

Knowing the End of the Story

Nov. 8, 2011

The other day, on a friend's recommendation, I started watching *So You Think You Can Dance*, which is like *Dancing With the Stars* only with people who actually can dance. I found it on a cable station, and watched several episodes. Then I discovered that I was watching last season's shows, so I googled the program and found out who won.

Knowing the outcome changes the way I view the competition. A judge's critical assessment of a performance is just a bump on the road when I know the dancer will eventually win in the end.

That's one of the many reasons for reading and studying the Bible. When we know how the story is going to end, it helps us process the meaning and impact of the slings and arrows of living in a fallen world, and we don't have to be undone by them.

We know that in the end, God will set everything right.

In the end, He will see that good triumphs over evil.

In the end, Jesus will be crowned King over all, and He will reign in His kingdom here on earth, and those who have been faithful will be rewarded with opportunities to reign with Him, to serve in His kingdom. (For a mind-blowing explanation of the difference between the kingdom and heaven, check out Curtis Tucker's new book *Majestic Destiny*.)

It is faithfulness that qualifies us for a place in the kingdom (which is different from receiving eternal life, which is a free gift with no strings attached). And faithfulness is proven by our responses to the challenges and tests of this life. It's about choosing to trust in the goodness and love of

a sovereign God instead of resorting to our own methods of making life work. It's about resisting temptation to conform to the world's mold. It's about waiting on the Lord's timing instead of taking matters into our own hands when He doesn't seem to be moving fast enough for us.

Knowing how the Big Story will end helps us put the small stories of our lives into perspective. But knowing how we got here, by studying the histories recorded in the Bible, also provides perspective.

I have a friend who is baffled and confused—well, actually, *terrified* is more accurate—because everything she's ever counted on to make life work is being taken away. She finds herself divorced, without custody of her children, no job, and no idea how she will pay next month's rent. None of it makes sense to her.

But I've been reading the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) this year, and what's happening to her makes a lot of sense to me. God is lovingly taking away all the props that she has been depending on to make life work so that she can learn that that He is good, that He is her provider, that He is enough. And because she doesn't yet know Him—she really just has some ideas about Him—she doesn't know that she can trust Him.

Just as God cured the idolatry of His people by stripping them of all His gifts and benefits that they blindly attributed to the false gods they worshipped, I believe God is removing everything except Himself from my friend's life. It's a scary place, but it doesn't have to be a hopeless place. God has a way of setting up crazy situations where we are given a front-row seat to what He's about to do to reveal His heart to us.

Studying the Bible's stories and lessons helps us see that. Looking backward, and looking forward.

Where there will be dancing!

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

When to Break a Promise

Oct. 11, 2011

An important part of integrity is keeping one's word. But are there times when breaking a promise is the *right* thing to do? I think so. And I think God is honored when we do.

We need to make a distinction between giving our word on a legitimate matter—such as wedding vows, signing a legal contract, or even promising to bake six dozen cookies for the PTA bake sale—and making promises that are foolish or sinful in the first place.

I know a number of women struggling to disengage from emotionally dependent relationships with other women. Emotional dependency is putting all your emotional and relational eggs in another's basket, so to speak—needing another's attention, affection and approval as desperately as a baby needs her mama. Making huge promises is part of the manipulative glue that holds these relationships together: "I will always be here for you." "I will always take your calls and return your texts." "I've never loved another like I love you and I always will." "I will never hurt you."

When women come to the point of recognizing these relationships are not God's intention for either of them, they often struggle with their promises as if they were inviolate and carved in stone. Yet the bigger issue—which they need help to see because brokenness keeps us bound up in blindness—is

that keeping some promises means sinning against God. In that case, obedience to God is the better choice, even if it means breaking a promise that never should have been made in the first place.

In that case, the right thing to do is repent of making the promise, confess it as sin, and turn in obedient trust to God, depending on Him for help in the painful process.

