

Don't Judge Me?

The 14-year-old daughter of a friend recently responded to her mother's correction with, "Don't judge me, Mom." The same week, a friend of mine asked my opinion on something, and as I was mentally running it through the grid of "what does God say about this in His word," she said, "Now, don't you go judging me!"

Tolerance and acceptance—the *new* tolerance, which says that every value, belief and behavior should be embraced as equally valid—are the highest values of our culture. Which makes judging the most hideous and unacceptable of sins.

Now, to be fair, there is a lot of ugly judging in the world. Before a friend became a Christ follower, she was on the receiving end of a lot of hateful judging when she would protest at gay rights events, hearing "You're going to hell!" and other ugly epithets. People who didn't know her at all made judgments about her character and her destiny. I have personally received my share of hate mail from strangers accusing me of not being a Christian because I disagree with them on a cherished position.

But if we get pulled over for speeding, and the officer points out that we were going twenty miles over the speed limit, nobody says, "Don't judge me, officer!" He's not judging our character, he's comparing our behavior to the law.

Judging is assuming you have all the facts and making an assessment of condemnation out of ignorance. It's about smugly believing "I'm right and you're wrong. You are lesser-than."

There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to be familiar with "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus' call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24

He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother's eye (Matt. 7:5)? That's about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another's sin, not to ignore other people's behavior.

But then there's the "big daddy" passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. Judging doesn't mean condemning, though; often it's a matter of comparing one's behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of one's choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

Comparing someone's beliefs and actions to a standard can be a loving thing to do. A lady working in an after-school program noticed that one little girl was clearly not doing well on her homework, but she also seemed to not be working very hard at it. The teacher said, "I think your brain is switched off! May I touch your head? I think I can find the switch and turn it back on!" The wide-eyed little one gave permission and the teacher said with a smile, "Oh, here it is! Right under one of

your braids! Let's turn your brain back on!" What a lovely, eloquent way to call a child to live up to her potential without shaming or judging her for being lazy or stupid.

Challenging someone to be better than they are can be a gift. One of the best-ever movie lines is in "As Good As It Gets" when Jack Nicholson tells Helen Hunt, "You make me want to be a better man." When parents ask their children at report card time, "Did you do your best? Only you can know," they are giving them a chance to honestly compare their ability to their potential. It honors another to say something like, "I think you'll be happier with yourself if you live out your gifting" rather than shaming them with something like, "What a loser." Now *that's* shaming.

And judging.

And ugly.

And unlike Jesus.

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We Are Special

January 17, 2013

A recent study has found what many of us have observed for some time. College students think they are special. One newspaper put it this way: "If you asked a college freshman today who the Greatest Generation is, they might respond by

pointing in a mirror.” The study documented young people’s unprecedented level of self-infatuation.

Psychologist Jean Twenge found that over the last four decades of research on college freshman, there has been a dramatic rise in self-confidence. For example, they describe themselves as “above average” in academic ability and in their personal lives. The problem is that there is a stark disconnect between their opinions of themselves and their actual ability.

I have quoted Jean Twenge before in other studies that she has done. For example, she has found that students suffer from what she calls “ambition inflation.” As their ambition increases, it reaches levels of unrealistic expectations. She has also found in another study that there has been a 30 percent increase toward narcissism in students since 1979.

The changing culture is part of the reason for this dramatic change. She explains: “Our culture used to encourage modesty and humility and not bragging about yourself.” If someone did that in the past, we called that person “stuck-up” or conceited. Today the culture often rewards such attitudes and behavior.

I would also argue that social media encourages and accentuates this trend. Students posting pictures of themselves on Facebook and Instagram, uploading videos on YouTube, and leaving numerous comments on Twitter receive positive feedback for such behavior. These technologies provide additional vehicles to feed their narcissism.

These studies remind us that this generation needs guidance from pastors and parents so they can apply biblical perspectives on success, humility, and self-image. I’m Kerby Anderson, and that’s my point of view.

