somebody a proud look. Not an abomination? Slavery. Jesus never said anything about gay people.”

There are different kinds of laws in the Old Testament. Civil and ceremonial laws, such as those concerning religious sacrifices and dietary laws, were time-bound and limited to the people of Israel. They are no longer in force for a variety of reasons: first, all the OT sacrifices and ceremonies were given as a foreshadowing of the Messiah’s ministry and of His death, burial and resurrection. They are no longer necessary because they were the preparation for the Reality that has come. Second, the civil laws pertained to a nation of people who no longer exist. (The current nation of Israel is a political one, not the same as the group of OT people God called to follow Him alone as their Ruler.)

Moral laws, such as the Ten Commandments and all the laws constraining sexual immorality, are not time-bound because they are rooted in the character of God. It is always sinful to have sex with someone you’re not married to, regardless of gender.

Slavery, as ugly as it is, is not inherently unnatural the way homosexual practice is. Dr. Robert Gagnon, a theologian who has a breathtaking understanding of homosexuality and its attendant arguments, writes, “The Bible accommodates to social systems where sometimes the only alternative to starvation is enslavement. But it clearly shows a critical edge by specifying mandatory release dates and the right of kinship buyback; requiring that Israelites not be treated as slaves; and reminding Israelites that God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.”

We don’t know that “Jesus never said anything about gay people”; it’s quite possible that His comments on eunuchs in Matthew 19 included those who would have never sex with women because of their same-sex attractions.

Usually, the argument goes, “Jesus never said anything about homosexuality.” What He DID say about God’s intention for His creation and sexuality in Mark 10:6-8 excludes homosexuality, along with other forms of sexual sin such as polyamory, incest and bestiality. Scripture powerfully indicates His intention for a male-female prerequisite for sexuality.

“Love is love” (so let’s sing a love song to two lesbian students)

Is it? How would the “God Squad” feel about singing a love song to a woman committing adultery with one of their dads? How would they feel about a father paying them to sing a love song to the daughter he’s regularly raping while calling it love? Our culture is so anxious to justify anything by slapping the label of “love” on it that we dishonor the God who IS love: a sacrificial, others-centered, giving love that took Him to the cross to pay for the very sins that are being elevated and celebrated on network TV.
When to Break a Promise

Oct. 11, 2011

An important part of integrity is keeping one’s word. But are there times when breaking a promise is the right thing to do? I think so. And I think God is honored when we do.

We need to make a distinction between giving our word on a legitimate matter—such as wedding vows, signing a legal contract, or even promising to bake six dozen cookies for the PTA bake sale—and making promises that are foolish or sinful in the first place.

I know a number of women struggling to disengage from emotionally dependent relationships with other women. Emotional dependency is putting all your emotional and relational eggs in another’s basket, so to speak—needing another’s attention, affection and approval as desperately as a baby needs her mama. Making huge promises is part of the manipulative glue that holds these relationships together: “I will always be here for you.” “I will always take your calls and return your texts.” “I’ve never loved another like I love you and I always will.” “I will never hurt you.”

When women come to the point of recognizing these relationships are not God’s intention for either of them, they often struggle with their promises as if they were inviolate and carved in stone. Yet the bigger issue—which they need help to see because brokenness keeps us bound up in blindness—is that keeping some promises means sinning against God. In that case, obedience to God is the better choice, even if it means breaking a promise that never should have been made in the first place.

In that case, the right thing to do is repent of making the promise, confess it as sin, and turn in obedient trust to God, depending on Him for help in the painful process.

Recently, a friend who is getting help extricating herself from a sinful relationship told one of her helpers, “But when my friend comes over to help me get out of bed in the morning because I’m depressed, I would be an awful person if she drove all the way over here and I didn’t answer the door and let her in.” The helper wisely responded, “You’re concerned about being an awful person for not answering the door, but you’re in a relationship with a married woman! What about the adultery? Which one is the sin?”

Sometimes, we make promises we shouldn’t make because we didn’t check first with God. Many years ago, our church choir director arranged a day-long seminar with a very wise man. One thing he said stopped me in my tracks: “Why are you here? The need is not the call; the call is the call. If God did not call you to this ministry, then you’re not available for what He wants you to be doing.” I realized I had never asked the Lord if He wanted me to sing in the choir, and when I asked, He said no. Embarrassed, I tendered my resignation so that I’d be available for the “something else” that He
actually wanted me to do—which, it turns out, was teaching women’s Bible study. Both the women in
the study and the other singers in the choir can testify that I am a far better teacher than singer!

Are there promises you should break so you can say “yes” to God instead?

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

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It’s Not Rubbing the Genie’s Magic Lamp

Oct. 25, 2011

Recently I heard a young man share his story of battling his unwanted same-sex attractions. Though
Ben’s dad loved him very much, he felt like he was everyone else’s dad and then his dad. He also
didn’t connect with the masculine that his dad represented. He ended up with longings for deep
connection with males. What helped him turn the corner was when he found people with whom he
could be completely honest about his shameful desires and feelings, who also helped him develop his
relationship with God.

