

Abortion: A Biblical View

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

Why Abortion is So Volatile

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Given the sexually charged atmosphere in which we live, it is not surprising that so many people are having sex outside of marriage and getting pregnant. And so abortion is treated like an eraser; people see it as a way to try to get rid of the consequences of their sexual activity. Of course, there are always exceptions; pregnancies do occur as a result of incest and rape. Some women get pregnant because of someone else's sin. But does that make it right to kill the baby that has been conceived?

The Bible's View of the Unborn

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sometimes you will hear a pro-choice argument that says the Bible does not put the same value on the life of the unborn as on infants, citing an Old Testament passage on personal injury law. Exodus 21:22-25 gives two penalties if fighting men hit a pregnant woman. The first penalty was a fine, and some people conclude from this that an unborn baby doesn't have the same value as a born child. But that penalty was for a situation where nothing serious happened. If there *was* serious injury, the

offender was severely punished with the same injury he inflicted. If the mother or baby died, the offender was to be put to death. This actually shows very eloquently how valuable God considers both the mother and her unborn baby.

Post-Abortion Syndrome

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sawyers' Story

Steve and Tessie Sawyer will never forget Halloween 1990. Tessie was four months pregnant, and

her doctor had suggested, “Tess, you’re 35 years old; let’s do a neurological test on the baby. It’s just a simple blood test.” Sure, that was fine with Tessie...until the day before Halloween, when the test results came back.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Handicapped Children

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

For Further Reading

Alcorn, Randy. *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, Portland: Multnomah, 1992.

Garton, Jean. *Who Broke the Baby?* Minneapolis: Bethany, 1988.

Michels, Nancy. *Helping Women Recover From Abortion.* Minneapolis: Bethany, 1988.

Schaeffer, Francis and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1983.

Young, Curt. *The Least of These.* Chicago: Moody, 1984.

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[The Dark Underside of Abortion: A Christian Worldview Perspective](#)

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

Laura's Story

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

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

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

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

She didn't get over it. She was stuck in a place filled with anger and hurt. She couldn't overcome the loss of her baby, and she didn't even have words for that. Anything related to babies made her cry:

new baby announcements at church, diaper commercials, even driving by Babies-R-Us. Everything triggered relentless heartache. There was a wound in her soul that would not stop bleeding.

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

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

Why Women Choose Abortion

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

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

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

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

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

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

Abortion is deeply troubling because it touches on three central issues of a woman’s self-concept: her sexuality, her morality, and her maternal identity. She also has to deal with the loss of a child.

This loss must be confronted, processed, and grieved in order for a woman to resolve her experience. {9}

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

For millions of women, Post-Abortion Syndrome is an ugly after-effect of abortion, consisting of a number of powerful emotions that can erupt in dangerous and destructive behaviors. Far from being "no big deal," which is how abortion is often minimized in our culture, abortion is a traumatic event in the life of most women who have one. Life becomes divided into "before the abortion" and "after the abortion." So it is no surprise that so many experience some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder. They used to call this "shell shock" after World War II. PTSD is a collection of negative, destructive behaviors and ways of thinking.

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

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

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

Post Abortion Syndrome: Shame and Denial

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

Denial - Many women spend huge amounts of mental energy trying not to think about their abortion.

Romans 1 calls this “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.” The horror of participating in the death of one’s child is too painful to face, and many women work hard at maintaining denial for five to ten years.[{14}](#) But eventually reality usually comes to the surface.