A Golf Lesson for Non-Golfers

Jan. 16, 2013

Recently my husband and I, along with two friends, took a golfing excursion in Jamaica while on a cruise. Two of them golfed while the other two of us rode in a cart taking pictures of the golfers and the breathtaking beauty of the mountainous course that provided ocean views from almost every hole.

This course required a caddy (a golfing-savvy helper) to accompany every golfer, and it was the first time our friend Pam had ever golfed with a caddy. She kept marveling at the Christian life lessons she was learning from the specialized help she



received throughout the game. At dinner on the last night of the cruise, the eight people at our table each shared the highlight of our week; Pam's was definitely "golfing with a caddy."

Pam realized that her experience on the golf course was a picture of how the Holy Spirit would love to bless us, as a kind of "internal caddy," if we would just allow Him to:

Giving instruction: the caddy would suggest ways to shift her stance, her grip on the club, or the way to swing. When she followed through on what he said, it helped her game—and it helped her have more fun.

The Holy Spirit knows the best way to approach and execute every detail of our lives, and will gently prompt and nudge us

if we will just listen expectantly to His suggestions.

Giving direction: out of his knowledge of the challenging terrain of the course, the caddy would suggest which club to use. Sometimes Pam would disregard the suggestion and “lean on her own understanding” (Prov. 3:5) and it never worked out as well as when she followed his advice. He never shamed her when she chose a different club, just allowing the consequences of her choice to speak far more eloquently.

The Holy Spirit knows the terrain of every step of our journey through life, and He knows how to direct our paths (Prov. 3:6). As we learn to listen to His voice, He whispers, “This is the way; walk ye in it” (Is. 30:21). When we quench Him instead (1 Thess. 5:19), He never shames us; He allows us to learn from the more painful teacher of consequences.

Encouragement: when Pam made a bad swing, she defaulted to what many women do, saying, “I’m sorry.” Apologizing for not being perfect, right? How many times do we do that? Then she would hear the powerful words of encouragement, “Look, you hit the ball! Good for you!”

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate encourager, comforter and counselor. He reminds us of truth from God’s word and will often whisper (sometimes even thunder!) to us exactly what we need to hear: things like, “I will take care of you,” “You are not alone, I am here,” and “I love you.”

Trust: several times, Pam’s caddy would look at her and say, “Trust me.” He had the confidence of years of experience, but she had to choose to place herself in his hands by following his advice. He never steered her wrong.

The Holy Spirit is constantly engineering circumstances that invite us to trust Him. As I come up on 40 years of walking with Jesus, it seems to me that every life quiz or test from God has the same answer: “Trust Me.”

In the space of a five-hours golf game, Pam made some amazing discoveries about the Christian life that will last for a long, long time. Instead of a white jumpsuited-clad caddy helping her golf, her big takeaway was that the indwelling Holy Spirit wants to be even more involved in every aspect of her day, her life, her choices, her sorrows, her joys.

Fore!

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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.

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Are You a Safe Person?

Dec. 19, 2012

We all want people in our lives that we can be real with, people we can trust with our hearts and our struggles, people we can risk opening up to. But it is foolishness to share the treasure of our hearts with unsafe people who will judge us, shame us, or condemn us.

So what does a safe person look like? How do we recognize them? And more importantly, how do we become one?

Being a safe person starts with owning your own brokenness and need for Jesus. It means admitting you're not perfect. Beyond that, it means dropping the unrealistic hope of perfection in this lifetime and the pretense that you've got it all together. It means being open about your hurts, your temptations, your failings, your humanity. A safe person gets that "there but for the grace of God, go I."

A safe person is humble, which means being right-sized. Not pretending to be bigger than they really are, and not thinking they are less than they really are. Right-sized! Humble people don't look down on others from their "superior" position, but they don't put others on a pedestal either. They understand that the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

A safe person understands grace and gives it to others. I love Pastor John Ortberg's delightful definition: "Grace is the offer of God's ceaseless presence and irrational love that cannot be stopped. It's the flow of God's power and presence and favor in your life from one moment to the next that

enables you to do whatever it is God has for you to do.”

