

# “What’s My Purpose in Life?”

A dear younger friend of mine recently posted this question on a forum:

“Do you feel that you have a great mission or purpose in life?

“I do feel like I’m made for something more than this, but whatever it is I can’t reach it, or find out what it is. I do feel as though I have a great purpose or mission in life—I’m sure I do!!! Why can I just not figure it out?

“Was I born in the wrong time? My roommate says that I’m like a young person who thinks they were meant for more. She says hardly anyone here has a great life of purpose and I just have to accept reality. 99% of the people are just normal people—that there are not that many characters, priests, prophets, or heroes.

“Does everyone go through life never figuring out what their great purpose is? There has to be a purpose beyond just surviving. Roommate says that my problem is that I think I’m born to be a superstar, a saint or a hero. She thinks I’m just unrealistic, and what I expect from and of myself is unrealistic. I think she’s a pessimist. I want to do something big. I don’t want a mediocre life.”

Similar to [C.S. Lewis’ argument](#) that our longings correspond to God’s plan for the fulfillment of those longings (such as experiencing hunger because food exists for us to eat, and experiencing fatigue because there is such a thing as sleep), I think my friend’s longing for the something bigger and something more, her disdain for a mediocre life, is indeed shaped by God’s call to love and serve Him in large and glorious ways. But we may have been waylaid by the “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” gospel, since many 20th-century Westerners seem to have directed their focus to

finding out this wonderful plan rather than on God Himself.

I don't see anywhere in scripture where we are called to find our purpose in life. I think God just wants us to obey what He's already given us. When we do a search for the phrases "God's will" or "will of God" in the Bible, we know for sure God wants us to do things like give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), be sanctified and avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3), silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good (1 Peter 2:15), and sometimes, suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong (1 Peter 3:17).

All the "one anothers" in the Bible are commands, so those are God's will as well. So our purpose in life is to please Him through obedience, which should grow out of our awareness that He loves us and made us for Himself.

Because we are made in the image of God, our purpose in life is to put Him on display. We—our bodies, our minds, our humor, our gifts and talents—are a display case for the glory of God. I think the specifics of how we go about that don't matter as much as we seem to think they do. Desiring to be truthful and transparent in serving as display cases for the treasure within matters more, I believe.

According to John 15, it is the Lord's pleasure—and thus His purpose for us—that we bear *much* (as opposed to *some* or *more*) fruit in us. That means Christlikeness; that means the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). So whether we are engaged in paid work or evangelizing on street corners, changing diapers or driving in traffic, putting Jesus on display is the most important thing. To do that, we need to continually immerse ourselves in His presence and His word, and hang around His people who are also immersing themselves in His presence and His word.

Right along with spiritual fruit is the topic of [spiritual gifts](#). Finding God's personal purpose for us will involve discovering which of the spiritual gifts He has given each one of us, and using them to build up the body of Christ and bless others. (They are found in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.)

And finally, 2 Corinthians 2 offers a delightful word picture of Christ-followers serving as "a sweet aroma of Christ to God" the Father, as well as bringing the fragrance of knowing Christ to people who are either being saved or perishing. That, too, is part of our purpose in life. I think that if we focus on what God has already told us pleases Him, obeying the commands He has already given His children, we'll get to the point of looking in the rear-view mirror of life and discovering, "Oh, *that* was my personal purpose! Cool!"

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## Permission Givers

Recently I was shopping in a store clogged with shoppers seeking Grand Opening bargains. I wanted three of an item; as one of the stockers opened a box for me, another lady said, "The limit is six, right? Give me six!" Suddenly I wanted to have six as well. She had given me permission to buy more than I intended. It was like she whipped out a permission slip and handed it to me. And I took it. This lady had no idea what she did!

We often function as "permission givers" in each other's

lives. It's part of living in community. We give each other permission not just for things we do, but how we think. And that's why we need to be careful what we're giving permission for. That was Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 10 when he warned the believers that they could end up giving permission to eat meat that had been offered to idols, which was sold at cut-rate prices in the meat market, to other believers for whom it would be sin because of their weak consciences.

We can give permission for evil as well as for good.

