

# Grappling with Guilt

## What Makes You Feel Guilty?

What makes you feel guilty?

Has a relationship gone sour and you find yourself agonizing about what might have been if you'd acted or spoken differently? Maybe your slave-driver boss hassles you for being behind. Are your kids wondering why they ended up with you as a parent?

These days, food guilt is common. With super-slim models gracing supermarket tabloids and magazine covers (admit it, now; you've peeked), even a fit, petite-sized former cheerleader can get depressed standing in the checkout line. "No-Guilt Nachos," offers a *Ladies' Home Journal* recipe.

America Online has a special guilt section dealing with "Relationship Guilt," "Parental Guilt," "Food Guilt," "Workforce Guilt," "Pricey Guilt," "I'm-a-Rotten-Person Guilt," "Stay-in-Touch Guilt," and "Trying-to-Please-Everyone Guilt." Whew!

Ever been late paying a family bill due to negligence or overspending? Been unfaithful to your spouse? Lied to the IRS or a friend? Been angry without reason?

When we fall short of our own – or others' – standards, guilt feelings can result. Unresolved guilt can bring anxiety, depression, ulcers, low self-esteem and more.

I am a recovering perfectionist. As a teenager, I could be pretty hard on myself. I once fouled out of a high school basketball game in the final seconds with our team ahead. The opposing player made his free throws, putting his team ahead. I felt bleak. Our team's desperation inbound pass went to

midcourt, where a teammate caught the ball and threw up a prayer. The ball swished through the net as time expired. We had won. I was the second happiest player there. I probably would have excoriated myself had he missed.

A single man I know became involved with another man's wife. Her rocky marriage had sent her lonely heart wandering and his youthful enthusiasm and libido met many of her wants. They dreamed, schemed, sneaked, and rendezvoused. When discovered, he lied and sought to perpetuate the affair. Eventually, friends convinced him to break things off. He felt guilty for having the fling, guilty for lying about it, and guilty for dumping her.

Feeling guilty can cripple you emotionally. Serious ethical or moral lapses can bring blame and shame. A seemingly minor flaw can sometimes bug the daylights out of you. This article looks at healthy, biblical ways to deal with guilt, and how to know that you are really forgiven.

## **Some Causes of Guilt Feelings**

Why does guilt affect us so, and how can we alleviate it? Some psychologists emphasize that problems in our past can plague us in the present. Inability to reconcile or move past unhealthy relationships with parents, siblings, teachers or classmates may color our emotions. Other authorities feel that people may be following overly rigid standards.

Suggested solutions have included discovering and resolving past hang-ups, relaxing moral codes or easing personal expectations. Certainly many people still suffer from past problems or set unrealistic standards. Forty-eight hours of tasks won't fit into one day, so don't necessarily castigate yourself when only half your ambitious to-do list gets accomplished. If you find yourself sneaking a diet-busting snack, maybe rewarding yourself occasionally is better than whipping yourself. But it seems wise to also consider that, at

least in some instances, we may feel guilty because we are guilty.

If this is true, then therapy for a guilty person could begin with getting them to admit their shortcoming. That's not always easy.

Admitting you're wrong can be hard. Perhaps you've heard of the writer who asked his domineering editor if he'd ever been wrong. "Yes," replied the editor. "I was wrong once. It was when I thought I was wrong but I wasn't."

University of Illinois psychologist O. H. Mowrer pointed out a common dilemma in trying to face your own shortcomings:

*Here, too, we encounter difficulty, because human beings do not change radically until first they acknowledge their sins, but it is hard for one to make such an acknowledgement unless he has "already changed." In other words, the full realization of deep worthlessness is a severe ego "insult," and one must have a new source of strength to endure it.*[\[1\]](#)

I understand this inner weakness problem. As a teenager, I found success through athletics, academics, and student government. I was attending one of my nation's leading secondary schools. President John F. Kennedy and actor Michael Douglas were alumni. But my achievements didn't bring the personal satisfaction I wanted. Guilt, anxiety, and a poor self-image often plagued me on the inside.

My first year in university, I met some students who said that the spiritual side of life offered a solution to the guilt problem. A relationship with God, they said, could give me the "new source of strength" necessary to face my own flaws and seek help. Because of them, I discovered practical reasons why faith could help me overcome my guilt.

## A Solution to Guilt

The hit movie *Bruce Almighty* depicts God's attempts to contact the main character (played by Jim Carrey) by leaving a number on his pager. Turns out the phone number is valid in many area codes. After the film's release, people and businesses began getting calls from folks asking for God.

A Florida woman threatened to sue the film studio after twenty calls per hour clogged her cell phone. A Denver radio station built a contest around the fluke. Some callers to the station seemed to think they'd really discovered a direct line to God. One even left a message confessing her adultery.[{2}](#)

Owning up to guilt can help clear your conscience.

Those college students I mentioned earlier had a joy and enthusiasm that attracted me. They claimed to have a personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. I couldn't believe it all. I kept returning to their meetings because I was curious and because it was a good place to get a date. Especially because it was a good place to get a date!

They explained that God loved me, but that my own self-centeredness or sin had separated me from Him. They said His Son, Jesus, died to pay the penalty for my sins, and rose from the dead so I could receive forgiveness as a free gift. Eventually, it made sense.[{3}](#) Through a simple heart attitude, I invited Jesus to enter my life, forgive me, and become my friend. There was no thunder and lightning, no angels appeared, and I did not become perfect overnight. But I found a new inner peace, freedom from guilt, assurance that I would be with God forever, and the best friend I could ever have.

Of course, my experience is not unique. Harvard psychologist William James, in his classic book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* cites Henry Alline who placed his faith in Christ: "the burden of guilt and condemnation was gone . . . my whole

soul, that was a few minutes ago groaning under mountains of death . . . was now filled with immortal love . . . freed from the chains of death and darkness....”{4}

One early believer wrote: “God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross.”{5} I found that my own guilt was gone, but I also had to draw on His power daily.

A friend of Jesus wrote, “If we confess our sins to him, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”{6} Some call this statement the believer’s “bar of soap.” We confess, being honest with God. He forgives and cleanses us.

But what if you don’t feel forgiven? Is there such a thing as false guilt?

## True or False?

A reader who signed his e-mail “Guilt plagued” told me of his struggles:

*A few years ago, out of desperation, I made a series of terrible mistakes. I am committed to the Lord and confessed my sins. I’m terribly ashamed and embarrassed about what I have done, and I feel ten times worse because I can’t make restitution. . . . I’m having a difficult time processing the idea that He has forgiven me. . . . Please help me . . . what should I do? The guilt is eating me alive.*

Sometimes we feel guilty because we are guilty. Other times we feel guilty without cause. Is your guilt true or false, and what can you do about the feelings?{7}

When my wife, Meg, was in graduate school at Stanford, she regularly parked on the street near her campus office. One

afternoon she discovered a parking ticket on her windshield. During that day – while she was parked there – campus management had painted the curb red, signifying “No Parking.” (The curb had never had paint during her tenure.) Was she guilty?

Her dilemma was both laughable and burdensome. Meg would have to either pay a fine or go to court. She appeared in court and told the judge what had happened. He dropped the charges. (I should *hope* he would!)

The law and the judge’s application of it determined guilt or innocence. Similarly, if we violate God’s proscriptions, we stand guilty. If we do not violate biblical principles, then we may or may not be guilty.

If you know your guilt is real, your solution begins with placing your trust in Christ to forgive you. Once you have, and you become aware of sins in your daily life, simply admit them to God.

Keep short accounts with God. As the proverbial country preacher said, “I ‘fesses ‘em as I does ‘em.” Feelings may lag behind, but if you’ve admitted your sin to God, He has forgiven you.

What if you’re unsure if your guilt is true or false, or if you confess your sins but still don’t feel forgiven?

Consider *the Holy Spirit’s guidance*. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to guide us into truth,[{8}](#) especially concerning sin.[{9}](#) If the Bible doesn’t prohibit certain behaviors, you – if you’re a follower of Jesus – can ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom about them. Jesus’ brother James wrote, “If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you.”[{10}](#) Discerning God’s guidance is not a perfect science, but His inner conviction can help you sort things out.

## Making Things Right

What do you do if you're not sure if your guilt feelings are legitimate, or if you don't feel forgiven?

Realize that *God's promises trump your own self-criticism*. Members of God's family can trust His opinion even when they don't feel like it's true. We can "set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."[{11}](#) Does your heart condemn you unjustly? You can say, "Listen, heart. I'm a child of God. I've confessed my sin and He says I'm forgiven. I refuse to believe your condemnation."

I recommend that you converse with yourself in private rather than in public! For a variety of psychological and spiritual reasons, your guilt feelings may not disappear immediately. Changing established emotional patterns can take time. Choosing to believe God is good starting point.

Realize also that *God's promises trump the real enemy*. This may be hard to swallow, but it's important. Jesus taught the existence of "Satan," a "liar and the father of lies,"[{12}](#) the "accuser" of believers.[{13}](#)

I once considered myself too intellectual to believe in Satan. Our university mascot was the "Blue Devil." To me, the devil was some guy in a blue costume with a pitchfork who ran around at basketball games. Then I heard that Satan the deceiver has some people so deceived that they don't believe he exists. Jesus' life and teachings eventually convinced me that Satan was real. If you experience false guilt feelings, realize that they may have a lower source. You needn't deny the feelings, but you can deny false guilt based on Jesus' friendship with you.[{14}](#)

You may need to *make restitution*. My second year in college, I swiped a plastic bucket from behind the lectern in the

psychology lecture hall. It had been there every day during the semester. "No one wants it," I convinced myself. "It deserves to be taken." I used it to wash my car.

Two years later, I read a booklet about God's forgiveness. That bucket kept coming to mind. I not only needed to admit my theft to God. I needed to make restitution.

My booty long since lost, I purchased a new bucket and carried it sheepishly across campus one afternoon. Finding no one in the psychology building to confess to, I left the bucket in a broom closet with a note of explanation. Maybe a janitor read it. My conscience was clear.

After hearing of this stolen bucket episode in a lecture, one friend wrote his former employer to confess all the items he had stolen and to offer restitution. "We all probably have some plastic buckets in our lives," observed another associate.

Feeling guilty? You may just need to relax unrealistic standards in a stress-filled world. But you also may need to face genuine personal shortcomings. If you do, you can know that the complete forgiveness that Jesus offers is free and that His truth trumps all challengers.

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## Notes

1. O. H. Mowrer, "Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils," quoted in Henry R. Brandt, *The Struggle for Peace* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, 1965).
2. Mitch Stacy, "'Bruce Almighty' Phone Number Annoys Many," *Associated Press/AOL News*, May 28, 2003.
3. For detailed information on Jesus and evidence to support His claims, see [www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com](http://www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com).



4. *The Life and Journal of the Rev. Mr. Henry Alline* (Boston, 1806), 31-40; selection abridged in Henry James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library/Random House, 1936 [original copyright 1902]), 214-215.
5. Colossians 2:13-14 NLT.
6. 1 John 1:9 NLT.
7. For more on false guilt, see, Kerby Anderson, "False Guilt," [www.probe.org/false-guilt/](http://www.probe.org/false-guilt/) and Sue Bohlin, "It's Not Your Fault!" [www.probe.org/its-not-your-fault/](http://www.probe.org/its-not-your-fault/).
8. John 16:13.
9. John 16:8.
10. James 1:5 NLT.
11. 1 John 3:18-20 NIV.
12. John 8:44 NASB.
13. Revelation 12:9-10 NASB.
14. 1 John 4:4 NLT.

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## Divorce and You

*How can you cope with divorce if it comes your way? How can you help a friend who is going through it? What about divorce and the ministry? Practical—and personal—thoughts on this important issue.*



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

## It's Over

Divorce. What thoughts and feelings does that word kindle in you?

Are you happily married and feel that divorce is not an option? Maybe the concept scares you. The fear of loss seems overwhelming.

Are you in a struggling marriage and the end is near? Perhaps you are confused, angry, depressed, or grieving. Or maybe you are happy and envision this as the necessary end of an unpleasant relationship.

Perhaps your parents are divorced. Maybe you recall their angry disputes during your childhood, fear over your family's future, anguish over deciding with whom you would live.

Got any friends whose marriage is on the rocks? You might care for both of them, but how should you relate to them now? Take sides? Remain neutral? Intervene? Keep out of it?

In 1975 I married a wonderful woman. She was kind, sensitive, beautiful, loving, intelligent, fun, talented . . . my best friend. We traveled the globe together speaking in universities, on television and radio, writing books and articles about love, sex and marriage. She taught me much about love, kindness, sensitivity, communication. Much of the modest success I've seen in speaking and writing I owe in part to her excellent coaching.

Twenty years later, in 1995, she told me she wanted out. I felt devastated. The love of my life didn't love me any more. The pain of rejection ran deep. I had not committed adultery or desertion. I felt helpless. Legally, I was helpless. California's "no-fault" divorce laws mean that in our state it takes two to get married but only one to get divorced. One partner can simply claim "irreconcilable differences" – no proof is needed – and a judge will dissolve the union after a six-month waiting period. The unwilling partner is legally powerless to stop it.

Imagine the worst spat you've ever had with your spouse, partner, or friend. Multiply the pain of that by a jillion and

you have a glimpse of the hurt. It felt as if I were being reamed out by an emotional Roto Rooter. I cried buckets. It was really, really awful. Are you getting the idea that I did not like this experience?

What does the Bible say about divorce? How can you cope with divorce if it comes your way? How can you help a friend who is going through it? And what about divorce in the ministry? This article offers you some practical thoughts on this controversial topic.

## **Biblical Issues**

Is divorce a solution or a cop-out?

I appreciate it when speakers or writers make clear their way of looking at the world. My worldview is a biblical one. You may agree or disagree, and I certainly respect that, but may I encourage you to consider what the biblical documents say on this issue?

Moses, the famous Jewish liberator, explained that God made the first man and woman for a close bond. "For this reason," Moses wrote, "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."[{1}](#)

Hundreds of years later, some religious leaders asked Jesus of Nazareth about divorce. He quoted Moses' statement, then added, "Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."[{2}](#) Jesus held marriage in high esteem: "God has joined them together," He declared, ". . . let no one separate them."

But if divorce is wrong, these male religious leaders responded, why did Moses discuss how to handle certain complicated divorce situations? Jesus explained: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you," Jesus continued, "that anyone who divorces his wife, except

for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”[{3}](#)

Strong words. What do they mean? Even dedicated followers of God differ about whether He allows divorce and under what circumstances. A thorough study exceeds the scope of this short series. I recommend Jay Adams’ book, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*,[{4}](#) for more detail.