He shared that he slowly realized his heart was looking for three things in other men. First, he
longed for someone who was unquestionably a “Capital M-A-N” who made that intangible connection
with him that his father didn’t make, leaving him with a father-shaped hole in his soul. And he
realized that he was also looking for a rescuer, to pull him out of his own wretchedness. And finally,
he wanted to be comforted by someone, he said, “who’s there when I come back down, when I’m
lost, when I’m troubled; I would fantasize about a guy who could just say the right things, do the
right things, and comfort me any time I needed it.”

Optimally, he told us, it would really great if he could find someone who would be all three of those
things at one time, wrapped up in one person. That would be the “Mr. Right” he longed to find and
be loved by.

The major “lightbulb moment” of his journey came when he realized that what he longed for was a
Father, a Savior, and a Comforter. . . and that perfectly describes who God is—three in one, Father,
Son and Spirit. And because he had trusted in Christ at an early age, that very God was already
indwelling him! He realized that the triune God was everything his heart was longing for but he had
been too blind to see. God, in giving Himself to His beloved son, was ready to meet Ben’s heart’s
needs and longings, but would not force Himself on him. When Ben opened his heart to receive the
Fathering, the Saving, and the Comforting of the God who loved him, everything shifted inside.

God connected some dots for me when hours later, our pastor observed that Psalm 37:4 is one of the
first Bible verses that people memorize. . . and one of the most misunderstood.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Sounds like a magic formula, right? Delight yourself in the Lord, and you get what you want? Just a
religious-sounding way of rubbing the genie’s magic lamp to get your wishes granted? But that’s not
what it means.
When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He gives us Himself, and He is what our hearts desire. Uncover all the surface, temporary things we think we want, and underneath are the true desires of our heart: to be loved, to be known, to be valued, to be safe, to matter.

And as Ben showed us, to be fathered, to be rescued, to be comforted.

Yes, we want all those things—and our marvelous God delights to give them to us as He gives us Himself.

He is so good!

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

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**DWTS and the T in GLBT**

The big controversy in the current season of Dancing With the Stars is the presence of Chaz Bono, born Chastity, the daughter of pop icons Sonny and Cher. The media has documented Chaz' transition from female to male, bringing “transgender” into people’s living rooms and water cooler conversations.

For over a decade, I have loved and walked with people struggling with their gender identity and unwanted same-sex attractions. When I see Chaz, my heart just aches deeply.

How should we wisely, biblically, and compassionately think about those who feel trapped in the body of the opposite sex? [I am not talking about those who were born with chromosomal abnormalities or an endocrine imbalance, which results in hermaphroditism, or—the new term—intersex. These are biological effects of living in a fallen world, and are in a different category from those born with normal, functioning bodies who want to change those bodies.]

People who identify as transgender report feeling different from a young age, which is easy to describe as feeling “born that way,” especially when that is the new banner cry of the marginalized, thanks to Lady Gaga’s mega-hit of the same name. But it’s a big (and, I would respectfully suggest, tragic) step from “I have always felt different from the other boys/girls” to “I am a girl in a boy’s body” or “I am a boy in a girl’s body.”
I would suggest that the core misunderstanding of those in the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgendered) community is the same core misunderstanding of the vast majority of people: a too-narrow understanding of God-designed variations in masculinity and femininity. (Please see my blog post "The Gender Spectrum.") Many of my friends who struggle with same-sex attraction confess that they’ve often thought how much better life would be if they were the other gender, but transgender-identifying folks take the fantasy to a new level.

The fantasy that “becoming something other than what I am will make me happy” marks transgender. It’s wrapped up in a deep-seated envy of the opposite sex, and a hatred of one’s own gender. That’s why so many believe that surgery to remove the offending body parts will kill what they detest in themselves, their own gender, and transform them into what they admire and believe will give them life.

Fantasy and pretending are part of childhood, but now thanks to advances in technology, an adult can gain access to medical treatments that will feed the fantasy and turn it into reality—or at least the promise of it. Our post-modern culture invents words and redefines language in ways that adds layers of confusion to the issue: instead of the dual simplicity of God creating male and female, we are now told that there is a difference between sex, gender, and sexual identity. No wonder there is so much confusion about this issue!

“I am a man in a woman’s body, and I need to bring my outsides into alignment with my insides.” (Or the opposite.) This feeling may be strong, but it is not accurate, and it is not trustworthy. We are fallen people living in a fallen world with fallen understanding, and we should not trust our conclusions when they vary so much with what God has said. He declares Himself as our Creator; when God creates a female, which we know by the female body He creates, He is making a statement about His intention for that girl. When God gives us the stewardship over His creation, which includes our bodies, that precludes mutilating them by amputating healthy body parts because we hate them.