*Right now, the top three best-selling books are the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy, which is female erotica. Verbal porn. Many people are enthusiastically hitting the LIKE button on Facebook whenever anyone mentions it, each one giving permission to others to read it. In Dannah Gresh's blog ["I'm Not Reading Fifty Shades of Grey,"](#) she mentions a friend who "regretfully can't get the images out of her head." (And that's why I'm not reading it either.)*

We can give permission for others to endorse what the Bible calls sin by reassuring each other that we've outgrown the ancient, outmoded values that were given for our protection. We can give permission to continue building an addiction to sexual sin like using pornography by reassuring each other that "everybody does it." And it starts early; my friend has been intentional about teaching her 11-year-old son to choose purity, warning him that others will want to show him dirty pictures. Sure enough, last month in the bathroom of a boy scout camp, another 11-year-old offered to show him his porn collection on his cell phone.

But let's talk about giving permission for *good!* That's where this social dynamic can really shine!

For over a decade, I have participated in an online support forum, and I did a search for my posts using the word "permission."

- “I wish someone had asked me when I was growing up what it was like to be handicapped, to be stared at, to be different. It would have given me permission to find and use my voice, instead of living in bondage to shame that wasn’t mine.”

- After people responded to a post that I also shared here, [“What Would You Say to Your 8-Year-Old Self?”](#), I affirmed posters for the really powerful truths they would want to say to their younger selves. “Now—will you give that same little self permission to receive that truth? And ask the Holy Spirit to seal it to your heart?”

- One of the young women I mentor gave herself permission to agree that there *would* be a last time for destructive behaviors that she repeatedly fell into: sinful relationships, indulging in drugs, and self-injury. That permission-giving opened the door to believing that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead was available to her for living in sobriety.

- A number of us encouraged a young lady terrified of doctor visits, who confessed her irrational fear of the crinkly paper on the exam table. I uploaded a “permission button” and wrote, “I give you permission to sit in a chair in the exam room till the very last second.” It was amazing how comforting that was!



Permission

- “Denying pain doesn’t make it go away, just harder to access because you try to bury it. Give yourself permission to feel pain. You don’t have to do it by yourself—invite Jesus into it, grab a hold of His hand, and hang on for dear life.”

- “You have permission to break a promise you never should have made in the first place, what has been called ‘foolish vows.’ For example, when you promise you will never leave or abandon a friend where the relationship has turned unhealthy and sinful.”

- “Please give yourself permission to think of [a certain

person] as an illegal, immoral, harmful substance like crack cocaine that you just cannot have even a tiny bit of, because there's no such thing as a tiny bit of a life-controlling, life-dominating, life-destroying substance." "The Holy Spirit knows every single thing we need to let go of [in forgiveness]. Each memory is like a splinter He wants permission to remove. But you have to cooperate with the process, thus the need to give Him permission."

- "Give yourself permission to mentally fire your sister as the supposedly 'older and wiser' sister. She may be older, but she's not wiser, and you don't have to follow her advice when it is not wise because it's informed by the world, not by God."

- And finally, "Give yourself permission to become comfortable with new habits you'd like to form, such as stopping in the middle of the conversation to pray. And praying out loud. And using new expressions like 'The Lord bless you!' And even something as prosaic as wearing a wrap instead of a sweater, or wearing a hat. Give yourself permission to step outside your comfort zone and practice this new thing you want to become comfortable with, and tell yourself, 'It's OK to not be comfortable with this yet. I'll get there eventually.'"

What have you given—or received—permission for?

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# The Stink of Self-Pity

When I got polio as an infant in 1953, just before the vaccine was developed, my parents were instructed by the doctors and the therapists that the very worst thing that could happen was for me to wallow in self-pity, and to never let me go there. Maybe they all thought that if no one ever talked about the huge assault of this life-changing trauma, it would never occur to me to think about it, and so I'd never end up in the Self-Pity Mudpuddle. So what was modeled to me, and which I dutifully followed, was a constant response of denial.

So I grew up wondering, but never able to put into words, why it was that no one seemed to understand how really, really rotten it was that I have to live my entire life with a disability, with restrictions, with growing weakness and fatigue and pain.