Recently, a friend who is getting help extricating herself from a sinful relationship told one of her helpers, "But when my friend comes over to help me get out of bed in the morning because I'm depressed, I would be an awful person if she drove all the way over here and I didn't answer the door and let her in." The helper wisely responded, "You're concerned about being an awful person for not answering the door, but you're in a relationship with a married woman! What about the adultery? Which one is the sin?"

Sometimes, we make promises we shouldn't make because we didn't check first with God. Many years ago, our church choir director arranged a day-long seminar with a very wise man. One thing he said stopped me in my tracks: "Why are you here? The need is not the call; the *call* is the call. If God did not call you to this ministry, then you're not available for what He wants you to be doing." I realized I had never asked the Lord if He wanted me to sing in the choir, and when I asked, He said no. Embarrassed, I tendered my resignation so that I'd be available for the "something else" that He actually wanted me to do—which, it turns out, was teaching women's Bible study. Both the women in the study and the other singers in the choir can testify that I am a far better teacher than singer!

Are there promises you should break so you can say "yes" to God instead?

This blog post originally appeared at

Young Christians Leaving Church

Oct. 5, 2011

Why are young Christians leaving church? There are lots of reasons, and the latest Barna Report lists six reasons that can be found in the book by David Kinnaman titled, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Church*.

The first reason young people are leaving is due to the feeling that churches are overprotective. This generation has unprecedented access to ideas and worldviews. But they feel that pastors, church leaders, and members of the congregation fear the world and are often ignoring problems in the real world.

Young Christians also feel that Christianity is shallow. A significant percentage say that church is boring and many others say "faith is not relevant to my career or interests."

A third reason for the exodus is that churches often come across as antagonistic to science. Three out of ten young adults with a Christian background feel that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in." Many who majored in science say they are struggling to find ways to stay faithful to their Christian beliefs.

A different view of sex is a fourth reason Christian young people want to leave the church. Sadly most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers, even

though they have more orthodox views about sexuality.

The exclusive nature of Christianity is fifth reason Christian young people leave the church. They have grown up with the tolerance gospel and have trouble reconciling the claims of Christ and the exclusivity of Christian belief.

Finally, Christian young people also feel that the church is not a friendly place for those who doubt. In fact, they say that most churches do not allow them to express their doubts openly.

The church in the 21st century faces a significant challenge from Christian young people who are trying to reconcile the Bible and Christian teaching with their social experiences. We cannot ignore their concerns, but neither should we affirm their unbiblical views about sexuality or the exclusivity of the gospel. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

It's Not Rubbing the Genie's Magic Lamp

Oct. 25, 2011

Recently I heard a young man share his story of battling his unwanted same-sex attractions. Though Ben's dad loved him very much, he felt like he was everyone else's dad and *then* his dad. He also didn't connect with the masculine that his dad represented. He ended up with longings for deep connection with males. What helped him turn the corner was when he found people with whom he could be completely honest about his shameful desires and feelings, who also helped him develop his relationship with God.

He shared that he slowly realized his heart was looking for three things in other men. First, he longed for someone who was unquestionably a “Capital M-A-N” who made that intangible connection with him that his father didn’t make, leaving him with a father-shaped hole in his soul. And he realized that he was also looking for a rescuer, to pull him out of his own wretchedness. And finally, he wanted to be comforted by someone, he said, “who’s there when I come back down, when I’m lost, when I’m troubled; I would fantasize about a guy who could just say the right things, do the right things, and comfort me any time I needed it.”

Optimally, he told us, it would really great if he could find someone who would be all three of those things at one time, wrapped up in one person. That would be the “Mr. Right” he longed to find and be loved by.

The major “lightbulb moment” of his journey came when he realized that what he longed for was a Father, a Savior, and a Comforter. . . and that perfectly describes who God is—three in one, Father, Son and Spirit. And because he had trusted in Christ at an early age, that very God was already indwelling him! He realized that the triune God was everything his heart was longing for but he had been too blind to see. God, in giving Himself to His beloved son, was ready to meet Ben’s heart’s needs and longings, but would not force Himself on him. When Ben opened his heart to receive the Fathering, the Saving, and the Comforting of the God who loved him, everything shifted inside.