Years before my own marriage began to crumble, I carefully studied a biblical perspective on divorce and remarriage. Here is what made the most sense to me. Partners should enter marriage for life, “until death do us part.” If splits arise, reconciliation should always be the first aim. If reconciliation fails, I see two biblical bases for divorce and remarriage: adultery of one spouse[{5}](#), and desertion[{6}](#). Adultery or desertion do not mandate divorce, but they make it allowable.

As difficult as this subject may seem, remember that God loves you and wants the very best for you.[{7}](#) If you are hurting right now, He understands. He wants to wrap His arms around you, be your friend, and help you handle your deepest disappointment.

## **Coping With Divorce**

What are some ways to cope with a shipwrecked marriage?

Divorce can teach you a lot. I’m a sinful person who made plenty of mistakes in marriage. I could have been more thoughtful, sensitive, and kind. Though I tried hard to be a good husband, I realized I could not be responsible for another’s decision.

About a year after the divorce, at some friends’ encouragement, I began to speak publicly about what I had learned. I was determined not to speak ill of my ex wife, but I wanted to encourage others. My story got several reactions,

which I began reflecting to audiences to help them process it. Maybe you can relate.

“Some of you feel uncomfortable with this topic,” I would tell listeners. “You wish I would change the subject. I’ve felt that way. Others of you think, I wish the person I love would be as open with his heart as you’re being.’ Some of you are skeptical,” I’d continue. “You’d like to hear *her* side of the story! I can appreciate that. Maybe you’re angry. Perhaps I remind you of your ex-spouse. You think, He talks so sweet. But I bet he’s a tyrant in private!’ I realized that I cannot assume responsibility for all the people who have hurt you. But I can offer hope. Maybe people will reason, He’s hurt; I’ve hurt. He says Jesus helped him with his hurt. Maybe Jesus can help me with my hurt.’”

Jesus can help you with your hurt. He said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls.”[{8}](#)

Often divorcees experience the classic stages of loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.[{9}](#) You may not believe you’re experiencing this. You may be mad at your mate or God. You may promise God you’ll follow Him if He restores your marriage. You may become depressed when the end seems certain. Eventually you may accept reality.

What helped my journey through grief? I had to believe that God really did cause “all things to work together for good to those who love” Him.[{10}](#) I sought to walk closely with Him. I asked forgiveness of my ex-wife for my many shortcomings. I forgave her and forgave myself.

I saw a skilled counselor. A wonderful divorce recovery group helped me understand what I was experiencing and feeling. I did not date for about two years after the divorce was final,

to allow time to sort things out. And some fine friends helped me to land on my feet.

## Responding to a Friend's Divorce

How might you be a friend to someone in the midst of divorce?

The couple next door is splitting up. One partner is bailing on the marriage. You and your family have known them for years. You've babysat each other's kids, carpooled to work, vacationed together, laughed and cried together. You are members of the same church.

How should you relate to them now? Take sides? Remain neutral? Intervene? Keep out of it?

If you are a follower of Jesus, you likely will want to seek divine wisdom. Every situation is different, and marital strife can be explosive. Jesus' mother Mary once had some wise advice that relates well to these situations. She said, "Whatever He [Jesus] says to you, do it."[{11}](#)

I was quite fortunate to have a circle of good friends who reached out in loving care. Perhaps their examples can give you some ideas of what you might do.

My friends did not abandon me in my darkest hour. They stuck with me, let me know that they cared, asked how they could help, arranged opportunities for us to spend time together. One couple had me over to dinner every Friday night during the fall. Then we would watch their son play high school football. It helped take my mind off of my problems, relax, and enjoy being around other people.

Some recommended books,[{12}](#) met me for lunch, and invited me to a concert. One couple listened as I poured my heart out and helped me plan my future. Some organized a prayer meeting among close friends, helped me move, sat with me in court. They would call to ask how I was doing, especially when I felt

particularly lonely or burdened.

Two friends tried to contact my estranged wife to encourage her to drop the divorce action.

After the divorce, many gracious folks welcomed me into their circles and encouraged me to serve others. Some pastors and theologians who knew me well told me they thought it was appropriate biblically for me to remarry. I was reluctant. I wondered if I could ever open my heart to another woman.

Then, at a conference, I met Meg Korpi, a beautiful, sensitive, kind, wise, caring, brilliant, fun woman. She was as dedicated to God as she was wise and gorgeous. (I get points for saying all this in writing, you understand!) I knew what I liked and I liked what I saw! We began to date almost three years after the divorce ended and were married about a year-and-a-half later. We are very happy together. We thank God often.

## **Divorcees and the Ministry**

What about divorce and the ministry? If a ministry leader divorces, should he or she remain in ministry?

If a leader initiates an unbiblical divorce – or commits adultery or otherwise acts inappropriately – one should confront him or her as described in Matthew 18. In my view (not all will agree), with a change of mind and heart – and after appropriate time – it may be possible to restore a fallen leader to effective service. Paul wrote, “If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”[\[13\]](#)

What about the victim of an unbiblical divorce? There are both wise and unwise ways to deal with such tragedies. Ministry boards and executives should take special care to act biblically. They may be tempted to value public image and donations above biblical principles.

Perhaps my case will be instructive. My first wife and I were international speakers with a prominent evangelical movement with thousands of wonderful staff. We traveled the world together, wrote books, appeared on television. In my twenty-fifth year with this organization, my wife filed for divorce without – in my opinion – biblical grounds. This caused quite a stir.

Though initially expressing concern and care, corporate leaders claimed they had a policy requiring me to leave if my spouse divorced me. I was told I was a PR risk and would need to go. At one point they wanted me to agree never to speak or write about marriage, divorce, or remarriage (mine in particular or these themes in general). Things got “curiouser and curiouser.”

Again, this movement has done much good around the globe. It helped me come to faith when I was a student. Please understand that I am seeking here the proper blend of grace and truth, not an easy task in these matters.

My employer owned a seminary, a separate corporation that had no automatic divorce restriction. The seminary president hired me. He took some heat for acting biblically, but those like him who refused to convict me of a sin – divorce – that I did not commit were God’s instruments of grace in my life. After a time of healing, I returned to the lecture circuit. Today, I am privileged to enjoy an even larger global influence via speaking and writing.

Divorce does not have to end ministry. Has any sin been dealt with in a biblical fashion? If so, then the divorced servant of Christ can, with God’s direction and power – and with appropriate accountability – continue to touch lives for Him. Jesus welcomed the denying Peter into fellowship and service.

The wounded servant may become even more effective, able to connect with people on a deep level and to point them to the



One who can heal their broken hearts.

## Notes

1. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
2. Matthew 19:6 NLT.
3. Matthew 19:8-9 NIV.
4. Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).
5. Matthew 19:9.
6. 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, taken with Matthew 18:15-17. An outline of this argument regarding desertion is as follows: 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 can be understood to mean that when a spouse who does not believe in Christ deserts a spouse who does have faith in Christ, the deserted believer is not bound from remarriage. Regarding a marriage between two believers, a deserted spouse should first seek reconciliation. If the deserter will not reconcile, the deserted spouse should follow the biblical "progressive correction" prescription in Matthew 18:15-17. That is, s/he should confront the deserter with his/her sin individually, then (if the deserter continues to resist) with one or two others, then involving the church. If the deserting spouse still resists, then the Lord's admonition to the church (which includes the deserted spouse) is "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." In other words, relate to that person just as you would to someone outside the church, as to an unbeliever. How does the church relate to unbelievers? One of the many biblical teachings regarding relationships between believers and unbelievers is that an unbelieving spouse who deserts a believer does not bind that believer from remarriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). See Adams, *op. cit.*, for a more complete discussion of desertion as allowable grounds for remarriage.
7. Romans 8:35-39; Psalm 23.
8. Matthew 11:28-29 NLT.
9. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., *On Death and Dying*, reprint edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, reprint, 1997).

10. Romans 8:28, NASB.

11. John 2:5 NASB.

12. Especially helpful are Joseph Warren Kniskern, *When the Vow*

*Breaks* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993); and many of the Fresh Start resources

at [www.freshstartseminars.org](http://www.freshstartseminars.org).

13. Galatians 6:1 NIV.

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## Sex Education

Christians are increasingly confronted with arguments in favor of sex education in the public schools. Often the arguments sound reasonable until the scientific reports that advocate these programs are carefully analyzed. I am going to be discussing a number of these studies and will conclude by providing a biblical perspective on sex education.

I want to begin by looking at reports released by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood. One of these reports was entitled, "Teenage Pregnancy in Developed Countries: Determinant and Policy Implications."

Alan Guttmacher was president of Planned Parenthood from 1962 until his death in 1974, so it is not surprising that the Guttmacher report supports the Planned Parenthood solution to teenage pregnancy. The Guttmacher report concludes that the adolescent pregnancy rate in the U.S. is the highest among developed nations and implies that this rate will decline if sex-education programs are instituted and contraceptive devices are made readily available.

There are a number of problems with the report, not the least of which is the close connection between the Guttmacher Institute and Planned Parenthood. But even if we ignore this policy-making symbiosis, we are still left with a number of scientific and social concerns.

First, the authors of the report selected countries that had lower adolescent pregnancy rates than the U.S. and looked at the availability of contraceptive devices. But what about countries like Japan, which has a very low teenage pregnancy rate but does not have a national sex-education program? Japan was excluded from the final "close" comparison of countries. In a footnote, Charles Westoff says that "conservative norms about early marriage and premarital sex may explain this phenomenon better than the availability of fertility control." So we are given only a selected look at developed countries; those with conservative morality (like Japan) were excluded.

Second, the researchers cite statistics that make a case for sex education but seemingly ignore other statistics of concern to society at large. For example, the Guttmacher report suggests we can learn a great deal from Sweden's experience with sex education, which became compulsory in 1954. While it has a much lower teenage pregnancy rate than the U.S., Sweden has paid a heavy price for this rate. Here are a few crucial statistics that should have been cited along with the Guttmacher report.

From 1959 to 1964, the gonorrhea rate in Sweden increased by 75 percent, with 52 percent of the reported cases occurring among young people. Between 1963 and 1974, the number of divorces tripled and the number of people bothering to get married dropped 66 percent. By 1976, one in three children born in Sweden was illegitimate, despite the fact that half of all teenage pregnancies were aborted.

So while it is true that the teenage pregnancy rate in Sweden is down, the percentages of venereal disease, illegitimate

births, and teenage disillusionment and suicide are up.

## **School-Based Health Clinics**

With more than one million teenage girls becoming pregnant each year, family-planning groups are pushing school-based health clinics (SBCs) as a means of stemming the rising tide of teenage pregnancy.

These groups argue that studies of teen sexuality demonstrate the effectiveness of these clinics. Yet a more careful evaluation of the statistics suggests that SBCs do not lower the teen pregnancy rate.

The dramatic increase in teen pregnancies has not been due to a change in the teen pregnancy rate but rather to an increase in the proportion of teenage girls who are sexually active (28 percent in 1971, 42 percent in 1982). The approximately \$500 million in federal grants invested in sex-education programs since 1973 has not reduced the number of teen pregnancies. So proponents now argue that health clinics located in the public schools can reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by providing sex information and contraception.

The most oft-cited study involves the experience of the clinic at Mechanics Arts High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. Researchers found that a drop in the number of teen births during the late 1970s coincided with an increase in female participation at the SBCs. But three issues undermine the validity of the study.

First, the Support Center for School-Based Clinics acknowledges that "most of the evidence for the success of that program is based upon the clinic's own records and the staff's knowledge of births among students. Thus, the data undoubtedly do not include all births."

Second, an analysis of the data done by Michael Schwartz of the Free Congress Foundation revealed that the total female

enrollment of the two schools included in the study dropped from 1268 in 1977 to 948 in 1979. The reduction in reported births, therefore, could be attributed to an overall decline in the female population.

Finally, the study shows a drop in the teen birth rate, not the teen pregnancy rate. The reduction in the fertility rate was probably due to more teenagers obtaining an abortion.

A more recent study cited by proponents of clinics is a three-year study headed by Dr. Laurie Zabin at Johns Hopkins University. She and her colleagues evaluated the effect of sex education on teenagers. Their study of two SBCs showed a 30 percent reduction in teen pregnancies.

But even this study leaves many unanswered questions. The size of the sample was small, and over 30 percent of the female sample dropped out between the first and last measurement periods. Moreover, the word abortion is never mentioned in the brief report, leading one to conclude that only live births were counted. On the other hand, an extensive national study done by the Institute for Research and Evaluation showed that community-based clinics used by teenagers actually increase teen pregnancy. A two-year study by Joseph Olsen and Stan Weed (*Family Perspective*, July 1986) found that teenage participation in these clinics lowered teen birth rates. But when pregnancies ending in miscarriage or abortion were factored in, the total teenpregnancy rates increased by as much as 120 pregnancies per 1000 clients. Olsen and Weed's research had been challenged because of their use of weighting techniques and reliance on statewide data. But when they reworked the data to answer these objections for a second report, the conclusion remained.

School-based health clinics are not the answer. They treat symptoms rather than problems by focusing on pregnancy rather than promiscuity. And even if we ignore the morality of handing out contraceptives to adolescents, we are left with a

claim that cannot be substantiated.

## **Planned Parenthood**

Planned Parenthood has been running ads in newspapers around the country that adopt a lesson from George Orwell and engage in a heavy dose of “newspeak.” One ad, for example, contains an impassioned plea for the continued legalization of abortion by defeating what they call “compulsory pregnancy laws.”

I take it that by “compulsory pregnancy laws,” they mean anti-abortion laws. But the ads seem to imply that the people who want to stop the killing of unborn babies are also bent on coercing women into getting pregnant. That is not what the ads really mean, but isn't it a bit odd to label laws against abortion “compulsory pregnancy laws?”

Another ad carries the title, “Five Ways to Prevent Abortion (And One Way that Won't).” According to the ad, outlawing abortion won't stop abortions. But it will. While it may not stop all abortions, it certainly will curtail hundreds of thousands that are now routinely performed every year. And it will force many women who presently take abortion for granted to consider what they are doing.

But what are some of the ways Planned Parenthood suggests will stop abortion? One of their proposals is to “make contraception more easily available.” The ad states that, since the early 1970s, Title X for national family planning has been supported by all administrations except the Reagan and Bush administrations. The ad therefore encourages readers to lobby for increased funding of Title X.

By the way, Planned Parenthood has been the largest recipient of Title X grants. In other words, the solution to abortion requires we give more of our tax dollars to Planned Parenthood.