Some women find themselves falling apart when their youngest child leaves home, or at menopause. Others become uncontrollably sad when they hold their first grandchild. One woman’s denial system shattered when she saw a museum exhibit of pre-born babies and saw what her baby looked like when she aborted him. Another woman almost lost it in nursing school when she learned about prenatal development. The abortion counselor had told her it was just a blob of tissue. Even those who deny their unborn child was a human being and not a clump of cells admit they have to work at maintaining denial. One woman said, “I didn’t think of it as a baby. I just didn’t want to think of it that way.”[{15}](#)

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

Healing After Abortion

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

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

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

Cervical, Ovarian and Liver Cancer - Women with one abortion face a 2.3 relative risk of cervical cancer, compared to non-aborted women, and women with two or more abortions face a 4.92 relative risk. Similar elevated risks of ovarian and liver cancer have also been linked to single and multiple abortions. These increased cancer rates for post-aborted women are apparently linked to the unnatural disruption of the hormonal changes which accompany pregnancy and untreated cervical damage.[{23}](#)

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

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

What do you say to someone who’s experienced the trauma of abortion? It’s a terrible loss. How do you help someone grieve? What do you say? Perhaps something like, “I’m so sorry. It must be very difficult for you. Do you want to tell me about it?” We can offer a listening ear, full of compassion

and grace: "What was the abortion like? What has it been like to live with it?" Seek to validate the woman or man's grief with honor and respect so they can get to a place of healing peace.

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

The pain and grief of abortion is complicated by the fact that it is also sin. But it is not the unpardonable sin. Confess it, and receive the cleansing and forgiveness that Jesus offers. He paid for your abortion on the Cross. He offers you the healing that allows you to be at peace with God and with yourself. He offers you the courage to tell your story with someone safe, which transforms your pain into something redemptive. He offers you the stability that means you don't fall apart if someone else is talking about abortion, or pregnancy, or babies in general.

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

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

Notes

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

2. *Ibid.*, 41.

3. *Ibid.*, xx.

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

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

Shame - Mom feels that if her daughter's pregnancy becomes public knowledge, everyone will know she was not a good mother. She failed at teaching her daughter morality and purity and the things a good Christian mother should have taught her.

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

6. John 10:10.

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

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

9. Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 33.
10. Sixty-three percent of women who have had an abortion seek mental health care. There is a one hundred and fifty-four percent increase in suicide. The suicide rate within one year after an abortion was three times higher than for all women, seven times higher than for women carrying to term, and nearly twice as high as for women who suffered a miscarriage. Suicide attempts appear to be especially prevalent among post-abortion teenagers. Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.info/psychol.html (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).
11. "Before I Had Time to Think," Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).
12. A poll by the *LA Times* revealed that fifty-six percent of those who admitted to an abortion felt guilty. But since another poll showed that seventy-four percent of those who admitted to having an abortion believe it's morally wrong, I believe that number is way too low. See Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 47.
13. Linda Bird Francke, *The Ambivalence of Abortion* (New York: Random House, 1978), 61. Cited in www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/women_who_abortion_and_their_vie.asp (accessed February 23, 2008).
14. David Reardon, *Aborted Women-Silent No More* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987).
15. Francke, *Ambivalence*, 63.
16. Psychologist Philip Ney has studied the connection. He sees several effects of abortion:
 - 1) Failure to bond with subsequent children. One mother admitted, "We had our first daughter and I never felt the deep love for her I should have. For several reasons, I guess. The first is that I had never grieved over the loss of the child I had aborted. I was also afraid to love her too much. I felt that God was just going to take her away from me to punish me for killing my first child."
 - 2) The weakening of maternal instincts. Killing one's own child violates the God-given instinct to nurture and protect. It can result in a hardened heart as a way of protecting herself from the truth of her action.
 - 3) Reduced inhibitions against violence, particularly toward children. (Theresa Karminiski Burke and David C. Reardon, "Abortion Trauma and Child Abuse," Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org.)
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[Transgender Children](#)

How should we think about the growing number of children being told they are transgender? A recent YouTube video from parents of a six-year-old transgender child named Ryland went viral, with well over six million views in just a couple of weeks. A beautiful little girl announced she was a boy, *insisted* she was a boy. Her parents' research apparently was limited to LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) sources, and they decided to raise her as a boy, cut her hair like a boy, dress her like a boy, and use male pronouns to feed her illusion that she is a boy. The internet exploded with enthusiastic praise for this family.

How should we think about situations like this from a biblical perspective?

