

# Gay Teen Suicide and Bullying: A Christian Response

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

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

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

one's identity; what do you when you don't feel comfortable in your own skin?

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

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

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

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

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

Whether they know Him or not.[{1}](#)

Christians should be at the forefront of the anti-bullying movement. Bullying is the opposite of the second greatest commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31). The Gospels are full of stories of Jesus standing up

for the underdog; consider how He stood up to the religious bullies who had entrapped a woman caught in adultery (John 8). When it comes to bullies, what would Jesus do? Stand up to them. Defend the bullied. Communicate that they are precious, valued, and loved.

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

To understand the problem of gay teen suicides, it's helpful understand the issues for gay teens (please see my article ["Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality."](#)) We also need to understand more about bullying and what to do about it. The very wise and experienced Dr. Allan L. Beane offers "Tips for Parents, Assertiveness Skills for Students Who Are Bullied" and "Assertiveness Strategies for Siblings and Other Students (Bystanders)" on his web site.[{2}](#)

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

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

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

We can do something to prevent more gay teen suicides. The most influential people in gay teens' lives are their peers, whose affirmation or shaming holds extreme power. But teens need to be instructed in how to fulfill the second greatest commandment, in loving their neighbor. We can teach them that all young people need to be loved, to be accepted as people made in God's image, to be valued. They all need the "three A's": attention, affirmation, and affection. If sexually confused or gender-insecure teens, who are often marginalized by the other students, experienced Christians reaching out to them in friendship, simply communicating the grace of acceptance and value, that could make a big difference. It can be choices as simple as inviting someone to sit with them at

lunch, or telling others to “lay off” if they make insulting and negative comments about one of those marginalized students. They can even say affirming things to the bullies like, “Hey. You’re better than that, dude. Leave him alone.”

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

My mother used to give us kids two instructions:

1. If there is a kid on the playground that nobody else is playing with—you play with them.
2. If there is a bully picking on other kids—you be the one to stand up to him or her.<sup>{3}</sup>

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

## Notes

1. Thomas, Randy, “Step Up, Speak Out Against Bullying: The Tragic Case of Tyler Clementi,” Exodus International Blog, posted Oct. 1, 2010, accessed Nov. 11, 2010: [blog.exodusinternational.org/2010/10/01/step-up-speak-out-against-bullying-the-tragic-case-of-tyler-clementi](http://blog.exodusinternational.org/2010/10/01/step-up-speak-out-against-bullying-the-tragic-case-of-tyler-clementi).

2. Beane, Dr. Allan, Bully Free Program, “Tips for Parents” and other posts: [www.bullyfree.com/free-resources/tips-for-parents](http://www.bullyfree.com/free-resources/tips-for-parents) accessed Nov. 11, 2010.

3. Wallis, Jim, “Christians and Bullying: Standing with Gays and Lesbians,” God’s Politics blog: [blog.sojo.net/2010/10/21/christians-and-bullying-standing-with-gays-and-lesbians](http://blog.sojo.net/2010/10/21/christians-and-bullying-standing-with-gays-and-lesbians), accessed Nov. 11, 2010.

---

# Your Board of Directors

At a conference several years ago I was given a thought-provoking challenge, to identify the people on the board of directors of my life: whose voices do I listen to? Whose counsel do I follow? Whose values do I respond to?

The speaker pointed out that some people ought to be kicked off our board—like parents, if their voices of shame and criticism still control and restrict us. So should voices of much of the media, especially TV. And we can replace them with wiser, more godly voices who can offer us direction and perspective. There was a discussion of categories of potential board members. They don't have to be alive, and we don't have to personally know them, either.

The Lord Jesus, of course, needs to be the #1 board member. If we're married, our spouse should be on our board. The Apostle Paul is a good board member. Peter and James are good too, as is Solomon. So are some of the church fathers and Christian writers like C.S. Lewis. Or a pastor, and not necessarily our own. (I have a friend in a distant city who has adopted my pastor as hers, and listens to every audio recording my church puts online.) Mentors are great board members, and so are wise and trusted friends.

A few weeks ago, John Townsend, one of the co-authors of [the Boundaries series](#), was at my church. I love what he writes and listen to him on the radio show "New Life Live" whenever possible. I had a chance to talk to him briefly, so I told him about my board of directors. "John," I said, "Several years ago I installed you as a permanent member of my board. Other people have come and gone, but you're always there. I really appreciate your wisdom and godly perspective, and you have

equipped me to respond to various life challenges. Just wanted you to know how you've blessed me even though we've never met."