Foundational to this proposal is a flawed view of teenage

sexuality that sees cause-and-effect in reverse order. Accepting a distorted fatalism that assumes teenage promiscuity as inevitable, Planned Parenthood calls for easy access to birth control. But isn't it more likely that easy access to contraceptives encourages easy sex? Another proposal listed in the ad is to "provide young people with a better teacher than experience." As commendable as that suggestion may sound, what is really being proposed is increased funding for sex-education courses in public schools and the community. Again, notice the presupposition of this proposal. The ad writers assume promiscuity and propose further sex education in order to prevent pregnancy. The emphasis is on preventing pregnancy, not preventing sexual intercourse.

Hasn't Planned Parenthood ignored a better option? Isn't chastity still the most effective means of preventing pregnancy as well as a multitude of sexual diseases? Shouldn't we be encouraging our young people to refrain from sex before marriage? Shouldn't we teach children that premarital sex is immoral?

Arguments for sex education frequently ignore the reality of human sinfulness. We simply cannot teach sexuality in the schools and expect sexual purity unless we also teach moral principles. The greatest problem among young people today is not a lack of education, but a lack of moral instruction.

## **Parental Notification**

Next I want to focus on state laws that require parental notification when minor children are given prescription birth-control drugs and devices.

Opponents refer to these requirements as "squeal rules" and denounce them as an invasion of privacy. This reaction illustrates how far our society has deviated from biblical morality.

High-school students must routinely obtain parental consent in order to go on field trips, participate in athletics, or take driver's education classes. Many school districts even require parental consent before a student can take a sex-education class. But opponents of parental notification believe these regulations constitute an invasion of privacy.

Critics argue that such regulations will not change the sexual mores of our teenagers. Perhaps not, but they do encourage parental involvement and instruction in the area of sexual morality. The moral burden is placed upon the parent rather than the family- planning clinic.

Without such rules, government ends up subverting the parent's role. Each year taxpayers subsidize thousands of family-planning clinics that provide medical treatment and moral counsel, yet balk at these meager attempts to inform parents of their involvement with their children.

Ultimately, who has authority over teenagers: the clinics or the parents? Opponents of these "squeal rules" would have you believe that these clinics (and ultimately the government) are sovereign over teenagers. But parents are not only morally but legally responsible for their children and should be notified of birth- control drugs and devices dispensed to teenagers.

But even more important than the question of authority is the question of morality. Premarital sex is immoral. Just because many teenagers engage in it does not make it right. Statistics are not the same as ethics, even though many people seem to have adopted a "Gallup poll" philosophy of morality.

Critics of the squeal rule believe government should be neutral. They argue that government's responsibility does not include "squealing" to teenagers' parents. But in this situation an amoral stance is nothing more than an immoral stance. By seeking to be amoral, government provides a tacit endorsement of immorality. Secretly supplying contraceptives



through government-subsidized clinics will not discourage premarital sex. It will encourage teenage sexual promiscuity.

Again, critics of the squeal rule see cause-and-effect acting in only one direction. They contend that the fact of sexually active teenagers requires birth control clinics. But isn't the reverse more accurate? The existence of birth control clinics, along with the proliferation of sex-education courses, no doubt contributes to teenage promiscuity.

Experience with these rules shows that parental notification will increase parental involvement and thus reduce teenage pregnancy and abortion. Parents should not be denied the opportunity to warn their children about the medical, social, and moral effects of premarital sex.

Make no mistake—parental notification laws will not stop teenage promiscuity; secrecy, however, will do nothing but ignite it.

## **A Biblical Perspective**

I would like to conclude with a biblical discussion of sex education. As Christians, we need to understand the basic assumptions behind the movement to place sex-education programs and clinics in public schools.

Proponents of sex education often make naturalistic assumptions about human sexuality. They tend to argue as if young people were animals in heat who are going to have sexual relations despite what is taught at home, in church, and in school. The Bible clearly teaches that we are created in the image of God and have the capacity to make choices and exercise self-control. Sex-education advocates would have us believe that young people cannot exercise sexual control; thus we must capitulate to the teenager's sexual urges.

A second false assumption is the tendency of sex-education programs to ignore human sinfulness. Although we are created

in the image of God, we all are born with a sin nature. Frequently, sex education panders to that fallen nature.

We cannot teach sexuality and expect sexual purity without also teaching moral principles. Most sex-education programs present data in a so-called value neutral way. But, in trying to be amoral, these program become immoral. Human sexuality must be related to moral values. Young people need information about sex, but it must be placed in a moral context. The greatest problem among young people today is not a lack of education about sex, but a lack of moral instruction about sex.

I believe we are involved in a moral civil war over teenage sexuality. Here is how we lost a number of battles. First, the old morality was declared passe. The sexual revolution in the 1960s made words like virginity, celibacy, purity, and chastity seem out of date. In previous generations, peer pressure kept young people from sex; today, peer pressure pushes them into it.

We lost a second battle when we turned sexuality over to scientists and took it away from moralists and theologians. Alfred Kinsey's studies "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" (1948) and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" (1953) presented comprehensive statistics, but no moral reflection. Today, discussions about sex are supposed to be done in value-neutral settings. Inevitably, demographics determine morality.

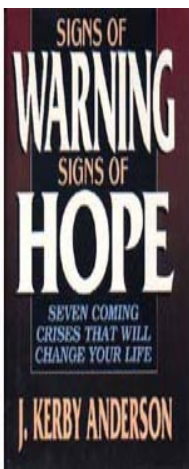
What is the solution? Christians must reassert their parental authority and instruct their children about God's view of sex. We must teach them to flee fornication just as Joseph did in the Old Testament. We must teach them to avoid temptation by making no provision for the flesh. We must teach them to exercise self-control in every area of their lives, including the sexual. In other words, we must educate them about the dangers of premarital sex and the wisdom of obeying God's commands regarding human sexuality. Instead of capitulating to

teenager's sexual urges, as sex-education advocates want us to do, we should provide them with biblical principles and moral leadership in the area of sexuality.

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## Mid-Life Transition



Each year more than three million baby boomers turn 40. Now there is nothing magical about turning 40 per se, but turning 40 does signal the beginning of a time of introspection and re-evaluation that generally occurs during the 40-something years.

Millions of people will encounter a mid-life transition in the 1990s. Why does this occur? How does it affect people? And how can Christians marshal the emotional and spiritual resources to deal with these changes? These are just a few of the questions we will address and attempt to answer.

The leading edge of the baby boom has been the first group to hit this time of transition. Born in the late '40s and early '50s, they lived in new houses, built on new streets, in new neighborhoods, in the new American communities known as the suburbs.

When they headed off to school, they sat in new desks and were taught about Dick and Jane by teachers fresh out of college. They grew up with television and lived in a world brimming with promise. In the '60s they graduated from high school and enrolled in college in record numbers. Then they landed jobs at good salaries in a still-expanding economy and bought homes before housing prices and interest rates went through the roof.

Unlike the baby boomers born after them, the leading edge achieved, in large part, the American dream. They weren't smarter or more talented. Their success was due simply to being born earlier. But even though they have achieved a degree of financial success, many are beginning to encounter a crisis of purpose. They are like the cartoon that appeared in *The New Yorker*. The husband turns to his wife over the breakfast table and says, "The egg timer is pinging. The toaster is popping. The coffeepot is perking. Is this it, Alice? Is this the great American dream?"

Millions in this generation will no doubt repeat these questions in the next two decades. Is this it? Is this the great American dream? Add to these questions others like: Where is my life going? Is this all I am ever going to achieve?

In some ways, these are strange questions coming from the leading edge boomers who enjoy the fruits of the American economy. They have achieved a measure of success and yet they are asking questions that signal a coming crisis of purpose. So why a crisis of purpose? And why now?

## **The Age 40 Transition**

As it enters mid-life, the baby boom generation remains an enigma. Its members rejected the values of their parents and changed the structure of their families in ways unimaginable to a previous generation. But they must now shoulder adult

responsibilities and assume positions of leadership (if they aren't already in them). Put another way: the baby boom stands at a point of transition. This is not the first time this generation has collectively faced a point of transition. When the leading-edge boomers began turning 30, they hit what psychologist Daniel Levinson calls the "Age 30 Transition." The struggle of leaving childhood and entering the adult years was worked out in a period of stagnant wages and appreciating house prices. Ultimately the collective angst of the boom generation turned Gail Sheehy's book *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* into a runaway bestseller. Among other things, the book assured the baby boomers that they were not alone in their confrontation with a major lifestage.

The leading edge of this generation is now in the midst of a more significant transition: the mid-life transition. Turning 40 is no more a predictor of change than turning 30 was. But somewhere in that time period, mid-life re-evaluation begins. It is a stage in which men and women begin to evaluate and question their priorities and deal with their dreams and aspirations.

While this transition is both somber and serious, some have attempted to inject some levity into the discussion. Lawyer Ron Katz found the YUPPIE designation an inaccurate description of his friends' lifestyle. So he coined, somewhat facetiously, yet another acronym to describe boomers at this stage. No longer rolling stones, but not yet the grateful dead, they're MOSS—middle-age, overstressed, semi-affluent suburbanites.

According to Katz, MOSS (or MOSSY, if you prefer the adjective) is what YUPPIES have become in the 1990s. As Katz says, a MOSS is "41 years old; more overstressed than overworked; affluent but doesn't feel that way." A MOSS also is beginning to understand why the world hasn't changed more over the past 25 years; [and] hopes that the world changes somewhat less over the next 30 years.

And while some social commentators want to discount the existence of a mid-life crisis, psychologists and sociologists assure us that something is indeed taking place. It is not merely media hype or self-fulfilling prophecy. During the years of mid-life, a substantial re-evaluation is taking place.

In actuality, the transition to mid-life is gradual. There are no major landmarks or signposts that signal our entry into this new and uncharted domain. Perhaps that is why there are so many jokes about turning 40 even though nothing of any significance actually happens on one's 40th birthday. Turning 40 provides a visible demarcation of a gradual process.

## **The Seasons of a Man's Life**

In the preface of his book *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson says, "Adults hope that life begins at 40—but the great anxiety is that it ends there." Fearing this may be true, many baby boomers are beginning to become "frantic at forty- something." They are making a transition from the years of their youth to a time of adulthood without any hope or optimism.

In his book, Daniel Levinson describes a number of developmental stages in adult life. He delineates an early adult era from the mid-20s to the late 30s. He also discusses a middle adult era from the mid-40s to the early 60s. What is in-between is what he calls the years of mid-life transition. He sees these years as a bridge between young adulthood and senior membership in one's occupational world.

The psychological study done by Levinson focused on men between the ages of 35 and 45. He found that about 80 percent of those studied went through a time of personal crisis and re-evaluation during this mid-life transition. Levinson argued that the 20 percent that did not encounter a struggle were in a state of denial and would go through this transition later.

This raises the first of two assumptions in these studies.

While the stages and themes documented by these studies are descriptive, they are by no means normative. As a Christian, I reject a deterministic model which predicts that everyone will go through a certain stage. While writing an earlier book on the subject of death and dying, I found that not all people go through the same psychological stages of grief. Christians, for example, who have come to terms with their own mortality and the mortality of their loved ones can face death and agree with the apostle Paul that it is better "to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." Likewise, people who have come to grips with their place in the world may not face a wrenching mid-life crisis.

A second assumption has to do with the subjects of these studies. The major studies of adult development (including Levinson's study) used male subjects born before the 1930 depression. Comparable studies for women were not done, and studies of baby boomers have not been done.

The men in the study have at least three things in common. They grew up in stable families; they had realistic goals for their lives; and they became adults in an expanding economy. Few experienced divorces in their families. Most had simple goals like "being able to provide for their families" and "being a good father." They also built their careers in a flourishing economic climate.

These assumptions are not true for the baby boom generation. They grew up in less-stable families and now are raising families in a world where divorce is very common. Baby boomers have much greater expectations and thus have personal goals that are much more difficult to fulfill. And baby boomers reached adulthood when the economy was shrinking.

Such differences make it difficult to apply these studies directly to the boom generation. While some investigators

argue that talk about a true mid-life “crisis” is overblown, most believe the current generation will be even more susceptible to a crisis than the previous one.

## **New Roles**

In his research, Levinson discovered a number of themes that surface during the time of mid-life transition. The first is that mid-life transition involves adapting to new roles and responsibilities. By the time you are in your 30s, you are expected to think and behave like a parent. You can postpone this for awhile, and the boom generation has been fairly successful at postponing adulthood by extending the period simply called “youth.” Boomers extended adolescence into their 20s and even into their 30s. Now they are facing different and more demanding sets of roles and expectations. They are taking senior positions in their jobs and must provide care for both their children and their aging parents.

A man in his 40s is usually regarded by people in their 20s as a full generation removed. He is seen more as a parent than as a brother. In the minds of those who are younger, he is “Dad” rather than “buddy.” This message comes first as a surprise and then as an irritation to a man in mid-life.

Another way to look at this transition is to use the definitions of generations used by Spanish philosopher Jos Ortega y Gasset. He identifies five generations: childhood, youth, initiation, dominance, and old age.

The Initiation generation includes the time of mid-life transition and leads to what he calls the Dominant Generation, where individuals are expected to assume the mantle of leadership, authority, and responsibility. According to Ortega y Gasset, the Initiation and Dominant generations are the two most crucial ones. The relations between them and the successful passing of authority from one to another affect the fate of society. During the 1990s and the early part of the



21st century, this transition from the older generation to the younger generation will be taking place.

## **Mortality**

The second stage of mid-life transition involves dealing with our own mortality. In mid-life we become increasingly aware of death. Living in a death-denying culture shields us from a sense of our own mortality. And being young further heightens our sense of indestructibility. Teenagers and young adults tend to think of themselves as “bullet-proof” and destined for immortality. But by the age of 40, we have seen many people not much older than ourselves succumb to cancer and heart attacks. Many of us have seen death in our own families. The death of a parent is a clear signal that we are now on our own. It also reminds us how short life really is.

People going through this transition not only face a crisis of mortality; they face a crisis of growing old. Baby boomers are entering what I call the “Ache Age.” Vigorous exercise is followed by hurting muscles that seem to stay sore longer. Cuts and bruises that used to heal almost overnight take much longer to heal. Such physiological reminders also focus our attention on our own mortality.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has identified five different stages of grief. Although these describe the psychological stages of a patient who is dying, they correlate remarkably well with the feelings people go through in mid-life. Whether it is the death of an individual or the death of their dreams, the emotional feelings are often the same.

## **Culminating Events**

A mid-life transition surfaces from a culminating event. This event serves as a marker for a conclusion of young adulthood. It may be a very obvious one like a promotion or being fired from a job. But it also might be something that no one would

be able to identify, not even our spouses. It is a milestone that helps us see that one of our life's dreams is not going to be realized, and it provides an estimate for future success or fulfillment.

In *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson argues that the dreams we have are so compelling that nothing short of total success will satisfy. In other words, there is no such thing as modest success. Frequently, the culminating event is seen as evidence of flawed success and often as total failure.