That's the key: we need to understand that this is really a worldview issue. Perspective is crucial. Where you start makes all the difference. If you leave God out of it, starting with the person trying to make sense of the feeling that one's body is not aligned with their internal sense of gender, then confusion is inevitable. If people feel free to define themselves as they wish, then sex and gender can be seen as elastic or fluid—and manipulatable. It's the modern-day expression of an Old Testament phenomenon that never worked out well, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" in the times of the Judges (Judges 17:6).

But if you start with God as creator, with the right to choose a baby's gender, then that makes a huge difference. When baby Ryland's birth was announced with a happy, "It's a girl!"—God was speaking His intention for her identity and her life.

Sometimes children try on alternate identities—girls saying they are boys, boys saying they are horses. Parents are responsible for modeling logic and wisdom (not to mention life experience) in their response to this kind of proclamation. When Ryland started screaming "I'm a boy," it was a perfect opportunity to ask some critical thinking (and critically important) questions: "What is a boy?" "Why don't you like being a girl?" Their video says that Ryland "began to show aversion to anything feminine." This, of course, is the story of many girls whom God created as tomboys, who

don't like the stereotypical pink-girly-girl attributes our culture labels as feminine. The problem is not an aversion to pink frills; the problem is a too-narrow definition of femininity. [*Please see my post [The Gender Spectrum](#).*]

If Ryland's parents continue down the path of other parents who enable their children to feed the unrealistic fantasy that they can choose to be anything they want, including the other gender, that will include giving Ryland powerful hormones to suppress puberty, and other powerful hormones to cause her body to mimic maleness: muscle mass, a stubble, a deeper voice, more body hair. But as one girl who stopped taking testosterone [put it](#), "This is not who you are. You are hiding behind a chemically induced mask." No hormones or surgery can turn Ryland into a male. Nothing will change her XX chromosomes. Most boys grow up to become fathers, but she can never father a child. She is NOT a boy, she will NEVER be a man. It is neither loving nor wise to cooperate with confusion, which will only get worse with age.

When adults tell a child "you are transgender," and the child then parrots that idea, both the parents and the child get something right and something wrong. The something right is an awareness of a heartbreaking brokenness, which is what can happen in a fallen world. The something wrong is the diagnosis of *what* is broken: it's not their body, it's their feelings. Transgender transition and therapy try to change the part that is healthy (one's body) and bring it into alignment with what is broken (one's thinking and feeling).

To return to a biblical perspective: God says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Regardless of what the situation, whenever our thinking and feelings are out of alignment with God's intention, we need to submit our will and our thinking to the transforming power of God. What does that look like? Speaking the truth to oneself, encouraged by other truth-speakers. In the case of those struggling with their gender: "God made me female (or male), and I choose to trust that He is good and He knows what He's doing. I surrender my beliefs and feelings about femaleness (or maleness) to Him. I choose to pursue intimacy with Him over my own sense of self, and allow Him to change me from the inside out."

It's not easy, but it's always the right thing to choose the truth over an illusion. Over a lie.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/transgender_children on June 17, 2014.

[The Dark Underside of Female Friendships](#)

Cherry and Beth met in a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group at their church, hitting it off immediately. They loved the mutual connection with another mom, understanding the stresses and joys of having small children about the same age. Their weekly play dates became the highlight of each girl's week. They would chat on the phone every day, comparing notes on what they would be fixing for dinner or what great, repeatable golden nuggets their toddlers spouted. That morphed to texting each other throughout the day, at least once an hour.

The intense sense of connection, of feeling heard and understood and valued, grew to be like an

emotional drug for them. Over time, they realized they felt closer to each other than they did to their husbands. They preferred each other's company to anyone else's—including their husbands'. Texting throughout the day felt like a lifeline, a continual source of reassurance that all was right with the world. Eventually, caring for their children, the very thing that had brought them together in the first place, started to feel like an unwelcome burden that interfered with their first love—each other. Anyone and any thing that came between them was cause for resentment and annoyance . . . when it didn't make them outright angry.