God connected some dots for *me* when hours later, our pastor observed that Psalm 37:4 is one of the first Bible verses that people memorize. . . and one of the most misunderstood.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Sounds like a magic formula, right? Delight yourself in the

Lord, and you get what you want? Just a religious-sounding way of rubbing the genie's magic lamp to get your wishes granted? But that's not what it means.

When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He gives us Himself, and *He* is what our hearts desire. Uncover all the surface, temporary things we think we want, and underneath are the true desires of our heart: to be loved, to be known, to be valued, to be safe, to *matter*.

And as Ben showed us, to be fathered, to be rescued, to be comforted.

Yes, we want all those things—and our marvelous God delights to give them to us as He gives us Himself.

He is so good!

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

DWTS and the T in GLBT

The big controversy in the current season of Dancing With the Stars is the presence of Chaz Bono, born Chastity, the daughter of pop icons Sonny and Cher. The media has documented Chaz' transition from female to male, bringing "transgender" into people's living rooms and water cooler conversations.



For over a decade, I have loved and walked with people struggling with their gender identity and unwanted same-sex attractions. When I see Chaz, my heart just aches deeply.

How should we wisely, biblically, and compassionately think about those who feel trapped in the body of the opposite sex? [I am not talking about those who were born with chromosomal abnormalities or an endocrine imbalance, which results in hermaphroditism, or—the new term—intersex. These are biological effects of living in a fallen world, and are in a different category from those born with normal, functioning bodies who want to change those bodies.]

People who identify as transgender report feeling different from a young age, which is easy to describe as feeling “born that way,” especially when that is the new banner cry of the marginalized, thanks to Lady Gaga’s mega-hit of the same name. But it’s a big (and, I would respectfully suggest, tragic) step from “I have always felt different from the other boys/girls” to “I am a girl in a boy’s body” or “I am a boy in a girl’s body.”

I would suggest that the core misunderstanding of those in the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgendered) community is the same core misunderstanding of the vast majority of people: a too-narrow understanding of God-designed variations in masculinity and femininity. (Please see my blog post “[The Gender Spectrum](#).”) Many of my friends who struggle with same-sex attraction confess that they’ve often thought how much better life would be if they were the other gender, but transgender-identifying folks take the fantasy to a new level.

The fantasy that “becoming something other than what I am will make me happy” marks transgender. It’s wrapped up in a deep-seated envy of the opposite sex, and a hatred of one’s own gender. That’s why so many believe that surgery to remove the offending body parts will kill what they detest in themselves, their own gender, and transform them into what they admire and

believe will give them life.

Fantasy and pretending are part of childhood, but now thanks to advances in technology, an adult can gain access to medical treatments that will feed the fantasy and turn it into reality—or at least the promise of it. Our post-modern culture invents words and redefines language in ways that adds layers of confusion to the issue: instead of the dual simplicity of God creating male and female, we are now told that there is a difference between sex, gender, and sexual identity. No wonder there is so much confusion about this issue!

“I am a man in a woman’s body, and I need to bring my outsides into alignment with my insides.” (Or the opposite.) This feeling may be strong, but it is not accurate, and it is not trustworthy. We are fallen people living in a fallen world with fallen understanding, and we should not trust our conclusions when they vary so much with what God has said. He declares Himself as our Creator; when God creates a female, which we know by the female body He creates, He is making a statement about His intention for that girl. When God gives us the stewardship over His creation, which includes our bodies, that precludes mutilating them by amputating healthy body parts because we hate them.

Our culture looks at life through a purely naturalistic, materialistic lens that excludes the spiritual. Our feelings are part of that total focus on the temporal and transitory. When they are particularly strong, they can be all-consuming, and it’s easy to say they are true—regardless of what God says in His word. Some people insist that their brains and bodies are mismatched, that transgender is a purely biological issue that, thanks to modern medicine, can be addressed instead of leaving them feeling miserable.