To those on the outside looking in, a man may seem like he has reached the pinnacle of success. But they can't see into his irrational mind affected by sin. He may have dreams that are hopelessly unrealistic, especially in youth.

It may be that a man is the president of a very successful company, but nevertheless feels like a failure because his dream was to be President of the United States. A man who is very athletic and runs marathons feels unfulfilled because his dream was to play in the NBA. A woman who is one of the top salespeople in the company may feel inadequate because she wanted a family and cannot have kids.

## **Intense Introspection**

Fourth, mid-life transition involves intense introspection. A consistent pattern of adult life is an early struggle in adulthood to achieve a measure of success followed by a mid-life appraisal of one's values and philosophy of life. A man around 40 begins to reassess the meaning of life and begins reconsidering the fate of his youthful dreams. He is asking major questions like: Is this all I am going to do the rest of my life? Is this all I am going to achieve?

Many people find that what they thought was going to make them happy isn't making them happy. They enjoyed law school and the first few years of law. But the thought of practicing law for

the rest of their live is not very fulfilling. They enjoyed the first few years selling life insurance, but the thought of selling insurance for another 30 years sounds more like torture than a career.

This is a time when an individual shines a light on his or her accomplishments and sets an agenda for the second half of life. There may or may not be major mid-course corrections depending on the evaluation.

## **Leaving a Legacy**

Finally, a mid-life transition involves leaving a legacy. As we come to grips with our own mortality, we inevitably desire immortality, which is “one of the strongest and least malleable of human motives.” Leaving a legacy means finding a form of immortality by leaving something behind. One is reminded of Woody Allen’s quip that he didn’t want to be immortal by leaving something behind; he wanted to be immortal by not dying. But since that is not possible, then an individual seeks to leave a legacy, and that quest usually forms the core of the second half of a person’s life.

Successful resolution of mid-life comes from determining what legacy—possessions, memories, ministry—we will leave behind. The legacy may encompass family, work, or all of society. It may involve contributions as a parent, spouse, leader, or mentor. These elements of the legacy define the path we will take in the second half of our lives.

## **Application**

These then are the basic themes of the mid-life transition. For the Christian, there are two points of application. First is a personal application. If you are going through mid-life, recognize that you are going to be in a daily battle over three issues.

First, you will have a daily battle with your thoughts. We need to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). We will also have a daily battle with temptation. A key verse to memorize is 1 Corinthians 10:13. And finally we will have a daily battle with sin and must confess our sins (1 John 1:8-9).

The second point of application is to our personal ministry. If we are attentive to this mid-life transition, we will be able to minister to millions of people who will go through this struggle. The 1990s might be the greatest time for harvest in this generation. Until now, most baby boomers have had few struggles. As they confront mid-life, many will be asking important questions that can lead to evangelistic opportunities.

Here are two ways you can help. First, a knowledge of the transition can ease the struggle. Daniel Levinson says knowing the transition is coming is an important antidote to its effects. So a knowledge of this transition can help you reach out.

Second, a knowledge of the Bible can help you to minister. A generation that has been impervious to the gospel may be more willing to listen as it asks the fundamental questions of life. If we reach out in love with a biblical message, we can make a difference.

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## **How to Handle the Things You**

# Hate But Can't Change

*Sue Bohlin presents her personal testimony of how Christ led her to a biblical worldview understanding of her physical state. She explains how understanding her situation ministered to her and others spiritually and emotionally.*

The most unique and distinctive thing about me is something I absolutely HATED when I was growing up. I'm one of the last polio babies. I got polio when I was eight months old, in October of 1953, just a few months before the vaccine was developed. My left leg was paralyzed from the hip down, but a couple days after I got sick with polio, some limited use started to return to my virtually dead leg.

Polio left me with one leg shorter than the other, one foot smaller than the other, weakened muscles, and a serious limp. I had several orthopedic surgeries and went to physical therapy once a week. Every day until I was 14, I did exercises with a weighted boot strapped onto my shoe. I would cry, "But I don't *want* to do my exercises!!!" and my mother would insist, "But you *have* to do your exercises!!!" Before I learned to walk, I was fitted with a full-length steel and leather brace. I was so glad when the movie *Forrest Gump* came out, because my kids were able to see what braces looked like, since they never knew that part of my life!

Polio profoundly affected my body, but it only crippled my body a little compared to what it did to my self image. I hated the way I looked. I hated what the polio had done to me, and I despaired every time I looked in the mirror, thinking, "Ugly! You are so UGLY!!!"

So I got good at two things. One was repressing the polio altogether. I got in the habit, which I actually have to this day, of avoiding looking in mirrors, or seeing my reflection in store windows, or even acknowledging my shadow. I don't

want to see the way I walk, because it hurts to see the way I walk. I consider myself an expert on denial; in fact, one of these days I have to get that T-shirt that says, "Call me Cleopatra—Queen of Denial!"

The other thing I got good at was a very special fantasy. It was so private, so personal, that I never even wrote it down. I loved to fantasize that when I grew up, I would become a princess, and my polio troubles would be behind me because those sorts of things don't bother princesses! Now, the chances of a vacuum cleaner salesman's daughter from Highland Park, Illinois, becoming a princess are mighty slim, but I loved my fantasy.

In high school, the polio got in the way of dating. No one seemed able to just accept *me* as someone worth going out with. I had friends who were boys, but hardly anyone was interested in anything more than friendship. My sixteenth birthday was bittersweet because I was "sweet sixteen and never been kissed." High school boys then, like now, weren't exactly paragons of sensitivity and acceptance! My self-esteem dropped even lower.

I went to college at the University of Illinois to work on a degree in Elementary Education. One day in my sophomore year, something happened that changed the entire course of my life.

A friend was handing out flyers inviting students to see that evening's performance of an illusionist-magician. I thought, "Great! I love magic!" I love to see women get sawn in two, and the fake levitating, and all that David Copperfield sort of stuff, and I started to get excited about it. But then I noticed the small letters at the bottom of the flyer: this performance was sponsored by a campus religious organization. "Forget it," I thought. "I am NOT interested in Jesus freaks." But as the day wore on, I felt like a huge magnet was pulling me to the performance, and I found myself buying a ticket and planning on going. I'm so glad I did.

The illusionist, Andre Kole with Campus Crusade for Christ, was excellent. But I don't remember his magic nearly as much as I remember his message. For one thing, he stopped halfway through the evening and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to take a short intermission. After the break I'm going to use my illusion to illustrate some spiritual principles. If this will offend you, I want to give you an opportunity to leave during the intermission." I thought, "What in the world is this guy going to say?" Besides, I had spent one whole dollar on my ticket and I was going to get my money's worth!

When he started again, he said some things I'd never heard before, but which were quite intriguing. He quoted a famous philosopher who said that we each have a God-shaped vacuum within us, and nothing will fit that shape or fill that emptiness except for God Himself. He quoted someone else who had said that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. He pointed out that there's a huge difference between Christianity and "Churchianity." Churchianity, he said, is man trying to earn favor with God, trying to work his way to heaven. But Christianity as the Bible explains it is a relationship. It's God reaching down to man and calling us into an intimate friendship with Himself, not because of anything we deserve or anything we can do to please Him, but because He desires to have a relationship with us.

Andre Kole really got my attention when he asked, "Do you know what a Christian really is?" I thought, "Of course I do! A Christian is someone who isn't Jewish!" But he said that according to the Bible, Christian means "Christ-in-one," and that a true Christian is actually indwelled by Jesus Christ Himself. That blew me away.

Then he said, "I'm going to use my illusion to illustrate some points. Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern the spiritual universe."

# The Four Spiritual Laws

“The first law is that God loves you and He offers a wonderful plan for your life. When Jesus was on earth, He said, ‘I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.’ Now what do you suppose He meant by ‘abundant life’? I think He meant a life filled with purpose and joy and direction and fulfillment. But as you look around the world today, you see that, obviously, most people are not living that kind of life. Something is terribly wrong.

“That brings us to the second spiritual law: Man is sinful and separated from God. We don’t like to use the word ‘sin’ today, but it’s a word the Bible uses a lot. It’s actually an archery term, and it means missing the mark or the target. It doesn’t matter if you miss the target by one inch or one mile, you’re still missing it. God commands us to be holy and perfect, just as He is holy and perfect. But we don’t even meet our *own* standards, much less God’s!

“The Bible also tells us that ‘the wages of sin is death.’ That means that the penalty for missing the mark of being absolutely perfect and holy is death—not only the physical death of our bodies, but that when we die, we can’t ever be with God in heaven. It means the death of our spirits as well. And once we commit one sin, there’s nothing we can do to restore ourselves. We’re stuck. There’s a huge chasm between us and God, and there’s nothing we can do to cross it.

“That’s where the really good news comes in. The third spiritual law is that God has provided a solution to this dilemma. Since the Bible says that the punishment for sin is death, someone has to die because of our sin. God didn’t want us to have to pay that penalty, so He sent His own Son, Jesus, from heaven to earth. He took on human flesh—that’s what Christmas is about—and lived a perfect life. Then He died a heinous death on a cross, even though He was innocent, and He died in our place. Three days later, God raised Him from the



dead because He was pleased with Jesus' sacrifice."

Now, I had heard a lot of this stuff before when I was growing up in church, but it had never had any impact on me. I knew a lot of religious facts, but they didn't affect my life in any way. I believed that George Washington was the Father of our Country, I believed that Abraham Lincoln was the best president (I was from Illinois, remember. . ."the Land of Lincoln"!), and I believed that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. They were all in the same category in my head, and they all had the same affect on me— which is to say, none at all.

But I had never, ever heard what he said next, the fourth spiritual law. "Each of us must accept Christ's gift of eternal life *personally*." He explained that Jesus was offering each of us the gift of eternal life, which means not only going to heaven when we die but, starting that moment, He would live His powerful, holy, beautiful life from INSIDE US. Whoa!! This was a *totally* new concept!! I thought that God stayed in His corner of the universe, and I limped along in my little corner, and never the twain shall meet. But suddenly I was hearing something completely new and different—that God Himself loved me so much He wanted to come live IN MY HEART!!!! As I sat there, reveling in this new information and this incredible offer, I saw that all along, I had thought I was doing all right with God because I was basically a "good girl." But now I realized that I was missing the boat entirely, because I had never entered into a personal relationship with God at all; I had been caught up in rules and rituals and traditions, and had rejected them all because they had no meaning to me. And here was God offering me HIMSELF instead of those dead rules and rituals and traditions!

My whole spirit cried out in one big "YES!!!!!" It felt rather like a flower turning to the sun and bursting forth in full blossom. Andre Kole prayed a short prayer, which I followed

along in my heart, but my real prayer consisted of one incredibly joyful “YES!!!”

I went home to my dorm, where I told my roommates, “Guess what? When I left tonight, we were in a triple, but now we’re in a quadruple, because Jesus is now living in my heart!” They just groaned, “OH NO!! You got RELIGION!!” They dismissed what I was saying: “We know what this means, Sue. There’s a guy involved in this somewhere. We know how you work. Every two weeks or so you fall in love with somebody new, and whatever the guy believes, that’s your new philosophy. Last month you were in love with Tony Hunter, and you thought you were Jonathan Livingston Seagull! So this is nothing more than a fad, and it will pass when THIS guy doesn’t work out either.”

So my roommates waited for the fad to pass. That was 1973.

## **Just a fad? No way!**

It wasn’t a fad, and it didn’t pass, because my new relationship with Jesus Christ was the most real thing that had ever happened to me. My life became a perpetual surprise box. No one warned me that when God came to live inside me, He’d be making all sorts of wonderful changes! They just started happening.

For one thing, my language cleared up. When I was still at home, I was a “good girl.” But when I went to college, my crippled self-esteem made me crave the acceptance of my friends. And since they all had mouths like sailors, I started talking like that too. I was never really comfortable with it (because princesses don’t swear!). But within about two weeks of the night I trusted Christ, I realized that it was as if God reached down into my vocabulary box with a great big soapy sponge and cleaned out all the garbage that was in there—without asking Him to!

I discovered that, for the first time in my life, I wanted to

go to church. The friend who had invited me to the Andre Kole show also invited me to his church, which was a block from my dorm but somehow I had never noticed it. I didn't even own a dress, but I got one, and went to church of my own free will for the first time in my life. I made a startling discovery. The church was filled with college students who were there because they WANTED to be, not because their parents had made them go! From the very first time I went, I was captivated by the lights on in everyone's eyes. These people were honestly joyful and so glad to be there! Not only that, but they sang all the verses of the hymns, with enthusiasm! This was a *whole* new experience for me. Then, the pastor got up and taught us from the Bible, relating it to our 20th-century lives. I loved it!

And the third thing that happened was a new hunger to read the Bible. I didn't own one of those, either. I had tried it a couple of times; when I was in elementary school, a priest had told us one day that if we wanted to read a love letter from God, to go home and look in our family Bible and read the epistles. So I tried it. Didn't look like any love letter \*I\* wanted to read! It was too hard to understand, and seemed so dull and boring, I shut the dusty book and put it back on the shelf. Another time, another priest told us that if we wanted to see how the end of the world would happen, to read the last book of the Bible. What a disaster *that* was! But now I really wanted to read and understand the Bible, so I went to the college bookstore and found the Living Bible, a modern-day paraphrase that I could easily understand. In the first few pages, I found just what I needed: "If you're new to this book..." It gave a suggested order for reading certain books, and I knew I had the help I needed. I couldn't wait for 4 o'clock every day, when I could go back to my dorm room and read about Jesus, this new, wonderful Friend who was now living in my heart.

But it wasn't the immediate changes that I want to talk about.

Far more important are the long-term changes that God has been working in my life, healing my self-image and helping me deal with the polio.

## **Healing a Crippled Self-Image**

The more I read and studied the Bible, the more I learned to see myself as God said I was, and realized that what He said was so much more accurate and trustworthy than how I felt. I'm a woman, and the way I felt about myself completely depended on external things like whether my hair was clean, whether I was wearing make-up, and the time of the month. So I could wake up, force myself to look in the mirror, and whimper in defeat—then, 30 minutes later, not be so depressed once I'd had a chance to do something about myself. But as I learned to embrace the truth about what God said I was, that it was more valid than my fleeting feelings, it profoundly changed the way I felt about myself.

When I studied Genesis, the first book of the Bible that explains the beginnings of everything, I learned that when God made Adam and Eve in His image, that made them infinitely valuable—not because of themselves, but because of their Creator. And, because I'm descended from Adam and Eve, I learned that I was also made in the image of God, and that makes me infinitely valuable as well. But this was a truth I only learned in my head; I didn't learn it in my heart until my first son was born.