This was not normal female friendship. What started out as a lovely gift from God was corrupted into emotional dependency, which Lori Rentzel* defines as "When the ongoing presence and/or nurturing of another is believed necessary for personal security." Emotional dependency happens when one or both people are looking to a person to meet their basic needs for love and security, rather than to God (relational idolatry). It is characterized by a desperate neediness of the other.

Emotional dependency (the other ED) is at the core of most lesbian relationships and a lot of homosexual relationships, but it is not limited to these. Husbands and wives can be emotionally dependent on each other, and so can women friends. When friendship spills over the retaining walls of what is healthy into an enmeshment with another person—when they put all their emotional eggs in the other's basket, so to speak—the relationship has become broken and unhealthy.

My favorite anthem to emotional dependency is Barry Manilow's *Can't Smile Without You*, which sounds romantic until you think about how unhealthy it is:

You know I can't smile without you,
I can't smile without you,
I can't laugh
and I can't sing,
I'm findin' it hard to do anything.
You see, I feel sad when you're sad,
I feel glad when you're glad,
If You only knew what I'm going through,
I just can't smile without you.

Do you see how sick that is?

Emotional dependency feels like, "My happiness, my sense of security, is completely wrapped up in you giving me '[The Three As](#)' I need: attention, affection and affirmation. And if you withhold any of these from me, I will feel insecure, unloved and abandoned."

When people feel insecure, they feel powerless. And when they feel powerless, they usually resort to some kind of control to get their power back. Manipulation is the glue that holds emotionally dependent people together, since the desperate neediness (remember, "I can't smile without you"?) drives people to do desperate things to make sure the other person is tied to them at the heart. Such as sending close to 100 texts in a single day, to make sure the other person responds to them. And getting paranoid and angry ("Why aren't you answering my texts? I can tell you read them, my phone tells me you read them, why are you avoiding me? What did I do? Why aren't you answering me? TALK TO ME!!!!"). Such as giving gifts and anything else designed to bind the giver to the recipient. Such as using guilt to force the other person to engage ("You're the only person in the world who understands me! You're the only real friend I've ever had. If you leave me I will be completely and utterly alone!").

The good news is that when friendships have overflowed healthy boundaries into emotional

dependency, people can repent of their relational idolatry (making another person more important than God) and step back into balance. The other good news is that every aspect of unhealthy, emotional dependency on a person, is healthy dependency on God. One of my friends told me, "This was life changing for me, to realize that I could redirect my unhealthy energies to Jesus and it would make me a much better disciple!" Contacting Him 95 times a day through prayer (no texting necessary) is healthy. Feeling desperately needy toward Jesus is healthy. Giving gifts to Jesus to bind one's heart to Him is healthy. Saying, "If you leave me I will be completely and utterly alone" is true—but praise God, He has assured us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

When I have spoken on this topic in churches, I hear, "I expected that the dark underside you'd be talking about was gossip or something. I never would have expected THIS. Wow. I see how it can happen so easily."

Forewarned is forearmed, I trust.

*Lori Thorkelson Rentzel's little booklet *Emotional Dependency*, published by InterVarsity Press, is an invaluable and highly practical resource for understanding this issue.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-dark-underside-of-female-friendships/ on April 8, 2014.

[Did \(Duck Dynasty's\) Phil Get it Wrong? Is Homosexuality Sin?](#)



In one of the biggest social media flaps since social media was invented, Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson openly said that homosexuality is sinful. Then the cyber world blew up in a clash of worldviews—the progressive, whatever-floats-your-boat perspective of A&E, the cable network that profits greatly from the Robertsons' TV show, against the traditional biblical view of sin and sexuality. A lot of people think that Phil's old-fashioned morality is not only antiquated but unfair.

Is it? Is homosexuality a sin? If people are born gay, why would God condemn people for being the way He made them? What kind of God would do that?

Let me answer those questions in reverse order. First, how do we know that people are born gay? This idea is a newcomer on the scene of human history, arising only within the past hundred years—maybe only fifty. We “know” it because people keep saying so, and people say so because, looking into the rear view mirror of their lives, many of those who eventually identify as gay recall always feeling different, “other than.” According to the spirit of the age, that means they were always gay. Which means sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex.

