

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.

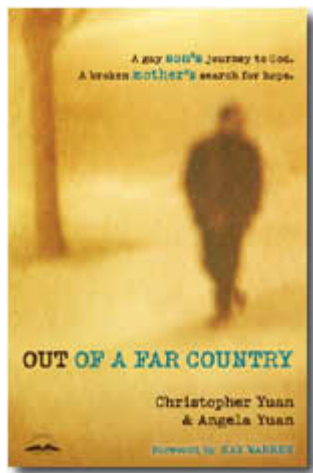
Make sure your faith is about trust, and surrender, and joining the circle of God's family. Make sure your faith is so much more than what the demons believe!

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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

Sept. 26, 2012

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
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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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“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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2, 2012

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

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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 women 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.

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?

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

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 blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_keys_to_emotional_healing_-_part_2 on April 24, 2012.