The whole time I was pregnant with Curt, I prided myself on being a thoroughly modern, non-emotional mother. I knew that newborn human babies weren't particularly beautiful, as compared to, say, newborn lambs. When I saw my baby, I was going to say, "Yes, that's a baby all right. Take him and clean him up, and when you bring him back we'll bond."

And then Curt was actually born.

When I first laid eyes on this child who was made in my husband's and my image, this child that God had made by taking Ray's intangible love for me and my intangible love for him and creating a tangible baby that we could hold and love, I thought, "WHOA! This is THE most BEAUTIFUL baby the world has ever seen!" I instantly fell in love with this little bundle of baby, and he was infinitely valuable to me, NOT because of anything intrinsic with him—I mean, all babies do is eat and sleep and poop and cry—but because he was made in our image.

A few days later, in the hospital, I had him on my lap doing a finger and toe check, and just sort of smelling his awesome newborn-baby smell, when I suddenly realized with a rush of mother-tiger protective love, that IF ANYONE SO MUCH AS LAID A HAND ON THIS CHILD, I WOULD PERSONALLY TEAR THEM LIMB FROM LIMB!!!! I didn't know I could love anyone that much, but I loved my baby with a ferocious, passionate love that surprised and overwhelmed me. (Okay, okay, I realized this was probably hormones, but it sure felt real enough at the time!) Then, as I lay there in the hospital bed overtaken with these strong emotions, I suddenly realized something else: that if I, being such a finite and limited human being, could love my child so ferociously and passionately, how much more must my heavenly Father, who is infinitely huge and powerful, love me? God loved me even more ferociously and passionately than I could imagine, and that meant that even if the rest of the world thumbed their noses at me and rejected me, if I knew that God loved me like that, it wouldn't matter.

Another truth that God used to heal my broken self-image came when I read in the gospel of John that "as many as received Christ [and I had], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." I learned that simply being a human being doesn't make us a child of God—that just means we are creatures made in His image. I became a child of God when I trusted Christ to save me from my sins, and according to what Jesus said, I was born

again at that point into God's family. Shortly after I learned about being a child of God, I came across one of my favorite names for God in the Bible: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Then suddenly I put the two things together: if God is the King of Kings, and I am a child of God, then the female child of a King is a PRINCESS!!



I made it!! When you look at me, I might not look like much on the outside, but I know that I am a princess on the inside because my heavenly Father the King made me one when I became His child!!

## **The Hole in My Soul**

The other area where God keeps working with me is the whole issue of polio. After I'd been a new Christian for a few months, I heard about a counselor who was sometimes able to pray for people and they received physical healing. So I made an appointment and went to see her.

I said, "Look, I've had polio almost all my life and I don't want it anymore. Would you please pray for me and heal me?"

She replied, "Well, I must tell you that sometimes God chooses to heal people in heaven, but first, tell me about how you feel about your polio."

"I don't like it, and I want you to heal me."

"Not so fast. How do you feel about God for letting this

terrible thing happen to you?"

"Everything's fine with God and me. Could we just get on with this?"

"No, wait. Having polio is an awful thing. Aren't you just a little bit angry with God for letting this bad thing happen to you?"

I instantly thought, "Good girls don't get mad at God," and said, "NO, I'M NOT ANGRY WITH GOD!! Please, just pray for me and I'll get out of here."

The counselor smiled gently at me and said, "Sue, I'm afraid that no amount of healing is going to happen in your life until you're honest with God. I can see that you have a great deal of anger and bitterness and resentment toward God for letting you have polio, and you need to deal with that first."

"You're not going to heal me?" I asked plaintively.

She shook her head and said, "I'm not the One who does the healing. I think you need to go pray about what's going on inside of you first."

I was terribly disappointed. I had had such hope that finally—FINALLY—I would be rid of the awful, horrible effects of this disease! Polio had ripped a huge wound in my soul as well as damaging my body, but this woman wasn't going to do things my way. Sadly, I got in my car and drove home.

Along the highway, I prayed, "God, this woman seems to think I have all this anger and bitterness and resentment stored up against You because of the polio. Is there anything to this?"

It was as if God said, "Finally, My precious daughter, you ask the right question!" I realized that I had been stuffing a lifetime of disappointment and pain into an emotional basement, and God was opening the door that I had kept shut for years. Feelings and memories started coming back to me out

of the basement, like the time I was about ten years old.

I knelt next to my bed one night and poured out my heart to God. "God, please PLEASE heal me! I *hate* this polio, You know how much I hate this polio! Please, please give me two normal legs! I hate my body, I hate limping, I hate doing the exercises with the boot, I hate going to physical therapy. I hate the lift on my shoe, and I hate having my left leg shorter than the other, and I hate having to wear such ugly shoes. Oh God, I want to go into a shoe store and buy one pair of beautiful shoes so bad! I hate having to wear different size shoes! And You know I can't wear high heels with my leg and foot being so weak. And God, if I can't wear high heels, how can I get married? Everybody knows that brides wear high heels on their wedding day! Besides, who would want to marry me with polio anyway? I hate this toothpick leg, and I hate *hate* HATE the way people stare at me in public, especially little kids. God, please PLEASE heal me tonight while I'm sleeping!"

Then I proceeded to help God out by giving Him helpful suggestions on how to go about healing me. "You can take the extra muscle from my right leg and transfer it over to my left leg. Then stretch the left leg so it's as long as the right, and pull on my toes so they're not crumpled up anymore. And in the morning I'll run downstairs yelling, "Mom! Mom! God healed me!" and she'll call the *Chicago Sun Times*, and it'll be on the front page: "God Heals Suburban Girl." And I won't be able to go to school because I'll need to go to a shoe store and pick out some beautiful shoes like everybody else's, since my different-sized shoes won't fit. Oh! And God, I'll be able to SKIP down the street! I've never been able to skip!! It'll be great! Now, I'll just go to sleep and while I'm sleeping, You work a miracle. Then, in the morning, I won't even have to throw back the covers to see what You've done. I'll *know*." I fell into bed exhausted, having poured out my hurting heart to God, and so hopefully confident that He had heard me and would



do what I asked.

In the morning, I was right: I didn't have to throw back the covers to see what had happened during the night. I knew without checking: absolutely nothing. NOTHING!! God had ignored me! I was *furious*. "God, how could You? I poured out my heart to You and You ignored me! You KNOW how much I hate the polio, You KNOW how much I want to be healed! It's no big deal for You to do this for me! If You could part the Red Sea, I know you could heal me! HOW COULD YOU?????" Then suddenly, I realized that, in my little ten-year-old heart, I was yelling at God, and I was horrified. Good girls don't get mad at God! So I took all the feelings of anger and disappointment and grief and stuffed them all down in my basement, along with all the other feelings I'd stuffed down there over the years.

And now, here I was, 20 years old, and all these feelings and memories were flooding back, and I realized that the counselor was right. I *did* have a huge amount of anger and bitterness and frustration stored up against God. . .and I didn't have a clue as to what to do about it. I'd never heard anyone speak on "What To Do When You're So Mad At God You Want to Spit in His Face." That sounds blasphemous! But that's how I felt, and I didn't know what to do about it.

So I prayed, "God, I don't know how to handle all these feelings, so I'm asking You to show me what to do. And God, it looks like You're not going to heal me of the polio either, are You? So please help me deal with it. I've always hoped that when I was grown up, it would magically go away, but that isn't going to happen. You're going to have to show me how to deal with the polio, too."

God is faithful, and He answered my prayer. In two ways.

## **God is Always in Control**

First, I learned what has been the single most comforting

truth I've ever learned as a Christian: that God has always been in control, and nothing has happened to me that He did not allow to pass through the grid of His love and purpose for my life. It was as if there were a suit of armor around me from the moment I was conceived, and nothing has touched my life that God did not purposely allow to get past the armor. I did not get polio by accident; there was a reason for it. When God saw that polio virus heading for me, He allowed it to do the exact amount of damage to my body that was in His plan for me. But once again, this was a truth I only learned in my head, and the heart-understanding didn't come until the day I took my second son Kevin to an immunization clinic for a shot.

I held him in my arms so that he was facing outward, his little thigh exposed. When the nurse stuck him, he wheeled around, and just before letting out a huge yell, he fixed me with a look of intense betrayal. I knew that if he had been able to put into words what he was feeling, he would have screamed, "You're my MOTHER!! I can't believe you let this woman attack me with that huge STICK!!" I thought, "Oh Kevin, I know you can't understand why I would allow this woman to attack you with that stick. Honey, I *drove* you here so she could attack you with that stick."

What I wanted to say, but it would have been pointless, was "Baby, I know how hard it is for you to understand what's happening. But my Mommy mind is so much bigger than your Baby mind, there's no way I can explain that I know what I'm doing, and I'm letting you hurt because I love you and I'm acting in your best interests, even though all you can feel right now is the pain. I'm so sorry, but you're just going to have to trust me."

I thought, "I'm going to take you home and give you some Tylenol, and you'll start to feel better, and in a few days all the pain and discomfort will be gone, but the good medicine inside you will make you strong and healthy for many years. Some day you won't even remember that today happened,

but the benefits of this shot will last for a long, long time.”

Right about then we walked out into the sunlight, and God spoke to me very quietly, on the inside: “My precious Sue, I know how much you hurt because of the polio. I hate it too—in fact, I hate it even more, because it was never part of My perfect Creation in the beginning. When sin entered the world and spoiled everything, polio was unleashed into My beautiful world. I hate for you to suffer like this. But just as My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, I can’t explain to you what I’m doing with the polio any more than you can explain what you’re doing to Kevin, and that his suffering is good. Sweetheart, you’re just going to have to trust Me.”

Then I realized that just as Kevin’s pain was going to go away in a matter of days, leaving him years and years free from the pain from the diseases he wasn’t going to contract, I needed to see the pain of my polio’d body in the scope of eternity. If my body lives to be 100, which is a very generous estimate, and I have to deal with polio for over 99 years, all that time is still only going to be the length of a pinprick compared to the billions and billions of “years” I’m going to live in heaven—in a *perfect* body. My life on earth does have its difficulties and pain, but it’s still temporary when I remember that the majority of my life will be lived in heaven where all pain will be behind me. And just as Kevin’s vaccination produced health in his body, I realized that God was using polio to produce character and depth and His kind of beauty in me, which will last for all eternity.

## **Giving Thanks for Everything**

The other way God answered my prayer was in discovering a little book (Merlin Carrothers’ *Power in Praise*) that said God wants us to give thanks for *everything* that happens to us. Not just *in* everything, not just the things we think will work out

all right, but everything that comes into our lives. The reason we can give thanks is because of the first lesson I learned, which is that God is in control and has unseen, unknown purposes for what touches our lives. The Bible never tells us to FEEL thankful; it just says to give thanks, which is an act of the will and not of emotion. I looked it up, and sure enough, in black and white, there it was Ephesians 5:20. Even in the Greek!

The book is full of story after story of how God changed people's hearts when they thanked Him for things they hated but couldn't change, and I knew I had stumbled across some wonderful wisdom. I remember where I was the first time I told God "thank You" for the one thing I never, ever thought I could give thanks for: my polio.

"God," I started, "I certainly don't FEEL thankful for polio, but Your word doesn't say to go by feelings but by faith, and Your word says to give thanks for all things. So I thank You for letting me have polio. Thank You for my limp. Thank You for the problem that shoes constantly give me, and how hard it is to find them for my mismatched feet. Thank You that I will never be able to wear high heels. Thank You for the way people stare at me. Thank you for all the physical therapy I had to go through, thank You for the boot, thank You for the surgeries, thank You for the brace I had to wear. Thank you that I don't know how well my body will hold up as I get older. I thank You for all these things."

As I disciplined myself to say "thank You" for these things I hated but couldn't change, something interesting started to happen. I realized that saying "thank You" enabled me to relinquish all the pain and anger I had stored up in my emotional basement, and God took it away and replaced it with His peace. Pain had carved huge caverns in my heart, but now instead of being filled with all the negative emotions I had hidden in there, all that space was now filled with peace and a marvelous joy that came from trusting in the One who loves

me perfectly. (In fact, since I'm only 5 feet tall, sometimes I think I'm bigger on the inside than I am on the outside!)

Something else that was interesting happened as I made myself give thanks for this horrible thing I hated but couldn't change. In addition to giving thanks by faith but not by feeling, I found that there were a bunch of things that I could easily, and with feelings of gratitude, give thanks for. I thank God for my parents, who loved me enough to make me exercise and endure surgeries so that I could walk as well as I did. I thank God for my husband, who, even though he's a runner, has never made me feel in the least bit inferior for not being able to keep up with him, and who is exceptionally gracious and sensitive in making allowances for my limitations. I thank God that if I had to have polio, it was in my leg and not in my arms. I'm a calligrapher, and it would be awfully hard to do hand lettering with my toes! I thank God that, even though I have to use a wheelchair in places like airports and amusement parks and malls, when I get to where I'm going, I can get up and walk. And there isn't a day that goes by that I don't thank God for my handicap permit! I get the best parking spaces!

I love happy endings, but this story doesn't have one. At least not as far as my earthly life is concerned. I still have to discipline myself in my reactions and attitudes concerning my body, because I'm now forced to deal with post-polio syndrome. 30 to 35 years after the onset of polio, a whole new set of symptoms crop up: bone-crushing fatigue, increasing muscle weakness, and pain. So far I don't have much trouble with the pain part (thank You LORD!!!!), but I've had to completely restructure my lifestyle to accommodate a body that is losing strength and ability.

One day, as I was reading 2 Corinthians 12, I puzzled over Paul's re-statement of what God told him concerning his thorn in the flesh: that His power was perfected in weakness. I knew there was a nugget of comforting wisdom in that, and asked God

to reveal to me what He meant. He answered my prayer one day when I was looking out a large plate glass window. Next to it was an expanse of brick wall. I was able to look out through the window and see not only a beautiful landscape outside, but I noticed that the sunlight was streaming in through the window. The sun was shining on the other side of the brick wall, too, but I couldn't see it. Then I realized that a glass window is fragile, transparent, and easily broken, but it lets the light shine through. A brick wall is strong, opaque, and is difficult to break it down, but nothing gets through it. When we are weak, whether physically or emotionally, we're like the fragile glass window, and God's power can stream through us, bringing power where we are powerless. When we're strong, like the brick wall, it's difficult to trust God because we're content in our own human strength—but no light, no supernatural power comes through. I am at the place where I'd rather be a window than a wall, because I want God's power and light to shine through me more than I want strength within myself.

At the time of this writing, I've had a chance to share my story with over 10,000 women, and I've never yet found a person who didn't have some sort of private heartache. Everyone has something about herself that she hates but can't change. Mine is on the outside, but for the majority of women, their heartbreak is on the inside. Allow me to encourage you to think about two things as you consider *your* private heartache.