Fast forward to a recent mini-vacation in Cozumel with my sister and her husband. I have a lightweight travel scooter that enables me to zip around, covering distances too great for me to walk, even with my cane. Well, one night we left the scooter outside our bungalow door while we charged the battery inside, but during the night there was a torrential downpour. Scooters and rain, I learned, are mortal enemies. It was dead. I called the front desk to ask for a golf cart to come get me to take me to the resort restaurant for breakfast, but no one came and it was too far to walk.

At one point, my husband Ray lovingly said, "You know you can't go into town without your scooter, and there are no wheelchairs here." (He knows me well; well-trained in denial from toddlerhood, it's easy for me to say, "Oh, it'll be fine"—and then later I am in excruciating pain after walking. He needs to speak the truth in love to me so I don't overdo things.)

Hit with the realization that I couldn't walk to breakfast, much less be able to go shopping with my sister, something I'd looked forward to for MONTHS, I was confronted again with the loss of mobility and the loss of independence that a scooter provides.

So I sat there, choosing to stay present in the feelings that overwhelmed me, paying attention to what I was feeling: Sadness. Grief. Loss.

Tears.

I invited Jesus into my feelings and looked to Him to help me process them well.

And then I wondered, *Am I feeling self-pity too?*

You know, the worst of all sins for polio survivors?

That's when the lightbulb came on. I realized that self-pity isn't a primary feeling like sadness, grief and loss. Self-pity is a secondary event, a choice to respond to legitimate negative feelings. But it's not the only choice. I could also choose to respond with trust that God knows my pain, He sees and understands, and I can trust Him to redeem every scrap of my pain and my grief—for His glory and my good.

I suddenly saw self-pity as analogous to the stink of body odor. When we're hot or we exercise, our bodies are designed to release excess heat through sweat, which doesn't smell. It's natural—it's God's gift to us. But if we let the sweat linger without showering, if we don't process it by bathing, bacteria multiply and excrete what DOES stink.

To draw the analogy out further, experiencing grief and sadness is natural and not sinful at all. There's no stink to those legitimate feelings that come from life in a fallen world. But when we don't bring our feelings to the Lord, allowing Him to cleanse and purify them as we trust that He is



good and He loves us even when we hurt, they can disintegrate and start to stink.

So I sat there, for the first time seeing the line between sadness and self-pity. Sadness happens because of the effects of sin in a fallen world; Jesus was “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). But self-pity springs from the wrong belief that “I don’t deserve this. Life should treat me better than this. Garbage always happens to ME while good things happen to others”. . . *ad nauseum*.

I think we can avoid self-pity by seeking to respond with truth: “I deserve nothing but hell. Life in a fallen world is just painful, and this is my share today. Bad things happen to everyone, and good things happen to everyone, and the difference is the willingness to look for and see them. God is still good even though He has allowed pain into my life, and I can trust Him that there is a purpose for my pain.”

By the way, we had to replace the dead scooter, but in His goodness, the Lord prompted some dear friends to pay for it as a gift. Now *that* feeling was on the opposite end of the spectrum from self-pity!

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## Private Sin Impacts Society

*June 11, 2012*

The June issue of the *AFA Journal* focuses due attention on how

five areas of private sin impacts all of society. This is such an important issue since a very large portion of our society has bought into the idea that "what I do in private has no impact on the public." This current issue reminds us that it is not true!

The first area the article addresses is pornography. Dr. Jill Manning documents that about 170 million Americans use the Internet and that nearly one-third go online "for sexual purposes." Her research has also revealed that online sexual activity is "a hidden public health hazard" that is exploding.

Substance abuse is another example of how private sin impacts society. The U.S. Department of Justice has found that more than one-third of convicted felons had been drinking alcohol when they committed their offense. Another study found that more than one-quarter of state and federal drug offenders committed crimes in order to get money to support their drug habits.

A third area is crime in general. The statistics are staggering. The National Center for Victims of Crime estimates that just three areas (robberies, arson, and Internet fraud) cost us more than \$1.6 trillion.

Abortion is a fourth area. Pro-choice advocates say that it shouldn't matter to society what a woman does with her body. Apart from the obvious moral objections to abortion are the social and economic costs. As one expert from the National Right to Life observed, "You can't lose fifty-three million lives and not expect it to have a serious economic impact."