We are broken people, and we try to fix our own brokenness with our own broken methods: enter sex-change clinics. One of the heartbreaking aspects of this issue is what is NOT told to

those putting their eggs in the sex-change basket. I had a very long talk one night with a MtF (male to female) post-op transgender woman who blessed me with her heart-wrenching honesty. She was so sure than she would get affirmation and praise as a woman, that the hole in her heart would be filled by what she would see in the mirror. Many surgeries later, from penis amputation to cosmetic surgery to reduce her adam's apple, when she looked in the mirror she saw a man trying unsuccessfully to be what God did not make him to be, and it broke her heart. She said she would give anything to go back to the way God had made her as a him, but now she felt stuck maintaining the charade because that was her identity, both personally and professionally.

This story is one of the reasons psychiatrist Dr. Paul McHugh shut down the sex-change program at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. In his extraordinary article "[Surgical Sex](#)," he wrote, "When I became psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins, I realized that by doing sex-change operations the hospital was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We would do better for these patients, I thought, by concentrating on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia."

I am grateful for the voices of those who have walked deep in the transgender waters and then decided to listen to God (mainly from the helpful website help4families.com): "I remember reading in the Word that our bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit, and I wondered, 'What have I done to myself?' After reading Psalm 139, I began to cry because it spoke of how God had created me and how He had known me from the beginning."

"I had a hard time having fun, because when I was out with my friends I was jealous of the girls and fun they were having. That started to become a theme in my life, I was jealous of females; their curves, softness, and what I perceived as

superiority over men. I hated everything about my masculinity; I had fantasies at times of castrating myself and ending the control of testosterone over my life.”

“I told my wife I was leaving and wanted to divorce and transition to becoming a woman. I went out and bought supplies and women’s clothing that night, and went to hotel room. I won’t go into all the details, but as I sat there in all my ‘feminine glory,’ reading on my computer the stories of other TS folks I remember praying ‘God what am I doing???’ And I remember this still small voice ask, ‘Is this what you really want?’ My response was ‘No, what should I do?’ and what I heard still rings in my head to this day: ‘Run!! Run back to your wife.’ So I did, my wife being the faithful, loving, and godly woman that she is accepted me back, and forgave me. . .

“[Later on] I again told my wife that I could no longer live this life and that I needed to leave to pursue my ‘true life’ as a female. I left my wife that night and told her that I wanted to separate. As I left to go back out and check into a hotel, I was feeling really angry with God. I was yelling on the drive, ‘God, this is bigger than You. I can’t do this anymore, I am so tired of fighting and I just want to live the way that my mind wants me to live.’ I remember God distinctly telling me, ‘I am your Father and you are My son. You do not need to do this; you need to get your significance from Me.’ I yelled back, ‘No God I am done with this crap, this is ridiculous, I am living a lie and I need to be female.’ I wrestled and wrestled with this for hours. Finally I was worn down and just asked God, ‘What do I need to do?’ The answer I got was, ‘Get your significance from Me, not from being female. You need to follow Me and love Me more than this.’

“I was worshiping femininity and was ready to sacrifice myself, my wife and my children on that altar. After searching

my heart I also realized that I was angry with God, I think mostly for not 'fixing me' the way I wanted. I wanted to pray the prayer and any desire to be female would be gone and I would be some sort of super-man. When God did not fix me this way after years of praying for it, I became bitter."

"If He had intended me to be a woman, He wouldn't have made me male in the first place."

May those who struggle with the lie that they are not okay as they are, find their significance in God who made them the way He wanted them, who delights in them, who loves them with a tender, compassionate love, and says, "Come to Me. Don't try to fix this on your own. Let Me pour truth and grace, love and life into your heart."

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/dwts_and_the_t_in_glbt on
Sept. 27, 2011

Muslim Conversion

Sept. 1 , 2011

There are so many encouraging stories of Muslims who have committed their lives to Christ. I thought I might share this one from a friend who works with the Jesus film project and is now using a video entitled Magdalena to reach Muslims.

A young Muslim girl was very strong in her belief, choosing to

wear a veil even though that is not something that is very common in her region. Nevertheless, she was preaching a strong message of Islam and admonishing every woman in her village to wear a veil and conform to the strict form of Islam.

