

# Shame-Based Families, Grace-Based Families

The messages of a shame-based family:

“Don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel.”

“Everybody has to put their needs aside so we can tiptoe around \_\_\_\_\_ and not make them mad.”

“Why did you do that, you dumb b\*tt?”

“If you disappoint me this much, how much more are you disappointing God?”

“Oh please, you’re not wearing that, are you?”

“Loser . . . stupid . . . such an embarrassment . . . I hope nobody knows you’re my daughter . . . You’ll never amount to anything . . . I wish I’d never had you . . . You’re so fat. And ugly.”

Every message of a shame-based family is an arrow into someone’s heart. Left there unacknowledged and not pulled out with truth, it starts generating lies and pain that can last a lifetime.

Lots of people grew up in this kind of family, but we are not sentenced to repeating it into the next generation. We can put on the brakes and steer our families in another direction altogether-the direction of grace.



Grace-based families also have messages:

“You are loved and valued, no matter what you do.”

“When we disagree, you never have to worry that I will stop loving you.”

“I was wrong and I am sorry. Will you forgive me?”

“Did you do your best? You’re the only one who can know.”

“Let’s talk about why you did that. What other choices did you have? What can you learn from this?”

“Can you help me understand what happened, what you were thinking or saying when you \_\_\_\_?”

The underlying message of a shame-based family is, “You are not acceptable and you risk being rejected and abandoned.” The underlying message of a grace-based family is, “You are an important and cherished part of this family and you will always be loved and accepted, even if we need to discipline you for wrong choices.”

Shame-based families shame out loud through name-calling, deadly comparisons (“Why can’t you be like \_\_\_\_?”), and anything that indicates the person is not good enough. Grace-based families affirm out loud with uplifting expressions of belief in each other, appreciation for each other, and affectionate use of each other’s names. Each person feels that their name is safe in everyone else’s mouths—but most especially mom and dad’s.

The focus of shame-based families is on performance, looking good and being good on the outside. It’s all external. Not embarrassing the family is huge. The focus of grace-based families is on the heart, remembering that character is shaped and developed in the family. The child’s value—which never changes—is separated from his or her behavior, which is eminently changeable. These families remember that God is not real pleased with our choices sometimes, but He never stops loving us.

Shame-based families specialize in unspoken rules and expectations. They are discovered when one gets broken. Often, one of the unspoken rules is that no one is supposed to notice or mention problems; if you bring a problem into the light by asking, “Hey, what about this?”—YOU become the problem. When one of my friends told her parents that her brother had been molesting her, her father threatened, “Don’t you ever talk

about this again. It is over.” When the abuse continued and she told her youth pastor, her father responded that his daughter was mentally ill, a pathological liar, and not to believe her.

There is often a “can’t-win” rule in effect: children are taught never to lie, but they are also not allowed to tell Grandma her cooking tastes awful. Or children are taught that smoking is bad, but if they point out that mom or dad smoke, they are shamed and shut down.

In grace-based families, rules and expectations are clearly spelled out. If an unspoken rule comes to light because someone broke it, it gets talked about without shaming the one who broke a rule they didn’t know was in place. If someone notices or mentions a problem, the problem is addressed instead of attacking the one who brought it up. In grace-based families, the *problem* is the problem, rather than the person who identified it.

Shame-based families often use coded messages to communicate, saying one thing while intending that their audience read their minds and respond to the actual message they wanted to give without coming right out and speaking it. Someone might say, “I have such a headache” and the second person replies, “That’s too bad” or “Sorry” and then continues to do whatever they were doing. The first gets upset that the other person didn’t offer to get them a pain reliever. The one with the headache used to be me, until a wise mentor responded with, “Would you like an Advil? Healthy people ask for what they need and want. Just ask me if I have one.” Whoa. That was a game-changer for me!

The communication in grace-based families tends to be clear and straight. It’s about saying what is true and what is actually meant. Scripture calls that “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). And healthy communication does not involve an unnecessary third person, a term called

“triangulating.” If someone complains about another person, or gives a message for another family member, a wise person redirects them to the one they actually need to communicate with, refusing to be the third person in a two-person communication. Another wise person has said, “If you don’t have a dog in that fight, stay out of it.” That works!

Shame-based families are preoccupied with fault or blame. They are always looking for where to place—or shift—the blame when something goes wrong. Then the culprit can be shamed, humiliated, and made to feel so bad they don’t do it again.

In grace-based families, the emphasis is on responsibility and accountability. People are responsible for their choices and held accountable for their behavior. Grace-based parents try to remember that all of life is training for a child, and it takes many, many times to learn wise and healthy behavior. So while a child may be disciplined, they are not punished for not getting something right. Instead of being shamed for slamming the door, they may be instructed, “OK, I guess you need practice in closing the door without slamming it. So you’ll be practicing 25 times in a row, starting right now.” Another way that grace-based families can build responsibility and accountability is by using natural consequences without anger: “Since you left your bicycle in the driveway again, you will lose the privilege of enjoying it for a week.” And sometimes, discipline without punishment means talking about what happened without shaming, by asking good questions: “So what can you learn from this?” “What can you do differently next time?”

Family is meant to be God’s safety net underneath is, the safe place to fall when we make mistakes and learn painful life lessons. By His grace and through being intentional, shame-based families can become grace-based families as we reflect on how God, the perfect Parent, loves us perfectly and unconditionally-yet teaches us to be responsible as we grow up to maturity.

Note: the grace-based family in the picture are my friends Rick and Abbie Smith with their sons Noah and Jaxten. If you want a blessing, check out their story of grace at [noahsdad.com/story](http://noahsdad.com/story).

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# Future Husbands and Cheerleaders: A Review of OMI's Cheerleader and Meghan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband"

Meghan Trainor's song "[Dear Future Husband](#)" and OMI's song "[Cheerleader](#)" have striking similarities. Musically they are both fun and upbeat songs. Both songs engage with the idea of marriage and outline what they expect and value in their potential spouse. However, the two songs offer conflicting ideas of what a good husband and wife look like. It is almost comical that "Cheerleader," from a man's perspective, describes the potential wife as a mere cheerleader and "Dear Future Husband," from the woman's perspective even if only satirically, [\[1\]](#) describes the potential husband as a mere servant. That brings me to the final comparison: both songs expect the spouse to be an aid in providing whatever the artist desires.

However, there are some truths hidden in these songs about the

role of husband and wife in marriage that can best be understood and even celebrated through a biblical understanding of marriage.

## **Marriage as a Deal**

Meghan Trainor's song "Dear Future Husband" is basically a list of criteria that a man must accomplish or agree to before he is allowed to marry her. The song introduces the list by remarking "Here's a few things you'll need to know if you wanna be my one and only all my life." Trainor spells out examples of what she expects from her husband including taking her on dates, telling her she is beautiful, not correcting her, apologizing, buying her a ring, opening doors for her, and even letting her sleep on the left side of the bed. Then of course she adds the the catch-all requests such as "be a classy guy," "treat me like a lady," and "love me right."

The song also outlines what he will get in return as a reward if he does everything right. She will only "be the perfect wife," buy groceries, give "some kisses," be his "one and only all [her] life," give "that special loving" if he does exactly what she asks of him. Additionally, he will have to expect that she will be crazy (at least some of the time), she will correct but not be corrected, she will not cook, and they will favor her extended family over his. What a deal! And unfortunately that is exactly what marriage is conflated into—a deal, an exchange.

Most of these actions are pretty standard ways men show love to their wives. However, men should not and likely do not perform the acts because of a contractual agreement or because of expectations. How can this man show true unconditional and sacrificial love to his wife if he does these actions out of duty or hope of reward?

This marred picture of marriage is so faulty because it offers a picture of marriage that is a one-sided willingness to be

served by her husband and then only serve him as a response. Even though the song lists loving actions in marriage, this picture of marriage is ultimately selfish, conditional, manipulative, and loveless.

## **Marriage as a Cheerleader**

Looking to “Cheerleader,” the song offers a more hopeful and less distorted picture of marriage—however, we are still left wanting. The future wife in OMI’s song is a woman characterized by her support, affection, strength, physical beauty, readiness to serve, and faithfulness. All these attributes are biblically commendable and should even be sought after. Yet, what does OMI, as the future husband, offer to her? Fidelity and sex. In contrast to Trainor’s song, here the husband remains rightly faithful and offers sex because he values his wife so much, especially her ability to support him. [\[2\]](#)

However, again the picture seems woefully incomplete. The song portrays a limited picture of women by reducing his future wife to only a handful of attributes that benefit him. His wife should be more than a mere cheerleader. She is simply a tool he can pull out whenever he wants or needs her. The song further reduces—and in some ways even dehumanizes—her by focusing on the services she can offer him. As a result, she is not represented as her own person with her own needs and desires.

## **Marriage as a Picture of Unity**



Ultimately marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church—a picture both songs catch a small glimpse of. When Trainor in “Dear Future Husband” desires (albeit via demand) for her husband to show her love by serving her and

affirming her, she desires something that is biblical. Husbands are called to nourish, cherish, honor, embrace, protect, and love their wives.[{3}](#) Having biblical standards in what to expect in a husband is what God wants, but not through demands and deals.

OMI also desires legitimate attributes in his wife. He values a wife who will support and affirm him. In Genesis God created woman with Adam’s need for companionship and assistance in mind.[{4}](#) Proverbs 31 describes an excellent wife as a woman who is strong, trustworthy and praiseworthy.[{5}](#) However, Proverbs 31 does not just define an excellent wife in those terms; the excellent wife is generous, wise, skilled, dignified, and uses her time buying, selling, trading, and providing for her entire household. So when OMI seeks an excellent wife, he gets a cheerleader—but if he were to look for a biblically defined wife of excellence then the proverb would ring true, that “he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”[{6}](#)

But neither artist has the full picture. Marriage is not an exchange of services—yes, spouses should serve each other; not out of duty but out of a thankful and loving heart. The element that is missing from both songs is the true and complete needs and desires of the opposite spouse. However, both songs together offer a fuller picture of what each spouse needs and desires. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives, something Trainor focused on, and for wives to respect their husbands, as OMI touched on through valuing affirmation



from his wife.[{7}](#)

Genesis describes marriage as becoming one flesh, and following that theme Paul in Ephesians calls husbands to “love his wife as himself.”[{8}](#) By being one flesh, spouses should see their separate wills as one unified will and their separate body as one body. Paul writes that concerning this idea of unity, “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”[{9}](#) This picture of marriage is strikingly different from the deal-making, manipulating, and self-serving marriage according to Trainor and OMI.

The true beauty and blessing in marriage for the Christian, is ultimately that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Again in Ephesians, Paul refers to marriage by writing, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”[{10}](#) When a man and a woman marry, they symbolize unity that is fully complete between Christ and His people.[{11}](#)

However, because of our sin we were incapable of being united with Christ. In order for Christ to marry his Church he had to make us clean and even righteous. Christ accomplished this by taking our place and dying on the cross for our sins so we might receive the righteousness of Christ. In that way, when God the Father looks down at His Church He sees a people who are flawless and thus fitting to be united with His son. Christ is the perfect husband, and when we are complete in our glorification, we will be the perfect wife as the Church.

## **Marriage as a Broken Picture**

Yet our marriage is only a picture—a flawed and imperfect picture. Husbands abuse wives, wives undermine their husbands, and spouses cheat on each other which can all lead to separation and divorce. God did not intend marriage to be plagued by sin, and divorce and pain was not in his design. [{12}](#) However, we did sin and as a result sin has damaged our relationships, including marriage, in a deeply painful way.



Nevertheless, God still works to better our marriages. He sent the Holy Spirit to help believers in the process of sanctification—which is making us more like Christ. Both songs lack a place for sanctification. Trainor does not want to be confronted and OMI only wants to be affirmed.