Grace is acceptance. It looks at others and communicates, “I accept you just as you are.” Acceptance doesn’t mean agreeing about everything, or condoning others’ foolish or sinful choices; it means not denying reality, and respecting other people’s right to make their own choices. God accepts us just as we are but He doesn’t agree with our sin. When a friend’s daughter confessed she was pregnant and unmarried, it was a painful struggle for the mom. One day she protested in her prayer time, “Lord, I suppose You want me to help put together a *shower* for her?!” She was taken aback by the gentle response she received: “Every child deserves to be welcomed and celebrated.” Chastened, she helped organize a shower for a little girl who has been nothing but a blessing and an unimaginable joy from the day she was born. My friend learned to live out the grace of acceptance without compromising on the sin that created the situation in the first place.

Safe people encourage others, by their example of transparency and authenticity, to be the same person on the outside that they are on the inside.

Safe people remember there are two sides to every story, and they wait to make a judgment till they hear the other side.

Safe people seek to maintain a non-judgmental attitude toward others. They don’t shame others. They don’t criticize others.

Safe people are honest people. They speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) as a way of life. Safe people teach themselves to be good listeners. When the other person is talking, they’re not thinking about what they are going to say when the other’s done; they simply receive their words with respectful attentiveness.

Safe people love with God’s love. By abiding in the vine (John 15), they stay yielded to God, and His love flows through a pipeline from the Father’s heart to others’ hearts.

Safe people are forgiving people. They extend to others the forgiveness they have received from God and from others.

Safe people seek forgiveness when they blow it. They confess their specific faults, acknowledge the effects of their actions on others, and ask for forgiveness.

It's especially wonderful when safe people become leaders, because they understand that brokenness and struggles are a normal part of growing and of the sanctification process. They know there will be stumbles and falls. They expect it. They're not shocked when it happens. So when it does, they recall their own desperate need for Jesus and His grace, and they extend it with sorrow rather than judgment, and compassion rather than criticism.

How safe a person are *you*?

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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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18, 2012

Don't Believe Like the Demons

Believe!

Nov. 11, 2012

One of our pastors shares a favorite story: a young man in Sweden, while trying to get rid of the watermark on his trial software so he could use it illegally, did some online research that led him to a YouTube film clip from our church (Watermark Community Church) making the case for waiting to have sex before marriage. The twenty-something had never heard of such a thing, and while it sounded crazy to him, he continued to watch more clips, which intrigued him further, and he did more research that led him to the conclusion, "Wait a minute, there's something really different about these people."

So he called the pastor. From Sweden. "Hey man, I don't know your God, never heard of your Jesus, but I want to know Him. I've been tracking with you guys online, watched a ton of sermons, and I want to know that God." J.P. led him to the Lord, and he trusted Christ over the phone in Swedish.

He called again some time later. "Hey, we always go out and get drunk, and I'm having a hard time doing that all of a sudden. Yeah, we always pride ourselves on taking some girl home that we don't know, and all of a sudden that doesn't feel right to me. What's wrong with me? This isn't any fun anymore. Something happened!"

That's what lifechange looks like. That's the kind of transformation that happens when someone puts their trust in Jesus Christ and surrenders their heart and their life to a new kind of supernatural God-life. The New Testament talks about two kinds of life—the merely physical, and the supernatural, eternal, abundant life Jesus said He came to bring us (John 10:10). This eternal life invades our merely physical life.

I've been engaging in an email conversation with a dear man who is wondering why he hasn't experienced any lifechange stories like the new Swedish Christian. When I asked his understanding of what it means to be a Christian, he indicated he had prayed a prayer that Christians had told him to pray. But nothing had happened, nothing had changed. In decades. When I asked him who he thinks Jesus is, he said whoever Christians told him He was. He's now considering that all this time, he hasn't been a Christian after all, and I think he's right.

His dilemma illustrates a heartbreaking truth: there are a lot of people who think they are Christians because they have prayed a prayer or they mentally assent to some spiritual truths. But then they don't see anything different in their lives, because they have been offered a false gospel of "say this prayer" or "believe these things" and they think they've got their going-to-heaven ticket punched. But they continue to live the same way, simply adding Jesus to their mental cubbyholes, ready to call on Him at the moment of death.