One day she went to the market to buy a veil for her cousin as a birthday gift. She told the shop keeper that she knew her cousin would not wear the veil. But she felt as a Muslim it was her obligation to convince her cousin that Islamic law requires it.

The shop owner took the opportunity and gave her a Magdalena video telling her, "I am doing the same thing as a Christian. I am not forcing you to view the movie, but my Lord ordered me to share His message of salvation with you. Please watch this movie." She took the movie in order to not offend the shop owner and left with the veil and the movie.

The next day at 9:00 o'clock she returned to the shop with tears in her eyes saying, "I want to tell you one thing: I have worn a veil for almost five years and I wanted my cousin to be veiled. After watching this movie I understood that the best veil I will have with me forever and for every one is the Spirit and the message of Jesus Christ in me. Jesus gave me power, assurance, new life, dignity and peace." She removed her veil and proclaimed with tears and a smile, "I am a Christian now."

This is but one of millions of stories of Muslims coming to Christ due to personal witness, proclamation through broadcasting, and videos. And it illustrates what can happen when we are willing to pass on a tract, a book, or a video to the Muslims we meet. Most of all, we should all be encouraged by what is happening in our world today. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

Air Force Suspends Ethics Class

August 17, 2011

The Air Force suspended an ethics course that has been taught by its chaplains for more than twenty years because the material included passages from the Bible. The course in question carries the title "Christian Just War Theory." It was taught by chaplains at the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Both Old Testament and New Testament verses were used.

The challenge to the class was brought by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation that argued that the course violated the constitutional separation of church and state. A spokesman for the Air Force said the purpose of the course was to help missile launch officers understand that "what they are embarking on is very difficult and you have to have a certain amount of ethics about what you are doing to do that job." He went on to say that the class was suspended the same day the complaint was filed.

The class is currently under review by Air Force officials in order to determine whether to revise the material or end the class. Given the speed at which they suspended the class, I suspect that this will be the last we hear of a class on "Christian Just War Theory."

Considering the current climate, I guess it is surprising that such a class lasted as long as it did. Various groups calling for freedom from religion have been challenging any teaching or event that could possibly be considered an unconstitutional establishment of religion.

David French, senior counsel at the American Center for Law and Justice, says there is not violation of the Constitution. He has served in the military and reminds us that “Just War theory has been a vital part of American military history for the last several hundred years.” He believes it is “another attempt to cleanse American history of its religious realities.”

Yes, it does seem to be just another case of removing the Bible and biblical principles from public life. I’m Kerby Anderson, and that’s my point of view.

Already Gone

August 29, 2011

Most parents believe that their children’s Christian faith really won’t come under attack until they leave home for college. They have seen other kid’s faith falter in college and naturally assume that the university environment is toxic to a Christian’s faith. While the last part of that assumption may be true, the rest of these assumptions are false.

First, Christian young people begin to have doubts about their Christian faith long before they head off to college. That is the researched conclusion from the book *Already Gone* by Ken Ham and Britt Beemer. On my radio program they explained the results of their research. American Research Group made 20,000 phone calls and conducted detailed surveys of 1,000 twenty-somethings who used to attend evangelical churches on a regular basis. When asked when they first had doubts, 40 percent said in Middle School and 44 percent said in High School.

The study found that we are losing our Christian kids in middle school and high school rather than college. The title of the book says it all. They are “already gone” even though they are sitting in the pews and going to church. Ham and Beemer concluded that the youth in our churches are not being taught apologetics and therefore do not know how to answer the skeptical questions of our age.

A second issue is whether the university is toxic to Christian faith. Of course it is, but the latest studies by sociologist Christian Smith shows that youth that do not go to college show the same (even slightly greater) drop off in religious commitment. In other words, the culture is just as toxic to Christian faith as the university.

Parents (as well as pastors, teachers, and youth leaders) need to understand the crucial need to prepare our youth for a culture that is hostile to their faith. They may be in our churches and youth groups, but there is growing evidence that many of them are “already gone.” I’m Kerby Anderson, and that’s my point of view.