Our culture looks at life through a purely naturalistic, materialistic lens that excludes the spiritual. Our feelings are part of that total focus on the temporal and transitory. When they are particularly strong, they can be all-consuming, and it’s easy to say they are true—regardless of what God says in His word. Some people insist that their brains and bodies are mismatched, that transgender is a purely biological issue that, thanks to modern medicine, can be addressed instead of leaving them feeling miserable.

We are broken people, and we try to fix our own brokenness with our own broken methods: enter sex-change clinics. One of the heartbreaking aspects of this issue is what is NOT told to those putting their eggs in the sex-change basket. I had a very long talk one night with a MtF (male to female) post-op transgender woman who blessed me with her heart-wrenching honesty. She was so sure than she would get affirmation and praise as a woman, that the hole in her heart would be filled by what she would see in the mirror. Many surgeries later, from penis amputation to cosmetic surgery to reduce her adam’s apple, when she looked in the mirror she saw a man trying unsuccessfully to be what God did not make him to be, and it broke her heart. She said she would give anything to go back to the way God had made her as a him, but now she felt stuck maintaining the charade because that was her identity, both personally and professionally.

This story is one of the reasons psychiatrist Dr. Paul McHugh shut down the sex-change program at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. In his extraordinary article “Surgical Sex,” he wrote, “When I became psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins, I realized that by doing sex-change operations the hospital was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We would do better for these patients, I thought, by concentrating on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia.”
I am grateful for the voices of those who have walked deep in the transgender waters and then decided to listen to God (mainly from the helpful website help4families.com): “I remember reading in the Word that our bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit, and I wondered, ‘What have I done to myself?’ After reading Psalm 139, I began to cry because it spoke of how God had created me and how He had known me from the beginning.”

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“I had a hard time having fun, because when I was out with my friends I was jealous of the girls and fun they were having. That started to become a theme in my life, I was jealous of females; their curves, softness, and what I perceived as superiority over men. I hated everything about my masculinity; I had fantasies at times of castrating myself and ending the control of testosterone over my life.”

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“I told my wife I was leaving and wanted to divorce and transition to becoming a woman. I went out and bought supplies and women’s clothing that night, and went to hotel room. I won’t go into all the details, but as I sat there in all my ‘feminine glory,’ reading on my computer the stories of other TS folks I remember praying ‘God what am I doing???’ And I remember this still small voice ask, ‘Is this what you really want?’ My response was ‘No, what should I do?’ and what I heard still rings in my head to this day: ‘Run!! Run back to your wife.’ So I did, my wife being the faithful, loving, and godly woman that she is accepted me back, and forgave me. . . .

[Later on] I again told my wife that I could no longer live this life and that I needed to leave to pursue my ‘true life’ as a female. I left my wife that night and told her that I wanted to separate. As I left to go back out and check into a hotel, I was feeling really angry with God. I was yelling on the drive, ‘God, this is bigger than You. I can’t do this anymore, I am so tired of fighting and I just want to live the way that my mind wants me to live.’ I remember God distinctly telling me, ‘I am your Father and you are My son. You do not need to do this; you need to get your significance from Me.’ I yelled back, ‘No God I am done with this crap, this is ridiculous, I am living a lie and I need to be female.’ I wrestled and wrestled with this for hours. Finally I was worn down and just asked God, ‘What do I need to do?’ The answer I got was, ‘Get your significance from Me, not from being female. You need to follow Me and love Me more than this.’

“I was worshiping femininity and was ready to sacrifice myself, my wife and my children on that altar. After searching my heart I also realized that I was angry with God, I think mostly for not ‘fixing me’ the way I wanted. I wanted to pray the prayer and any desire to be female would be gone and I would be some sort of super-man. When God did not fix me this way after years of praying for it, I became bitter.”

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“If He had intended me to be a woman, He wouldn’t have made me male in the first place.”

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May those who struggle with the lie that they are not okay as they are, find their significance in God who made them the way He wanted them, who delights in them, who loves them with a tender, compassionate love, and says, “Come to Me. Don’t try to fix this on your own. Let Me pour truth and grace, love and life into your heart.”
Helping Homosexuals Change? Yeah, Right.

ABC News recently did a story on presidential candidate Michele Bachmann’s family business, a Christian counseling center run by her husband, Dr. Marcus Bachmann. The focus of the story was a biased, “can you believe this?” exposé of the fact that the counselors help people who don’t want to be gay, address their unwanted homosexuality.

They interviewed two people, a man whose mother had taken him to the clinic when he came out as homosexual, and an undercover reporter who brought two recording devices into the sessions with him. Neither man believed their homosexuality was changeable—and when it comes to the counseling office, if your mind is made up that something cannot be changed, guess what? It won’t be.