But think about a newborn baby. Is he or she sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex? No, of course not. That is an emotional development issue that will arise years down the road. Consider a toddler: how does one find the gay kids in a church or daycare nursery? You don't. But even in toddlers, some temperament and personality differences have surfaced, the kinds of differences that can lead to a child feeling “other than.”

Little boys who are emotionally sensitive, artistic and creative, can be uncomfortable around the rough-and-tumble boys who are far more physically aggressive, sporty and relationally insensitive. It doesn't mean they're gay, it means their design, their God-chosen kind of masculinity, is different. They're probably going to feel “other than,” and later on someone will label that as gay. It's not.

Little girls who have athletic gifts and abilities, who don't care for pink or dresses or nail polish and are often natural leaders, can be uncomfortable around the girly-girls who are interested in very different things. It doesn't mean they're lesbian, it means their design, their God-chosen kind of femininity, is different. They're probably going to feel “other than,” and later on someone will label that as lesbian. It's not.

People are not born gay, which is a constellation of beliefs and feelings about oneself and others that is the result of many interactions with many people over many years. Just like people are not born prejudiced. Or entitled. Or English speaking, for that matter. But all those things can become so entwined with a sense of self that it feels like that's who one is.

Recently, my husband was talking with a new friend who struggles with same-sex attraction. His friend said it was hard growing up in a slender “case” (body type) and so sensitive, and that's why he was gay. My husband pointed out that he, too, had the same body type and was emotionally sensitive, that that was their design. Ray talked to him about the [gender spectrum](#) for different kinds of masculinity as God's creation, and his friend absolutely lit up with gratitude. He had never heard that the way God had made him didn't mean he was gay, it meant he was gifted, and he had never heard an “everstraight” like my husband acknowledge that boys and men can live on that end of the spectrum and not identify as gay. There is another way of explaining the feeling of “other than” that honors both the person and the God who made them in a way that has often not been appreciated or affirmed.

But let's turn to the first question: is homosexuality a sin?

It's important to define your terms. What do you mean by homosexuality? Our culture has clouded the biblical perspective of the issue. Do you mean being same-sex attracted? Or do you mean “stepping over the line,” actually engaging in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships? What Phil Robertson did, which is part of the firestorm, is to shine a light on what the Bible says: all sex outside of marriage is sin, both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. Our sex-saturated culture finds that offensive and unacceptable. Sex is seen as a right and a basic need of life, when it is neither.

But the Bible never condemns same-sex attractions, which constitute temptation and not sin. People generally discover, not choose, that they are drawn to the same sex, and [there are very good reasons](#)

[for this](#). As with all temptations, God says to stand against them and not give into them. It is foolishness to define oneself by our temptations and weaknesses! (Much better to define ourselves the way God sees us, as His beloved child who desperately needs Him.)

So define homosexuality. If you mean simply feeling “other than” and different, complicated by being drawn to members of the same sex, then homosexual attractions are temptation, not sin. If you mean acting on those attractions to engage in emotionally dependent and/or sexual relationships, then according to the Bible’s standards, yes that is sin. Note how God addressed Cain’s struggle with feelings and temptations: “Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:7) So it really comes down to feelings vs. behavior. The feelings are not necessarily sinful (although sin begins in the mind, where attractions can cross over the line into the sin of lust, regardless of the object of those attractions), but behavior always is. We need to keep homosexuality in the context that God does: pre-marital sex, adultery, same-gender sex, incest, and sex with animals: anything outside the marriage bed (defined as one man and one woman, Gen. 2:24) is sin.