The people who saw radical changes in their lives in the New Testament were those who opened themselves to being invaded by Jesus Christ's startlingly different, supernaturally powerful eternal life. As the true gospel spread, fueled by God's Spirit manifested through Jesus' lifechange in these people, the world was changed forever. I love how Dallas Willard writes:

So, C.S. Lewis writes, our faith is not a matter of our hearing what Christ said long ago and "trying to carry it out." Rather, "The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to 'inject' His kind of life and thought, His Zoe [life], into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin." (The Divine Conspiracy, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998, p. 20)

Why do so many people not experience the kind of lifechange of our Swedish friend? I respectfully (and, to be honest, somewhat fearfully) submit that their belief is that of demons. They believe the same thing the demons subscribe to, but it's not a saving, life-changing kind of faith. Biblical faith is about trusting our entire self into Jesus' hands, not merely nodding in intellectual assent or saying the words of a prayer. James 2:19 says, "You believe that God is one; well and good. *Even the demons believe that—and tremble with fear*" (emphasis mine).

"I believe in God." *So do the demons.*

"I believe Jesus is God's Son." *So do the demons.*

"I believe Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world." *So do the demons.*

"I believe Jesus rose from the dead." *So do the demons.*

What the demons *don't* do is repent, turning 180 degrees from going their own way to surrender to Jesus, receive His love, and follow Him in obedience. They *don't* entrust themselves into Jesus' care. They *don't* receive Jesus into the core of their being (John 1:12), as a response to Jesus drawing them into the core of His heart.

But we can. We must.

Biblical Christianity is about *relationship*. The Father, Son and Spirit invite us into Their circle of mutual love and affection, glory and grace. Jesus made it possible for us to be reconciled to God by taking our sin, that horrible barrier to relationship with His Father, out of the way at the cross. Biblical Christianity—being "injected" with eternal life—is SO not about mere intellectual assent or praying a prayer. It's about surrendering to an amazing love and an amazing relationship.

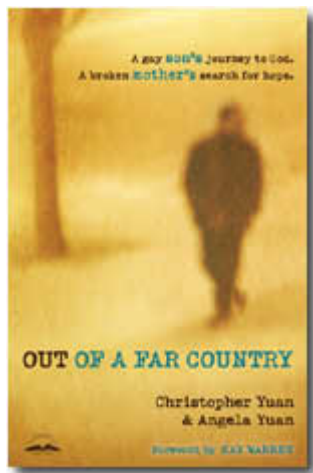
Make sure your faith is about trust, and surrender, and joining the circle of God's family. Make sure your faith is so much more than what the demons believe!

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The Power of a Mother's Prayers

Oct. 23, 2012

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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



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Flush It, Don't Eat it

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I used to have a family member who never had a cheerful or affirming thing to say. She was grumpy and judgmental, and nothing was ever good enough. But I learned an exceedingly valuable life lesson from her.

One day I realized that the way she treated me was like the solid waste that goes into toilets, if you know what I mean. I had a choice with how to handle it. I could internalize it, which would be like pulling out a spoon and eating it . . . or I could refuse to take it personally, and send it away by flushing it. There was a delightful sense of power the first time I told myself, "This is about her, not me," as I mentally reached for the handle and said to myself, "Flushhhhhh!" I couldn't help but smile at the freedom I felt.

I couldn't keep her brokenness, her own "heart garbage" from

dumping on me, but I found a way to refuse to accept it and make it *my* heart garbage. Result: greater emotional health for me.

When I taught the high school girls' Bible study at my church, they would complain about the way the high school boys treated them. (Not abuse, just relational cluelessness.) I assured them that high school boys are not fully formed human beings yet, and they needed to finish growing up. But I also empowered the girls with this wisdom, instructing them how to mentally reach over, hit the handle and say to themselves, "Flushhhhhh!" Swearing them to secrecy within the Bible study, I suggested that if some boy said something dumb, the girls could look at each another and say, "FI!" for "flush it."