But marriage is made for more than just affirming the good and ignoring the bad. Because men and women are different yet compatible, God uses marriage to aid in the process of making us more Christlike. Women tend to be more relational and emotional and men tend to be more protective and provisional. In marriage, the wife can learn from and value her husband's strengths and the husband can learn from and value his wife's strengths, as co-heirs with Christ. And when one spouse has wronged the other they can and should go to each other for confession, repentance and reconciliation that will result in more unity and ultimately aid in their sanctification.

With the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, even in our sinful state, we can still strive to symbolize our unity in Christ in our marriages. Married Christians should continually search the Bible for insight and direction on how to better serve and love their spouse. However, both married and single Christians all wait expectantly for the glorious wedding feast celebrating our unity to Christ.

## Notes

1. There has been some debate about whether or not Trainor's song is supposed to be understood as a satire. I am more inclined to think it may be hyperbolic but I think it might be too generous to call it a satire. However, most conclude that if it is meant to be satirical it does not skillfully convey that message. For more of this conversation simply google "Dear Future Husband sexist satire" and you should have plenty of articles to start on.
2. Fidelity and sex should both be a fundamental part of a biblical marriage. See Hebrews 13:4.
3. Ephesians 5:28-29, 1 Peter 3:7, and Proverbs 4:7-9. All Bible verses are in the English Standard Version.
4. Genesis 2:18.
5. Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 31:10-11, 17, 28.
6. Proverbs 18:22.
7. Ephesians 5:33.
8. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:33
9. 1 Corinthians 7:4.
10. Ephesians 5:32.
11. Because marriage is a picture of the reality of our unity in Christ that is not yet fully realized, we value and guard the sanctity of it. That is why as Christians we should be mournful at the distortions of marriage such as divorce or homosexuality. Distortions in marriage are so offensive because they distort the truth that marriage is supposed to reflect. Because marriage should be highly regarded and protected the Bible uses harsh language when speaking about sexual immorality and divorce (For example, see Malachi 2:16 for severity of husbands not loving their wives).
12. See Matthew 19:6 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

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# Divorce – A Biblical Christian Perspective

*Kerby Anderson examines the epidemic of divorce from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. He presents data on its impact on families and society and compares the trend with biblical teaching on the subject.*

Families are experiencing many problems today, but the role of divorce in this picture has been frequently overlooked because its destructive effects have been subtle, yet insidious. When the divorce rate increased in the 1960s, few would have predicted its dire consequences three decades later. Yet divorce has changed both the structure and the impact of the family.

This is not just the conclusion of Christians, but also the conclusion of non-Christian researchers working in the field. Clinical psychologist Diane Medved set out to write a book to help couples facing transitions due to divorce. She begins her book with this startling statement:

*I have to start with a confession: This isn't the book I set out to write. I planned to write something consistent with my previous professional experience helping people with decision making. . . . For example, I started this project believing that people who suffer over an extended period in unhappy marriages ought to get out...I thought that striking down taboos about divorce was another part of the ongoing enlightenment of the women's, civil- rights, and human potential movements of the last twenty-five years...To my utter befuddlement, the extensive research I conducted for this book brought me to one inescapable and irrefutable*

*conclusion: I had been wrong.”(1)*

She titled her book *The Case Against Divorce*.

Until the 1960s, divorce has been a relatively rare phenomenon. Certainly there have always been some couples who have considered divorce an option. But fundamental changes in our society in the last few decades have changed divorce from being rare to routine.

During the 1970s, the divorce rate doubled (and the number of divorces tripled from 400,000 in 1962 to 1.2 million in 1981).(2) The increase in the divorce rate came not from older couples but from the baby boom generation. One sociologist at Stanford University calculated that while men and women in their twenties comprised only about 20 percent of the population, they contributed 60 percent of the growth in the divorce rate in the 1960s and early 1970s.(3)

This increase was due to at least two major factors: attitude and opportunity. The baby boom generation's attitude toward such issues as fidelity, chastity, and commitment were strikingly different from their parents'. Their parents would stay in a marriage in order to make it work. Baby boomers, however, were less committed to the ideal of marriage and quite willing to end what they felt was a bad marriage and move on with their lives. While their parents might keep a marriage going "for the sake of the kids," the baby boom generation as a whole was much less concerned about such issues.

Economic opportunities also seem to be a significant factor in divorce. The rise in divorce closely parallels the increase in the number of women working. Women with a paycheck were less likely to stay in a marriage that wasn't fulfilling to them. Armed with a measure of economic power, many women had less incentive to stay in a marriage and work out their differences with their husbands. A study of mature women done at Ohio

State University found that the higher a woman's income in relation to the total income of her family, the more likely she was to seek a divorce.(4)

## **Divorce and Children**

Divorce is having a devastating impact on both adults and children. Every year, parents of over 1 million children divorce. These divorces effectively cut one generation off from another. Children are reared without the presence of their father or mother. Children are often forced to take sides in the conflict. And, children often carry the scars of the conflict and frequently blame themselves for the divorce.

So what is the impact? Well, one demographer looking at this ominous trend of divorce and reflecting on its impact, acknowledged:

*No one knows what effect divorce and remarriage will have on the children of the baby boom. A few decades ago, children of divorced parents were an oddity. Today they are the majority. The fact that divorce is the norm may make it easier for children to accept their parents' divorce. But what will it do to their marriages in the decades ahead? No one will know until it's too late to do anything about it.(5)*

What little we do know about the long-term impact of divorce is disturbing. In 1971, Judith Wallerstein began a study of sixty middle-class families in the midst of divorce. Her ongoing research has provided a longitudinal study of the long-term effects of divorce on parents and children.

Like Diane Medved, Judith Wallerstein had to revise her previous assumptions. According to the prevailing view at the time, divorce was seen as a brief crisis that would resolve itself. Her book, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*, vividly illustrates the long-term psychological devastation wrought not only on the children but

the adults.(6) Here are just a few of her findings in her study of the aftershocks of divorce:

- *Three out of five children felt rejected by at least one parent.*
- *Five years after their parent's divorce, more than one-third of the children were doing markedly worse than they had been before the divorce.*
- *Half grew up in settings in which the parents were warring with each other even after the divorce.*
- *One-third of the women and one-quarter of the men felt that life had been unfair, disappointing and lonely.*

In essence, Wallerstein found that the emotional tremors register on the psychological Richter scale many years after the divorce.

In addition to the emotional impact is the educational impact. Children growing up in broken homes do not do as well in school as children from stable families. One national study found an overall average of one lost year of education for children in single-parent families.(7)

Divorce and remarriage adds another additional twist to modern families. Nearly half of all marriages in 1990 involved at least one person who had been down the aisle before, up from 31 percent in 1970.(8)

These changing family structures complicate relationships. Divorce and remarriage shuffle family members together in foreign and awkward ways. Clear lines of authority and communication get blurred and confused in these newly revised families. One commentator trying to get a linguistic handle on these arrangements called them "neo-nuclear" families.(9) The rules for these neo- nukes are complex and ever-changing. Children looking for stability are often insecure and

frustrated. One futuristic commentator imagined this possible scenario:

*On a spring afternoon, half a century from today, the Joneses are gathered to sing "Happy Birthday" to Junior. There's Dad and his third wife, Mom and her second husband, Junior's two half brothers from his father's first marriage, his six stepsisters from his mother's spouse's previous unions, 100-year-old Great Grandpa, all eight of Junior's current "grandparents," assorted aunts, uncles-in-law and stepcousins. While one robot scoops up the gift wrappings and another blows out the candles, Junior makes a wish ...that he didn't have so many relatives.(10)*

The stress on remarried couples is difficult enough, but it intensifies when step-children are involved. Conflict between a stepparent and stepchild is inevitable and can be enough to threaten the stability of a remarriage. According to one study, remarriages that involve stepchildren are more likely to end in divorce than those that don't.(11) Fully 17 percent of marriages that are remarriages for both husband and wife and that involve stepchildren break up within three years.(12)

## **No Fault Divorce**

Historically the laws governing marriage were based upon the traditional, Judeo-Christian belief that marriage was for life. Marriage was intended to be a permanent institution. Thus, the desire for divorce was not held to be self-justifying. Legally the grounds for divorce had to be circumstances that justified making an exemption to the assumption of marital permanence. The spouse seeking a divorce had to prove that the other spouse had committed one of the "faults" recognized as justifying the dissolution of the marriage. In most states, the classic grounds for divorce were cruelty, desertion, and adultery.



This legal foundation changed when California enacted a statute in 1969 which allowed for no-fault divorce. This experiment has effectively led to what could now be called "divorce-on-demand." One by one, various state legislatures enacted no-fault divorce laws so that today, this concept has become the de facto legal principle in every state.

The fault-based system of divorce law had its roots in the view that marriage was a sacrament and indissoluble. The current no-fault provisions changed this perception. Marriage is no longer viewed as a covenant; it's a contract. But it's an even less reliable contract than a standard business contract.

Classic contract law holds that a specific promise is binding and cannot be broken merely because the promisor changes his/her mind. In fact, the concept of "fault" in divorce proceedings is more like tort law than contract law in that it implies an binding obligation between two parties which has been breached, thus leading to a divorce. When state legislatures implemented no-fault divorce provisions, they could have replaced the fault-based protections with contract-like protections. Unfortunately, they did not. In just a few decades we have moved from a position where divorce was permitted for a few reasons to a position in which divorce is permitted for any reason, or no reason at all.

The impact on the institution of marriage has been devastating. Marginal marriages are much easier to dissolve, and couples who may have tried to stick it out and work out their problems instead opt for a no-fault divorce.

But all marriages (not just marginal marriages) are at risk. After all, marriages do not start out marginal. Most marriages start out on a solid footing. But after the honeymoon, comes the more difficult process of learning to live together harmoniously. The success of the process is affected by both internal factors (willingness to meet each other's needs,

etc.) and external factors (such as the availability of divorce). But even these factors are interrelated. If the law gives more protection to the marriage contract, a partner may be more likely to love sacrificially and invest effort in the marriage. If the law gives less protection, a partner may be more likely to adopt a “looking out for number one” attitude.

## **Biblical Perspective**

The Bible speaks to the issue of divorce in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The most important Old Testament passage on divorce is Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

These verses were not intended to endorse divorce; just the contrary. The intention was to regulate the existing custom of divorce, not to put forth God’s ideal for marriage. Divorce was allowed in certain instances because of human sinfulness (Matt. 19:8).

Divorce was widespread in the ancient Near East. The certificate of divorce apparently was intended to protect the reputation of the woman and provided her with the right to remarry. This public declaration protected her from charges of adultery. The Mishnah, for example, stated that a divorce certificate was not valid unless the husband explicitly said,

“Thou art free to marry any man.”(13)

Key to understanding this passage is the definition of “something indecent.” It probably did not mean adultery since that was subject to the penalty of death (22:22), nor did it probably mean premarital intercourse with another man (22:20-21) since that carried the same penalty. The precise meaning of the phrase is unknown.

In fact, the meaning of this phrase was subject to some debate even during the time of Christ. The conservative school of Shammai understood it to mean a major sexual offense. The liberal school of Hillel taught that it referred to anything displeasing to the husband (including something as trivial as spoiling his food). The apparent purpose of this law was to prevent frivolous divorce and to protect a woman who was divorced by her husband. The passage in no way encourages divorce but regulates the consequences of divorce.

Another significant Old Testament passage is Malachi 2:10-16.

*Have we not all one Father ? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?...Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel.*

This passage deals with breaking a prior agreement or covenant. It specifically addresses the issue of illegal intermarriage and the issue of divorce. Malachi specifically teaches that husbands and wives are to be faithful to one another because they have God as their Father. The marriage relationship is built upon a solemn covenant. While God may tolerate divorce under some of the circumstances described in Deuteronomy 24, the instructions were given to protect the woman if a divorce should occur. This passage in Malachi

reminds us that God hates divorce.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, we have the clearest teachings by Jesus on the subject of divorce.