(To my delighted surprise, he lit up and asked if he could hug me!)

Who's on your board? Who can you kick off to the glory of God? (Hint: magazines that make you unhappy with how God made you as you compare yourself to the celebrities and models inside, certain internet sites, particular TV shows. . .)

Who can you put on your board? Let's hear it.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/your\\_board\\_of\\_directors](http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/your_board_of_directors)  
in July 2009.

---

## Watching Transformation Happen

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

I got to experience the power of answered prayer as I stood in worship with a divorced couple whom I have known online for several years but met at the conference. The husband had gone AWOL for the past year, choosing to pursue his feelings

instead of his identity as a beloved child of His Father. He told me “something” kept drawing him back into the light: with a smile, I told him that Jesus has His hook in his heart because he belongs to Jesus! And there he was, reconnecting with his God and his wife in worship and the beauty of repentance.

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

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

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



happens.

And it is beautiful.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/watching-transformation-happen/](https://blogs.bible.org/watching-transformation-happen/) on July 21,  
2009.

---

# Mothering Little Men from Mars

One of the greatest privileges of my life—right after saying “yes” to Jesus and “I do” to my husband—has been mothering my two sons, now 20 and 22.

Several years ago, my husband Ray and I started researching gender differences and discovered the truths in John Gray’s mega-bestseller, [\*Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus\*](#). It didn’t take long for us to realize that we didn’t have gender-free *children*; we had little men from Mars! And then I started realizing why I sometimes unnecessarily frustrated my kids and why we didn’t connect all the time—because I’m from Venus and they’re from Mars, and there is a HUGE gender gap between masculine and feminine! John Gray didn’t discover it; God created it, with great delight and a big smile on His face.

For example, boys, being male, are wired to be **self-reliant**. They act like they get extra brownie points for doing something on their own. One of my son Curt’s first whole sentences was, “**I** do it!” For boys, accepting help is perceived as weakness. For us relationally-oriented ladies, offering and accepting help is a way to make a heart-connection with another person. So when I would say, “Let

Mommy help you," they would be offended and I never knew why. If I could do it over again, I would tell them, "Let's see if you can do it on your own. If it doesn't work, I'll be glad to help."

One of the most powerful lessons I've learned about mothering boys is that the male mind is linear, life is handled only one piece at a time. This impacts both their thinking and activity.

Males tend to think on one thing at a time. I now know that when my husband or sons are reading, it's not safe to start a conversation until I get their attention and they're looking at me. I used to frustrate the dickens out of my sons on soccer game days when they were dressed in their soccer uniforms, their soccer bags were packed, they had their game face on, and there were 15 minutes left before we had to leave. And I, being the ever-efficient one, would try to get them to use that time wisely to clean up the living room or fold laundry. They never, ever, cooperated willingly! And now I know why. I'd love to go back and change that part of mothering.

This linear approach also has a major impact on their activity. They are created to **do one thing at a time** before moving on to the next event. If I wanted their attention while they were watching TV, I would have to physically stand in front of the screen to break their attention and have them look at me. I, on the other hand, am a natural multi-tasker, because if mothers couldn't do more than one thing at a time, humanity wouldn't last more than one generation. So I would have conversations with my boys or direct homework while doing the dishes or cooking or a multitude of other things. I finally realized that because my kids can't multi-task, they never believed that I was actually paying attention to them if my hands were busy.

Knowing this, I have learned that when they start to tell me

something, I put down whatever I'm doing, turn my body to face them squarely, and give them my full physical attention. It's been wonderful to see the difference; they now *feel* I am truly listening. I've shared this insight with several of my friends, who report that it's made a major difference with the boys in their homes as well. Their girls never gave it a thought, because girls intuitively know you can wash dishes and talk at the same time!

Where girls are more verbal, boys are usually **more physical**. I have a friend who wanted her boys to always move quietly and slowly like girls, and had a "no rough-housing" rule in the house. This is the fast track to killing a boy's heart, because boys were made to wrestle and tumble and be loud. This isn't a design defect. It's the way God was pleased to make them. While it's not good to break lamps, of course, boys need to be able to MOVE while their moms smile and let them be who they were made to be.