The reporter used the now-familiar phrase “pray away the gay,” which is an effective and condescending dismissal of what actually happens when people do successfully shift their sexual orientation. (And I personally know a number of people who have experienced significant and lasting change in their orientation.) Some do successfully engage in reparative therapy, which addresses the emotional deficits in those who find themselves attracted to the same sex using purely psychological methods. But what is more effective is the transforming power of the gospel in the life of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. And, like all discipline of radical discipleship, which means saying “no” to our flesh and “yes” to the flow of Jesus’ resurrection power in our lives, it takes hard work over a period of years. There is no easy, 1-2-3 magic prayer to change the way we think and feel. Sanctification is a long process of cooperation with the Spirit of God.

The message our media pumps out today is that sexuality is fluid—except for homosexuality, which is fixed and can’t be changed. This means it’s okay to give into your secret cravings and come out as gay, in which case folks like Oprah will celebrate you embracing your “authentic self,” but it’s not okay to say, “God didn’t make me gay, and I choose to accept the identity HE gives me instead.” It’s not okay to say, “I used to be gay and now I’m not.”

Which explains why there was an explosion of rage when Dr. Robert Spitzer, eminent professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, released the results of his landmark 2001 study that showed that change is possible in highly motivated individuals: rare, in his estimation, but possible. (Dr. Spitzer had been the pro-gay lobby’s hero since he spearheaded the American Psychiatric Association’s removal of homosexuality from the DSM-IV manual, which is the psychiatrists’ bible of mental disorders. That decision was the result of caving into political pressure, not the result of any research.)

The idea that people can experience change not only in their behavior but in their hearts is threatening to those committed to the idea of homosexuality as a fixed and unchangeable truth. (I personally believe the reason for their insistence is an understandable defensive reaction to trying to change their orientation on their own unsuccessfully, including attempting to “pray away the gay,” which doesn’t work. I have written about why that is, here.)
Many of the loud voices insisting that homosexuality is not changeable hold to an unrealistic standard, that only a complete shift from 100% homosexual to 100% heterosexual constitutes change. I suggest that nowhere else do we hold to that standard: would we denounce a former alcoholic who has successfully lived for years in freedom from the destruction of alcohol, as not really changed if he thinks that a cold beer on a hot day still sounds good?

Dr. Spitzer’s findings back up the message of the New Testament: that Jesus Christ changes the lives and thus the behavior of people caught in all kinds of sin. Remember this list of changed people in the church of Corinth?

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9-11)

Change is possible. That is part of the good news of the gospel. And, for the believer in Jesus, change is a normal and expected part of being a follower of Christ.

Even if the world laughs at the notion with a “can you believe this?” contempt. Can homosexuals change? It’s not “Yeah, right.” It’s “Yes! Amen!”

This blog post was originally published at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/helping_homosexuals_change_yeah_right on July 19, 2011.

Mommy Blogger Outs Her 5-Year Old Son

Last week, a mommy blogger caused a firestorm with her blog post “My Son is Gay” about how her 5-year-old dressed up for Halloween as Daphne from Scooby Doo. Her little boy had had second thoughts about wearing the costume, afraid that people would make fun of him, but she pushed him to wear it to his preschool. “Who would make fun of a child in a costume on Halloween?” she wrote.

Well, lots of people. And she was angry.

“If you think that me allowing my son to be a female character for Halloween is somehow going to ‘make’ him gay then you are an idiot. Firstly, what a ridiculous concept. Secondly, if my son is gay, OK. I will love him no less. Thirdly, I am not worried that your son will grow up to be an actual ninja so back off.”

Her post generated more than 26,000 comments and has gone viral as people blogged about it (like this one).

This mom doesn’t have any problem with the idea that her son who likes bright colors and is attracted to a female costume might be gay, but I wonder what his dad thinks.
There is another way to think about boys like this. They don’t have to be gender-confused; they are just created by God to be artistic, creative, and emotionally sensitive. They love color and texture, they revel in nuances in sound and light, touch and smell. They are God’s gift to us: the musicians, the artists, the poets, the actors. When these boys are supported in their God-given flavor of masculinity (especially by their fathers), they can grow up to be great men who contribute their gifts to the church, to the world, and to their families. They make great counselors, pastors, teachers—and husbands and fathers.

My dear friend Ricky Chelette from Living Hope Ministries wrote an insightful article “Parenting the Sensitive Soul.” He allays the fears of a growing number of parents of young boys who come to his office concerned that their boys are too girly. And Ricky, an incredible artist, writer, singer, cook—and devoted husband of 20 years—tells them their boys are not being effeminate, they are merely expressing their giftedness. He writes about what he explained to a worried dad:

“I reassured the father that his son did not want to be a girl and the only person that was really saying anything about him being a girl was the dad. But why then was this boy drawn towards things which were typically identified as more feminine than masculine? Simply, he was a very sensitive soul.