*It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery. (Matt. 5:31-32) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matt. 19:9)*

In these two passages, Jesus challenges the views of the two schools of Jewish thought (Shammai, Hillel). He teaches that marriage is for life and should not be dissolved by divorce.

Defining the word *porneia* (which is translated marital unfaithfulness) is a key element in trying to understand these passages. While some commentators teach that this word refers to incestuous relationships or sexual promiscuity during the betrothal period, most scholars believe the word applies to relentless, persistent, and unrepentant adultery. Among those holding to this exception clause for adultery, some believe remarriage is possible while others do not.

The other significant section of teaching on divorce in the New Testament can be found in Paul's teaching on divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15.

*To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a*

*believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*

In the first section, Paul addresses Christians married to one another. Paul was obviously aware of the prevalence of divorce in the Greek world and of the legal right that a wife has to initiate a divorce. He gives the command for believers to stay married.

In the next section, Paul addresses the issue of mixed marriages. He says that even in spite of religious incompatibility in such a marriage, Paul teaches that the believing spouse is not to seek divorce. Some divorces may have been initiated because of the command of Ezra to the Israelites in Jerusalem after the exile (Ezra 10:11) to divorce themselves from pagan spouses. Paul affirms the same biblical principle: do not seek divorce. However, if the unbelieving spouse insists on divorce, the believer may have to concede to those proceedings and is not bound in such circumstances.

Based on the preceding verses, we can therefore conclude that a Christian can acquiesce to divorce in cases of marital infidelity by the other spouse or in cases of desertion by an unbelieving spouse. Yet even in these cases, the church should not encourage divorce. Certainly in very troubling cases which involve mental, sexual, and/or physical abuse, legal separation is available as a remedy to protect the abused spouse. God hates divorce; therefore Christians should never be in the position of encouraging or promoting divorce. Instead they should be encouraging reconciliation.

One final question is whether a divorced person is eligible for a leadership position within the church. The key passage is 1 Timothy 3:2 which calls for a church leader to be above reproach and "the husband of one wife." Rather than prohibiting a divorced person from serving in leadership, the language of this verse actually focuses on practicing polygamists. Polygamy was practiced in the first century and found among Jewish and Christian groups. The passage could be translated "a one-woman man." If Paul intended to prohibit a divorced person from leadership, he could have used a much less ambiguous term.

As Christians in a society where divorce is rampant, I believe we must come back to these important biblical principles concerning marriage. Christians should work to build strong marriages. Pastors must frequently preach and teach about the importance of marriage. We should encourage fellow Christians to attend various marriage enrichment seminars and ministries in our community.

As Christians I also believe we should reach out to those who have been through divorce. We must communicate Christ's forgiveness to them in the midst of their shattered lives. They need counseling and support groups. Many times they also need financial help and direction as they begin to put together the shattered pieces of their lives.

But as we reach out to those whose lives are shattered by divorce, we must be careful that our ministry does not compromise our theology. We must reach out with both biblical convictions and biblical compassion. Marriage for life is God's ideal (Genesis 2), nevertheless, millions of people have been devastated by divorce and need to feel care and compassion from Christians. Churches have unfortunately erred on one side or another. Most churches have maintained a strong stand on marriage and divorce. While this strong biblical stand is admirable, it should also be balanced with compassion towards those caught in the throes of divorce. Strong convictions

without compassionate outreach often seems to communicate that divorce is the unforgivable sin.

On the other hand, some churches in their desire to minister to divorced people have compromised their theological convictions. By starting without biblically-based convictions about marriage and divorce, they have let their congregation's circumstances influence their theology.

Christians must simultaneously reach out with conviction and compassion. Marriage for life is God's ideal, but divorce is a reality in our society. Christians should reach out with Christ's forgiveness to those whose lives have been shattered by divorce.

#### Notes

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# Arguments Against Abortion

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand that concerns about abortion are more than just a fundamentalist backlash. He reviews arguments from a Christian, biblical perspective and then introduces arguments from medical, legal and philosophical points of views as well. He concludes, "The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life."*

## Biblical Arguments Against Abortion

In this essay we will be discussing arguments against abortion. The first set of arguments we will consider are biblical arguments.

That being said, we must begin by acknowledging that the Bible doesn't say anything about abortion directly. Why the silence of the Bible on abortion? The answer is simple. Abortion was so unthinkable to an Israelite woman that there was no need to even mention it in the criminal code. Why was abortion an unthinkable act? First, children were viewed as a gift or heritage from the Lord. Second, the Scriptures state—and the



Jews concurred—that God opens and closes the womb and is sovereign over conception. Third, childlessness was seen as a curse.

One of the key verses to understand in developing a biblical view of the sanctity of human life is Psalm 139. This psalm is the inspired record of David's praise for God's sovereignty in his life. He begins by acknowledging that God is omniscient and knows what David is doing at any given point in time. He goes on to acknowledge that God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. David adds that wherever he might go, he cannot escape from God, whether he travels to heaven or ventures into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. Finally David contemplates the origin of his life and confesses that God was there forming him in the womb:

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (vv. 13-16).*

Here David speaks of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. Notice that the Bible doesn't speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. The description here is not of a piece of protoplasm that becomes David: this is David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

In verse 13, we see that God is the Master Craftsman fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14 and 15, David reflects on the fact that he is a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praises God for

how wonderfully God has woven him together.

David draws a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he refers to his life before birth when "I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." This poetic allusion harkens back to Genesis 2:7 which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also notes that "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated *unformed substance* is a noun derivative of a verb meaning "to roll up." When David was just forming as a fetus, God's care and compassion already extended to him. The reference to "God's eyes" is an Old Testament term used to connote divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or group of people.

Next, we will consider additional Old Testament passages that provide a biblical argument against abortion.

## **Additional Old Testament Arguments Against Abortion**

Now that we've looked at Psalm 139, the most popular argument against abortion, let's look at two other Old Testament passages.

Another significant passage is Psalm 51. It was written by David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and records his repentance. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). David concludes that from his time of conception, he had a sin nature. This would imply that he carried the image of God from the moment of conception, including the marred image scarred from sin.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). Bearing the image of God is the essence of humanness. And though God's image in man was marred at the Fall, it was not erased (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9). Thus, the unborn baby is made in the image of God and therefore fully human in God's sight.

This verse also provides support for what is called the traducian view of the origin of the soul. According to this perspective, human beings were potentially in Adam (Rom. 5:12, Heb. 7:9-10) and thus participated in his original sin. The "soulish" part of humans is transferred through conception. Therefore, an unborn baby is morally accountable and thus fully human.

Another argument against abortion can be found in the Old Testament legal code, specifically Exodus 21:22-25.

*If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*

The verses appear to teach that if a woman gives birth prematurely, but the baby is not injured, then only a fine is appropriate. However, if the child dies then the law of retaliation (lex talionis) should be applied. In other words, killing an unborn baby would carry the same penalty as killing a born baby. A baby inside the womb has the same legal status as a baby outside the womb.

Some commentators have come to a different conclusion because they believe the first verses only refer to a case of accidental miscarriage. Since only a fine is levied, they argue that an unborn baby is merely potential life and does

not carry the same legal status as a baby that has been born.

There are at least two problems with this interpretation. First, the normal Hebrew word for *miscarry* is not used in this passage (cf. Gen. 31:38; Exod. 23:26; Job 2:10; Hos. 9:14). Most commentators now believe that the action described in verse 22 is a premature birth not an accidental miscarriage. Second, even if the verses do describe a miscarriage, the passage cannot be used to justify abortion. The injury was accidental, not intentional (as abortion would be). Also, the action was a criminal offense and punishable by law.

## **Medical Arguments Against Abortion**

Thus far in our discussion we have looked at biblical arguments against abortion. But what if someone doesn't believe in the Bible? Are there other arguments we can use? Yes, there are: medical arguments, for example. Let's look, then, at some of the medical arguments against abortion.

The medical arguments against abortion are compelling. For example, *at conception the embryo is genetically distinct from the mother*. To say that the developing baby is no different from the mother's appendix is scientifically inaccurate. A developing embryo is genetically different from the mother. A developing embryo is also genetically different from the sperm and egg that created it. A human being has 46 chromosomes (sometimes 47 chromosomes). Sperm and egg have 23 chromosomes. A trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and that of a sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

Another set of medical arguments against abortion surround *the definition of life and death*. If one set of criteria have been used to define death, could they also be used to define life? Death used to be defined by the cessation of heartbeat. A stopped heart was a clear sign of death. If the cessation of

heartbeat could define death, could the onset of a heartbeat define life? The heart is formed by the 18th day in the womb. If heartbeat was used to define life, then nearly all abortions would be outlawed.

Physicians now use a more rigorous criterion for death: brain wave activity. A flat EEG (electroencephalograph) is one of the most important criteria used to determine death. If the cessation of brain wave activity can define death, could the onset of brain wave activity define life? Individual brain waves are detected in the fetus in about 40-43 days. Using brain wave activity to define life would outlaw at least a majority of abortions.

Opponents to abortion also raise the controversial issue of fetal pain. Does the fetus feel pain during abortion? The evidence seems fairly clear and consistent. Consider this statement made in a British medical journal: "Try sticking an infant with a pin and you know what happens. She opens her mouth to cry and also pulls away. Try sticking an 8-week-old human fetus in the palm of his hand. He opens his mouth and pulls his hand away. A more technical description would add that changes in heart rate and fetal movement also suggest that intrauterine manipulations are painful to the fetus."[\[1\]](#)

Obviously, other medical criteria could be used. For example, the developing fetus has a unique set of fingerprints as well as genetic patterns that make it unique. The development of sonography has provided us with a "window to the womb" showing us that a person is growing and developing in the mother's womb. We can discern eyes, ears, fingers, a nose, and a mouth. Our visual senses tell us this is a baby growing and maturing. This is not a piece of protoplasm; this is a baby inside the womb.

The point is simple. *Medical science leads to a pro-life perspective rather than a pro-choice perspective.* If medical science can be used at all to draw a line, the clearest line

is at the moment of conception. Medical arguments provide a strong case against abortion and for life.

## **Legal Arguments Against Abortion**

At this point in our discussion, we need to look at legal arguments against abortion.

The best legal argument against abortion can be seen in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. It violated standard legal reasoning. The Supreme Court decided not to decide when life begins and then turned around and overturned the laws of 50 different states.

Most of the Supreme Court's verdict rested upon two sentences. "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to an answer."

Although the sentences sounded both innocuous and unpretentious, they were neither. The Supreme Court's non-decision was not innocuous. It overturned state laws that protected the unborn and has resulted in over 30 million abortions (roughly the population of Canada) in the United States.

The decision also seems unpretentious by acknowledging that it did not know when life begins. But if the Court did not know, then it should have acted "as if" life was in the womb. A crucial role of government is to protect life. Government cannot remove a segment of the human population from its protection without adequate justification.

The burden of proof should lie with the life-taker, and the benefit of the doubt should be with the life-saver. Put another way: "when in doubt, don't." A hunter who hears rustling in the bushes shouldn't fire until he knows what is

in the bushes. Likewise, a Court which doesn't know when life begins, should not declare open season on the unborn.

The burden of proof in law is on the prosecution. The benefit of doubt is with the defense. This is also known as a presumption of innocence. The defendant is assumed to be innocent unless proven guilty. Again the burden of proof is on the entity that would take away life or liberty. The benefit of the doubt lies with the defense.

The Supreme Court clearly stated that it does not know when life begins and then violated the very spirit of this legal principle by acting as if it just proved that no life existed in the womb. Even more curious was the fact that to do so, it had to ignore the religious community and international community on the subject of the unborn.

Had the religious community really failed to reach a consensus? Although there were some intramural disagreements, certainly the weight of evidence indicated that a Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong. People with widely divergent theological perspectives (Jewish, Catholic, evangelical and fundamental Protestants) shared a common agreement about the humanity of the unborn.