On Gender and Refusing to Disclose It

There was a storm of controversy recently (June 7, 2011) over a Toronto couple’s [announcement](#) that they were not disclosing the sex of their now 4-month-old baby. They “believe they are giving their children the freedom to choose who they want to be, unconstrained by social norms about males and females.” Not only are they raising their child Storm to be genderless, but they decided not to tell the world—and the world did not like that one bit.

The mother, Kathy Witterick, writes, "When the baby comes out, even the people who love you the most and know you so intimately, the first question they ask is, 'Is it a girl or a boy?' If you really want to get to know someone, you don't ask what's between their legs." But genitals are only one indication of sex; gender-bound brain structures and chromosomes also delineate the fact that we live in a boy/girl world. And the way God set things up—to maintain the boy/girl distinction—you don't have to ask what's between someone's legs because there are plenty of other signs far less intimate.

Ms. Witterick and her husband, David Stocker, hold a loose ideology about gender, which they are encouraging in Storm's brothers, Jazz (five years old) and Kio (two). Jazz loves traditionally girly things like pink and purple, and chooses to wear his hair long in braids, which regularly invites people to assume he's a girl. His parents give him total freedom in how he presents himself.

"It is true that my oldest son Jazz does not have a traditional notion of what boys should wear, look like or do. It is also true that we believe our children should have the right to choose their clothes and hairstyle. Jazz has a strong sense of being a boy, and he understands that his choices to wear pink and have long hair are not always acceptable to his community. He chooses freely to do them anyway, because he also has been taught to respect difference, love himself and navigate the world in a way that is true to his own voice."

This is a five-year-old boy. How free is he, really, to make choices that he "understands" are "not always acceptable to his community"? How much understanding of the nature of the world does a five-year-old have?

Jazz's mom suppresses her natural instincts in order to parent ideologically:

“In my heart of hearts, I squirm when my son picks a dress from the rack (won’t people tease him?), even though I know from experience and research that the argument that children need a binary gender orthodoxy taught to them in order to feel safe is simply incorrect.”

I would suggest that teaching “a binary gender orthodoxy” is not incorrect; it is woven into the very nature of how things are because God made it that way: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27) When we depart from a biblical explanation and understanding of reality, and we start making it up as we go along, we invite chaos and confusion.

I think she’s right to squirm when her son picks a dress from the rack, and not just because people will tease him. The binary nature of gender is part of God’s plan for helping us maintain boundaries between things that need to be kept separate. The Old Testament includes a prohibition against cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5) to support the natural distinction between the sexes. Creating confusion by dressing in the other gender’s clothes is not consistent with God’s intent to maintain separations between things that should not be confused or blurred. Genesis 1 tells us that He separated the light from the darkness, the waters above from the waters below, the land from the sea. And when he created humans, He created them in two distinctly different types: male and female. Then, in Isaiah 5:20 He said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”

I do understand the frustrations of Storm’s parents concerning society’s too-narrow definitions of boy and girl. (Please see my blog post “[The Gender Spectrum](#).”) Jazz is one of those [emotionally sensitive boys](#) who delight in color, texture, fabrics and vibrancy, and his parents apparently fully support the kind of gifted, creative boy he is, which is great. But

when parents fully indulge a boy's gravitation to pink, and dresses, and long hair, yet he wants other people to know he's a boy (as Jazz does), there's some needless confusion going on because of a lack of common-sense boundaries.

There's another aspect of this philosophy of parenting that is disturbing: the desire for children to discover "their true gender self," as psychologist Diane Ehrensaft puts it, and to choose what they want to be. Storm's mama wrote,

"[I]n not telling the gender of my precious baby, I am saying to the world, 'Please can you just let Storm discover for him/herself what s(he) wants to be?! . . . We've decided not to share Storm's sex for now—a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a stand up to what the world could become in Storm's lifetime (a more progressive place? ...)"