A final area documented in the article is fatherlessness. U. S. Ambassador Gregory Slayton has been on my radio program a number of times and documents the social and economic impact of fatherless homes. The estimated price tag for fatherhood failure is more than a trillion dollars over the last decade alone.

These few examples show the error in believing that private sin has no impact on society. We are paying a huge cost for people's sin. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

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## Just Say the Magic Words

*June 11, 2012*

One of my friends is doing the hard work of facing the devastating effects of childhood abuse and various unspeakable horrors. She knows that she needs to accept the full impact what happened to her in order to grieve it and forgive the people who wounded her so she can walk in freedom. But one of her friends recently gave her some disheartening counsel: "Oh, there's a spirit of grief harassing you. You don't need to go around digging up the past like you're doing. Just speak your inner healing into existence! Declare that you are healed and whole in Jesus' name!"

This lady has bought into the dangerous (and unbiblical) "word of faith" theology (WOF) that puts faith in one's words instead of in God Himself. It's a religious version of "wishing will make it so," having morphed into "speaking will make it so." This wrong thinking can range from an unfortunate misunderstanding of the Scriptures to a blasphemous presumption that creatures can create reality by the power of their words—just like God did when He spoke creation into existence by the power of His word.

It's certainly an appealing idea, bypassing the hard soul work of [grieving and forgiving](#) to get to the prize of a healed heart at peace. Just say the magic words, like waving a magic wand, and POOF! you're healed! Who wouldn't want to go that far, far easier route?

Shortcuts don't work. They do, however, result in major disappointment when people are taught [unrealistic expectations](#) of God about promises He never made. One of the most basic principles of Bible reading and study is that "context is king." We must never wrench verses out of their surrounding paragraphs, chapters, and books. And if we come up with an understanding or application of a verse that is contradicted by other passages in scripture, we need to jettison our wrong thinking.

So, for example, if someone points out Isaiah 53:5 to my friend, which says "by His stripes we are healed," and promises she can claim healing of any and every pain or ailment, what happens when nothing happens? This wrong-headed promise tempts people to conclude that God is not good, and He is not faithful, because He didn't keep His word. But that cannot be the meaning of Isaiah 53:5 since the supposed promise of immediate healing is contradicted in other scriptures such as 2 Cor. 12:7-9, where Paul tells us that God said no to his pleas for healing from his thorn in the flesh, promising instead that His grace was enough. Claiming inner healing without submitting to the process of facing the full impact of what happened to her so that she can release it to the Lord not only isn't truthful, it doesn't work like that.

WOF taps into legitimate longings for a life free from want, from sickness and death, from pain, which are promised to believers in Christ in the new heavens and new earth. But it illegitimately promises that life NOW. It's simply a matter of praying in faith, believing *not* in God's goodness, but the power of one's own prayers. Our own words. That's a form of idolatry.

But this theology is not consistent with reality, which means it cannot be of God. One night I was at an event where there would be a drawing for some jewelry. I watched several people lay hands on the blingy stuff and say, "I claim this in Jesus' name." Guess what—none of them won the drawing. What happened?

It's the same dynamic as when believers on both sides of a football game claim victory for their team in Jesus' name. God cannot grant two opposite requests—or, in this case, demands. (He's not much into demands of any kind, actually.)

God deals with truth, not fantasy and illusion. WOF violates the scriptural principle of embracing truth, such as the psalmist's powerful statement in Ps. 51:6, "You desire truth in the innermost being." Another friend, Cathy, was dying of cancer, but she refused to believe what the doctors said. She insisted right up to her last breath that she was believing health for herself, and would not talk to anyone about funeral arrangements or even what to do with her house and her possessions because that would be faithless. But she wasn't putting her faith in God, who was actually calling her home, but in her wishful prayers.

Beware of spiritual shortcuts, especially those that are created by your own words. If there were such a thing, don't you think Jesus would have bypassed the Cross?

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## **The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 2**

In [part 1](#), I talked about grieving as a necessary part of emotional healing. The other part is forgiving, separating ourselves emotionally and spiritually from the offense so that we can continue to be healthy toward the offender. As I said

last time, forgiving is like pulling out the soul-splinter that is causing pain and the emotional “pus” that accumulates from unresolved pain and anger. (Grieving discharges this emotional pus.) Forgiving releases the person who hurt us into the Lord’s care, for *Him* to deal with.