The same could be said about the international legal community. Physicians around the world subscribed to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"). The unborn were protected by various international documents like the Declaration of Geneva and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Just as there are solid medical arguments against abortion, so also there are legal arguments against abortion. *Roe vs. Wade* was a bad decision that needs to be overturned.

# Philosophical Arguments Against Abortion

Finally, we will conclude our discussion by looking at philosophical arguments against abortion.

A third set of arguments against abortion would be philosophical arguments. A key philosophical question is where do you draw the line? Put another way, when does a human being become a person?

The Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* separated personhood from humanity. In other words, the judges argued that a developing fetus was a human (i.e., a member of the species *Homo sapiens*) but not a person. Since only persons are given 14th Amendment protection under the Constitution, the Court argued that abortion could be legal at certain times. This left to doctors, parents, or even other judges the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding when personhood should be awarded to human beings.

The Supreme Court's cleavage of personhood and humanity made the ethical slide down society's slippery slope inevitable. Once the Court allowed people to start drawing lines, some drew them in unexpected ways and effectively opened the door for infanticide and euthanasia.

The Court, in the tradition of previous line-drawers, opted for biological criteria in their definition of a "person" in *Roe v. Wade*. In the past, such criteria as implantation or quickening had been suggested. The Court chose the idea of viability and allowed for the possibility that states could outlaw abortions performed after a child was viable. But viability was an arbitrary criterion, and there was no biological reason why the line had to be drawn near the early stages of development. The line, for example, could be drawn much later.

Ethicist Paul Ramsey frequently warned that any argument for



abortion could logically be also used as an argument for infanticide. As if to illustrate this, Dr. Francis Crick, of DNA fame, demonstrated that he was less concerned about the ethics of such logical extensions and proposed a more radical definition of personhood. He suggested in the British journal *Nature* that if “a child were considered to be legally born when two days old, it could be examined to see whether it was an ‘acceptable member of human society.’” Obviously this is not only an argument for abortion; it’s an argument for infanticide.

Other line-drawers have suggested a cultural criterion for personhood. Ashley Montagu, for example, stated, “A newborn baby is not truly human until he or she is molded by cultural influences later.” Again, this is more than just an argument for abortion. It is also an argument for infanticide.

More recently some line-drawers have focused on a mental criterion for personhood. Dr. Joseph Fletcher argues in his book *Humanhood* that “Humans without some minimum of intelligence or mental capacity are not persons, no matter how many of these organs are active, no matter how spontaneous their living processes are.” This is not only an argument for abortion and infanticide; it’s adequate justification for euthanasia and the potential elimination of those who do not possess a certain IQ. In other writings, Joseph Fletcher suggested that an “individual” was not truly a “person” unless he has an IQ of at least 40.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many good arguments against abortion. Obviously there are a number of biblical arguments against abortion. But there are also medical, legal, and philosophical arguments against abortion. The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.

## **Endnote**

1. H.P. Valman and J. F. Pearson, What the Fetus Feels, *British Medical Journal* (26 January 1980): 233-234.

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*Note from Kerby Anderson:*

*So many people ask for more information on abortion; I suggest you check out the Abortion Facts Web site at [www.abortionfacts.com](http://www.abortionfacts.com).*

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# Adultery

## Adultery and Society

The seventh commandment says “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Nevertheless, this sin has been committed throughout history. Today, though, adultery seems more rampant than ever. While tabloid stories report the affairs of politicians, millionaires, and movie stars, films like “The English Patient,” “The Prince of Tides,” or “The Bridges of Madison Country” feature and even promote adultery.

How prevalent is adultery? Two of the most reliable studies come to similar conclusions. The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior estimates that “More than one-third of men and one-quarter of women admit having had at least one extramarital sexual experience.”<sup>{1}</sup> A survey by the National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago) found lower percentages: 25 percent of men had been unfaithful and 17 percent of women. Even when these lower ratios are applied to the current adult population, that means that some 19 million husbands and 12 million wives have had an affair.<sup>{2}</sup>

Whatever the actual numbers, the point to be made is that adultery is much more common than we would like to admit. Family therapist and psychiatrist Frank Pittman believes “There may be as many acts of infidelity in our society as there are traffic accidents.”[\[3\]](#) He further argues that the fact that adultery has become commonplace has altered society’s perception of it. He says, “We won’t go back to the times when adulterers were put in the stocks and publicly humiliated, or become one of those societies and there are many in which adultery is punishable by death. Society in any case is unable to enforce a rule that the majority of people break, and infidelity is so common it is no longer deviant.”[\[4\]](#)

Perhaps you are thinking, “This is just a problem with non-Christians in society. It can’t be a problem in the church. Certainly the moral standards of Christians are higher.” Well, there is growing evidence that adultery is also a problem in Christian circles. An article in a 1997 issue of *Newsweek* magazine noted that various surveys suggest that as many as 30 percent of male Protestant ministers have had sexual relationships with women other than their wives.[\[5\]](#)

*The Journal of Pastoral Care* in 1993 reported a survey of Southern Baptist pastors in which 14 percent acknowledged they had engaged in “sexual behavior inappropriate to a minister.” It also reported that 70 percent had counseled at least one woman who had had intercourse with another minister.

A 1988 survey of nearly 1000 Protestant clergy by *Leadership* magazine found that of the 300 pastors who responded, 12 percent admitted to sexual intercourse outside of marriage, and that 23 percent had done something sexually inappropriate with someone other than their spouse. The researchers also interviewed nearly 1000 subscribers to *Christianity Today* who were not pastors. They found the numbers were nearly double: 45 percent indicated having done something sexually inappropriate, and 23 percent having extramarital

intercourse. [{6}](#)

Adultery is in society and is now in the church. Next, we'll look at some of the myths surrounding extramarital affairs.

## Myths About Adultery

Marital infidelity destroys marriages and families and often leads to divorce. Public sentiment against adultery is actually very strong as approximately eight out of ten of Americans disapprove of adultery. [{7}](#)

Yet even though most people consider adultery to be wrong and know that it can be devastating, our society still perpetuates a number of untruths about adultery through a popular mythology about extramarital affairs. At this point we want to examine some of the myths about adultery.

**Myth #1: "Adultery is about sex."** Often just the opposite seems the case. When a sexual affair is uncovered, observers often say, "What did he see in her?" or "What did she see in him?" Frequently the sex is better at home, and the marriage partner is at least as attractive as the adulterous partner.

Being pretty, handsome, or sensual is usually not the major issue. Partners in affairs are not usually chosen because they are prettier, more handsome, or sexier. They are chosen for various sorts of strange and nonsexual reasons. Usually the other woman or the other man in an adulterous relationship meets needs the spouse does not meet in the marriage. Dr. Willard Harley lists five primary needs for a man and five primary needs for a woman in his book *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*. He believes that unmet needs, by either partner, are a primary cause of extramarital affairs. He has also found that people wander into these affairs with astonishing regularity, in spite of whatever strong moral or religious convictions they may hold. A lack of fulfillment in one of these basic emotional areas creates a

dangerous vacuum in a person's life. And, unfortunately, many will eventually fill that need outside of marriage.

Frank Pittman, author of the book *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, found in his own personal study that many of his patients who had affairs had a good sex life, but came from marriages with little or no intimacy. He concluded that, "Affairs were thus three times more likely to be the pursuit of a buddy than the pursuit of a better orgasm."[\[8\]](#)

Sex may not be involved in some affairs. The relationship may be merely an emotional liaison. Counselor Bonnie Weil warns that these so-called "affairs of the heart can be even more treacherous than the purely physical kind. Women, particularly, are inclined to leave their husbands when they feel a strong emotional bond with another man."[\[9\]](#)

**Myth #2: "Adultery is about character."** In the past, society looked down on alcoholics as having weak character because of their problem. Now we see it as an addiction or even a disease. While that doesn't excuse the behavior, we can see that can't be merely labeled as bad character.

There is growing psychological evidence that adulterous behavior in parents dramatically affects children when they reach adulthood. Just as divorce in a family influences the likelihood of the adult children to consider divorce, adulterous behavior by parents seems to beget similar behavior by their offspring. Is this not one more example of the biblical teaching that the sins of one generation being visited upon the next?

**Myth #3: "Adultery is therapeutic."** Some of the psychology books and women's magazines circulating through our culture promote extra-marital affairs as positive. This myth that an affair can revive a dull marriage is a devastating lie. Depending on which source you are reading, an affair will: make you a better lover, help you with your mid-life crisis,

bring joy into your life, or even bring excitement back into your marriage. Nothing could be further from the truth. An affair might give you more sex, but it could also give you a sexually transmitted disease. It might bring your marriage more excitement, if you consider divorce court exciting. Remember that adultery results in divorce 65 percent of the time. "For most people and most marriages, infidelity is dangerous."[\[10\]](#)

**Myth #4: "Adultery is harmless."** Movies are just one venue in which adultery has been promoted positively. *The English Patient* received twelve Oscar nominations including best picture of the year for its depiction of an adulterous relationship between a handsome count and the English-born wife of his colleague. *The Bridges of Madison County* relates the story of an Iowa farmer's wife who has a brief extra-marital affair with a *National Geographic* photographer that supposedly helped re-energize her marriage. *The Prince of Tides* received seven Oscar nominations and shows a married therapist bedding down her also-married patient.

Notice the euphemisms society has developed over the years to excuse or soften the perception of adultery. Many are not repeatable, but ones that are include: *fooling around, sleeping around, flings, affairs, and dalliances*. These and many other phrases perpetuate the notion the adultery is guilt-free and hurts no one. Some have even suggested that it's just a recreational activity like playing softball or going to the movies. Well, don't pass the popcorn, please.

Forbidden sex is an addiction that can—and usually does—have devastating consequences to an individual and a family. Adultery shatters trust, intimacy, and self-esteem. It breaks up families, ruins careers, and leaves a trail of pain and destruction in its path. This potential legacy of emotional pain for one's children should be enough to make a person stop and count the costs before it's too late.

Even when affairs are never exposed, emotional costs are involved. For example, adulterous mates deprive their spouses of energy and intimacy that should go into the marriage. They deceive their marriage partners and become dishonest about their feelings and actions. As Frank Pittman says, "The infidelity is not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn't whom you lie with. It's whom you lie to." [\[11\]](#) 1

**Myth #5: "Adultery has to end in divorce."** Only about 35 percent of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair; the other 65 percent divorce. Perhaps nothing can destroy a marriage faster than marital infidelity.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. One counselor claims that 98 percent of the couples she treats remain together after counseling. Granted this success rate is not easy to achieve and requires immediate moral choices and forgiveness, but it does demonstrate that adultery does not have to end in divorce.

## Preventing Adultery: Her Needs

How can a couple prevent adultery? Dr. Willard Harley in his book *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* provides some answers. He has found that marriages that fail to meet a spouse's needs are more vulnerable to an extramarital affair. Often the failure of men and women to meet each other's needs is due to a lack of knowledge rather than a selfish unwillingness to be considerate. Meeting these needs is critically important because in marriages that fail to meet needs, it is striking and alarming how consistently married people seek to satisfy their unmet needs through an extramarital affair. If any of a spouse's five basic needs goes unmet, that spouse becomes vulnerable to the temptation of an affair.



First, let's look at the five needs of a wife. The first need is for *affection*. To most women affection symbolizes security, protection, comfort, and approval. When a husband shows his wife affection, he sends the following messages: (1) I'll take care of you and protect you; (2) I'm concerned about the problems you face, and I am with you; (3) I think you've done a good job, and I'm so proud of you.

Men need to understand how strongly women need these affirmations. For the typical wife, there can hardly be enough of them. A hug can communicate all of the affirmations of the previous paragraph. But, affection can be shown in many ways such as: kisses, cards, flowers, dinners out, opening the car door, holding hands, walks after dinner, back rubs, phone calls—there are a thousand ways to say "I love you." From a woman's point of view, affection is the essential cement of her relationship with a man.

