

Scraping Ceilings and Souls: Lessons on Sanctification From a Home Improvement Project

The process of upgrading and repairing Byron Barlowe's home helped him to see how God does the same kind of transformation in the souls of Christ-followers.

My wife and I are living in a suspended state of misery in our own home. It's like camping in a plastic-lined dustbin after a tornado blew furniture and books into random piles. Hidden in every crevice there's a thin fog of whitish dust and snow that won't melt. "How long, O Lord?" This odyssey started as we launched a long-awaited kitchen remodel, which would be stress enough: "Where's that sink they took out with the bulk waste—we need it back until the granite people come to install the new one!" Camping indoors again.

But then we succumbed to the contractor's compelling sell-job on removing popcorn from our ceilings—you know, that lumpy stuff hanging from 20th century ceilings. "They'll get it done and clean it up for you." No sweat, right? Right!

Anyone who's lived through a major renovation or addition can testify to the disturbance. It's an all-encompassing project. "How many more trips to Home Depot?" I'm at the library writing this and will head to the shower at the YMCA. The paint makes it hard to sleep. Finally, we left for vacation. Disruption of routines and an exploded sense of place overwhelms and badgers us.

Yet God is in it. The ordeal is bringing out loads of attitudes and frustrations in me, especially since God seems

to be doing an *attitude renovation* within me simultaneously. Is that dual lesson cruel of God, or spiritually strategic? Do I really grow when things sail smoothly along?

Yes, the promise of a new look and feel gets lost in the temporary tiresomeness of it all. The more you have, the more you pay in so many ways! Yet, what we had was not up to grade. Some of it was poised to cause disaster, like some plumbing in our kitchen. Replacing the working fridge with a cooler one (accidental pun) revealed a faulty valve. It had to be replaced. In the same way, my soul needs a makeover.

Like a master plumber, the Lord needs to hook up the new pipes of grace he has for me. He's renovating my heart. I need to grow into the new creation I already am. New openings for new blessings, old things made new. Getting hung up on my way of seeing issues or settling for an inadequate view of God's goodness calls for a major overhaul. The Lord is committed to make this happen as I somewhat grudgingly lay my life before him in submission—again. It hurts and is a mess, like the unexpected plumbing issue. But like the fridge fix, it makes possible a bounty of unspoiled fruit and prevents a nasty flood!

Back to the originally intended project: the process for the ceiling redux is a multi-step process. It requires the following:

- **scraping**: complete with the roar of compressor to spray water, a sharp scraper, and the old junk that falls to floor (and into everything) like oatmeal or, well, wet popcorn
- **"mud"** to fill holes and fix gouges, a lot like grout for tile or what painters do with picture hanger holes
- **texture** for a new, updated look, smoother than the stuff from the days of puffy hairdos and disco music!
- And **paint** to "top" it off and complete the enjoyable and

more livable change.

Simple processes aside, the disarray and disruption of either kind of renovation cannot be overstated. Every last physical item, habit, and way of life has been overturned, from sleeping to showering, eating to breathing itself. Repeat after me, self: *temporary pain for years of gain*. And isn't that what spiritual growth is like? Is it worth it? This is the operative question each time the Lord convicts us of sin or a character issue. Sanctification—the project of turning us into the real likeness of Christ—promises *eternal* reward and glory! It showcases the goodness and truth of God. Maturity matters, even though its development stinks at efficiency and convenience from a human perspective.

Because negative thought patterns burn into our minds and even have bodily effects, they need to be peeled off, removed. Kind of like the dragon skin of the character Eustace, the unbearably cynical and snooty boy character in C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. His spiritual blindness and insensitivity had to go but was painful to remove. Sin sticks and separates us from God, goodness and others. Due to its toxic spiritual effects, transformation can't be kept waiting. We, like young Eustace, need to release our sense of entitlement and thanklessness, rid ourselves of a false sense of pleasure and pride. He have to grow new skin. We too must be scraped over, repaired, remade and painted afresh.

What does this spiritual scraping of sanctification look like in more detail? Well, not unlike ceiling refurbishment in so many ways.

Necessary Disruption

First, like those old popcorn ceilings, coverings in my soul simply must be replaced, and not for reasons of fashion. *Scraping ceilings and hearts is inconvenient*—the workers are in our house all day. The Lord does his work while we do our

lives. There is never a “good time” for it. You just have to suck it up and have your life turned around a bit. I have been forced, in no small part by dealing with contractors and suppliers, to wrestle down thoughts like, “People are clueless—I wish they’d smarten up and pay attention.” While there is truth behind those convictions as we all know, people have reasons for distraction and the unredeemed have no choice but to be self-centered and confused. The Lord has been revealing what it means to “value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). When my protective and cynical dragon skin layers are removed, I begin to appreciate how gentle and ordered others’ minds can be. Their skills and especially their ability to roll with messy, changeable situations amazes me. They are better than me at a lot of things. Regardless of my perceptions, God sees them as priceless and since he loves me supremely, so I can afford to regard them as more important than myself.