## **What To Do With the Things You Hate but Can't Change**

First, think about how much God loves you. He proved it once and for all by sending His only Son to die a horrible death in your place, so that you could be reconciled to Him. One truth has been of untold comfort to me: His love is stronger than my pain.

Second, the way to truly relinquish the anger about your private heartache is to give thanks for it. It occurred to me one day that every difficulty in our lives is a beautiful gift wrapped in really ugly wrapping paper. That's because God loves paradoxes, and He wraps His best gifts in tremendously daunting "paper." Imagine if someone held out a gift to you wrapped in the newspaper that had spent several days at the bottom of the garbage can, soaked in chicken juice (ew YUCK!) and covered with coffee grounds, with maggots crawling all over it. You'd say, "What in the world kind of gift could possibly be inside such a grotesque wrapping?" and shrink back from it. But God does exactly that. Many of us never get past the paper to open the gift. But that's what giving thanks will do for you—get you past the ugly wrapping paper to the choice gift inside. For me, it was a heart full of peace and joy. For others, who were sexually abused for example, it's the delight of discovering He will restore the chunks of your soul that other people stole from you. For still others, it's learning that even though you never had the earthly Daddy you should have had, you have a heavenly Daddy who loves you more perfectly and intimately than you can ever know till heaven.

But giving thanks is not a magic formula; it doesn't do any good unless you first have a personal relationship with God by knowing and trusting His Son, Jesus Christ. It is essential that you turn from depending on yourself and your own efforts, and trust Jesus to save you from your sin, placing yourself in God's hands. If you're feeling like there's a rope wrapped around your heart and it's being tugged from the other end, please let me encourage you to identify that as God Himself, pulling you toward Himself and saying, "I love you! I created you to be in fellowship with Me! Please come to Me and give Me yourself so I can give you Myself." If that's what you're feeling, I suggest you tell God something similar to what I'm going to share with you, and what Andre Kole shared with me the night I trusted Jesus:

“Dear God, I realize I’m a sinner and You are a holy, perfect God. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die on the cross in my place. I trust Him now to save me from my sin and to come live inside me. Please make me into the person You want me to be. Amen.”

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## **Shark Victim Surfer Girl's Simple Faith**

Bethany Hamilton looks like any fun-loving young American teenager—bright eyed, smiling, excited about what she enjoys doing. She’s athletic, attractive, trim, tanned and blonde—qualities that in this culture can open many doors.

But Bethany faces a special challenge that many her age do not. She is missing her left arm just below the shoulder, lost to a shark attack while surfing in Hawaii in the fall of 2003. The 1,500-pound tiger shark also chomped a huge chunk from her surfboard. She’s fortunate to be alive.

Bethany, who lives on Kauai, was the state’s top-ranked female amateur surfer before the attack. Such a loss might seem devastating. *USA Today* reports that Bethany seems undismayed. Merely three months after the mishap, she was surfing competitively again. She aims to be among the world’s best surfers.

Rather than hiding her left arm under clothing, she displays it in tank tops and calls it “Stumpy.” When her prosthetic turned out to be too light in color to match her suntan, she nicknamed it Haole Girl, slang for a non-Hawaiian. She peels tangerines by holding them between her feet and using her right hand.



How to account for her bright spirits? Determination and dedication seem part of her makeup. But is there something more?

Her dad gives a clue. "She's not suffering," Tom Hamilton told the newspaper. "Somehow God gave Bethany an amazing amount of grace in this. I am in awe. She never says, 'Why me?'"

Bethany confirms her father's analysis: "This was God's plan for my life, and I'm going to go with it... I might not be here if I hadn't asked for God's help."

This surfer girl's simple faith astounds observers. She has become a media darling—with TV appearances on Oprah, 20/20 and Good Morning America. Book and movie offers have come. She threw out the first pitch for baseball's Oakland Athletics on opening day. Through it all, her family ties remain strong.

Her optimism echoes that of an early follower of Jesus, Paul, whose life-experience log included unjust imprisonments, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks and social ostracism. He was convinced that "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love" Him.

Life can throw many curve balls: serious illness, accidents, terrorism, domestic strife, employment hassles, theft and more. Answers to "Why me?" and "What to do?" are often complex. Accompanying feelings of fear, confusion, grief or despair should not be ignored or minimized.

But perhaps a perspective that includes God in the picture can be a starting place for coping. Maybe the surfer girl's belief and trust have something valuable to say to a society filled with pain and risk.

During a winter New York City media tour, Bethany spontaneously gave her ski jacket to a homeless girl sitting on a Times Square subway grate, then called off a shopping spree, citing her own material abundance.

Something very significant is happening in this young athlete's life. Watch for more.

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## Cool Stuff About Love and Sex

*Hey, kids. Want to read some cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your folks? Hey, parents. Want to learn how to communicate with your kids about these important topics? Read on!*

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



### Cool Stuff

Psst! Hey, kids! Want to hear some really cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your parents? Listen up! (But . . . how about closing your ears for the next few seconds?)

Hey, parents! Want to learn how to talk to your kids about sex in a way they will understand and relate to? Keep listening. [{1}](#)

OK, kids. You can listen again.

“A fulfilling love life. How can I have one? How can I get the most out of sex?” University students worldwide ask these questions. As I've spoken on their campuses, I've tried to offer some practical principles because I believe both pleasure and emotional fulfillment are important facets of sex. These principles relate to teens, too. Teens of all ages.

Sex is often on our minds. According to two psychologists at

the universities of Vermont and South Carolina, 95% of people think about sex at least once each day.[{2}](#) You might wonder, “You mean that 5% of the people *don’t*?”

Why does sex exist? One of the main purposes of sex is pleasure. Consider what one wise man named Solomon wrote. Writing sometimes in “PG” (but not “R-rated”) terms, he said:

Drink water from your own cistern  
And fresh water from your own well.  
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,  
Streams of water in the streets?  
Let them be yours alone  
And not for strangers with you.  
Let your fountain be blessed,  
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.  
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,  
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;  
Be exhilarated always with her love.[{3}](#)

Solomon’s ancient love sonnet, the “Song of Solomon,” is one of the best sex manuals ever written. It traces the beauty of a sexual relationship in marriage and is an openly frank description of marital sexual intimacy. You might want to read it yourself. (Would it surprise you to know that it’s in the Bible? You can dog-ear the good parts.)

Another purpose of sex is to develop oneness or unity. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, Moses, the great Israeli liberator, wrote, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”[{4}](#) When two people unite sexually, they “become one flesh.”

A third purpose for sex is procreation. That, of course, is how we all got here. You learn that in first year biology, right?

OK, so sex is for pleasure, unity, and procreation. But how

can people get the most out of love and sex?

## How to Have a Most Fulfilling Love Life

One way not to have a fulfilling love life in marriage is to concentrate solely on sexual technique. There is certainly nothing wrong with learning sexual technique—especially the basics—but technique by itself is not the answer.

The qualities that contribute to a successful sex life are the same ones that contribute to a successful interpersonal relationship. Qualities like love, commitment, and communication.

Consider love. As popular speaker and author Josh McDowell points out, those romantic words, “I love you,” can be interpreted several different ways. One meaning is “I love you *if*—If you go out with me . . . if you are lighthearted . . . if you sleep with me.” Another meaning is “I love you *because*—because you are attractive . . . strong . . . intelligent.” Both types of love must be earned.

The best kind of love is unconditional. It says, “I love you, *period*. I love you even if someone better looking comes along, even if you change, even if you have zoo breath in the morning. I place your needs above my own.”

One young engaged couple had popularity, intelligence, good looks, and athletic success that seemed to portend a bright future. Then the young woman suffered a skiing accident that left her paralyzed for life. Her fiancé deserted her.

This true story—portrayed in the popular film, “The Other Side of the Mountain”—was certainly complex. But was his love for her “love, period”? Or was it love “if” or love “because”? Unconditional love (or “less-conditional”, because none of us is perfect) is an essential building block for a lasting relationship.

Unconditional love with caring and acceptance can help a sexual relationship in a marriage. Sex, viewed in this manner, becomes not a self-centered performance but a significant expression of mutual love.

Commitment is also important for a strong relationship and fulfilling sex. Without mutual commitment, neither spouse will be able to have the maximum confidence that the relationship is secure.

Good communication is essential. If a problem arises, couples need to talk it out and forgive rather than stew in their juices. As one sociology professor expressed it, "Sexual foreplay involves the 'round-the-clock relationship.'" [\[5\]](#)

## Why Wait?

After I'd spoken in a human sexuality class at Arizona State University, one student said, "You're talking about sex within marriage. What about premarital sex?" He was right. I was saying that sexual intercourse is designed to work best in a happy marriage and recommending waiting until marriage before experiencing sex.

This view is, of course, very controversial. You may agree with me. Or you may think I am from another planet, and I respect your right to feel that way. Here's why I waited.

First is a moral reason. According to the perspective I represent, the biblical God clearly says to wait. [\[6\]](#) Some people think that God wants to make them miserable. Actually, He loves us and wants our best. There are practical reasons for waiting.

Premarital sex can detract from a strong relationship and a fulfilling love life. Too often, it's merely a self-gratifying experience. After an intimate sexual encounter, one partner might be saying, "I love you" while the other is thinking, "I

love it.”

Very often premarital sex lacks total, permanent commitment. This can create insecurity. For instance, while the couple is unmarried, the nagging thought can persist, “If he or she has slept with me, whom else have they slept with?” After they marry, one might think, “If they were willing to break a standard with me before we married, will they with someone else after we marry?” Doubt can chip away at their relationship.

Premarital sex can also inhibit communication. Each might wonder, “How do I compare with my lover’s other partners? Does he or she tell them how I perform in bed?” Each may become less open; communication can deteriorate and so can the relationship. Premarital sex can lessen people’s chances to experience maximum oneness and pleasure. I’m not claiming that premarital sex eliminates your chances for great sex in marriage. But I am saying that it can introduce factors that can be difficult to overcome.

A recently married young woman told me her perspective after a lecture at Sydney University in Australia. She said, “I really like what you said about waiting. My fiancé and I had to make the decision and we decided to wait.” (Each had been sexually active in other previous relationships.) She continued: “With all the other tensions, decisions and stress of engagement, sex would have been just another worry. Waiting ’till our marriage before we had sex was the best decision we ever made.”

Wise words. I waited because God said to, because there were many practical advantages, and because none of the arguments I heard for not waiting were strong enough. [\[7\]](#)

## **The Vital Dimension**

So far we’ve looked at “Why sex?”, “How to have a most

fulfilling love life," and "Why wait?". Consider now the vital dimension in any relationship.

Powerful emotional factors can make it difficult for teens to wait until marriage for sexual intercourse or to stop having sex. A longing to be close to someone or a yearning to express love can generate intense desires for physical intimacy. Many singles today want to wait but lack the inner strength or self esteem. They may fear losing love if they postpone sex.

Often sex brings emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it. As one TV producer told me, "Frankly, I think the sexual revolution has backfired in our faces. It's degrading to be treated like a piece of meat." The previous night her lover had justified his decision to sleep around by telling her, "There's plenty of me for everyone." What I suspect he meant was, "There's plenty of everyone for me." She felt betrayed and alone.

I explained to her and to her TV audience that sexuality also involves the spiritual. One wise spiritual teacher understood our loneliness and longings for love. He recognized human emotional needs for esteem, acceptance, and wholeness and offered a plan to meet them. His plan has helped people to become brand "new persons" inside.[{8}](#) He promised unconditional love to all who ask.[{9}](#) Once we know we're loved and accepted, we can have greater security to be vulnerable in relationships and new inner strength to make wise choices for safe living.[{10}](#)

This teacher said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."[{11}](#) Millions attest to the safety and security He can provide in relationships. His name, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth. Though I had been a skeptic, I placed my faith in Him personally my freshman year in college. Through a simple heart attitude, I said, "Jesus, I believe you died and rose again for me. I ask you to enter my life, forgive me, and give me the new life you promised." He forgave all my

flaws—and there were (and are) many of those. He said His own death and resurrection—once I accepted His pardon—erased my guilt.[{12}](#) That was great news!

Marriage with Jesus involved can be like triangle with God at the apex and the two spouses at the bottom corners. As each partner grows closer to God, they also grow closer to each other. Life doesn't become perfect, but God's friendship can bring a vital dimension to any relationship.

## Parents and Kids

A nationwide survey of teens asked the question, "When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?" Forty-nine percent of teens responding said it was their parents. The next closest response was "Friends" (16 percent). Eleven percent said the media influenced their decisions about sex the most. Only 5 percent said it was their romantic partner.[{13}](#) Kids, lots of your peers think that it is important to consider how their parents feel about sex.

And teens feel that talking with their parents about sex can make important sexual decisions easier. In a subsequent national survey, teens overwhelmingly expressed that they could more easily postpone sexual activity and avoid getting pregnant if they could only talk about these matters more openly with their folks.[{14}](#)

But there's a problem. Too many parents are unaware how important what they think about sex is to their teens. Parents often think that their teenagers' friends are the strongest influence on their teen's decisions about sex. Yet teens don't consider their friends as being nearly as influential as parents think they are.[{15}](#)

And mom, you are really, really important!

A major report based on two University of Minnesota studies involving national data found that teens having close



relationships with their mothers are more likely than teens lacking close relationships with their mothers to delay first intercourse. The report authors note, “previous studies have shown that mothers tend to have a greater influence than fathers on teens’ sexual decision-making.”[{16}](#)

What can a parent do to help their teens develop positive, healthy sexual attitudes and behavior? Here are some ideas:

- Develop close, loving relationships with your kids from the time they are young.
- Model the types of behavior and attitudes you wish them to emulate.
- Listen to them and treat them with respect.
- Talk about sex, your own values, and why you hold them.
- Help your teen think through their life goals, including education, and how teenage sexual activity might affect their dreams.
- Discuss what types of media are appropriate for your son or daughter to consume.

Making sexual decisions can be hard for teens today. Parents and teens can help each other by becoming close friends and by communicating. It’s not always easy, but the rewards can be significant.

## Notes

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This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, "Cool Stuff About Love and Sex," *The Plain Truth*, January/February 2004, pp. 17-19.

# Our Cheatin' Hearts (Radio Version)

*From classroom to boardroom, from sports to shoplifting, people try to get something that's not rightfully theirs. What are the roots of dishonesty? Why do people cheat? How does cheating impact society? Is there a solution? Rusty Wright considers cheating.*



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

## Cheating Ways

Cheating is rampant these days. Just ask the nation's retailers, educators, and investors. From classroom to boardroom, from filling stations to airplanes, folks everywhere are trying to get something that's not rightfully theirs.