Another thing I'd go back and change is trying to pry conversations out of my sons. I didn't understand that females naturally generate three times as many words as males, and we talk to build community and knit hearts together. Boys and **men talk for one reason: to convey facts and information**. If they don't have anything to convey, they don't talk. A wise counselor finally explained to me that if I waited for my sons to initiate conversations on their timetable, I would get what my heart longed for. I also learned that one of my son's love languages is physical touch, and if I would go in at the beginning or the end of the day and silently rub his back, he would often start talking. It's amazing what meaningful conversations can happen at bedtime when the kids are trying to forestall sleep!

John Gray says, and it's my experience as well, that a **man's primary need is to be *respected***. It starts when they're very small boys. When a boy's mother shows him respect, especially when it's backed by a father's respect, that fills boys'

“respect buckets.” Because they are made in the image of God, that alone makes them infinitely valuable and precious and worthy of great respect and dignity. I showed them respect by giving them significant choices, and honoring those choices. It started with choosing their clothes and making various school-related choices, and grew into choices like room colors and what sports they would pursue. I showed them respect by listening to them and not interrupting, by not being sarcastic, and by not saying shaming and condemning things. My son has commented that it’s important to remember that kids are “little MEN from Mars,” and not talk down to them as inferior beings simply because they are not adults. He is glad we didn’t do it, but it really bothers him when he sees grown-ups do it to kids.

One last thing I’ve learned lately is the importance of supporting and cherishing our children’s gender to help them grow into healthy adults. Little **boys need to know that being a boy is a good thing**, and of course the same holds true for girls. After sharing this with a group of mothers of preschoolers, one friend took her little boy for a walk down to the lake. Along the way she said, “Parker, let’s look for frogs and toads. Mommy is so glad God made you a little boy so you could like yucky things like frogs and toads.” When they got back to the house, his grandmother asked, “So how was your walk?” and Parker said, “Mommy’s glad that I’m a boy because I like yucky things like frogs and toads.”

When my first son was born, my mother told me that mothers and sons, and fathers and daughters, have a very special relationship. She was so very right, and I thank the Lord for His good, so very good, gift of my sons.

Copyright 2002 Sue Bohlin

This blog post was originally published on February 26, 2002.

---

# The Mother Heart of God

Two days ago we observed Mother's Day in the US. I think Mother's Day matters to God because mothers matter to God. And I think mothers matter to God beyond their necessity for bringing new life into the world, but because women reflect an aspect of God's heart in ways men cannot.

Every aspect of our femininity, it seems to me, comes from God originally. He made females in His image with the feminine attributes and strengths that come straight from the Father heart of God.

The essence of our femininity is expressed in two main ways: responding and nurturing.

One of the most wonderful promises in God's word says, "Call to Me, and I will answer." He says this multiple times, and multiple ways! God is a responsive God. And it honors and glorifies Him when WE respond—to Him, and to others.

Nurture shares the same root word as nurse. I am fascinated by one of the Old Testament names for God, El Shaddai. El means "strong one," and Shaddai is a form of the word for the breast. El Shaddai means "The strong breasted one. "

El Shaddai is the mother heart . . . of God the Father. It's from the Father we receive a mother's heart.

I acknowledge that Mother's Day is painful for some women, especially those who long to be mothers and aren't. But the heart of a mother isn't about having given birth. It's an attitude of the heart, a desire and willingness to nurture others.

El Shaddai longs to nurture and nurse us, if we'll let Him,

and He longs to draw us into an intimate embrace with Him.

I have seen Him bring healing to the hearts of many people as they pressed hard into His breast to receive nurture and comfort. . . and identity. His love is powerful enough to transform a heart that is so riddled with holes that it's like a spaghetti strainer, and when His love functions like Super Glue to plug up the holes, people's hearts are transformed into vessels that can hold His love—as well as people's—instead of draining out. As they receive nursing and nurturing from The Strong Breasted One, He loves and provides for them. I've watched it happen multiple times.

I am so grateful for the responsive, nurturing “Mother heart of God”!

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_mother\\_heart\\_of\\_god](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_mother_heart_of_god)

---

[Listen to Sue's message on this topic given at a Dallas-area church](#)

---

## Ellen and Her “Wife”

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

Oprah is enthusiastically pro-gay, so I was not surprised that she oohed and aahed over her guests' romance and wedding, which we saw in video and gorgeous photography. And I wasn't

surprised that Ellen and Portia said they were glad to be “married” because it gave validity and legitimacy to their relationship. That perspective is part of an agenda about normalizing homosexuality, not the one-flesh union of male and female God intends marriage to be.