Many people have a faulty concept of a distant, scowling god sitting on his throne looking for people having a good time so he can be mad at them, looking for an excuse to hurl thunderbolts at them for daring to enjoy themselves. The God of the Bible is not Zeus. Jesus corrected many aspects of our misunderstandings of His Father. He is a loving God who put guardrails on the treacherous mountain road of human sexuality. He doesn’t condemn people who run off the safety of the road by crashing through the guardrails He put in place; He knows that the natural consequences of running off the cliff are their own discipline. God says, “Don’t have sex outside of marriage” because He loves us and knows that sex outside of marriage brings pain to the soul (as well as dishonoring everyone involved, including Him).

God doesn’t make anyone gay, but He is full of compassion for those who find themselves with same-sex attractions. He warns us against all kinds of sexual sin because He knows how destructive it is when we violate His intention and design for our bodies and souls. He wants so much better for us.

This blog post originally appeared at

blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/did_phil_get_it_wrong_is_homosexuality_sin on Jan. 1, 2014

[Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn’t](#)

July 17, 2013

Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven’t needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical “us/them” dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted "gay to straight" change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but "flesh management," using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding values, which until recently was still found on their "About Us" page:

While we have never met anyone who "chose" to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. **Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.

We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God's creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

What I see here is a statement pointing to God's standards, God's intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one's sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can't stop being sinners and can't stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, "I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader's Conference except this past year, and have always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God's truth, and encouraging people not so much to be "straight" but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: 'Proclaim God's Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.' Nothing has changed for us."

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you what it *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It doesn't mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It doesn't mean that there isn't any help for those dealing with this issue, either for themselves or

a loved one.

- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.
- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt

Honor Thy (Very Flawed) Father and Mother

July 30, 2013

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

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

To give them honor means showing (not necessarily *feeling*) respect, letting them know you are listening and considering what they say. (And it does not necessarily mean following through!) To give them honor means being civil and kind in your dealings with them. It does not mean trusting them. It does not mean placing yourself in harm's way. It means forgiving them, so that you are not carrying and paying for the emotional baggage of their treatment of you. And please remember that forgiveness is given, but trust is earned, so it's entirely possible that you can release the woundings you sustained from them without ever, ever trusting them with your heart, because they don't deserve your trust.

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

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

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

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

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

www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/questions/parentingandfamily/honormymotherandfather.html

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

http://www.newhopenow.com/ask/honor_parents.html

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

[When Ex-Gays Return to a Gay Identity](#)

I recently received an envelope in the mail with no return address and no personal note, just copies of three articles about men who used to be part of Exodus International, who used to identify themselves as “ex-gay,” and now repudiate that part of their histories. It is consistent with emails and [blog comments](#) I have received pointing this out, and asking if that doesn’t negate [my position that homosexuality is changeable](#).

No. The fact that some people, denouncing something they used to support, now represent themselves as proud gays and lesbians, doesn’t change anything. Just as people who lived in sobriety from alcohol and drugs for years have been known to get sucked back into their addictions, it isn’t surprising that some would get weary of the struggle against their temptations and stop fighting.

Some people gave up earlier than others, hoping and expecting that if they just kept living “the straight life,” their feelings would catch up with their resolutions. They kept waiting for homosexual desires and temptations to disappear, and they didn’t. So they decided that they were done with trying to pretend to be something they weren’t. I’m good with not pretending; I’m a huge believer in [authenticity and transparency](#).

But if someone continues to experience same-sex attraction even if they don’t act on it, does it mean they’re gay, as the culture insists?

What the culture says—if you ever have same-sex feelings, it means you’re gay—doesn’t matter compared to what God says.

God calls us to make choices every day that contradict and violate our feelings and temptations, but which we choose because they are the right thing to do. From the basics of the Ten Commandments to the ultimate example of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, He calls us to choose obedience and behavior that honors Him and other people despite our feelings. What if we don’t *feel* like telling the truth? Don’t lie anyway. What if we don’t *feel* like not killing the person who really ticks us off? Don’t murder anyway. What if we don’t *feel* like remaining faithful to our spouse? Don’t commit adultery anyway.

So what if someone doesn’t *feel* like stewarding their sexuality in purity and self-control? Regardless of the nature of the temptation, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, God calls us to possess our own body in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:4).