We see this modeled by the Lord Jesus during the crucifixion process, when He repeated over and over, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). With each fresh offense, He released the offender into His Father’s hands, refusing to succumb to the sin of unforgiveness.

Let’s say you do something to hurt me. It’s like tossing a potato at me. I catch the potato and discover it’s a *hot* potato. I could continue to clutch the potato to my chest, screaming in pain and yelling at how much it hurts and how awful you are to do this to me, going on and on, “IT HURTS! IT HURTS! OHHH THIS IS HORRIBLE, TERRIBLE, AWFUL PAIN! HOW DARE YOU DO THIS TO MEEEEEE!”

Or I could let go and let it drop to the floor.

There is relief in release, to be sure, but the problem with merely letting go is that we can pick it back up again. Biblical forgiveness means “sending away,” with the Old Testament image of a scapegoat to help us understand. Once a year, the priest would place his hands on the head of a goat, symbolically transferring the sins of the entire nation to the goat, send it away into the wilderness, then release it. (Lev. 16:7-10)

We do need to let go of the offense and the offender, but the real power in forgiveness is *sending it away* to Jesus for Him to deal with.

If someone tosses a metaphorical hot potato at us, instead of simply letting it drop to the floor where we could pick it up again, we need to imagine Jesus standing there with His hands outstretched, inviting us to give our “hot potato” to Him. He

has asbestos hands!

Forgiveness means we acknowledge the offense against us, and then transfer the offender over to God in our hearts. But for forgiveness to be real and true, we need to face the impact of the other person's sin or hurt against us and *grieve* it before we can truly let go of it and send it away to Jesus. Otherwise, it's like going to the emergency room with a broken bone and telling the doctor, "I want you to fix my bone from the other side of the room without touching me."

In the real world, if I continued to clutch a hot potato to myself, it would cool down and no longer cause pain. But in the emotional realm, if we continue to clutch an offense to our hearts, it hardens into something like cement, and a wall is built between the offender and us. And between us and God. And between us and everyone else. Unforgiveness is spiritually and emotionally dangerous. One of my family members hung on to every offense of her entire life, real or perceived, and never let go. With every year she became more and more bitter, cold and hard-quite unlovely and unlovable, apart from the power of God. She died with a heart so diminished and shriveled that her death was nothing but a relief for the rest of us.

When we forgive the ones who hurt us, we send their offense to Jesus, who already paid the penalty for their sins and woundings against us. The best exercise I've ever encountered to help people forgive is called "the Jesus Jail," which you can find [here](#) courtesy of my friend Chuck Lynch, author of the book *I Should Forgive, But. . .*

Grieving and forgiving: the two powerful components of emotional healing. May you experience the grace of God in tearing down emotional strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4) to walk in the freedom of healing.

This blog post originally appeared at

# The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 1

After seeing God bring about major transformation of emotional healing in a number of broken people, I asked Him what was happening when He healed people's hearts. I wanted to understand the process. His answer was simple and profound, but never easy: "grieving and forgiving."

Both of these emotional disciplines are necessary to move from the place of sustaining a wound to the soul, to the place where that wound no longer controls and diminishes us—because it has been transformed into a healed scar.

Grieving means moving pain and anger from the inside to the outside. Tears are God's lubricant for that process, and what a gift of grace tears are. They are a physical manifestation of emotional pain, and when we weep—whether silent tears rolling down our cheeks or huge wracking sobs that exhaust us—the pain leaves our soul as it leaves the body.

One of my friends was so deeply wounded as a child by various kinds of abuse that in order to survive, her personality splintered into several "alters." (Multiple personality disorder is now called DID, Dissociative Identity Disorder.) One day in therapy, as she cried while talking about the pain inside, she reached for the box of tissues to blot the tears. Abruptly, she "switched" to another alter who said to the therapist, "Don't let her use the Kleenex. We need to feel the tears rolling down her cheeks. That's what healing feels



like.” When she told me this, it resonated deeply with me as true, and I started paying attention to how the feeling of tears on my face nourishes my soul, regardless of the reason for them. (Specks of dust under my contacts notwithstanding!)