“Sensitive boys are real boys. They simply are extremely gifted with particular giftings that manifest in emotionally and aesthetically expressive ways. His little boy’s obsession with women’s shoes were not because he wanted to be a girl, but more because he was aesthetically and visually oriented—and women’s shoes are much more visually exciting than the black, brown or burgundy of men’s shoes. Women’s shoes have sparkles, bobbles and bows. They come in every color imaginable and are in different shapes and textures. They are an aesthetically gifted boy’s dream! And he was not trying to identify as a girl when he grabbed his mother’s skirt, put it on, and twirled around. To him, it was similar to our experience of going to the fair and doing drop art projects where we drop paint on a spinning paper and watch it splatter, but even better. As he moved, he created art and beauty as the colors whirled around him and flowed up and down in the air. Better yet, he was the center of it all!

“The dad looked at me with disbelief, but with a sense of relief. ‘Do you mean he really isn’t trying to be a girl?’

“‘Absolutely not,’ I replied. ‘He is simply trying to express his giftedness as best he can. You have a very artistic young man with amazing potential to make this world a more beautiful place. He has the creative and masculine heart of God. You have the privilege of finding ways to affirm those gifts and channel them in a way that he can grow as gifted man of God!’

“It was as though I just found the lost key they had been searching to find for years; suddenly despair was replaced by hope and relief. But those feelings of relief were just as quickly followed by a look of bewilderment.

“‘But how do I do that? How do I affirm him in those gifts when I obviously don’t even understand what he is thinking or why he is doing what he is doing?’

Read the rest of his article to find out: Parenting the Sensitive Soul.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mommy_blogger_outs_her_5-year_old_son on Nov. 9, 2010.
Gay Teen Suicide and Bullying: A Christian Response

The rise in gay teen suicides is alarming and heartbreaking, whether it is an actual rise in suicides or a rise in the reporting and awareness of these needless deaths. Five teens killed themselves in a recent three-week period because of bullying or “outing,” but no one knows for sure how many there are.

Teens who experience same-sex attractions are already stressed simply by the difficulties of adolescence. This is painfully exacerbated by the confusion that accompanies unwanted desires and feelings that make them feel “other than,” different, like they don’t belong. Many of those who struggle with gay and lesbian feelings are very emotionally sensitive, and they can feel their pain more deeply than many of their classmates. They can easily buy into the lies that life is too hard, the challenges too daunting, that the hopelessness is too overwhelming.

When one factors in the excruciating pain of being taunted and bullied for even being perceived as gay or lesbian, the shame can become too much. If one is overweight, there is a possibility of losing weight; if one is a poor student, there is a possibility of working hard and studying to do better. But if one feels disconnected from and unaccepted by their same-sex peers, and if they can’t explain and did not choose the attractions that plague them, then most students will despair, believing there is no hope of anything changing. This is especially true for those who have prayed—many of them every single day—for God to take away their feelings, and He doesn’t seem to answer. (There are good reasons for this, but they don’t know that.) Gender identity is at the center of one’s identity; what do you when you don’t feel comfortable in your own skin?

Given these stresses, Christians could and should be the first ones to reach out to the marginalized, the ostracized, and the bullied. Every single person is precious to God, made in His image, and deserving of dignity and respect.

The emphasis needs to be on “teen suicides,” not “gay suicides.” Any time a young person takes his or her own life it is horrific and unacceptable—and, may I repeat myself, heartbreaking.

I am grateful for the way the media is highlighting the problem of bullying. This is a problem we can do something about—regardless of our particular beliefs about sexuality.

My friend Randy Thomas, executive vice-president of Exodus International, responded to the highly publicized suicide of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi on the Exodus blog (Exodus is a ministry to those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions):

Christians we need to speak out strongly against bullying and condemn vicious and violating behavior like this. God is the author of every breath. As long as there are Tylers in this world we have to defend their right to freedom and self-determination. We must afford them at least the very basics in human respect [and] dignity and defend them from those [who] would exploit and abuse them . . . . God is the author of every breath, and when we look into the face of another we are seeing a dim reflection of Him.

Whether they know Him or not. {1}
Christians should be at the forefront of the anti-bullying movement. Bullying is the opposite of the second greatest commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31). The Gospels are full of stories of Jesus standing up for the underdog; consider how He stood up to the religious bullies who had entrapped a woman caught in adultery (John 8). When it comes to bullies, what would Jesus do? Stand up to them. Defend the bullied. Communicate that they are precious, valued, and loved.

I have read a number of stories of people who were bullied when they were growing up. I can’t imagine how difficult it is to live through the painful isolation and rejection, of feeling that no one cares and nothing can fix the problem (apart from the bullies disappearing). I can’t imagine how painful it is to see teachers, bus drivers, and other adults say nothing and do nothing to come to the defense of kids being picked on—for being different, for being new, for being “other than,” for no reason at all other than the arbitrary attack of someone who felt small, and who bullied someone else to feel “bigger than.”

To understand the problem of gay teen suicides, it’s helpful understand the issues for gay teens (please see my article “Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality.”) We also need to understand more about bullying and what to do about it. The very wise and experienced Dr. Allan L. Beane offers “Tips for Parents, Assertiveness Skills for Students Who Are Bullied” and “Assertiveness Strategies for Siblings and Other Students (Bystanders)” on his web site.