The second need is *conversation*. Wives need their husbands to talk to them and to listen to them; they need lots of two-way conversation. In their dating life prior to marriage, most couples spent time time showing each other affection and talking. This shouldn't be dropped after the wedding. When two people get married, each partner has a right to expect the same loving care and attention that prevailed during courtship to continue after the wedding. The man who takes time to talk to a woman will have an inside track to her heart.

The third need is *honesty and openness*. A wife needs to trust her husband totally. A sense of security is the common thread woven through all of a woman's five basic needs. If a husband does not keep up honest and open communication with his wife, he undermines her trust and eventually destroys her security. To feel secure, a wife must trust her husband to give her accurate information about his past, the present, and the future. If she can't trust the signals he sends, she has no foundation on which to build a solid relationship. Instead of adjusting to him, she always feels off balance; instead of



growing toward him, she grows away from him.

*Financial commitment* is a fourth need a wife experiences. She needs enough money to live comfortably: she needs financial support. No matter how successful a career a woman might have, she usually wants her husband to earn enough money to allow her to feel supported and to feel cared for.

The fifth need is *family commitment*. A wife needs her husband to be a good father and have a family commitment. The vast majority of women who get married have a powerful instinct to create a home and have children. Above all, wives want their husbands to take a leadership role in the family and to commit themselves to the moral and educational development of their children.

## **Preventing Adultery: His Needs**

Now, let's look at the five needs husbands have. The first is *sexual fulfillment*. The typical wife doesn't understand her husband's deep need for sex anymore than the typical husband understands his wife's deep need for affection. But these two ingredients can work very closely together in a happy, fulfilled marriage. Sex can come naturally and often, if there is enough affection.

The second need for a man is *recreational companionship*. He needs her to be his playmate. It is not uncommon for women, when they are single, to join men in pursuing their interests. They find themselves hunting, fishing, playing football, and watching sports and movies they would never have chosen on their own.

After marriage wives often try to interest their husbands in activities more to their own liking. If their attempts fail, they may encourage their husbands to continue their recreational activities without them. But this option is very dangerous to a marriage, because men place surprising

importance on having their wives as recreational companions. Among the five basic male needs, spending recreational time with his wife is second only to sex for the typical husband.

A husband's third need is *an attractive spouse*. A man needs a wife who looks good to him. Dr. Harley states that in sexual relationships most men find it nearly impossible to appreciate a woman for her inner qualities alone—there must be more. A man's need for physical attractiveness in a mate is profound.

The fourth need for a man is *domestic support*. He needs peace and quiet. So deep is a husband's need for domestic support from his wife that he often fantasizes about how she will greet him lovingly and pleasantly at the door, about well-behaved children who likewise act glad to see him and welcome him to the comfort of a well-maintained home.

The fantasy continues as his wife urges him to sit down and relax before taking part in a tasty dinner. Later the family goes out for an evening stroll, and he returns to put the children to bed with no hassle or fuss. Then he and his wife relax, talk together, and perhaps watch a little television until they retire at a reasonable hour to love each other. Wives may chuckle at this scenario, but this vision is quite common in the fantasy lives of many men. The male need for his wife to "take care of things"—especially him—is widespread, persistent, and deep.

The fifth need is *admiration*. He needs her to be proud of him. Wives need to learn how to express the admiration they already feel for their husbands instead of pressuring them to greater achievements. Honest admiration is a great motivator for men. When a woman tells a man she thinks he's wonderful, that inspires him to achieve more. He sees himself capable of handling new responsibilities and perfecting skills far above those of his present level.

If any of a spouse's five basic needs go unmet, that person

becomes vulnerable to the temptation of an affair. Therefore, the best way to prevent adultery is to meet the needs of your spouse and make your marriage strong.

## Notes

1. Samuel Janus and Cynthia Janus, *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 169.
2. Joannie Schrof, "Adultery in America," *U.S. News and World Report*, 31 Aug. 1998, 31.
3. Frank Pittman, *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* (New York: Norton, 1989), 117.
4. *Ibid.*, 13.
5. Kenneth Woodward, "Sex, Morality and the Protestant Minister," *Newsweek* (28 July 1997), 62.
6. "How Common Is Pastoral Indiscretion?" *Leadership* (Winter 1988), 12.
7. In this poll Americans were asked: "What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse? Their answers: 79% answered "always wrong" and another 11% answered "almost always wrong." Cited in "Attitudes on Adultery," USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll, 1997.
8. Pittman, 122.
9. Bonnie Eaker Weil, *Adultery: The Forgivable Sin* (Norwalk, Conn.: Hastings House, 1994), 9.
10. Pittman, 37.
11. *Ibid.*, 53.

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# Abortion: A Biblical View

*Sue Bohlin takes a hard look at abortion from a biblical perspective. Her Christian viewpoint focuses on the Bible's perspective on the source and sanctity of life while understanding the emotions many women face.*

## Why Abortion is So Volatile

Abortion is one of the most divisive and controversial issues of our day. People generally have strong views about abortion. It is not a social issue of mere preference, but an issue about life and death.

Abortion draws out the clashes between two divergent world views. The humanistic worldview says, "Man is the highest standard there is. You don't answer to anyone, so do whatever you want." The Christian worldview says, "We answer to God, and He has commanded us not to murder. We must always submit our desires and preferences to the authority of His word."

I believe that the *real* reason that we see such emotional, tenacious commitment to the availability of abortion goes even deeper than the issue of abortion: people want sexual freedom without consequences.

Our culture has a definite agenda supporting any and all sexual expression. It's difficult to find a new movie, or a successful TV show, or a popular song, that doesn't embrace this view of sex. When the director of a Crisis Pregnancy Center in Dallas offered a school district a presentation supporting abstinence till marriage, the district turned her down. Their own presentation featured birth control devices, and they couldn't let her talk about self-control one day if they were going to sell the kids on condoms the next.

As a society, we are amazingly schizophrenic about this sort of thing. My son, who was born in 1982, is a *de facto* member of what they're calling the "Smokefree Class of 2000." No one bats an eye at this worthy national goal of graduating an entire class of non-smokers, but people laugh derisively at the thought of kids not having sex. Which is easier to get, a sex partner or a cigarette?

Teenagers are becoming more and more open about the fact that they are having sex, and this is a reflection of the sexual mores they see in movies, on TV, and in music. The whole society is loosening up to the point that people who have chosen to remain chaste are openly ridiculed on Geraldo; the decision of Doogie Howser, a TV hero and role model for young people, Doogie Howser, to lose his virginity is hailed as "responsible sex"; and a couple that *doesn't* live together before the wedding is asked, "Why not?"

Western civilization has been heading down this path for a long time. With the rise of Humanism during the Renaissance, societies began turning away from God's laws and God's ways. From the Enlightenment sprang a virtual worship of nature. Once nature, not God, became the standard for morality, people started believing that, since humans are a mere product of nature, anything we do naturally is normal, and even good. Sex is natural, sex is powerful, and so it eventually followed that sexual expression was seen as a natural and normal part of all human existence in any circumstances, much on the level of eating and sleeping.

It's no coincidence that the two most heated issues of our day are abortion and homosexuality; underlying both is an insistence on sexual freedom while thumbing one's nose at God and His laws.

Given the sexually charged atmosphere in which we live, it is not surprising that so many people are having sex outside of marriage and getting pregnant. And so abortion is treated like

an eraser; people see it as a way to try to get rid of the consequences of their sexual activity. Of course, there are always exceptions; pregnancies do occur as a result of incest and rape. Some women get pregnant because of someone else's sin. But does that make it right to kill the baby that has been conceived?

## **The Bible's View of the Unborn**

Historically, hiding the evidence of sexual activity was the main reason for abortions. One of the early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, maintained that "those who use abortifacient medicines to hide their fornication cause not only the outright murder of the fetus, but of the whole human race as well."(1)

Pro-choice advocates don't like the use of the word "murder." They maintain that no one really knows when human life begins, and they choose to believe that the idea of personhood at conception is a religious tenet and therefore not valid. It is a human life that is formed at conception. The zygote contains 46 chromosomes, half contributed by each parent, in a unique configuration that has never existed before and never will again. It is not plant life or animal life, nor is it mere tissue like a tumor. From the moment of conception, the new life is genetically different from his or her mother, and is not a part of her body like her tonsils or appendix. This new human being is a separate individual living inside the mother.

The Bible doesn't specifically address the subject of abortion, probably since it is covered in the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder."(Ex. 20:13) But it does give us insight into God's view of the unborn. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for the unborn (*yeled*) is the same word used for young children. The Hebrew language did not have or need a separate word for pre-born babies. All children were children regardless of whether they lived inside or outside the womb. In the New Testament, the same word is used to describe the

unborn John the Baptist and the already-born baby Jesus. The process of birth just doesn't make any difference concerning a baby's worth or status in the Bible.

We are given some wonderful insights into God's intimate involvement in the development and life of the pre-born infant in Psalm 139:13-16:

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

All people, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, or whether they are healthy or handicapped, have been personally knit together by God's fingers. He has planned out all the days of the unborn child's life before one of them has happened.

Sometimes you will hear a pro-choice argument that says the Bible does not put the same value on the life of the unborn as on infants, citing an Old Testament passage on personal injury law. Exodus 21:22-25 gives two penalties if fighting men hit a pregnant woman. The first penalty was a fine, and some people conclude from this that an unborn baby doesn't have the same value as a born child. But that penalty was for a situation where nothing serious happened. If there was serious injury, the offender was severely punished with the same injury he inflicted. If the mother or baby died, the offender was to be put to death. This actually shows very eloquently how valuable God considers both the mother and her unborn baby.

# Post-Abortion Syndrome

After having an abortion, many women feel a sense of relief at having avoided the stress and responsibility of pregnancy and a baby, but abortions eventually cause serious emotional damage in millions of women.

The American Psychiatric Association has identified abortion as one of the stressor events that can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many of us associate PTSD with Vietnam Veterans suffering from the effects of the war; but post-abortion syndrome is a form of PTSD that affects women who have had abortions.

The death of a child is one of the biggest stress points a person can experience in life. Post-abortion syndrome is the emotional stress of not grieving, not letting ourselves feel the pain and suffering that is part of a loss. To be emotional healthy, we all have to grieve through our losses; but what do you do when society tells you there's nothing to grieve about? If a woman does not recognize her need to grieve for her baby, or if she does not allow it to occur, that emotional pain is going to go *somewhere*. Frequently, following a woman's abortion, she goes into what one CPC counselor described as "self-destruct mode": getting pregnant again, having an affair, punishing herself, and generally showing all the variations that severe depression can take.

Depending on how stressed a woman is, PAS can show up within weeks or months of the abortion, or she can have a delayed reaction to it, typically seven to eight years later. Women experiencing post-abortion syndrome generally feel a confusing and overwhelming sense of guilt. One study reported that 92 percent of women who have had an abortion feel guilt.(2) One woman who is now involved in a post-abortion healing group reports that after her abortion, the memory haunted her. She heard this little voice in her head: "Abortion, abortion; you're a terrible, awful person."(3) For many women, the guilt



and shame is expressed through a deep anger—at the doctors and abortion counselors for hurting her and her baby, at her husband, boyfriend, or parents for pressuring her into an abortion, and at herself for getting pregnant and having the abortion.

Many women dealing with the effects of abortion spend a great deal of emotional energy denying the death and denying that what they did was wrong. A woman uses denial to keep herself from coming face to face with the fact that her child was killed and she allowed it to happen. One young woman pleaded with my sister not to leave her alone the day she had an abortion. This hurting teen tried to keep her feelings at bay as she spent the afternoon telling dead baby jokes.

Abortion is not an eraser to rub out a mistake or an inconvenience. It has more than one victim; women as well as their babies are victims of abortions. It is essential that a woman grieve for her baby and face her role in the baby's death; in fact, women who allow themselves to grieve and understand their need to grieve are not likely to experience post-abortion syndrome. But even more essential is that women who have had abortions accept that there really has been a death, that abortion is sin, and that the Lord Jesus Christ's death covered every wrong they have ever done. No sin—not even abortion—is greater than the power of His blood, and He offers total forgiveness and cleansing to everyone who will come to Him in faith.