Healing Takes Time, Repetition

Second, *filling in the holes and cracks means going over the same “ground” again*. It’s detailed work and has to set up and dry before you can move on. This does not feel efficient, yet it ensures that things are permanently restored. Often, the soulish equivalent of this comes in the form of deep fellowship and counseling—filling in the injury done to our souls with solid truth and love. The old becomes new again, the cracked smooth, the damaged healed. “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (Psalm 51:12).

The Grace of Preparation and Protection

In fact, prepping the house took the most time: taping plastic to the floor, draping furniture and ceiling fans, disconnecting light fixtures and removing air vents. It’s as if the protection of our belongings and dwelling takes precedence over the new look and underlying stuff. Isn’t this

God's way? As his Spirit renovates our lives, he lines us with protective layers of grace and love, draping us with the encouragement of prayers he evokes on our behalf and the love of fellow Christ-followers.

Renovation Takes Force

Third, just like ceiling overhauls, *retexturing* is yet another wearying pass over the same square footage for the purpose of renewal—and *it has to be forced*. Workers hold a little orange plastic tank attached to a hose that's hooked up to a compressor, then spray the new coating on the freshly prepared surface. The pneumatic motor kicks into a whining screech that fills the house. Without that push, the spray can't come out of the nozzle ten feet in the air. Similarly, the Spirit's regeneration of our souls is noisy, messy, pushy and downright unpleasant. We may tire of reaching up to do our part in spreading newness onto the same surface from which God has removed the old stuff. Our shoulders and hearts get exhausted, sore from holding up our part of the work. The air is a bit nasty to breathe. But if our new life is to be realized, it has to be done, forcibly.

The Stuff of Spiritual Renovation

Just what is such *spiritual newness*? The material used is God's Word illumined by his Spirit, creating new pathways for our minds, hearts and wills, right down to the bone and marrow of our beliefs. It means filling our minds with "whatever is true . . . honorable . . . right, . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good repute . . . any excellence [and] anything worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8), being "transformed" and "renewed" in our minds (Romans 12:1-2), reckoning (deciding to be so) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans

6:11). All of these fresh Spirit-pumped coatings can cover our internal overheads with new, living realities. That is, thinking and believing in a life-giving outlook that takes

seriously the promise that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17) is the ultimate renewal. Now, the house has a new sky, if you will, and the sun is ready to shine a bit brighter. As we capitulate to the often onerous process of scraping, mudding, and texturing, we experience a brand new covering for ceilings and souls-in-Christ. And now for the *coup de grace*!

New Paint, New Spiritual Robes

Painting is the final stage of this household transformation. Gone are the ugly, useless bits, replaced with the smoothness of shalom—peace-filled blessedness—where defects get filled in and fixed as we submit to the work. Likewise, as we are molded into Christ’s likeness, we put on robes of pure white righteousness (Revelation 19:8; 3:4). So much can be said about the glory of holiness produced in willing saints. Suffice to say that the glory that awaits us outshines even the brightest hues applied to earthly surfaces. Our spiritual man is growing brighter, even as our bodies break down and fade. “We do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Many of us have ceilings that overhang us with old, outdated looks. All believers in Christ have rooms—perhaps whole houses—that need reworking. Let the scraping begin. It’s worth it!

Back Infections and Heart

Infections

My husband Ray knew something was wrong as soon as he got out of bed.

His lower back, where he'd had back surgery six weeks before, was wet. His t-shirt was wet. The sheet was wet. His fingers glistening with a strange wetness from reaching back to investigate, he asked me to check what was going on. I saw a rivulet of fluid pouring out of the top of his surgical incision. Something was really, really wrong.



As I gently pressed the skin around the incision, pus kept flowing out. He had a serious infection under the incision. It had been hidden, but it literally rose to the surface of his body and forced its way out. His problem wasn't that pus was being discharged from the inside to the outside—that was just the symptom, the manifestation of the true problem: a deep and serious infection.

He'd had the infection before he was forced to be aware of it. There were indications: fever, and just not feeling right.

The Lord is quite adept at using the physical to show us truths about the spiritual and emotional. I started seeing parallels between the two worlds.

The undealt-with, unhealed spiritual and emotional hurts in our souls don't just sit there under the surface—our awareness—forever. It's like emotional pus. Eventually it starts leaking out sideways: addictions, anger, isolation, rebellion, self-destruction. These are the presenting problems

that drive people to seek help through recovery programs such as [Re:generation](#) and [Celebrate Recovery](#), or counseling.

Just as a rivulet of pus wasn't Ray's true problem but merely a symptom, our heart issues are the true problem that Jesus wants to point to and say, "Let Me heal them. You can't do it on your own."