Parents, pastors, youth workers and students need to encourage one another to stand up against any bullying of any student. There is strength in numbers, especially when it comes to dealing with a bully, although it only takes one voice to say, “Stop it.” Experienced teachers say a no-tolerance policy toward bullying is essential to taking power away from bullies. The key is the community—the school, the church, the neighborhood, the youth group: when the community says nothing, bullying explodes. When the community refuses to allow bullies to exploit others’ weaknesses, it is quenched.

At the same time, however, as we encourage teens to reach out to their marginalized peers by standing with them against their bullies, we don’t want to be naive. Although community pressure on bullies to stop often works, Scripture makes it clear that living like Jesus and standing up for the outcast will not be easy. Just as the Pharisees were upset by the way Jesus interfered with their social hierarchy, so too things will get sticky for those who upset those at the top of the social ladder. High school bullies are often at the top of the social food-chain. We need to prepare our students for the teasing and bullying they very likely will face for defending the marginalized, reminding and encouraging them that being persecuted for doing the right thing is to be expected, and is part of what makes the hope we have in a world and a kingdom beyond this one so sweet.

Gay teen suicides happen when students feel alone and isolated, when they feel “other than” and feel judged for that other-ness. Many of those who find themselves attracted to other boys or other girls are already uncomfortable with their desires; most of them try to pray or wish them away, but that’s not how those feelings are changed into the God–given, normal attractions for the opposite sex.

We can do something to prevent more gay teen suicides. The most influential people in gay teens’ lives are their peers, whose affirmation or shaming holds extreme power. But teens need to be instructed in how to fulfill the second greatest commandment, in loving their neighbor. We can teach them that all young people need to be loved, to be accepted as people made in God’s image, to be valued. They all need the “three A’s”: attention, affirmation, and affection. If sexually confused or gender-insecure teens, who are often marginalized by the other students, experienced Christians reaching out to them in friendship, simply communicating the grace of acceptance and value, that could make a big difference. It can be choices as simple as inviting someone to sit with them at
lunch, or telling others to “lay off” if they make insulting and negative comments about one of those marginalized students. They can even say affirming things to the bullies like, “Hey. You’re better than that, dude. Leave him alone.”

Jim Wallis recently wrote something stellar in a blog post on “Christians and Bullying”:

> My mother used to give us kids two instructions:

1. If there is a kid on the playground that nobody else is playing with—you play with them.

2. If there is a bully picking on other kids—you be the one to stand up to him or her. {3}

Being “Jesus with skin on.” That’s how teen suicides, regardless of sexual identity, can be prevented. May God use His people to love these hurting young women and men whom He loves dearly.

Notes


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**Watching Transformation Happen**

*July 21, 2009*

Last week I was privileged to attend the annual Exodus Conference along with a thousand people coming out of homosexuality, as well as some family members and people like myself who minister to them. Nothing has built my faith in the power and the loving heart of our life-changing God like my decade-long involvement in this kind of ministry.

I got to experience the power of answered prayer as I stood in worship with a divorced couple whom I have known online for several years but met at the conference. The husband had gone AWOL for the past year, choosing to pursue his feelings instead of his identity as a beloved child of His Father. He told me “something” kept drawing him back into the light: with a smile, I told him that Jesus has His hook in his heart because he belongs to Jesus! And there he was, reconnecting with his God and his wife in worship and the beauty of repentance.

I got to hear the testimony of a beloved young woman, deeply wounded, whom I have watched soften
and become so much like her Jesus over the past several years. As we were singing the words “Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow,” she suddenly and violently experienced the memory of being a sexually abused five-year-old, sitting in the tub with blood everywhere. In the pain of that moment, the Father met her there with the same words He had spoken to Sy Rogers, that evening’s speaker, about his sexual abuse: “Daddy sees, and Daddy’s sorry.” As His compassionate love washed over her, healing came.

And I got to see actual physical transformation in a dear lady with whom I have been walking out her repentance from lesbianism. As she has dared to believe that God really means everything in His word, especially about His love for her and how He sees her as a precious, beautiful, beloved daughter, change has come. She has gone to great lengths to drink in her Abba’s love in intimate ways (and has taught me what that can look like in the process). Halfway through the week, she caught a glimpse of herself in a plate glass window and was amazed to realize that her posture had changed: she was walking more upright and confidently, assured that she was “a real person” (her words). At the end of the week, she said she believed the change in her was permanent and lasting. She finally feels solid, not hollow. That’s the power of God’s healing love.

And that’s why it is such a joyful privilege for me to serve people whose thorn in the flesh is unwanted same-sex attractions. As their SSA drives them to Jesus, transformation happens.

And it is beautiful.

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

Ellen and Her “Wife”

Yesterday’s (November 10, 2009) Oprah featured Ellen DeGeneres and her “wife,” actress Portia di Rossi. I watched the show with the perspective of one who, for a decade, has helped women come out of the bondage of lesbian relationships. Let me share with you the meaning of what I saw and heard.