## **The Sawyers' Story**

Steve and Tessie Sawyer will never forget Halloween 1990. Tessie was four months pregnant, and her doctor had suggested, "Tess, you're 35 years old; let's do a neurological test on the baby. It's just a simple blood test." Sure, that was fine with Tessie...until the day before Halloween, when the test results came back.

The alpha-fetoprotein test indicated that her blood count was extremely low. Normal was 450, and hers was 120. This test has three parts, and the part that came back so abnormal tested for Down's Syndrome. Neither Steve nor Tessie were the least bit prepared for the staggering news that something might be terribly wrong with their baby.

This baby was a surprise to the Sawyers, who already had two very active little boys and weren't anticipating any more. But, being believers, they knew that God's sense of humor and timing is something to be reckoned with.

Later, they did another alpha-fetoprotein test. Hoping against hope, they waited in anguish for the results to come back to Dallas from the lab in Santa Fe. But the second results were just as abnormal as the first. The doctor informed Steve and Tessie of their option to abort the baby, since there was an almost certain indication that he would be handicapped. But that was never an option for them. The doctors wanted to do amniocentesis on Tess, but they refused that, too.

At this point, the Sawyers' friends had two different perspectives. Their church friends were wonderfully supportive, both emotionally and in prayer; their unchurched friends questioned them: "Why don't you have an amnio?" Steve and Tessie were delighted, in the midst of their fear, to be able to share their faith that God was the One in control: "It doesn't matter what the test results would be. We're not aborting this baby. There's a risk of miscarriage or early labor with amniocentesis, and five months' peace of mind in exchange for our baby's life just isn't worth it."

At seven months, the doctor did a special, extensive sonogram to measure the baby's femur. Down's Syndrome babies have longer than normal extremities, but the doctor couldn't see anything unusual about the baby's bones. And he couldn't see the baby's face, either. The waiting, and not knowing, went on two more months.

Tessie had a scheduled C-section. As she was being prepped for surgery, it hit her that in a matter of moments, their lives could be changed forever. That kind of fear feels like a cold, hard iceball in your stomach. But Steve and Tessie were trusting God no matter what happened, believing in His love for them and for their baby, believing that He was still in control.

The doctor delivered Lucas Clay Sawyer and turned him over. "He looks perfectly normal," he pronounced cautiously. But sometimes Down's Syndrome takes a while to show up, and for the next 24 hours they ran a lot of tests on Luke. And I'm glad to say that today he is absolutely, positively, the healthiest, most robust, smartest little kid you've ever seen.

All the world's conventional wisdom advised Steve and Tessie, "Your baby is probably not normal. You should seriously consider abortion." But are they glad they didn't!! We need to hear that test results are sometimes wrong. No one knows why the Sawyers' alpha-fetoprotein test came back with such dismal numbers on such a healthy baby. How many other healthy babies are being aborted after the parents get misleading or just plain wrong test results?

## **Handicapped Children**

The Sawyers had a very happy ending to their story, but sometimes the tests do tell the truth and babies really are sick or handicapped. There's no doubt about it, raising a handicapped child is painful and hard. Is it ever okay to abort a child whose life will be less than perfect?

We need to ask ourselves, does the child deserve to die because of his handicap or illness? Life is hard, both for the handicapped person and for her parents. But it is significant that no organization of parents of mentally retarded children has ever endorsed abortion.

Some people honestly believe that it's better to abort a handicapped child than to let him experience the difficult life ahead. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States, has performed thousands of pediatric surgeries on handicapped children. He remarks that disability and unhappiness do not necessarily go together. Some of the unhappiest children he has known had full mental and physical faculties, and some of the happiest youngsters have borne very difficult burdens.(4) Life is a lot harder for people with disabilities, but I can tell you personally that there is a precious side to it as well. I have lived most of my life with a physical handicap, but it hasn't stopped me from experiencing a fierce joy from living life to the fullest of the abilities I *do* have. I can honestly rejoice in my broken body because it is that very brokenness and weakness that makes it easier for others to see the power and glory of my Lord in me, because His power is perfected in weakness.

Often, parents abort children with defects because they don't want to face the certain suffering and pain that comes with caring for a handicapped individual. By aborting the child, they believe they are aborting the trouble. But as we discussed earlier, there is no way to avoid the consequences of abortion: the need to grieve, the guilt, the anger, the depression.

What if a baby is going to die anyway? Anencephalic babies, babies born without brains, have no hope of living any length of time. I think we need to look at the larger picture, one that includes God and His purposes for our lives. When a tragedy like this occurs, we can know that it is only happening because He has a reason behind it. God's will for us is not that we live easy lives, but that we be changed into the image of Jesus. He wants us to be holy, not comfortable. The pain of difficult circumstances is often His chosen method to grow godliness in us and in the lives of those touched by the tragedy of a child's handicap. When it is a matter of life

and death, as abortion is, it is not our place to avoid the pain.

My husband and I know what it is to bury a baby who only lived nine days. We saw God use this situation to draw people to Himself and to teach and strengthen and bless so many people beyond our immediate family. Despite the tremendous pain of that time, now that I have seen how God used it to glorify Himself, I would go through it again.

Not all abortions are performed as a matter of convenience. Some are performed in very hard cases, such as a handicapped child or as the result of rape or incest. But again, we need to back off and look at things from an eternal perspective. God is the One who gives life, and only He has the right to take it away. Every person, born or unborn, is a precious soul made by God, in His image. Every life is an entrustment from God we need to celebrate and protect.

#### Notes

1. Paedogus 2:10, 96, 1
2. Ann Speckhard, "The Psycho-Social Aspects of Stress Following Abortion," doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota.
3. Nancy Michels, *Helping Women Recover From Abortion* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1988), 76.
4. C. Everett Koop, "The Slide to Auschwitz," in Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 45-46.

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# The Dark Underside of Abortion: A Christian Worldview Perspective

*Sue Bohlin looks at the common effects of an abortion on the women who choose it. From a biblical worldview perspective, it is not surprising that many women experience guilt, shame and denial. Christ can bring forgiveness and healing for those who have taken this brutally wrong path in their past.*

## Laura's Story

No matter how many times Laura<sup>[1]</sup> took the home pregnancy test, it kept showing up positive. She was pregnant, and seventeen years old. She'd gotten an A on her paper against abortion in school. Her parents would never understand, especially since her mother volunteered at the crisis pregnancy center! Her boyfriend was hot, but hardly husband material. He was more committed to skateboarding than to her. Laura had never felt more confused in her life.

When she called her boyfriend to tell him she was pregnant, he just said, "That stinks. Well, I gotta go," and he was gone. She carried her horrible secret for three weeks before finally telling her parents. Her father exploded: "What did I ever do to deserve this? Well, we'll just have to get rid of it. It's the best thing for everybody. You're too young to be a mother." When Laura's eyes flooded with tears, he said, "You

may hate me for a while, but I'm willing to take that risk. You'll get over it. You're young. You can have a real life with a real future this way."

Her mother, visibly shaken, said, "How could you do this to us? What would people think of us, to have a pregnant daughter? You've really gone and done it now, Laura." Two days later, her mother took her to a Planned Parenthood clinic. Laura cried the whole way there: "Please, no! Don't make me do this, don't make me do this!" Nobody listened, nobody cared that she didn't want the abortion. When a counselor asked if she was sure, she just shrugged her shoulders, beaten and defeated.

As soon as it was over, everyone seemed to forget about it. Her parents never brought it up again. All her relationships fell apart. Laura was deeply depressed, not knowing how to handle her feelings. She was too ashamed to talk about the abortion with her friends, and her parents made her promise not to tell anyone.

She didn't get over it. She was stuck in a place filled with anger and hurt. She couldn't overcome the loss of her baby, and she didn't even have words for that. Anything related to babies made her cry: new baby announcements at church, diaper commercials, even driving by Babies-R-Us. Everything triggered relentless heartache. There was a wound in her soul that would not stop bleeding.

Abortion is not the cure to a problem pregnancy. It is what counselor Theresa Burke calls an "emotionally draining and physically ugly experience."<sup>2</sup> The majority of those who have an abortion experience a variety of problems afterwards. One post-abortal woman described it as "emotional torture."

In what follows, we're going to explore the ugly underside of abortion.

## Why Women Choose Abortion

The banner of the pro-choice movement is, “Every woman has the right to choose.” But why do women choose to have an abortion? Many women report that they didn’t want one. Various studies have found that sixty-five to seventy percent of women who get abortions also believe it’s morally wrong.[{3}](#) When women violate their conscience or betray their maternal instincts, that’s going to cause a lot of stress.

Years after their abortion, women will often say that they didn’t want to have one but they felt forced to. They thought it was wrong, but they did it anyway because they felt pressure—from circumstances, or from one or more key people in their lives. Often it’s boyfriends, sometimes husbands. When a boyfriend threatens to leave unless a girl has an abortion, most of the time they break up anyway. Then she has lost both her baby and her boyfriend. Crisis pregnancy counselor Dr. Julie Parton says that almost as often, the pressure comes from parents, especially Christian parents.[{4}](#) She says that there are three main factors influencing Christian mothers to push their daughters toward abortion: selfishness, shame, and fear.[{5}](#)

But the bottom line reason for abortion is spiritual. Even though they’re usually not aware of it, people are listening to the voice of the enemy, who Jesus said came to steal, kill, and destroy.[{6}](#) Satan hates women, and he hates the image of God in the unborn baby. Abortion hurts women and destroys babies.

And for every woman who has had an abortion, there is a man whose baby has died. Whether he pushed for the abortion or fought it,[{7}](#) God’s design of his masculine heart to protect and provide has been violated as well. Dr. Parton points out that over forty-five million men have bottled-up feelings about their abortions, and wonders if there is a connection with the heightened amount of violence in our culture of



death. Could road rage be the boiling over of deep-seated anger in some of these men?

We need to talk more about the ways that abortion steals, kills and destroys. But it is crucial that you know that *abortion is not the unpardonable sin*. Jesus Christ died to pay for all sins, including abortion. He extends cleansing and forgiveness to every man and woman who has been wounded by abortion. He offers reconciliation with God and the grace to forgive ourselves. No sin is greater than His love or His sacrifice to pay for that sin. There is peace and joy waiting for those who have received Christ's gift of forgiveness and cleansing from guilt.{8}

## **Post-Abortion Syndrome: Self-destruction, Guilt and Anger**

Abortion is deeply troubling because it touches on three central issues of a woman's self-concept: her sexuality, her morality, and her maternal identity. She also has to deal with the loss of a child. This loss must be confronted, processed, and grieved in order for a woman to resolve her experience.{9}

Many women find themselves troubled after their abortion because they don't think through these issues before their abortion. The fact that they experience relief immediately after the abortion is no guarantee that problems won't surface later. Unresolved emotions will demand our attention sooner or later.

For millions of women, Post-Abortion Syndrome is an ugly after-effect of abortion, consisting of a number of powerful emotions that can erupt in dangerous and destructive behaviors. Far from being "no big deal," which is how abortion is often minimized in our culture, abortion is a traumatic event in the life of most women who have one. Life becomes divided into "before the abortion" and "after the abortion."

So it is no surprise that so many experience some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder. They used to call this “shell shock” after World War II. PTSD is a collection of negative, destructive behaviors and ways of thinking.