There are lots of legitimate choices that children can make for themselves, and exercising those "choosing muscles" develops self-confidence. But some choices are not legitimate: deciding whether or not to brush their teeth, refusing to eat anything but junk foods, discovering their own religious "truths". . . and choosing their gender, regardless of what their body tells them. From a biblical perspective, God as creator is the one who gets to choose a child's gender, and His choice is revealed in the first moment of birth: "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" It is our place as His creations to accept and embrace God's choice for us, not insist on the personal freedom to define ourselves according to our own limited ways of understanding. That is anarchy. That kind of independence from God is the essence of sin.

I am reminded of the deep wisdom of Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Just because something sounds good to us at the time doesn't mean it will end up well. And this seems especially true of encouraging children to make their own paths without

parental limitations.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/on_gender_and_refusing_to_disclose_it
on June 7, 2011.

Helping Homosexuals Change? Yeah, Right.

ABC News recently did a story on presidential candidate Michele Bachmann's family business, a Christian counseling center run by her husband, Dr. Marcus Bachmann. The focus of the story was a biased, "can you believe this?" exposé of the fact that the counselors help people who don't want to be gay, address their unwanted homosexuality.

They interviewed two people, a man whose mother had taken him to the clinic when he came out as homosexual, and an undercover reporter who brought two recording devices into the sessions with him. Neither man believed their homosexuality was changeable—and when it comes to the counseling office, if your mind is made up that something cannot be changed, guess what? It won't be.

The reporter used the now-familiar phrase "pray away the gay," which is an effective and condescending dismissal of what actually happens when people do successfully shift their sexual orientation. (And I personally know a number of people who have experienced significant and lasting change in their orientation.) Some do successfully engage in reparative therapy, which addresses the emotional deficits in those who find themselves attracted to the same sex using purely

psychological methods. But what is more effective is the transforming power of the gospel in the life of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. And, like all discipline of radical discipleship, which means saying “no” to our flesh and “yes” to the flow of Jesus’ resurrection power in our lives, it takes hard work over a period of years. There is no easy, 1-2-3 magic prayer to change the way we think and feel. Sanctification is a long process of cooperation with the Spirit of God.

The message our media pumps out today is that sexuality is fluid—except for homosexuality, which is fixed and can’t be changed. This means it’s okay to give into your secret cravings and come out as gay, in which case folks like Oprah will celebrate you embracing your “authentic self,” but it’s not okay to say, “God didn’t make me gay, and I choose to accept the identity HE gives me instead.” It’s not okay to say, “I used to be gay and now I’m not.”

Which explains why there was an explosion of rage when Dr. Robert Spitzer, eminent professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, released the results of his [landmark 2001 study](#) that showed that change is possible in highly motivated individuals: rare, in his estimation, but possible. (Dr. Spitzer had been the pro-gay lobby’s hero since he spearheaded the American Psychiatric Association’s removal of homosexuality from the DSM-IV manual, which is the psychiatrists’ bible of mental disorders. That decision was the result of caving into political pressure, not the result of any research.)

The idea that people can experience change not only in their behavior but in their hearts is threatening to those committed to the idea of homosexuality as a fixed and unchangeable truth. (I personally believe the reason for their insistence is an understandable defensive reaction to trying to change their orientation on their own unsuccessfully, including attempting to “pray away the gay,” which doesn’t work. I have

written about why that is, [here](#).)

Many of the loud voices insisting that homosexuality is not changeable hold to an unrealistic standard, that only a complete shift from 100% homosexual to 100% heterosexual constitutes change. I suggest that nowhere else do we hold to that standard: would we denounce a former alcoholic who has successfully lived for years in freedom from the destruction of alcohol, as not really changed if he thinks that a cold beer on a hot day still sounds good?

Dr. Spitzer's findings back up the message of the New Testament: that Jesus Christ changes the lives and thus the behavior of people caught in all kinds of sin. Remember this list of changed people in the church of Corinth?

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Change is possible. That is part of the good news of the gospel. And, for the believer in Jesus, change is a normal and expected part of being a follower of Christ.

Even if the world laughs at the notion with a "can you believe this?" contempt. Can homosexuals change? It's not "Yeah, right." It's "Yes! Amen!"

This blog post was originally published at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/helping_homosexuals_change_yeah_right on July 19, 2011.