The *Wall Street Journal* has reported a rash of petty personal cheating ranging from zipping through turnpike tollbooths without paying to pocketing restaurant silverware.<sup>{1}</sup>

One Los Angeles network television employee described the rush he felt from sneaking into an airline First Class seat from his coach section. "It was exhilarating," he explained of his stealth upgrade. "I felt like I robbed a bank."

A Las Vegas restaurant lost \$10,000 in pilfered ashtrays during its first two weeks of operation. A New Jersey engineer refuses to pay automated tolls on the Garden State Parkway

because he feels the toll plazas are poorly designed and irritating. The state established a bad system, he reasons, so “you have to abuse it.” Convenience stores report massive losses from “pump-and-flee” customers who fill their gas tanks and take off without paying.

A Knoxville-based theater chain watches for discount cheaters who purchase pay-by-phone automated tickets at undeserved senior discounts and hope ticket takers won't notice. Shoppers buy party dresses and power tools, use them, and return them for refunds. A California bookseller laments the customers who try for full-price refunds on books they've purchased from discount outlets. “You want to send them to Miss Manners,” she says. {2}

Prominent sports figures have been flagged for un-citizen-like conduct. George O'Leary lost the head football coaching job at Notre Dame within a week of his hiring for padding his résumé. U.S. Olympic Committee president Sandra Baldwin resigned after confessing lies about her academic background. {3}

Golfers not only adjust the lay of the ball. Some duck pricey greens fees by sneaking onto the course.

I know something about golf ethics. My childhood Miami home bordered a golf course. Occasionally, stray balls landed in our back yard. Neighborhood kids decided a ball was fair game only after the golfer had walked by without retrieving it. But it was entirely ethical, we determined, to cover the ball with a large almond leaf until the golfer passed.

What are the roots of dishonesty? Why do people cheat? How does cheating impact society? Is there a solution, and what is it? This article explores these themes.

## **Campus Cheating**

What part does education play in cheating? Duke University president Nannerl Keohane says that 45 percent of Duke

students have cheated at least once during college. *US News and World Report* quoted one Duke student who plagiarized an assignment: "It's not a big deal because it's just a mindless assignment. It's not a final or a midterm."[{4}](#)

The Center for Academic Integrity reports that:[{5}](#)

- On most university campuses more than 75 percent of students admit to some cheating.
- About one-third of students in one nationwide survey admitted to "serious test cheating."
- Half of the students in that survey admitted to "one or more instances of serious cheating on written assignments."

The Internet expands choices and convenience. Web access and a credit card can buy ready-made term papers or customized writing. Cybercheating can backfire though. Special computer searches sometimes allow suspicious professors to discover the original sources in only minutes.[{6}](#)

Cheating is bad enough when students do it to boost their academic standing. It's a mess when teachers and administrators orchestrate it. So-called "high-stakes testing" has tempted some educators to cheat to retain their jobs, earn merit pay or even preserve their schools. Some states base financial allocations on school test scores. Administrators anxious over funding cuts prompt teachers to provide, shall we say, inappropriate assistance.

New York City teacher Stacey Moscovitz gave her students answers to tests, raising their scores and the school's academic ranking. She says the school principal encouraged the practice. Later, Moscovitz felt she had betrayed her kids. Students needing remedial help did not qualify for it due to their artificially high test scores.

Moscovitz blew the whistle, prompting an investigation by Edward Stancik, the New York City School District independent

investigator. Stancik found fifty-two educators implicated in thirty-two schools. Among the methods he uncovered was the “scrap paper” method: Students took the exam on scrap paper, a teacher corrected the answers, then the answers went onto the standardized answer sheets, so as not to reflect erasures. In the “group testing” method, students called out the answers, the group agreed on the correct answer, and everyone filled it in. [\[7\]](#)

Cheating in school might seem fairly harmless to some. Lots of people do it. But what happens when corporate leaders cheat?

## Corporate Cheaters

Corporate cheating has had devastating effects. U.S. corporate scandals have seen thousands of employees lose their jobs while stocks plummet and corporate executives are led off in handcuffs. Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Anderson, AOL Time Warner, Adelphia, Xerox . . . sometimes the patterns of financial scandals can be confusing.

Consider a simple illustration. Suppose you want your local bank to lend you money so you can purchase your dream house. The bank views you as a means for them to make money. They want to assess their risk of investing in you to be sure you can pay them back faithfully and with interest. So they check your credit, income, assets and liabilities, and get you to fill out lots of forms.

Suppose you deceive the bank into believing that your financial status is better than it really is. You lie about your income and indebtedness. They believe you and lend you the funds. You buy your castle, then can't make the payments. You default on the loan, declare bankruptcy, and the bank loses its money.

That's a snapshot of just one type of scandal plaguing corporate America. Corporations that cook the books look like

better investments than they really are. Investors buy their stock, driving the price up and enriching leaders who profit personally from stock gains. When irregularities are exposed, companies restate their actual earnings and indebtedness and lay off employees. Investors, realizing they've been hoodwinked, sell their stock. Stock prices plummet. Investors question the sincerity of other corporations and are reluctant to buy. The market system falters.

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan summarized for Congress corruption's impact on the nation: "Fraud is theft. . . . It is indistinguishable from going into a bank and stealing something. . . . Our free market capitalist system cannot function in an environment in which fraud and misrepresentation are critical elements, because trust is so essential to making that system work."[8](#)

Corrupt CEOs wielded power similar to economic "weapons of mass destruction," said University of Minnesota accounting professor Brian Shapiro.[9](#) Consumer advocate Ralph Nader called it "greed on steroids."[10](#)

Moses, the great liberator of ancient Israel, once received some counsel on leadership from his father-in-law, who advised him to pick able leaders who "fear God" and "hate dishonest gain."[11](#) Not bad advice. As national scandals have shown, to do otherwise can be disastrous.

## **Cheating's Costs**

Epidemic cheating has serious costs. Whom can you trust?

*TIME* magazine compared what executives of seven troubled companies received (in stock sales and severance) with what their shareholders got.[12](#) Adelphia's John Rigas gained \$4.2 million in severance. When Adelphia filed for bankruptcy, its stock was worth 14 cents, a decline of over 99 percent in about a year. Enron's Jeffrey Skilling made \$78 million in

stock sales over a two-year period. Shareholders got a bankrupt company.

Have your medical insurance premiums been rising? Some of the increase may be offsetting corruption losses. Big names in healthcare like Columbia/HCA, National Health Laboratories, and GlaxoSmithKline have paid millions in fines to settle billing or fraud charges or investigations. While corporate accounting scandals may seem complex, much of the healthcare crisis involves outright theft such as overcharging for hospital care. This profitable game has even drawn drug criminals and the Russian mafia. Some have called the healthcare industry terminally ill.[{13}](#)

The African Union claims "corruption costs Africa almost \$150 billion a year." That's about one quarter of the continent's gross domestic product.[{14}](#) One Nigerian doctor told me bribery had become so commonplace in his country that corporations were including bribery allowances in staff budgets. They called it "public relations." Problems arose when employees began pocketing the "public relations" money instead of using it for bribes.

Identity thieves use computers to snoop. The biggest identity theft in U.S. history garnered information on 30,000 people. Thieves used pilfered data to siphon bank accounts and tap credit card accounts. The prosecutor described the situation as "every American's worst financial nightmare multiplied tens of thousands of times."[{15}](#)

Cheating that may begin in school can have disastrous results in society. Duke's president Keohane aptly summarizes: " (A)n education that involves cheating instead of learning . . . is no education at all. . . . (I)n the real world, when you set out to build a bridge or craft a legal document or begin brain surgery, just knowing what the result is supposed to be is of mighty little use in making it happen; pity the poor patients and clients!"[{16}](#)



Why do people cheat, and what is the solution?

## The Psychology of Cheating

Why do people cheat? Some seek the thrill of beating the system. Others want to make ends meet, protest high prices or achieve difficult—perhaps unattainable—standards.

Actress Winona Ryder's shoplifting conviction prompted questions about why a wealthy person would steal items they could easily afford. Often anxiety or depression accompanies kleptomania. The rush of theft may assuage deep emotional pain. Young shoplifters have stolen on dares from their peers.[{17}](#)

Desires for approval, advancement, avoiding embarrassment—all influence self-esteem. People sometimes take foolish risks to feel good about themselves.

Self-centeredness and lax standards seem obvious roots of dishonesty. The Securities and Exchange Commission began requiring CEO's of major companies to personally affirm "in writing, under oath and for publication " that their corporate reports are "complete and accurate."[{18}](#)

Restructuring business relationships to avoid conflicts of interest could reduce temptation. Stiff penalties—suspension, expulsion, prosecution—may help slow moral hemorrhaging. Strong role models, peer support, and ethical codes are significant.

Ultimately, honesty is an individual matter. Alan Greenspan told Congress of "an infectious greed" that influenced corporate scandals. "Greed is not an issue of business," he emphasized, "it's an issue of human beings."[{19}](#)

My sophomore year in college, I swiped a plastic bucket from behind the lectern in the psychology lecture hall. It had been there every day during the semester. "No one wants it," I

convinced myself. "It deserves to be taken." I used it to wash my car.

Two years later, I encountered a statement by an early follower of Jesus: "If we confess our sins to him, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."<sup>{20}</sup> I not only needed to admit my theft to God. I needed to make restitution.

My booty long since lost, I purchased a new bucket and carried it sheepishly across campus one afternoon. Finding no one in the psychology building to confess to, I left the bucket in a broom closet with a note of explanation. Maybe a janitor read it. My conscience was clear.

Solid spiritual commitment can help develop inner strength to resist temptation and act honorably. It can provide reasonable standards for civil society. And it can bring forgiveness and power to rebound from personal failure.

This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, "Our Cheatin' Hearts," *The Plain Truth*, September/October 2003, pp. 6-10.

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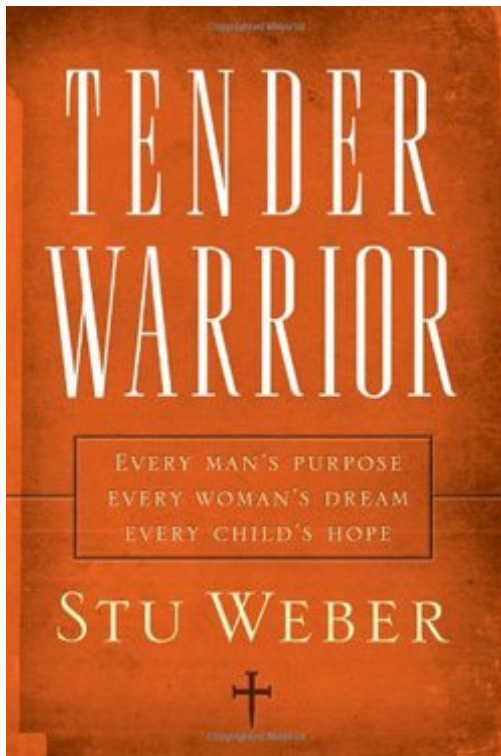
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# **Is the Tender Warrior Wild at Heart? – Characteristics of Christian Manhood**

*Dr. Bohlin looks at two attempts to define the characteristics of a godly man according to a Scriptural, biblical worldview perspective. These characteristics give a Christian man a way to evaluate his walk with God and how it communicates Christ to others.*

## **The Four Pillars of a Man's Heart**

Manhood continues to be in crisis. For many men today, their physical strength is rarely necessary. Technology and urban isolation have ripped up the landscape that men inhabit to such a degree that many men are wandering around wondering who they are and what they're here for. The extreme women's movement proclaims that a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.



Over the last fifteen years numerous books have been written from both secular and Christian authors to help men find their way. In this article we're going to spend some time with two of them. Stu Weber, a pastor in Oregon wrote the hugely influential *Tender Warrior* in 1993. *Tender Warrior* is full of stories and illustrations that irresistibly pull you along to Stu's appointed end: a vision of manhood mined from God's original intention for a man wrapped up in the New Testament vision of the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus

Christ.

At the core of Weber's vision is what he calls the four pillars of a man's heart: the Heart of a King, the Heart of a Warrior, the Heart of a Mentor, and the Heart of a Friend. I first read *Tender Warrior* in the mid 90s, and I was immediately caught up in his four-part description. I knew I didn't exemplify all of these characteristics as Weber describes them, but I knew I wanted to.

The Heart of the King reflects a man's provisional heart. The part of a man that wants to offer order, mercy and justice to the world he inhabits. Think of some of the Old Testament patriarchs, people like Abraham, Moses, and David. All of these men had a sense about them that drew others to them. They were leaders; they looked ahead and prepared those around them for what was coming.

The Heart of a Warrior portrays that part of a man that wants to shield, guard, defend and protect those around him. We intuitively understand this about men, but so many are inhibited from expressing this today. Movies and the entertainment industry often portray this aspect of manhood in

its harsher tones. Consequently, this true aspect of manhood is more a target for suppression than for understanding.

The Heart of a Mentor reflects that part of a man that desires to model, train, and explain. Little boys particularly expect their dads to know everything. And a dad puffs up every time he can answer his son's questions. This aspect particularly is missing today in the church as young men from broken and dysfunctional families flounder, looking for an older man to help point the way.

The Heart of a Friend describes the part of a man that is truly compassionate, loving, and committed. The apostle Paul was a tough character as expressed in the list of hardships in 2 Cor. 11:23-28, yet he talked to the Thessalonians with gentle and tender words in 1 Thess. 2:7-8.

"Sourced in Scripture, observed in history, and experienced personally, these four pillars bear the weight of authentic masculinity. They coexist. They overlap. And when they come together in a man, you will know it. You will feel it. You will be touched by it. Like four strands of a steel cable, they will hold you."[\[1\]](#)

## **A Man and His Family**

These four pillars encapsulate four essential qualities in a man of God: leadership, protectiveness, teaching, and compassion. A man with just three of the four is out of balance. A man who just emphasizes one of the four is a caricature of a real man. Nowhere is this more evident than in the biblical picture of headship and a man's role in his family.

Our culture is horribly confused on this point. Weber sums it up neatly when he says, "Men, as husbands you have been given a trust, a stewardship, a responsibility, a duty, to husband, or manage, or care for the gifts of your wife."[\[2\]](#) Part of my

job as a husband is to create an environment in our home that allows my wife to be all God created her to be. She needs to be able to trust my leadership. She needs to know I will stand up for her and provide a secure environment. She needs to be comfortable in seeking my guidance and instruction. Finally, she needs to know that she is loved with a Christ-like self-sacrificing love. Weber adds, "A woman was made to be provided for, protected, and cared for. A man was made to be a provider, protector, and caregiver. Nothing is more pitiful than a man forfeiting his masculinity or a woman her femininity by transgressing the created order." [\[3\]](#)

Weber's discussion of a man and his lady provides numerous helpful insights, exercises, and illustrations on how a man is to love a woman. One commentator suggested that the chapter titled, "Does Anyone Here Speak Woman?" is worth the price of the book alone. Weber encourages men to realize that since men and women are inherently different, a man needs to learn a woman's language, to live with her in an understanding way as Peter commands (1 Pet. 3:7). We need to put our analytical minds to work to understand how she is put together. We won't ever get all the way there, but after all, a little mystery is what keeps marriage exciting, fresh, and interesting anyway.