Sadly, some men who had come out of homosexuality have left their wives and children to return to living as gay men. This isn’t really much different from men who leave their wives and children for another woman. Succumbing to temptation, regardless of who tempts us, is still sin. Heartbreaking, home-breaking sin.

We’re hearing people saying, “I’m not ex-gay anymore because trying to be ex-gay doesn’t work. ‘Pray away the gay’ (a rather offensive term used by scoffers) doesn’t work. Trying hard to be straight doesn’t work. ‘Claiming my healing’ doesn’t work. I’m done.”

And they’re right.

What doesn't work:

Name-it-and-claim-it theology, the religious version of “wishing will make it so.” Trying to speak reality into existence, as in “I am no longer gay because I’m a Christian,” doesn’t work because we don’t create reality through our words. Only the Creator God can do that.

Casting out the demon of homosexuality. While there is always a demonic component to idolatry and unrepentant sin, homosexuality is not caused by a demon, any more than bigotry, selfishness or gossip are.

Trying harder, praying harder, reading the Bible, [begging God to make the gay feelings to go away](#). These human efforts are the religious equivalent of mowing the grass to get rid of dandelions. (For a completely different approach—grace—check out [True-Faced](#).)

What does work:

Laying aside one's sexuality as the measure of identity. “Who I really am” according to our flesh is always going to be at odds with “who God says I am” according to His word. Seeking a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the spiritual disciplines moves us toward reframing our faulty identity, no matter who we are or what we struggle with. We need to choose to find our identity in what God says about us—most importantly, receiving and owning the truth that He says, “You are My beloved child in whom I am well pleased.”

Looking at the contributing factors that shaped the same-sex “hole” in one’s heart (and the lies connected to them) to process them in light of God’s love and sovereignty, and then forgive the people who inflicted the wounds.

Choosing to learn to live with a tension: our flesh wants things that are dishonoring to God, dysfunctional and dangerous, but God calls us to do the right thing anyway. Regardless of our desires and feelings. Right from the beginning, He told Cain, “[I]f you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it” (Gen 4:7). God didn’t say to Cain, “I know, you’re angry because I didn’t accept your offering. That’s who you are, an angry soul. Go and let your anger explode!” In the New Testament, we read, “The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need” (Eph. 4:28). God didn’t say to the thief, “I know, you feel compelled to take what doesn’t belong to you. That’s who you are, a stealing soul. Go and act on your desires to steal!”

Now we have people saying, “I am attracted to the same sex. Since everyone says I am defined by my feelings, I now realize that’s just who I am.” And God does not say to them, “I know, you are gay/lesbian/transgender/bi-sexual. That’s who you are, so go act on it!” God calls everyone to the same standard: sexual holiness and integrity, which means keeping all sex within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman.

Adjusting one's expectations. Accepting the truth that one’s attractions and desires may always be warped to some degree; they may always remain an area of weakness that can drive the disciple to a deeper level of dependence on God, which is essential for growing in relationship with Him. That may mean learning to live with a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7-10) instead of insisting that the only culturally acceptable change is a 180-degree shift in attractions from homosexual to heterosexual.

There is no “easy button.” Submitting to the process of sanctification means crucifying the flesh, and that’s *hard*. For any Christ-follower. And that’s where lasting change happens—as we are made into the image of Christ (Gal. 4:19), as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

And that might, or might not, extend to our feelings. Regardless of who we are.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/when_ex-gays_return_to_a_gay_identity on May 7, 2013.

LET IT GO

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January 1, 2013

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

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

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

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

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

Colleen bought into the lie that she could get away with cheating on her husband. When she came to her senses after the divorce was final and her husband had custody of their children, she begged for forgiveness and reconciliation. But he had given himself permission to move on, and refused to consider it. Now she beats herself up regularly: "I can't do this! I want my family back! What can't I have my family back?" She also needs to let go of her refusal to accept reality, pushing back with, "I don't want reality! Why can't I have my family back?"