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

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

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

surprising that connection would be so important, but there is an element of desperation to the connection that characterizes lesbian relationships.

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

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

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

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/ellen\\_and\\_her\\_wife](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/ellen_and_her_wife)

---



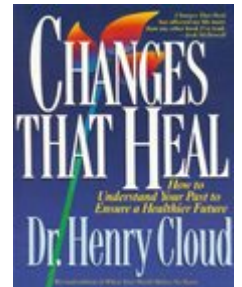
# How Change Happens

On my recent trip to Australia (2010), one of the topics I was asked to address at a conference featuring a redemptive view of homosexuality was “Is Change Possible?” This is a controversial question because there are some loud, insistent voices in the culture who say, “Unless you never again have a homosexual thought or feeling, you haven’t changed. And since no one admits to that, any claim of change is an illusion.”

No one would apply that strict a standard to any other issue! Former alcoholics living sober and free from the chaos of their drinking for decades still would like a cold beer on a hot day, but that doesn’t mean they haven’t changed!

Is change possible? Change is part of life! But transformation is also part of what it means to be a Christ-follower. Understanding how change happens, on the other hand, is another matter. So I have been thinking about the process for a long time as I prepared for my message.

One of my favorite explanations comes from Dr. Henry Cloud in his book *Changes That Heal*. He gives a delightful application to one of Jesus’ parables in Luke 13.



“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’ (vv. 6-9)

Grace and truth in this parable are symbolized by the actions of “digging around” and “fertilizing.” Using the trowel of God’s truth, we must dig out the weeds and encumbrances of falsehood, sin and hurt that keep the soil of our souls cluttered. In addition, we must add the fertilizer of love and relationship to “enrich the soil.”

As a Bible teacher, a lay counselor, and one involved in helping those deal with unwanted homosexuality, I have seen the truth of Dr. Cloud’s suggestion over and over again. As we study God’s word with an open heart and pursue knowledge of God and intimacy with Him in a personal relationship (“the trowel of God’s truth”), change comes when we identify the lies we have believed about life, about ourselves, about other people, and about God, and replace them with the truth. Change comes when we repent of how our coping mechanisms have become sin because they keep us from trusting God. Change comes when we forgive those who hurt us so we are no longer in bondage to those who left wounds on our souls. Change comes when we live in community, engaging with the Body of Christ who can be “Jesus with skin on” to us. Change comes when people love us and accept us as we are so we can be courageous to deal with our “stuff” and cooperate with God in the changing, healing process.

Dr. Cloud continues,

But the Bible tells us that in order for grace and truth to produce fruit, we need a third key element: time.

Look again at verses 8 and 9. “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, Fine! If not, then cut it down.’” The gardener, who certainly symbolizes our Lord, the “author and perfecter” of our faith, realized that his work and the fertilizer need time to take effect. In short, *it takes time to grow*. And time alone will not do it. *Time must be joined by grace and truth*. When we respond

responsibly to these three elements, we will not only heal, but also bear fruit.

We live in a microwave culture that has trained us to have unrealistic expectations about time. We want instant everything, and we hate waiting. I received an email from a young man in his early 20s who hated his same-sex attractions and wondered how long it would take to get rid of them. I explained to him that it's not like a bad case of acne, it's far more complex than that, and that it's our experience that for people his age, three to five years of actively "digging around" in the soil of their hearts and minds produces lasting change. He thought that was too long. I wondered, "What will your life look like in three to five years if you keep going down the path you're on? Bless your heart!"

Change is normative. Change is expected. Change is hard work, but we have the assistance of our divine Gardener to make it happen.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/how-change-happens/](https://blogs.bible.org/how-change-happens/)  
on Sept. 14, 2010

---

## The 3rd Grade Transgender Bus Driver

It's back to school time, which usually means parents buy school supplies and start waking kids up earlier in the morning. But one elementary school just sent out a letter informing the parents that the school is welcoming a new family with a transgendered "3rd grade girl."

The letter urges the parents and students to welcome and accept her and treat her the same as any other girl. Not so subtly, the letter also informed parents that the school district does not tolerate discrimination in respect to gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or religion.

YIKES!!!

My heart absolutely breaks to learn of this. I'm sure the school administrators (and possibly, it's just one person) are patting themselves on the back for being so progressive and politically correct. I can't imagine that they are aware of the pressure this puts on this poor confused little boy, as well as an entire school, to engage in this social experiment.