Oprah is enthusiastically pro-gay, so I was not surprised that she oohed and aahed over her guests’ romance and wedding, which we saw in video and gorgeous photography. And I wasn’t surprised that Ellen and Portia said they were glad to be “married” because it gave validity and legitimacy to their relationship. That perspective is part of an agenda about normalizing homosexuality, not the one-flesh union of male and female God intends marriage to be.

In her excitement to embrace the unreality these two women have formed, Oprah could not see the threads of commonality that tie most lesbian relationships together:

Hearts looking for their home. Both Ellen and Portia spoke of how they had found their home in each other: a place of rest, of sensing that the search was over. Many women who long for same-sex relationships speak of the sense of a gaping hole in their hearts, looking for someone to make them complete. They are looking for continual reassurance and safety, the security of being loved forever.
God’s plan for baby girls is that they find this nurturing and reassurance in their mother’s love and attention, with a strong connection with Mom that grounds them as human beings. All the lesbian women I know have sustained a life-altering “mother wound.” Either their mothers weren’t there for them, or something was broken in receiving their mothers’ love. They are longing for the unconditional and all-consuming mother love they never felt when they were babies, and they try to find it in the hearts of other women (or girls: growing numbers of teens are struggling as well).

Connection. Both of Oprah’s guests reported an immediate, electric connection to each other, even though it took some time for them to become a couple. (Interestingly, neither of them revealed during the interview that they were both in relationships with other women at the time, and they both dumped their respective relationships and moved in together. Abruptly leaving one girlfriend to hook up with a new one is typical.) In our online discussions of women dealing with their unwanted homosexuality, the word connection probably shows up more often than any other. Connection defines life for them. God created women to be relational, so it’s not surprising that connection would be so important, but there is an element of desperation to the connection that characterizes lesbian relationships.

Intensity. Intensity is a substitute for intimacy. Lesbian relationships are marked by intensity; one counselor calls it “emotional crack cocaine.” Intensity plus connection feels so overwhelming, so powerful, so intoxicating, that it is like a life-controlling drug. But God never intended for us to have that kind of human relationship, because it is idolatrous. People can never fill a heart-hole that God designed to be filled by Himself. So the cycle of lesbian relationships is: infatuation (reveling in the intensity of connection), disappointment (realizing the relationship does not satisfy, because idols never do), breakup (since God never intended same-sex coupling, it can’t work), and heartache... leading to looking for someone new to be infatuated with.

Lesbian relationship usually last only 3-4 years. (There are long-term relationships, but that’s usually because the women don’t know how to live without each other. It’s not the same as a stable heterosexual marriage relationship.) And when the breakup comes, it’s horrifically painful. I pray for Rosie O’Donnell and Kelli Carpenter, who have separated with 5 kids between them, to turn to the Lord for comfort and truth and peace.

And I pray for Ellen and Portia, when their ride is over as well. I pray for grace, and peace, for them to know Jesus... and for their eyes to be opened to why we use quotation marks for the word “wife.”

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

Newsweek’s Gay Marriage Propaganda Piece

The Dec. 15 (2008) issue of Newsweek features a breathtakingly biased essay called “The Religious Case for Gay Marriage.” The author, Lisa Miller, has a high view of homosexuality and a low view of scripture—and an even lower view of those of us who dare trust in God’s word. (Managing Editor Jon Meacham supports Ms. Miller’s piece in his column: he says the “conservative resort to biblical authority is the worst kind of fundamentalism.”)

Both Ms. Miller’s logic and her understanding of scripture and theology are riddled with problems. Let’s look at a few.
The biblical illustrations of marriage are so undesirable that no sensible person would want theirs to look like it. Abraham slept with his servant because his wife was infertile. Jacob fathered children by four mothers. Polygamy abounded in the patriarchs and the kings. Jesus and Paul were unmarried, Paul regarding “marriage as an act of last resort for those unable to contain their animal lusts.”

People have been making this mistake for years, taking the narrative sections of scripture and inferring that this is what God says to do since “it’s in the Bible.” As my friend Dan Lacich put it, it is the mistake of taking the “descriptive” and making it “prescriptive.” That would be like charging the editorial board of the Dallas Morning News with being pro-murder and pro-steroid abuse because it published news stories about those issues.

It’s true that the Biblical account includes a stunning array of ways to mess up God’s simple and beautiful plan for marriage. If we keep reading, it also includes the heartbreaking consequences of violating that plan. And, in the Song of Solomon, it also includes a lavish treatment of romantic love between a husband and a wife that illustrates how good it can be.

“[T]he Bible is a living document, powerful for more than 2000 years because its truths speak to us even as we change through history. In that light, Scripture gives us no good reason why gays and lesbians should not be (civilly and religiously) married—and a number of excellent reasons why they should.”