It drove the boys nuts. "Feminine Intuition?" "Nope! You'll never guess what it means, it's a secret!" The girls told me it really helped them to not take the boys' immature comments personally; I told them that I was glad they were learning the lesson then, and they just might find it helpful for dealing with a parent, a future mother-in-law, or some other person whose hurtfulness they couldn't escape.

Jesus showed us this pattern; He knew how to keep Himself mentally and emotionally balanced even though He was surrounded by people who kept giving Him reason to "flush." He never put His emotional eggs in their baskets—He never took their misunderstanding and their judgments personally (until the cross, when He absorbed every bit of our sin and judgments into Himself). Even during His torture and crucifixion, He kept releasing the hurts of people into the Father's hands, saying repeatedly, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Whether it's someone cutting us off in traffic, or dissing us in a group setting or a Facebook thread, or any other place where people's sinfulness and brokenness spews out on us, it's helpful to tell ourselves, "Flush it, don't eat it."

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

Does God Have a Sense of Humor?

Sure He does! Where else would we get ours, since we are made in His image, and a sense of humor is such a delightful gift?

Humor, though, is culturally rooted (with the exception of mother-in-law jokes, which are apparently universal in any culture on the planet!). That's why most of us Westerners find it difficult to understand that Jesus was really a funny fellow. For instance, it's easy for us to imagine Him intoning solemnly, "Blind guides! You strain out a gnat yet swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:28) Not only is it a funny mental image, but Jesus was making a pun that is completely lost in translation. The Aramaic word for gnat is *galma*, and the word for camel is *gamla*. If we'd been there as onlookers, we would have howled.

So maybe some more modern examples, closer to home, will serve to show that our God has an absolutely delightful sense of humor.

My dear friend Holly told me this story:

One time I was reading a story in which the author tells the reader that God delights in wooing us and that we can even ask Him to give us a love song. After all, Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that He will quiet us with His love and rejoice over us with singing. So why not ask Him for a love song?

I was thinking about that one day while waiting for my lunch order. I was sitting outside a café in the beautiful

sunshine, when two girls walked up to the outdoor picnic benches I was at, put down their purses and went inside to order their lunch.

I smiled at them as they walked inside, and then went back to pondering what kind of love song God could possibly give me. Would He honor the request right away, if at all? Maybe He'd send a bird chirping a beautiful song. Maybe He'd just splash a beam of sun right across my lap. Maybe He'd . . . oh, never mind. It's just silly to think about these things.

But . . . the author did say that God delighted to do these kinds of things.

Well, here goes nothing.

"God, would you send me a love song?" I squeaked out meekly.

No sooner had the words left my lips when this girl's cell phone started ringing in her purse loud enough for me to hear the ring tone. Over and over again it just kept repeating this phrase from a song by The Doors: "Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name? Hello, I love you, won't you tell me your name?" I laughed and laughed and laughed! That crazy God with a GREAT sense of humor and perfect timing!!

Holly's friend Sheila read that story and responded with this:

God is definitely funny. This morning I was praying that I wouldn't step on the dead mouse in the attic today, and I "heard" the reply, "How about tomorrow?" I laughed out loud."

I never thought of God as witty like that, but why not?

This is my all-time favorite, told to me by Angie herself:

When she was mothering three young children, she was struggling with a number of severe stressors when she sensed

God calling to her. Literally. In her spirit, she heard Him say her full name: “*Angela*.” Only her mother and God call her Angela. So she knew He wanted her to do something and whatever it was, she knew she didn’t want to do it.

She heard, “*Angela*,” and she pretty much held up her hand to the Lord and said, “Talk to Moses.”

Some time passed, and she heard His voice again: “*Angela*.” Again, she said, “Talk to Moses.”

More time passed. And then one day she was cooking dinner, stirring the pasta into boiling water, when she distinctly heard His voice again: “Joshua 1:2.”

Oh boy.

She turned off the stove, told her son to watch his younger siblings, grabbed her Bible and went to her room to read, “Moses My servant is dead. You, however, arise and go . . .”

Now that’s funny. I don’t care who you are!

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