In many cases, grieving also requires getting angry. Anger as a response to a violation of our dignity as people made in God’s image, to shaming or disrespect, to neglect or abuse, is a healthy reaction. It says, “You treated me as worthless when I have great value as God’s beloved child. You dishonored me AND you dishonored God.” We can express anger in constructive and destructive ways, and of course it’s always better to choose a constructive expression! We see the Lord Jesus constructively channeling His anger as He fashioned a whip before cleansing the temple (John 2:15). Some people have punched pillows, or hammered nails into pieces of wood, or torn down something slated for demolition. Others have screamed out their anger and grief in a safe place. Punching bags are a helpful place to discharge anger. And one of the most powerful ways to release anger is to create a list of all the ways someone has hurt us, and the impact of their choices and actions on us, and then talk to that person in an empty chair. We say—or yell or scream—the things we would want to say if we could duct-tape the person into the chair so they couldn’t leave, if they *had* to listen to us. And we go down the list, one item at a time, telling them everything they need to know about what they did and how it affected us. Often it’s unwise, if not impossible, to actually dump all that anger on the actual person, but it’s amazingly healing to speak out the pain and anger with our words. Out loud. Emphasis on LOUD, if need be!

Once we have grieved the hurt, the next step is letting go: forgiving. Forgiving is like pulling out the soul-splinter that is causing pain and the emotional “pus” that accumulates from unresolved pain and anger. (Grieving discharges this emotional pus.) Forgiving releases the person who hurt us into

the Lord's care, for *Him* to deal with.

I'll explain more about forgiving in my next blog post, [The Keys to Emotional Healing – Part 2](#).

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## Giving Thanks in a Hard Place

My husband and I are ministering in part of the former Soviet Union while I've been reading Ann Voskamp's book *One Thousand Gifts*. She focuses on seeing and living life through the filter of *eucharisteo*, the Greek word for "giving thanks." The title refers to the fact that she recorded a thousand little ways in which God revealed Himself and His goodness to her, most of which were a pleasure to receive, some of which were painful. She worked to practice gratitude, which not only built her faith but also made her aware of how deeply she was loved.

This is a physically and spiritually challenging place to be, so I've had many opportunities to practice *eucharisteo* here. I find that multiplying the "thank You's" keeps my heart tender and makes me aware of how comfortable and privileged is my life in America.

**Thank You that the tap water is not safe to drink.** But I thank You that safe bottled water is easy to obtain at the little market a block away. I thank You that my husband is more than willing to walk to the market so I don't have to. I thank You that replenishing the bottled water at the Bible College where

we teach is a high priority, especially since it's so dry here that we need to keep drinking from our water bottles all day long. Speaking of which, thank You for my Aquafina bottle that Ray bought me at the Dallas airport. The whole label is in English!

**Thank You that this is a handicap-unfriendly country**, that there are stairs everywhere and elevators only in buildings over five stories high. Thank You that there's no point to bringing my scooter or wheelchair. Thank You that at home, I have plenty of mobility assistance. Thank you for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thank You for allowing me to live in a country that is mainly accessible to polio survivors like me. Thank You for Lufthansa Airlines, which takes such good care of people who can't walk (or walk long distances) once I get to Germany next week.

**Thank You that I got strep the day *before* we left Dallas** and not *the morning of* our flight here! Thank You that my doctor could see me on short notice. Thank You for antibiotics that knocked it out immediately. Thank You for protecting our health while we are here.

**Thank You that languages were splintered at the tower of Babel** and we are surrounded by Slavic tongues we do not speak. Thank You for providing several gifted translators. Thank You for patience on the part of our friends here when we try to make our mouths produce unfamiliar, strange-sounding words. Thank You that in heaven, we will not need translators because we will all speak the language of the Lamb.

**Thank You for churches with outhouses rather than heated indoor restrooms.** Thank You that we are using them at the end of March rather than in January! Thank You for bathrooms at home with indoor plumbing, flush toilets, and flushable toilet paper. And thank You that our bathrooms don't stink.

**Thank You that our luggage was delayed on the way here.** But

thank You for getting it to us only 24 hours later! Thank You for the lesson about what to include in my carry-on. I didn't learn that lesson when we were stranded for four days by the [Iceland ash cloud](#) two years ago, and I thank You for giving me another chance to learn the importance of packing a nightgown and a change of clothes and anything else I really need.