It’s clear Ms. Miller agrees with Bible scholar Alan Segal that “the Bible was written by men and not handed down in its leather bindings by God.” (I’ve never come across a single individual who actually believed a physical book was plopped in anyone’s lap from heaven, but we keep hearing this argument.) Robert Gagnon, professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, points out that while scripture has a human element, it is not merely the compilation of human ideas. The ideas behind the words written down by men come from the mind of the same God who created men and women, and who invented sex and marriage. Ms. Miller is wrong about gay marriage because she disregards the truth of God’s word in favor of human philosophies, about which we are warned not to be taken captive (Col. 2:8).

“Most of us no longer heed Leviticus on haircuts or blood sacrifices. Why would we still accept its stance on homosexuality?”

Ms. Miller mentions the two proscriptions against homosexual behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20 as “throwaway lines in a peculiar text given over to codes for living in the ancient Jewish world.” This is a common argument for dismissing the Bible’s stance on same-sex behavior, but it’s not that simple. Both chapters forbid child sacrifice, adultery, incest, bestiality, and homosexuality. Why wrench the one verse on homosexuality out of each chapter’s context to throw away and keep all the surrounding prohibitions? We never hear this argument used to normalize having sex with one’s child or one’s father or one’s dog. Nor should we. Ever.

Sexual issues are moral issues. They are not in the same category as laws for haircuts or blood sacrifices. We know this because sexual laws don’t change over time, as did civil and ceremonial laws. Moral commands are rooted in the character of God, specifically His purity and holiness. His character does not change over time, and neither do His commands about how we are to express our sexuality.

“While the Bible and Jesus say many important things about love and family, neither explicitly defines marriage as between one man and one woman.”
If we’re looking for an in-your-face 21st-century kind of Bible verse that says “Marriage is only between one man and one woman,” we won’t find it. What we do find is an equally in-your-face first-century teaching about marriage from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself. In Matthew 19:4-5, He puts back to back two important verses from the foundational creation account of Genesis 1 and 2: “Male and female He created them (1:27) and said, ‘For this reason a man shall . . . be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh’ (2:24).” (Also found in Mark 10:6-8.) This was the creation. This was the original intent. All variations on this are corruptions of God’s intent.

**Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. . .**

He didn’t have to, for the same reason we have no record of Him denouncing nuclear war. It was unthinkable in the Jewish culture to which He spoke. If you look in the historical records of the time, references to homosexuality just aren’t there. Not that it didn’t ever occur in private, but that it was off the “radar screen,” so to speak. There were also no advocates for same-sex relationships in the Jewish culture. (But there were in the Gentile culture to which Paul was called as an apostle, which explains why he addresses homosexual behavior and calls it sin.)

Dr. Gagnon writes about Jesus,

> “Telling his audience in first-century Palestine that men should stop having sex with other males would have been met with perplexity since the point was too well known, too foundational, and too strongly accepted to merit mention. I myself have never been in a church where the pastor explained why believers shouldn’t be in a sexual relationship with their parent, child, or sibling or shouldn’t enter a polyamorous relationship. I have never thought that the reason for this is that the minister was open to incest or polyamory of an adult-committed sort.”

. . .But he roundly condemns divorce.

Again, Dr. Gagnon insightfully points out:

> “Jesus takes time to condemn divorce/remarriage not because it is a more serious violation of God’s sexual norms than homosexual practice—or than incest or bestiality, two other sexual offenses that Jesus also never explicitly mentions—but because it, along with lust of the heart, was a remaining loophole in the law of Moses that needed to be closed. The law already clearly closed off any option for engaging in homosexual practice, incest, bestiality, and adultery, whatever the excuse.”

The Newsweek article closes with a quote from Ms. Miller’s priest friend James Martin. “In his heart he believes that if Jesus were alive today, he would reach out especially to the gays and lesbians among us, for ‘Jesus does not want people to be lonely and sad.’” I couldn’t agree more. I can easily picture the Lord walking into gay bars with a warm smile on His face and open arms, ready to look straight past the shame that holds so many same sex attracted people in its grip, and offer them the embrace of grace instead. But He wouldn’t be officiating at any gay weddings. He would lovingly exhort them, one by one, as He did the woman caught in adultery: “Go and sin no more.” It’s true He doesn’t want people to be lonely and sad. His intention is for the community of His body to provide the sense of legitimate belonging and significance that people are seeking in gay marriage. As is often the case, the joy He offers is so much more than our too-little dreams and hopes. But it’s freely available.
I am grateful for the insights of two excellent commentaries on this issue:

Dan Lacich’s blog, Provocative Christian Living, http://provocativechristian.wordpress.com/2008/12/12/newsweek-magazine-and-the-case-for-gay-marriage/, and

Dr. Robert Gagnon’s article “More than ‘Mutual Joy’: Lisa Miller of Newsweek against Scripture and Jesus,” http://www.robgagnon.net/NewsweekMillerHomosexualResp.htm

This commentary was originally published on Tapestry, the Bible.org Women’s blog, and is used by permission.