Brae carries deep wounds from her family. Unrelenting shame often erupts in rage, but Brae cannot

imagine being able to express her rage at her shaming parents. So she directs it at herself through life-threatening self-injury. She needs to let go of the belief that watching her blood flow into the bathtub is a solution to the emotions that overwhelm her. And she needs to let go of the belief that hurting herself is the only way to release the rage inside.

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

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

And then LET GO of whatever He shows us.

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

When they point out something that is a self-sabotaging or dangerous or foolish encumbrance, we need LET IT GO.

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

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

[Queen James Bible](#)

Thomas Jefferson created his own version of the New Testament by literally cutting and pasting everything he agreed with, and leaving out anything supernatural. That's one way to treat what you don't like in God's word. Another is the recent publication of the Queen James Bible, where the editors changed eight verses that express God's prohibitions of homosexual acts to make homosexual expression okay.



As Bible versions go, this is a rather bizarre one. Legitimate Bibles are translated and thoroughly discussed by a team of scholars whose identities and credentials are

freely cited. The identity of the QJV editors is completely opaque, per the QueenJamesBible.com website and, apparently, the printed Bible itself. On Amazon, the author is listed as “God,” with “Jesus Christ” as a contributor.

The King James Version, first published in 1611, is now in the public domain. The editors changed the wording on eight verses that prohibit gay and lesbian practice, leaving the rest of the text unchanged. They explain their reasoning on the website and the printed version. Not a bit of it holds water.

For example,

Genesis 19:5

KJV: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may **know** them.

QJV: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may **rape and humiliate** them.

The editors write, “We side with most Bible scholars who understand the story of Sodom and Gomorra to be about bullying strangers.” Most Bible scholars? Maybe the few the editors read. That statement is patently untrue, particularly in the scope of church history. Further, the Hebrew word for “know” is used 946 times in the Old Testament, and not one time does it mean “rape and humiliate.”

Leviticus 18:22

KJV: Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination.

QJV: Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind **in the temple of Molech**: it is an abomination.

Since the command not to participate in pagan child sacrifice to the pagan god Molech immediately precedes the prohibition against men lying with men, the editors decided to incorporate it into verse 22. Interestingly, the verse on the other side of verse 22 prohibits sex with animals, but the editors decided to ignore that one in favor of reconfiguring this classic prohibition against male homosexual acts to be limited to male temple prostitutes.

Romans 1:27

KJV: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

QJV: Men with men working that which is pagan and unseemly. For this cause God gave the idolators up unto vile affections, receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

The editors, citing Paul’s familiarity with the holiness code in Leviticus, decided that “Leviticus, as we know, is intended to condemn ritual impurities associated with pagan idol worship.” So the editors pass the Romans passage—that condemns all same-sex intercourse—through the lens of pagan ritual and idolatry only. They ignore Paul’s use of the word “natural,” which is important because the apostle supports God’s design for male-female pairings in creation.

1 Corinthians 6:9

KJV: Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, **nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.**

QJV: Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, **nor morally weak, nor promiscuous.**

The two Greek words in this passage were not ambiguous in that culture. Bible scholar Dr. Robert Gagnon explains them: “Malakoi (lit., “soft men,” but taken in the sense of men who feminize themselves to attract male sex partners) and arsenokoitai (literally, “men who lie with [koite] a male [arsen]”) in 1 Cor 6:9 are clearly inclusive of all homosexual bonds. . .”

(www.robagnon.net/articles/HomosexHowBadIsIt.pdf) It is irresponsible to twist these descriptors to mean “morally weak” and “promiscuous.”

The Bible is replete with stories of people who “did what was right in [their] own eyes” (Judges 17:6). It never ends well. The Queen James Bible is another in a long line of unfortunate decisions to set aside what God has said and pursue what people think will make them happy. At the core of the QJV, just as in every self-serving sin each of us indulges in, is a core of rebellion and independence from God.

Editors can change the words they don't like in God's word, but it doesn't change the reality of His created intent for us. One day, the people who published this Bible, just like the people who believe the changes, will face the truth: God knows what He's doing, and we don't get a vote in it.

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