In many women with a history of abortion there is an alarming increase of self-destructive behavior. Many women are consumed with self-hatred, expressing it in drug and/or alcohol abuse. Millions of women battle depression and suicidal thoughts.[{10}](#) One woman said, “I became a tramp and slept with anyone and everyone. I engaged in unprotected sex and each month when I wasn’t pregnant I would go into a deep depression. I was rebellious. I wanted my parents to see what I had become. I dropped out of college. I tried suicide, but I didn’t have the guts to slit my wrists or blow my brains out. I couldn’t get my hands on sleeping pills, so I resorted to over the counter sleep aids and booze.”[{11}](#)

The majority of post-abortive women are plagued by guilt.[{12}](#) As one woman put it, “I hated myself. I felt abandoned and lost. There was no one’s shoulder to cry on, and I wanted to cry like hell. And I felt guilty about killing something. I couldn’t get it out of my head that I’d just killed a baby.”[{13}](#) This high guilt rate is unique to abortion compared to any other medical procedure. There are no support groups for those who had their appendix or gall bladder removed, and people don’t seek counseling after orthopedic surgery. Guilt is a painful aftereffect of abortion.

Some women react with anger and rage. They feel deeply isolated and angry at anyone who hurt them and their baby. They are irritated by everyone and everything, and no one can do anything right. They can fly into rages with the slightest provocation. Often, they are not aware of the connection between their abortion and a constantly simmering heart full of anger, especially since most women feel pressured to have the abortion in the first place.

# Post Abortion Syndrome: Shame and Denial

A huge aspect of Post-Abortion Syndrome is shame. Post-abortal women often feel like second-class citizens. They live in fear of others finding out their terrible dark secret. One woman told me that whenever she would walk into a room, she was constantly scanning the faces: *Do they know? Can they tell by looking at me?* Some women are afraid to attend an abortion recovery group where anyone would know them, even though everyone is there for the same reason. When a Christian has an abortion, she often goes into one of two directions; she either cuts herself off from God because she's so ashamed of herself, or she tries to become the ultimate "Martha," wearing herself out in service to try and earn her way to back to God's approval and blessing. The shame of abortion drives many women to perfectionism because they feel so deeply flawed and sinful.

*Denial* – Many women spend huge amounts of mental energy trying not to think about their abortion. Romans 1 calls this "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." The horror of participating in the death of one's child is too painful to face, and many women work hard at maintaining denial for five to ten years.[\[14\]](#) But eventually reality usually comes to the surface.

Some women find themselves falling apart when their youngest child leaves home, or at menopause. Others become uncontrollably sad when they hold their first grandchild. One woman's denial system shattered when she saw a museum exhibit of pre-born babies and saw what her baby looked like when she aborted him. Another woman almost lost it in nursing school when she learned about prenatal development. The abortion counselor had told her it was just a blob of tissue. Even those who deny their unborn child was a human being and not a clump of cells admit they have to work at maintaining denial. One woman said, "I didn't think of it as a baby. I just didn't

want to think of it that way.”[{15}](#)

*Child abuse* – As the number abortions continues to rise, so does the incidence of child abuse.[{16}](#) Unresolved post-abortion feelings are tied to patterns of emotional or physical abuse of living children. One mother erupted in intense rage whenever her newborn baby cried. She came to realize that she hated her daughter for being able to do all the things that her aborted baby could never do.[{17}](#) One woman beat her three year old son to death shortly after an abortion which triggered a “psychotic episode” of grief, guilt, and anger.[{18}](#)

## **Healing After Abortion**

Post-Abortion Syndrome is a dark, ugly underside of abortion. Researchers have reported over a hundred psychological effects of abortion stress, including depression, flashbacks, sleep and eating disorders, anxiety attacks, a diminished capacity for bonding with later children, increased tendency toward violent outbursts, chronic problems in maintaining intimate relationships, and difficulty concentrating.[{20}](#)

*Death* – Women who abort are approximately four times more likely to die in the following year than women who carry their pregnancies to term.[{21}](#)

*Breast Cancer* – The risk of breast cancer almost doubles after one abortion, and rises even further with two or more abortions.[{22}](#)

*Cervical, Ovarian and Liver Cancer* – Women with one abortion face a 2.3 relative risk of cervical cancer, compared to non-aborted women, and women with two or more abortions face a 4.92 relative risk. Similar elevated risks of ovarian and liver cancer have also been linked to single and multiple abortions. These increased cancer rates for post-aborted women are apparently linked to the unnatural disruption of the

hormonal changes which accompany pregnancy and untreated cervical damage.[{23}](#)

*Damage to Cervix and Uterus* – This causes problems with subsequent deliveries, and can result in handicaps in subsequent newborns.[{24}](#)

*Increased Risks for Teenagers* – Teenagers, who account for about thirty percent of all abortions, are also at much higher risk of suffering many abortion related complications. This is true of both immediate complications and of long-term reproductive damage.[{25}](#)

What do you say to someone who's experienced the trauma of abortion? It's a terrible loss. How do you help someone grieve? What do you say? Perhaps something like, "I'm so sorry. It must be very difficult for you. Do you want to tell me about it?" We can offer a listening ear, full of compassion and grace: "What was the abortion like? What has it been like to live with it?" Seek to validate the woman or man's grief with honor and respect so they can get to a place of healing peace.

What if you're the one who's had an abortion? You need to grieve. Grief is a natural and necessary response to loss. It's more than a single emotion of sadness. It includes feelings of loss, confusion, loneliness, anger, despair, and more. It can't be turned on and off at will. Working through your grief means confronting your loss, admitting it, grieving it with tears and other expressions of sadness.

The pain and grief of abortion is complicated by the fact that it is also sin. But it is not the unpardonable sin. Confess it, and receive the cleansing and forgiveness that Jesus offers. He paid for your abortion on the Cross. He offers you the healing that allows you to be at peace with God and with yourself. He offers you the courage to tell your story with someone safe, which transforms your pain into something

redemptive. He offers you the stability that means you don't fall apart if someone else is talking about abortion, or pregnancy, or babies in general.

Dr. Parton suggests three steps toward healing. First, acknowledge the wound that needs to be healed. It may take ten to fifteen years before a woman may be willing to take this step. Second, reach out for help. The Bible tells us, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."[{26}](#) Find others who have walked the same path, either in person or online.[{27}](#) Dr. Parton says there is an unusual strength of emotional bonding in post-abortive groups. Receive God's forgiveness and cleansing in community; that's His plan. Third, get into God's Word. It's a supernatural source of comfort and encouragement.

There is a dark and ugly underside to abortion, but it's not too dark for God to redeem. Praise the Lord!

## Notes

1. This account is based on a true story, with the name changed, found in Theresa Burke and David C. Reardon, *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002), 23-25.

2. Ibid., 41.

3. Ibid., xx.

4. Personal conversation with the author, Sept. 21, 2007.

5. **Selfishness** – because she had all these dreams, plans, hopes, and ambitions for her daughter. When the daughter turns up pregnant, mom has to grieve the loss of all her dreams for her precious daughter. She'll say things like, "I just can't stand by and watch you throw your life away" or "If you have a baby right now you're just going to be stuck for the next eighteen years."

**Shame** – Mom feels that if her daughter's pregnancy becomes public knowledge, everyone will know she was not a good mother. She failed at teaching her daughter morality and

purity and the things a good Christian mother should have taught her.

**Fear** – of rejection. She fears that her Christian friends will judge and reject her. So she thinks, or says, “How could you do this to me?” The mom can be so focused on her own stuff, her selfishness and shame and fear, that she can’t or doesn’t step up to the plate and help her daughter do what they both know is right, because these other factors are overwhelming her.

6. John 10:10.

7. I am aware that many men never know about the abortion of their child. Some find out later and they often experience deep grief and anger, not only at the loss of their child’s life, but the unilateral decision to keep them in the dark about their own child’s life or death.

8. Come to our website at Probe.org for help with that. [“The Most Important Decision of Your Life”](#) and [“How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change”](#).

9. Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 33.

10. Sixty-three percent of women who have had an abortion seek mental health care. There is a one hundred and fifty-four percent increase in suicide. The suicide rate within one year after an abortion was three times higher than for all women, seven times higher than for women carrying to term, and nearly twice as high as for women who suffered a miscarriage. Suicide attempts appear to be especially prevalent among post-abortion teenagers. Afterabortion.org,

[www.afterabortion.info/psychol.html](http://www.afterabortion.info/psychol.html) (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

11. “Before I Had Time to Think,” Afterabortion.org, [www.afterabortion.org](http://www.afterabortion.org) (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

12. A poll by the *LA Times* revealed that fifty-six percent of those who admitted to an abortion felt guilty. But since another poll showed that seventy-four percent of those who admitted to having an abortion believe it’s morally wrong, I believe that number is way too low. See Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 47.

13. Linda Bird Francke, *The Ambivalence of Abortion* (New York:

Random House, 1978), 61. Cited in [www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/women\\_who\\_abortion\\_and\\_their\\_views.asp](http://www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/women_who_abortion_and_their_views.asp) (accessed February 23, 2008).

14. David Reardon, *Aborted Women-Silent No More* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987).

15. Francke, *Ambivalence*, 63.

16. Psychologist Philip Ney has studied the connection. He sees several effects of abortion:

1) Failure to bond with subsequent children. One mother admitted, "We had our first daughter and I never felt the deep love for her I should have. For several reasons, I guess. The first is that I had never grieved over the loss of the child I had aborted. I was also afraid to love her too much. I felt that God was just going to take her away from me to punish me for killing my first child."

2) The weakening of maternal instincts. Killing one's own child violates the God-given instinct to nurture and protect. It can result in a hardened heart as a way of protecting herself from the truth of her action.

3) Reduced inhibitions against violence, particularly toward children. (Theresa Karminiski Burke and David C. Reardon, "Abortion Trauma and Child Abuse," [Afterabortion.org](http://Afterabortion.org), [www.afterabortion.org](http://www.afterabortion.org).)

17. Reardon, *Aborted Women*, 129-30.

18. Ibid.

19. R.F. Badgley, et al., *Report of the Committee on the Operation of the Abortion Law*, Minister of Supply and Services, Ottawa, Canada, 1977, 313-319.

20. The following citations are found in "A List of Major Physical Sequelae Related to Abortion" at [Afterabortion.org](http://Afterabortion.org), [www.afterabortion.org](http://www.afterabortion.org) (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

21. Gissler, M., et al., "Pregnancy-associated deaths in Finland 1987-1994 – definition problems and benefits of record linkage," *Acta Obstetricia et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 76 (1997): 651-657 .

22. H.L. Howe, et al., "Early Abortion and Breast Cancer Risk Among Women Under Age 40," *International Journal of*



*Epidemiology* 18, no. 2 (1989): 300-304; L.I. Remennick, "Induced Abortion as A Cancer Risk Factor: A Review of Epidemiological Evidence," *Journal of Epidemiological Community Health* (1990); M.C. Pike, "Oral Contraceptive Use and Early Abortion as Risk Factors for Breast Cancer in Young Women," *British Journal of Cancer* 43 (1981): 72.

23. M-G, Le, et al., "Oral Contraceptive Use and Breast or Cervical Cancer: Preliminary Results of a French Case- Control Study, Hormones and Sexual Factors in Human Cancer Etiology," ed. JP Wolff, et al., *Excerpta Medica: New York* (1984), 139-147; F. Parazzini, et al., "Reproductive Factors and the Risk of Invasive and Intraepithelial Cervical Neoplasia," *British Journal of Cancer*, 59 (1989): 805-809; H.L. Stewart, et al., "Epidemiology of Cancers of the Uterine Cervix and Corpus, Breast and Ovary in Israel and New York City," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 37, no. 1, 1-96; I. Fujimoto, et al., "Epidemiologic Study of Carcinoma in Situ of the Cervix," *Journal of Reproductive Medicine* 30, no. 7 (July 1985):535; N. Weiss, "Events of Reproductive Life and the Incidence of Epithelial Ovarian Cancer," *Am. J. of Epidemiology* 117, no. 2 (1983): 128-139; V. Beral, et al., "Does Pregnancy Protect Against Ovarian Cancer," *The Lancet* (May 20, 1978), 1083-1087; C. LaVecchia, et al., "Reproductive Factors and the Risk of Hepatocellular Carcinoma in Women," *International Journal of Cancer* 52 (1992): 351.