If a third grader decided brushing his teeth is a stupid waste of time and he wasn't going to do it anymore, responsible parents would never give in to the little tyrant who is completely unable to see the long-term consequences of foolish choices.

If a third grader decided that school itself is a stupid waste of time and he wasn't going anymore, responsible parents wouldn't give in to that misguided tantrum, either.

But when a third grader is so consumed by confusion about being a boy, when his whole life is permeated with the hopeless despair of believing *It's not okay to be me*, and when his parents capitulate to his fantasy, something bigger than mere confusion is going on. This kid is driving the bus of not only his life, but his parents' as well. And just as we would never let third-graders drive a literal bus, it's equally nuts and scary to let them sit at the controls of anyone's life.

When my friend Ricky was four, he decided he wanted to be a horse. His mother wisely did not build a stable in their back yard and feed him hay just because her little boy wanted to be something other than who he was. She said, "No, you're not a

horse, you're a human boy." And in time, he grew to accept who he was.

It's politically correct to affirm whatever feelings children have, such as "I'm a boy but I feel like a girl," as valid. When school administrators try to get a whole school to indulge the fantasy, it's only a matter of time before things blow up in their faces, because their rhetoric isn't powerful enough to disable kids' baloney detectors. At least some kids'. Telling children to accept a boy as a girl and expecting them to swallow it without thinking is sheer hubris, I think.

*". . . male and female He created them." Gen. 1:27*

Children know that we live in a binary world: boys and girls, male and female. And it is not good, or loving, to indulge the fantasy that one can change the reality God created. Or that He made a mistake in choosing a baby's gender.

I pray for this confused little boy, that his parents will get him the help for his gender identity disorder now while there's still lots of hope for help. And I pray for the Christians in that school to be lovingly bold in proclaiming that it's not in this student's best interest, or the best interests of the rest of the students, to take make-believe to a scary new level.

And I pray that the Lord will gently pick up this precious, confused little boy from his bus driver's seat and place him in His lap.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/the-3rd-grade-transgender-bus-driver/](https://blogs.bible.org/the-3rd-grade-transgender-bus-driver/) on August 18, 2009.

---

# What Not To Say When Someone is Grieving

Last week my dear friend Sandi Glahn wrote another boffo [blog post](#) about the myths of infertility, which included some of the dumb things people say.

It may be insensitivity or a lack of education that spurs people to say things that are unhelpful at the least and downright hurtful much of the time. I still remember my own daggers to the heart after our first baby died nine days after her birth. And for the past several years, I have been collecting actual quotes said to those already in pain.

So here's my current list of What Not To Say when someone is hurting:

## **Don't start any sentence with "At least. . . ."**

- "At least you didn't have time to really love her."
- "At least he's in heaven now."
- "At least you have two other children."
- "At least that's one less mouth you'll have to feed."
- "At least it didn't have to go through the pain of birth."
- "At least you've had a good life so far, before the cancer diagnosis."

## **Don't attempt to minimize the other person's pain.**

- "Cancer isn't really a problem." (e.g., Shame on you for thinking that losing your hair/body part/health is a problem.)
- "It's okay, you can have other children."

## **Don't try to explain what God is doing behind the scenes.**

- "I guess God knew you weren't ready to be parents yet."
- "Now you'll find out who your friends are."
- "This baby must have just not been meant to be."
- "There must have been something wrong with the baby."
- "Just look ahead because God is pruning you for great

works.”

- “Cancer is really a blessing.”
- “Cancer is a gift from God because you are so strong.”

**Don't blame the other person:**

- “If you had more faith, your daughter would be healed.”
- “Remember that time you had a negative thought? That let the cancer in.”
- “You are not praying hard enough.”
- “Maybe God is punishing you. Have you done something sinful?”
- “Oh, you're not going to let this get you down, are you?”  
(Meaning: just go on without dealing with it.)

**Don't compare what the other person is going through to ANYTHING else or anyone else's problem:**

- “It's not as bad as that time I. . .”
- “My sister-in-law had a double mastectomy and you only lost one breast.”

**Don't use the word “should”:**

- “You should be happy/grateful that God is refining you.”

**Don't use clichés and platitudes:**

- “Look on the bright side.”
- “He's in a better place.”
- “She's an angel now.” (NO! People and angels are two different created kinds! People do not get turned into angels when they die.)
- “He's with the Lord.”