**Thank You for sheets that don't cover the mattress** and come undone every night. Thank You for fitted bottom sheets on all our beds in our home. Thank You for top sheets with plenty of width and length.

I've never thanked You for many of these things, Lord, and I am so grateful for them now!

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## Forgive Myself?

Have you ever been told how important it is to forgive yourself?

I know Christians who have struggled with doing this, some for several years, unable to get a handle on it. There's good reason for that—scripture never even mentions forgiving ourselves, much less commanding it. I understand the idea of giving oneself forgiveness comes from humanistic psychology; doctors know that experiencing forgiveness is an essential part of mental health, but where do you find forgiveness when God, the source of forgiveness, has been excluded from the big picture?

You forgive yourself. At least, that's the way it should work in principle. When God is "Xed out." But, as many have learned, just deciding to forgive yourself sounds easier than actually doing it. On what basis do you forgive yourself? Just because? How many times do you need to beat yourself up before it's time for forgive yourself? What if you forgive yourself prematurely, before you've beaten yourself up enough?

What a mess.

I've also heard Christians say, "I know God has forgiven me, but I just can't forgive myself." It sounds quite humble, but in reality, this is upside-down pride. The underlying message is, "God may have forgiven me, but my own standards of what constitutes forgiveness are higher than God's, and my standard is what counts."

So what do we do when we're still keeping ourselves on the hook for past sins?

First, by faith receive the forgiveness that God has already granted. This has nothing to do with *feeling* forgiven and everything to do with choosing to trust that God keeps His word: "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God has already forgiven every sin we have ever committed and ever will. He waits for us to gratefully choose to receive His amazing grace of forgiveness. *"Lord Jesus, thank You for paying my debt for my sin and restoring me to relationship with the Father. Thank You for forgiving me. By faith, and in Your strength, I receive Your forgiveness and cleansing."*

Second (if necessary), we choose to take ourselves off the hook and release ourselves from being our own prisoners. We remind ourselves that Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be really free" (John 8:36). We remind ourselves that His last words on the Cross were "It is finished." His work of

freeing us from our sin and making forgiveness possible is finished. Done. Over and out. Which means we can take ourselves off the hook for something Jesus already paid for.

Recently I was teaching on forgiveness and painted a word picture of being handcuffed to the person who had offended us or hurt us. Forgiveness means unlocking the cuff from around our own wrist and snapping it on Jesus' wrist, giving Him custody of our offender, releasing them into His care. Several people told me, "I realized my prisoner was ME! And Jesus was inviting me to take the handcuffs off myself!" They did, and they were free.

I love the sound of chains falling off and people being set free from their strongholds!

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/forgive\\_myself\\_](http://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/forgive_myself_) on March 13, 2012.

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## Glee's Pro-Gay Theology

*Feb. 28, 2012*

Recently, the wildly popular TV show *Glee's* Valentine's Day episode featured a group of religious students called the "God Squad" discussing whether they should accept money to sing love songs to gay people (their term). The writers had students spouting pro-gay theology that was doubtless quite persuasive to the majority of viewers who don't know the truth that counters the propaganda.

**"They say that one out of every ten people are gay, and if**

**that's true than that means one of the twelve apostles might have been gay."**

That's a very old, very inaccurate statistic from Alfred Kinsey. A more accurate estimate is in the 2-3% range.<sup>{1}</sup> The idea that one of the twelve might have been gay is sheer speculation with no grounding in truth and no evidence for it, but it certainly planted the idea in the minds of millions of people to normalize it.

**"The Bible says it's an abomination for a man to lay down with another man. But we shared tents in Cub Scouts, and slept next to each other all the time. So that would make Cub Scouts an abomination."**

No. No, it wouldn't.

What the Bible actually says is, "You shall not lie with a male **as one lies with a female**; it is an abomination" (Lev 18:22). This passage is talking about same-sex intercourse, not guys in sleeping bags sharing a tent.

Further, it's always important to look at the context of any verse. That same chapter contains prohibitions against sexual activity we still condemn today: incest, bestiality and adultery. Those who want to dismiss verses prohibiting same-sex relations as archaic usually (but not always!) won't take a pro-incest, pro-adultery, or pro-bestiality stance. Neither should it be okay to take a pro-homosexuality stance.