Weber devotes three chapters to the incredible power of fathering. Our culture today is in dire need of real men willing to father their children. So many dads are absent either physically or emotionally. This alone accounts for so many wayward kids, both male and female alike. A father has a powerful multigenerational impact on his sons and daughters whether intentional or not. It's the nature of God's design.

Like arrows in a quiver, each child needs to be constructed, aimed, and released according to the bent God has given them. Skillful parenting does not come naturally, especially in our culture today that is so confused and off course. It will require biblical and rational thinking in advance.

## A Man and His Friends

In his book, *Tender Warrior*, Stu Weber titles the first chapter about a man and his friends, "Real Men Stand Together." In our increasingly mobile and fragmented society, it's harder than ever for men to know each other well enough to be willing to stand together. Upon hearing that Jonathan was dead, the future King David commented that Jonathan's love was wonderful, more wonderful than that of a woman (2 Sam. 1:26).

Men who have weathered tough times together, even fought together, develop a bond that can be stronger than that between a man and a woman. But how many men have such a friendship? There are numerous forces in our culture that leave most men isolated and cut-off. We see the lonely male model in the movies all the time. Characters played by John Wayne, Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger tend to be the isolated lonely male types: able, or perhaps, forced to handle life's pressures on their own.

Neighborhoods rarely have block parties today. We live in our closed up homes (no open windows in summer or people out on the porch on summer evenings) with tall fences keeping things private. We drive our own cars to work, work long hours, and relax in front of the TV or a book isolated from those around us. A sense of community has been lost in our cities and even small towns. Men, therefore, have no one to connect with outside of office mates or sports teammates. We think we do just fine on our own, thank you.

However, as we grow older, we hunger for someone of the male species to truly share what we are experiencing. But there is no Jonathan or David, someone I fought with in the trenches, someone who really knows me and my successes and struggles.

Men long for someone to lock arms with in a struggle greater

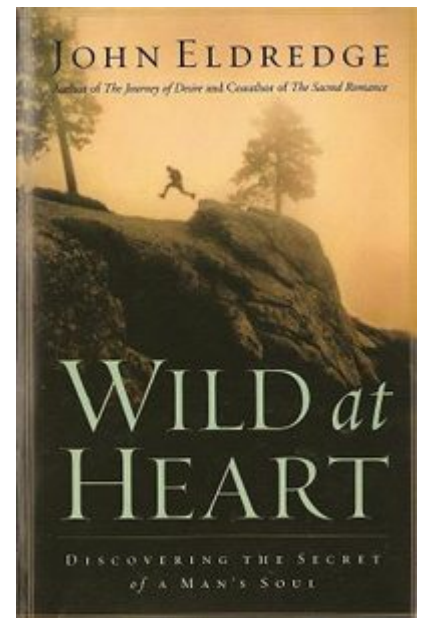


than themselves. Looking again at David and Jonathan, we learn in 1 Samuel 14 that Jonathan was a warrior just like David, and when David slew Goliath (1 Samuel 18), Jonathan immediately made a connection. They had shared values. They became one in spirit. Jonathan made a covenant with David that basically said what's mine is yours. They developed an unselfish love for each other. Jonathan exhibited a deep loyalty to David when he intervened on his behalf when his father, King Saul, sought David's life.

In 1 Samuel 20, David and Jonathan expect that they may never see each other again and weep in each other's embrace. They were transparent. They weren't afraid to be emotional in the other's presence. Do you have a friend like that? I encourage you to seek a friend who shares your values, and work to develop an unselfish, loyal, and transparent relationship that the Lord will use to guide you through today's muddy waters.

## **Battle to Fight, an Adventure to Live, and a Beauty to Rescue**

In the continuing parade of books from Christian authors for men comes a book that has taken the evangelical community by storm. Counselor and writer John Eldredge claims that men are wild at heart and desperately need to recapture this essential part of maleness. In his book, *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge claims that every man needs a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.



Eldredge's triumvirate lines up quite well with Weber's four pillars, the Heart of the King, Warrior, Mentor, and Friend. Both Weber and Eldredge assert that a man needs a cause

outside himself to fully live out the image of God in him. They just use different terminology.

However, *Wild at Heart* sometimes leaves you a little too wild. Yes, men need to be free to explore that wild side, but responsibility is not just a duty that shackles a man's God-given wildness. Eldredge can sometimes run roughshod over the state of men in the church and seems to encourage men to be little boys rather than grown men with both needs *and* responsibilities.

For instance, Eldredge uses many illustrations from physically demanding backcountry experiences to highlight his call to be wild at heart. Early in the book he retells how he and his sons faced the flooded, muddy, and debris-filled Snake River with nothing but a canoe. He says, "I have never floated the Snake in a canoe, nor any other river for that matter, but what the heck. We jumped in and headed off into the unknown, like Livingstone plunging into the interior of dark Africa." [\[4\]](#) Wild? Sure, but reckless and irresponsible, too!

But despite the occasional excess, Eldredge uncovers that same need for a cause outside himself, and identifies it as a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.

Eldredge proclaims that there is something fierce inside every man, whether it is slaying the dragons of business or whacking a little white ball on a golf course. Men naturally compete. If there is no winner, we quickly get bored.

The adventurous spirit is not just about having fun. Adventure requires something of a man. Deep down inside we wonder if we have what it takes, whatever the task that presents itself. Most men watch war movies wondering how they would have responded if presented with the same situation.

But there's more. Men need someone to fight for and with. A companion. A beauty. A helpmate. Adam had a great and wonderful world to explore at his creation. But God recognized

that he needed something else, a helpmate suitable for him.

In summary then, at the heart of every man there is something fierce, wild, and passionate. But all this can only be properly harnessed as we seek a relationship with the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus Christ. But in a fallen world, we are all walking wounded. If that is the case, does Eldredge have a recipe for healing?

## **Healing the Wound**

John Eldredge likens many men to a huge male lion in his local zoo. The lion, as powerful and ferocious as he is, is caged in a small cell where he lies around, bored except at feeding time, and is but a shadow of what he was created to be. In a fallen world, where our enemy prowls around looking for someone to devour, most if not all men have been wounded at the heart of their masculinity. It has sapped their strength and put them on the sidelines.

Most often this wound comes from someone close to us, either a parent (usually the father), sibling, relative or peer. Most of us can remember someone telling us, either by words or actions, that we don't have what it takes to be a man. This can often be due to a series of events over an extensive period of time rather than to a single event. As a result, we go through life wondering if we have what it takes.

In today's culture, this wound can come from a school system that is telling our boys that there is something wrong with them. Boys are far more likely to be medicated than girls, and often it is only for just being boys. And with so many fatherless homes due to either physical absence or an extremely passive father who never gets involved, nobody is showing boys and young men what it means to be a man.

So men will often try to answer their question, to heal their wound, by going to some very unwise places. Some rebel, others

try to earn their father's respect by becoming driven overachievers. Others retreat into passivity or are haunted by pornography or even drugs. Some search for their masculinity from women or maybe just one woman. But femininity can never bestow masculinity.

There ends up being a false self we create to distance ourselves from the question we fear, that gives others the impression we have it all figured out, when deep inside everything is mush. The answer lies in going to the One who created us for a very specific purpose and indeed knows who we are (Psalm 139). Jesus never shied away from acknowledging that He was totally dependent on the Father. Many times He said things like, "I and the Father are one." Or "I do nothing apart from the Father."

We have been created to be dependent on God, yet we as men continually try to convince ourselves we can do it on our own. In order to bring us to a point of recognizing our daily need to walk with Him, the Lord will bring us through trials that force us to depend on Him. The false self is stripped away until there is nothing left for us to do. Here and only here can the wound be healed. The Lord will walk us through an intensely personal awakening to reveal whom He created us to be if we will only trust Him.

So when troubles arise, instead of whining or complaining, we should ask, What is it the Lord wants me to see? What is He trying to teach me? What do I need to learn? Then we will be on the road to true masculinity.[\[5\]](#)

## Notes

1. Stu Weber, *Tender Warrior* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Books, 1993), p. 43.
2. Ibid., p. 92.
3. Ibid., p. 92.
4. John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson,

2001), p. 5.

5. This last section summarizes chapters 3-7, which are the heart of Eldredge's book, *Wild at Heart*. When reading *Wild at Heart*, one needs to be aware that Eldredge's language is sometimes imprecise and can leave the wrong impression. I'm convinced that Eldredge sees that the real battle we all must face is with spiritual forces, and that our physical tests of strength are only rehearsals for the real thing. But his book can be misinterpreted as an excuse for men to overindulge in risky behavior and some men to take dangerous risks they are not prepared for. For some, *Wild at Heart* can only serve as an appeal to the flesh. So, is the tender warrior wild at heart? Yes, but not to the degree some choose to believe. Eldredge uses a great illustration on page 83. "Yes, a man is a dangerous thing. So is a scalpel. It can wound or it can save your life. You don't make it safe by making it dull; you put it in the hands of someone who knows what he's doing." Only the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus Christ qualifies.

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**When Someone In Your  
Congregation Says "I'm Gay"**

## Things to Remember

1. **No one is born gay**, and no one chooses to be gay. Because of relational brokenness in families and among peers, some people experience emotional needs that they try to meet in ungodly ways. Many of them are uncomfortable with their own gender; later, they discover they are attracted to others of the same sex, but this is not their choice. Acting on it, however, is.

2. **Change is possible.** Even going back to the first-century church, the apostle Paul wrote to former homosexuals in the Corinthian church, “and such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11).

3. Because we live in a fallen world, **we are all broken.** Many people in our churches are sexually broken—victims of incest, pornography and masturbation addicts, and compulsive sex addiction. Homosexuality is only one form of brokenness.

4. **Homosexuality grows out of broken relationships and is healed in healthy relationships**, especially same-sex relationships. This is one of the reasons it is essential for recovering homosexuals and lesbians to be actively involved in the church, because this is where they can find healthy, God-honoring friendships. Their homosexuality is not contagious!

5. **Treat them with respect like you would anyone else.** They are people made in the image of God for whom Christ died—they are not their sexuality. Many people trying to come out of the gay lifestyle expect to find respect and acceptance only in the gay community. Finding it in church is immensely healing to their souls.

6. **Accept them where they are, just as Jesus did.** Choose to accept the person, but not sinful behavior. People don't change unless they experience the grace of acceptance first. But once they know they are loved and accepted, many of them are willing to do what it takes to live a life of holiness.

7. **Seek to see them with God's eyes** of love and acceptance, with His intention for their wholeness, healing and freedom. This means depending on the Holy Spirit for divine perspective and exercising humility to recognize that first impressions are often incomplete and inaccurate.

8. This is a great opportunity to lead people to an understanding of **what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ**. Some homosexual strugglers, especially men, feel that they have committed the unpardonable sin. They've heard they are going to hell no matter what they do, so they are permanently separated from God. They need to know this is a lie, because when we confess our sins, the blood of Jesus covers them ALL and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

9. Because of abuse issues, most **strugglers seem to have an especially hard time relating to Father God** and to receiving His love. Yet it is the masculine voice (first in earthly fathers, and ultimately in our Heavenly Father) that calls gender out from both men and women, and it is the Father's personal and powerful love that is the most important healing agent in human hearts.

10. Because most pastors are men in authority, **most strugglers (men and women) are INCREDIBLY intimidated** by them. Pastors need to know this and really understand in order to minister to strugglers. This means respecting the fragility of strugglers' relationships with pastors and choosing to be deliberately tender and gentle. They really need "good shepherds." Verbalize to them that God can not only change them, but He is very proud of them (as you are) for sharing this with you and desiring to change.

11. **Most same-sex strugglers have very weak and broken boundaries**. Their deep neediness causes them to lapse into emotionally dependent relationships with everyone who gets close. We encourage you to only counsel these folks at your

office during regular business hours where others can be aware of your activities. This gives a sense of security to the struggler and a protection for you as the pastor.

12. The most success in overcoming same-gender attraction has occurred when strugglers experienced **God as Healer through heterosexual people who were willing to come alongside them** in their journeys—men helping men, and women helping women. It would be helpful for you to find someone willing to befriend and mentor the struggler. This takes a person willing to seriously invest in the life of a very needy person. They will need to be available and accessible. Their presence in the struggler's life can be powerful and healing.

13. **If someone comes in with an agenda** of arrogance, demanding acceptance of their sexual sin, don't let them bully you. There is a difference between welcoming the sinner and allowing him to continue in his rebellion. Homosexuality is sin. Lev. 18:22-23; Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-11. Note that these verses condemn homosexual behavior, not feelings.

## **Five DON'TS:**

1. **Don't panic.** An excellent resource for understanding the issue of homosexuality is *Someone I Love is Gay* by Bob Davies and Anita Worthen (published by InterVarsity Press). Also Exodus International ([exodusinternational.org/](http://exodusinternational.org/)), a Christ-centered ministry that helps people deal with unwanted homosexuality, has numerous resources. Living Hope Ministries ([www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org)) is an Exodus referral ministry in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area with excellent online forums for parents, spouses, men and women, and youth (ages 13+) who struggle with homosexuality

2. **Don't make false assumptions or accusations.** For example, please do not assume he is HIV positive. Many aren't. And if he is, AIDS is sexually transmitted; the people in your congregation are safer than many fear. Respect the seriousness



of HIV with commonsense precautions (such as contact with bodily fluids), but don't ostracize the person. Handshakes and hugs are perfectly safe.

3. **Don't shut down pastorally or emotionally.** The person coming to you has known a lifetime of rejection and desperately needs to know that a representative of Jesus Christ will extend grace to him. Hug them when they leave. It may be the first positive touch they have had in years.

4. **Don't pass judgment.** All of us have besetting sins! As Billy Graham said, "Don't take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place."

5. **Don't disclose this person's secret without permission,** even among church staff. There is nothing safe about the gay lifestyle; people struggling with same-sex attraction need to find safety in the church.

*This is the text of a brochure from Living Hope Ministries, written by Sue Bohlin, who serves on the Board of Directors of Living Hope and moderates one of the online forums. A PDF version of this brochure is also available for download [here](#); you will need the free Adobe Acrobat reader to see it.*

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