**Don't instruct the person:**

- “This is sent for your own good, and you need to embrace it to get all the benefit out of it.”
- “Remember that God is in control.”
- “Remember, all things work together for good for those that love God and are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28 is powerful to comfort oneself, but it can feel like

being bludgeoned when it comes from anyone else.)

#### **What TO say:**

- “I love you.”
- “I am so sorry.” You don’t have to explain. Anything.

#### **What TO do:**

- A wordless hug.
- A card that says simply, “I grieve with you.”
- Instead of bringing cakes, drop off or (better) send gift certificates for restaurants or pizza places.

And pray. Then pray some more. It’s the most powerful thing we can say or do.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/what-not-to-say-when-someone-is-grieving/](https://blogs.bible.org/what-not-to-say-when-someone-is-grieving/) on January 20, 2009, and you can read the many comments there.

---

## **What Not to Say: Adoption**

The power of words to hurt and offend seems limitless, as Sandra Glahn and I have learned both in life and in the comments from our blogs about “what not to say.” [See [Infertility: People Say the Dumbest Things](#) and [What Not to Say When Someone is Grieving](#).]

I came across a new list of What Not to Say About Adoption from a single dad blogger. With some editing, here is his contribution:

#### **[Single Dad Laughing’s Guide to Adoption Etiquette.](#)**

- 1. Never, ever, ever, ask how much a child costs.** This includes the phrase, “How much did you pay for him?” First



of all, it's none of your business. Second of all, if you're interested in adoption, research it through the appropriate channels. Speak with an adoption agency. Adoptive parents don't purchase children. They simply pay legal fees and agency fees. Just like biological parents pay hospital and doctor bills. Don't turn the child into nothing more than a commodity.

**2. Never ask if a celebrity inspired the adoption.** Believe it or not, Tom Cruise, Connie Chung, and Angelina Jolie did not convince me one way or the other in the biggest decision of my life. Are you serious?

**3. Never ask "Where is his real dad?"** Forget the fact that it will hurt *my* feelings. How do you think it will affect my son's feelings to feel like I'm not a real dad to him? Adoptive parents *are* real parents. The term you're looking for is "birth mother" or "birth father."

**4. Don't say things like, "As soon as you adopt you're going to get pregnant"** when you find out somebody is adopting. First of all, there are usually many, many years of pain and financial burden strapped to infertility, treatments, and heartache. Do you really think that what you're saying will help them? Secondly, while it is funny when it happens, it's rare.

**5. Never say, "Why did she give him away?"** Do I really need to explain why this one would hurt a child? The proper term is "placed." A birth mother and birth father *place* their child for adoption. And again, it's personal and none of your business, so don't ask if you aren't my BFF.

**6. Don't say, "It's like he's your real son."** This is similar to number three, but worthy of mentioning. He *is* my real son.

**7. Don't say, "Do you love him as if he was your own?"** Ummm... probably more than you love your little terror, that's for

sure. And again... he *is* my own.

**8. Never say things like, “You’re so wonderful to adopt a child.”** I am a parent. Just like anybody else with kids.

**9. Don’t start spewing your horrible adoption stories.** “This one time, my friend’s sister’s aunt’s dog’s previous owner’s niece adopted a baby and the real dad came back and they took the baby away after they had him for two years.” First of all, it probably isn’t true. Second of all, how would you feel if I told you about all the ways you could lose your child? Adoption is permanent. And in the extremely rare circumstances that something like that happens, it’s not something you should spread because the hurt that exists for all the parties involved must be immeasurable.

**10. Don’t say things like, “Is it hard for him to be adopted?”** Well, it wasn’t, until you asked me that right in front of him, you thoughtless soul.

**11. I don’t want to hear about your second cousin who was on a waiting list for twelve years and never got a baby.** Granted, this one was much more annoying when we were going through the adoption process. Nobody wants to know that some people never get chosen. Show some kindness. Even to ugly people.

Some of our dearest friends have grown their families through adoption, and they have their own contributions to make, such as, “How can you ever love your adopted child as much as your biological children?” (Because the heart just grows bigger that way. Because the same God who adopted us into His family loves us just as much as the natural kids. Because love grows from the heart, not from the uterus.)

I am grateful for the input from people who have been on the receiving end of thoughtless comments and questions to help the rest of us be more loving in the way we interact with others.

Do you have anything to add to this list?

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/what\\_not\\_to\\_say\\_adoption](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_not_to_say_adoption)  
on Sept. 28, 2010.