24. K. Schulz, et al., "Measures to Prevent Cervical Injuries During Suction Curettage Abortion," *The Lancet* (May 28, 1983): 1182-1184; W. Cates, "The Risks Associated with Teenage Abortion," *New England Journal of Medicine* 309 no. 11: 612-624; R. Castadot, "Pregnancy Termination: Techniques, Risks, and Complications and Their Management," *Fertility and Sterility* 45, no. 1 (1986): 5-16. Barrett, et al., "Induced Abortion: A Risk Factor for Placenta Previa," *American Journal of Ob&Gyn* 141 (1981): 7. Hogue, Cates and Tietze, "Impact of Vacuum Aspiration Abortion on Future Childbearing: A Review," *Family Planning Perspectives* 15, no. 3 (May-June 1983).

25. Wadhera, "Legal Abortion Among Teens, 1974-1978," *Canadian*

*Medical Association Journal* 122 (June 1980):1386-1389.

26. James 5:16

27. [Her Choice to Heal;](http://www.abortionrecovery.org/messageboards/tabid/210/Default.aspx)  
[www.abortionrecovery.org/messageboards/tabid/210/Default.aspx](http://www.abortionrecovery.org/messageboards/tabid/210/Default.aspx)

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# Honor Thy (Very Flawed) Father and Mother

*July 30, 2013*

Someone asked me about how to resolve the biblical command to “Honor thy father and mother” (Ex. 20:12) with the fact that these people may have had huge and damaging flaws. I suggested googling the phrase “honoring your parents” for some insight. Below are some links I found helpful.

But as I told her, one aspect of honoring flawed parents is to understand that the best (or even only) way you might be able to honor them is from a distance, emotionally and physically. You can give yourself permission to do that.

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm's way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it's entirely possible that you can release the woundings you

sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don't deserve your trust.

Honoring flawed parents means you have healthy boundaries so that you know where you end and they begin. It means you learn how to protect yourself so that they can't steamroll over you; it also means you have realistic expectations about what they can and cannot give you or do for/to you. (You may need some help adjusting your expectations.) For instance, in our family there is a family member who has never, ever said the words "thank you." I mean, not even if you pass the salt, or do something they specifically asked! (I think this qualifies as "flawed," don't you?) It is unrealistic to expect that to change. It is an exercise in futility to expect anything different than a lifelong pattern of non-communication. Honoring this person means letting go of the futile hope to ever hear something as simple as "thank you," much less the more profound "I'm proud of you" or even "I love you"! Honoring this person means letting go of unrealistic expectations so we don't set ourselves up for continued disappointment and heartache. (An excellent book is *Boundaries* by Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud, and I taught a 7-week study on this book which is available [here](#) on Bible.org.)

Finally, let me share with you the insight of Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy*:

*"To honor our parents means to be thankful for for their existence and to respect their actual role as givers of life in the sequence of human existence. Of course in order to honor them in this way we need to be thankful for our own existence too. But we also will usually need to have pity on them. For, even if they are good people, it is almost always true that they have been quite wrong in many respects, and possibly still are.*

*"Commonly those who have experienced great antagonism with their parents are only able to be thankful for their*

*existence and honor them, as they deeply need to, after the parents have grown old. Then it is possible to pity them, to have mercy on them. And that opens the door to honoring them. With a certain sadness, perhaps, but also with joy and peace at least. One of the greatest gifts of The Kingdom Among Us is the healing of the parent-child relation, 'turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers' (Mal. 4:6)."*

## **Honor My Mother And Father? How Should I Treat My Abusive Parents?**

[www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html)

**What Does It Mean to Honor Your Parents?** (in this case, when a parent has dementia)

[http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor\\_parents.html](http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html)

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/honor\\_thy\\_very\\_flawed\\_father\\_and\\_mother](http://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/honor_thy_very_flawed_father_and_mother)

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# **LET IT GO**

[Tweet](#)

*January 1, 2013*

Most people's New Year's resolutions involve things to add or incorporate into your life: losing weight, reading through the Bible, decluttering your house, filing your income tax before April 15. (I hereby make a public commitment on that last one.

Feel free to ask me about it.)

But some people don't need to add anything else, they need to LET GO.

Judy's ex-husband made some horrifically sinful, deceived, foolish choices that culminated with sex-change surgery. For months she has been tormenting herself daily with false guilt: if she had loved him more, if she had changed this or that, he wouldn't have mutilated himself, now preening before a mirror at how beautiful he thinks he is. She needs to let go of the fantasy that it was within her power to fix him or change him. She needs to let go of the refusal to accept reality.

Polly is married to a difficult man. Neither one knew the other well when they married after a short internet courtship. She believed that marriage was an endless supply of unconditional love, acceptance and conversation. He believed that marriage was an endless supply of sex multiple times a day. Fifteen years later, she sees women she thinks are released from their sin-wracked marriages and doesn't understand why God keeps telling her to stay put and trust Him. She needs to let go of the fantasy of an easy out that would solve her problems.

Diane dances at the brink of disaster, focusing on how wonderful it would feel to nuzzle and cuddle the other women she's attracted to. When she crosses the line into flirting, touching inappropriately, and making suggestive small talk, she destroys one friendship after another. She needs to let go of the resentment that God says same-sex relationships are wrong and let go of the fantasy that if He would just say it's okay, she could cross the line with impunity and she could get what she's sure would make her happy. Finally.

Colleen bought into the lie that she could get away with cheating on her husband. When she came to her senses after the divorce was final and her husband had custody of their

children, she begged for forgiveness and reconciliation. But he had given himself permission to move on, and refused to consider it. Now she beats herself up regularly: "I can't do this! I want my family back! What can't I have my family back?" She also needs to let go of her refusal to accept reality, pushing back with, "I don't want reality! Why can't I have my family back?"

Brae carries deep wounds from her family. Unrelenting shame often erupts in rage, but Brae cannot imagine being able to express her rage at her shaming parents. So she directs it at herself through life-threatening self-injury. She needs to let go of the belief that watching her blood flow into the bathtub is a solution to the emotions that overwhelm her. And she needs to let go of the belief that hurting herself is the only way to release the rage inside.

We all cling to wrong beliefs and sometimes demonic deceptions that we trust to make life work, but they are our blind spots. We can no more identify those false idols than a fish can tell you what water is.

That's why one of the best prayers we can pray is, *Lord, show me where I'm being deceived. Reveal my idols to me. Show me what I'm trusting to make life work instead of You. Shine a light on where I need to let go of every thought, every habit, every burden, every encumbrance that so easily entangles me* (Heb. 12:1).

And then LET GO of whatever He shows us.

Often, God uses other people who are "doing life" with us, who don't have blinders on like we do, to point out the self-sabotaging or dangerous or foolish things we cling to-or which we allow to cling to us. This is yet another reason He wants us to live in community, where we know and are known and people will speak the truth in love to us.

When they point out something that is a self-sabotaging or

dangerous or foolish encumbrance, we need LET IT GO.

*Lord, I need You to help me LET GO of whatever You convict me of. In Your strength, I set it down, relinquishing it into Your hands. Receive this thing as an act of worship. I can't do it on my own.*

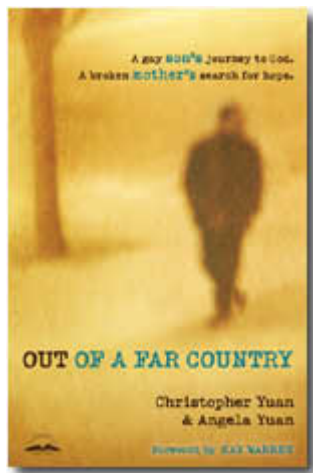
This blog post originally appeared at  
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# **The Power of a Mother's Prayers**

*Oct. 23, 2012*

Jesus' most famous parable in Luke 15 tells the story of a rebellious young man usually dubbed "the Prodigal Son" who demanded his share of his father's inheritance while his dad was still alive, shameful enough, but then went off into "the far country" to squander it on riotous living. A modern-day prodigal and his mother have written their story, telling parallel stories from each one's perspective. The son's "far country" included drug dealing, living it up as a party animal, and gay promiscuity leading to a diagnosis of AIDS. But God brought both mother and son out of the far country to Himself.



Because I am privileged to walk with a number of people out of their own personal “far countries” of homosexuality, *Out of a Far Country* was a compelling read for me. But because I am also a mother, Angela Yuan’s testimony of trusting Christ and then entrusting her beloved son into His hands again and again as a faithful prayer warrior, was deeply encouraging as well.

I was reminded of several lessons on prayer through this book.

First, *it’s better to pray big than to try to micro-manage the outcome*. Angela continued to relinquish her own desires for her son to the Lord’s better plan, which was for Christopher to walk in his true identity as a beloved child of a loving heavenly Father. When her son was angry and rebellious, she kept her eyes focused on the Lord instead of Christopher. She writes, “I started fasting and praying, asking God for wisdom and discernment. I had no idea what it would look like, but I had a clear sense that Leon and I needed to step aside and get out of the way so that God could work in Christopher’s life.”

When Christopher was three months away from graduating from dental school, he learned he was expelled because of his foolish, illegal and sinful choices. His parents went to meet with the dean. Both the dean and the son expected the senior Yuans to put pressure on the school, but instead, Angela said, “Actually, it’s not important that Christopher becomes a dentist. What’s important is that Christopher becomes a Christ follower. Leon and I have flown down to Louisville to tell you”—I looked over at Leon—“that we will support whatever decision you make. I only pray that my son will turn to God.”

And he did. It didn’t happen until he was incarcerated for his drug dealing, but God answered the far more important prayer.



Second, *let go of your time line*. We are such impatient people! We start praying and we want God to answer in the next day. Or week. Or month. But while He is at work behind the scenes, unscrambling the mess we tend to make of our lives, we don't think He is listening or answering. Angela prayed for years for God to bring Christopher out of the far country, and when He did, it was glorious. Christopher went from prison, where he met the Lord Jesus, to Moody Bible Institute, and then graduate school at Wheaton College, and now has a worldwide ministry telling his/their story and bringing great glory to God in the process.



Third, *prayer is essential for the spiritual battles against the forces of darkness*. Christopher's choices to engage in ongoing sexual sin, drug use and wild living went hand-in-hand with a spirit of rebellion and a strong delusion. Both of these involve demons, because his sinful choices opened up doorways to demonic influence. The Yuans' book provides plenty of examples of the spiritual blindness that resulted. But Angela's faithful time in the Word of God and intercessory prayer tore down the strongholds that held her son captive to his fleshly desires and his spiritual bondage. She turned a shower stall into her prayer closet, where she spent literally hours every day immersing herself in the Bible and prayer.



Fourth, *remain thankful*. When Christopher called his parents to tell them that he had been arrested and was in jail, Angela recognized this as the answer to her frequent prayer: *Lord, do whatever it takes to bring this prodigal son out of that far country to you*. For the first time in years, she knew that where her son was, and that he was safe. She grabbed a length of adding machine tape and wrote down that blessing. And then, as God unfolded His glorious plan for drawing Christopher to Himself and then redeeming the pain of his rebellion, she kept adding to the blessing list over the years. When I heard her tell her story at an [Exodus International](#) conference several years ago, she held up her rolled-up blessings list and let it drop: it's about six feet long! Christopher tells me it's almost full on the second side as well. Choosing to focus on the ways in which God continues to bless us in the midst of suffering, developing an attitude of gratitude, keeps us from losing heart in a hard situation.

Fifth, *persistent prayer changes the one praying*. Desperation for her son drove Angela Yuan to an incredible intimacy with her Savior. Her daily time in His word and her gift of intercessory prayer drew her heart ever closer to Him. *Out of the Far Country* isn't just a story of a mother's and son's spiritual journey, it is an inspiration to "always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).



This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_power\\_of\\_a\\_mothers\\_prayers](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_power_of_a_mothers_prayers)