My friend Randy Thomas had a powerful "lightbulb moment" concerning this verse. He writes,

*"The Father brought back the memory of Ron, the first man I thought I loved, and me together as a couple. In my memory we were in an embrace and I saw the Lord standing next to us. We were oblivious to His presence and He was grieving. His grief was so bitter I could see Him shaking with tears as He looked upon us. I was immediately struck with grief that God was so*

*grieved. It's a grief I will never forget.*

*"At that point I felt the Spirit asking me, 'Randy . . . what is the sin?' The only Scripture I knew was Leviticus 18:22 (that's only because it was on the signs that the Christians held up at pride parades and outside of clubs). I told the Lord that I didn't like that Scripture. But He persisted, 'What is the sin?' I thought through the verse again: 'When one man lies with another as a woman it is an abomination before the Lord,' (emphasis mine). The word 'it' jumped out at me. I sensed the Spirit asking, 'What is "it"?"*

*"I answered, 'A gender neutral pronoun?' I was a little surprised that in the middle of this powerful time the Holy Spirit would be giving me an English pop quiz. I felt Him say, 'EXACTLY!!!'*

*"Then my world fell apart over one little word. 'It' meant that I was not the abomination, Ron was not the abomination. It was the abomination – the act itself was keeping Ron and me looking toward each other and not to God for fulfillment of who we were and what God intended. For the first time in my life I knew that God is aware of every secret and not-so-secret thing I have done. Instead of sending hellfire and brimstone, He sent a grieving Savior to pay the price of my ignorance and sin.*

*"He forgave and redeemed me."*

**"You know what else the Bible says is an abomination—eating lobster, planting different crops in the same field, giving somebody a proud look. Not an abomination? Slavery. Jesus never said anything about gay people."**

There are different kinds of laws in the Old Testament. Civil and ceremonial laws, such as those concerning religious sacrifices and dietary laws, were time-bound and limited to the people of Israel. They are no longer in force for a



variety of reasons: first, all the OT sacrifices and ceremonies were given as a foreshadowing of the Messiah's ministry and of His death, burial and resurrection. They are no longer necessary because they were the preparation for the Reality that has come. Second, the civil laws pertained to a nation of people who no longer exist. (The current nation of Israel is a political one, not the same as the group of OT people God called to follow Him alone as their Ruler.)

Moral laws, such the Ten Commandments and all the laws constraining sexual immorality, are not time-bound because they are rooted in the character of God. It is always sinful to have sex with someone you're not married to, regardless of gender.

Slavery, as ugly as it is, is not inherently unnatural the way homosexual practice is. Dr. Robert Gagnon, a theologian who has a breathtaking understanding of homosexuality and its attendant arguments, writes, "The Bible accommodates to social systems where sometimes the only alternative to starvation is enslavement. But it clearly shows a critical edge by specifying mandatory release dates and the right of kinship buyback; requiring that Israelites not be treated as slaves; and reminding Israelites that God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt." [\[2\]](#)

We don't know that "Jesus never said anything about gay people"; it's quite possible that His comments on eunuchs in Matthew 19 included those who would have never sex with women because of their same-sex attractions.

Usually, the argument goes, "Jesus never said anything about homosexuality." What He DID say about God's intention for His creation and sexuality in Mark 10:6-8 excludes homosexuality, along with other forms of sexual sin such as polyamory, incest and bestiality. Scripture powerfully indicates His intention for a male-female prerequisite for sexuality.

## **“Love is love” (so let’s sing a love song to two lesbian students)**

Is it? How would the “God Squad” feel about singing a love song to a woman committing adultery with one of their dads? How would they feel about a father paying them to sing a love song to the daughter he’s regularly raping while calling it love? Our culture is so anxious to justify anything by slapping the label of “love” on it that we dishonor the God who IS love: a sacrificial, others-centered, giving love that took Him to the cross to pay for the very sins that are being elevated and celebrated on network TV.

### **Notes**

1. For citations, see my article on the Probe Ministries website “[Homosexual Myths.](#)”

2.

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/03/my-take-the-bible-really-does-condemn-homosexuality/>

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