Ray's infection was so large that he needed "wash out" surgery. He needed a skilled surgeon, in the sterile, controlled environment of the operating room, to open up his incision and clean out the infection. Before he even got to the OR, the doctor ordered IV antibiotics to attack and disarm the destructive power of the multiplying bacteria. By the time the surgeon got to the washing-out stage, Ray's infection had been disarmed, turned into "clean gunk." No bacteria was left, just the debris of the now-dead bacteria.

In the spiritual realm, it's truth that functions like powerful antibiotics. Truth attacks the destructive power of lies and decision. There is still leftover debris of lies—bad thinking habits and bad behavior habits—but when the lies are disarmed, it's a lot easier to replace the old habits with new, healthy, godly habits.

This was a serious infection. The day after surgery, they put in a PICC line that threaded a tube from his upper arm into a vein, ending just above his heart. This is a very effective way to infuse health-building antibiotics into his body, medicine that can't be taken orally—it has to be pumped directly into his bloodstream. He gets five antibiotic infusions a day, which we can do at home instead of needing to be hospitalized or having to go a doctor's office (which would be hard to do at 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.!).

The PICC line allows us to keep a constant level of antibiotic in his blood. He needs this constant flow to attack the infection over a long period of time. We also need a constant

infusion of truth into our souls, into our minds, to counteract the destructive power of lies and deceptions and schemes. In fact, one study revealed that it takes a minimum of four infusions of truth weekly through time in the Word for spiritual growth and healthiness.

I like thinking about the infusion of truth through God's Word as I connect the tubing to Ray's PICC line catheter. God is so good to give us physical lessons to show us spiritual truths!

Ray sure couldn't heal himself on his own. He pointed out that he had to surrender control over this entire "adventure" (to use my dad's word to describe his cancer journey). There was absolutely nothing he could do to fix the spinal stenosis that squeezed nerves, causing shooting pains down the backs of his legs, and he couldn't heal the infection that came later. He had to place himself in the hands of the surgeon both times. He had to place himself in the hands of the anesthesiologists to put him to sleep and wake him up. He had to place himself in the hands of the nurses to administer his pain meds and the IV antibiotics. He had to surrender control to those who knew how to help him.

At any point, he could have shut down the process—not having the surgery, or walking out of the hospital, or refusing the home infusions of IV antibiotics. He could have refused to wear the back brace after the spine surgery; he could have refused to submit to the BLT restrictions (no bending, lifting or twisting).

But that would have also shut down the healing.

When we have soul sickness—a heart infection, if you will—we need to entrust ourselves into the hands of people more educated in the healing process than we are. We need to surrender our false sense of control and invite others to lead us from sickness into health. And we need to not shut down the process by thinking we know better, or thinking we're fixed or

even just “good enough.” We need to not push back against restrictions suggested by those who know better than we do what it will take to help us climb out of our pits to get to the place of spiritual and emotional health.

God provides help for physical challenges like infections, and through the “one anothers” of scripture He provides help for spiritual and emotional challenges as well. And He lets us connect the dots to learn transferable concepts from each.

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The Thought Police Are Here

Recently, in the same week, I watched two strikingly polar opposite events unfold on my Facebook feed. One was the long-awaited, long-prayed-for birth of a precious baby girl whose daddy had left homosexuality and repented of a gay identity as he pursued intimacy with Christ. After several years of sexual sobriety and spiritual growth, he was actually quite surprised to find himself starting to be attracted to girls. I remember him saying, “If you think puberty is rough the first time, you should try it at 28!” I was privileged to watch him weep with gratitude through his wedding to a beautiful lady, and pray for him as he became a pastor of an inner city church. And finally, after a failed pregnancy and several failed adoptions, God gave him and his wife the desires of their heart when their little one was born.

This happened the same week that Amazon banned a number of books offering hope for people struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions or gender confusion, people like my friend. A gay activist convinced Amazon that the books by a clinical psychologist who had successfully treated hundreds of men who did not want to be gay, and other books presenting a biblical view of sexuality, are dangerous. He said they cause LGBT people to hate themselves and inflict grave psychological damage. Because no one should be able to say there's anything wrong with same-sex relationships and behavior.

It's really not any different than if a coalition of distilleries, vintners and brewing companies went after Alcoholics Anonymous to shut them down, proclaiming that it's dangerous and even wrong to support people who want to stop drinking. And there's something wrong with people not wanting alcohol to control or even destroy their lives, because drinkers are who they are and they need to embrace this reality.

Critics use the pejorative labels "gay cure" or "conversion therapy" to shut down the voices of those offering help to those who want it. No reputable therapist, counselor, or pastoral care person will attempt to force change on someone who doesn't want it, but what about those who *do* want help? What about another friend of mine, who sought help when he was deep in the weeds of his gay life? When I asked what made him reach out for help over 20 years ago, he answered, "God-induced misery. If the Holy Spirit truly lives within, there is no peace, there is no stability, there is no hiding. As James says, The double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

But technology has allowed "the Thought Police" to shut down the voices they don't like, like those of my friends. The stewards of high tech hold the power to decide what they want people to hear and see.

- John Stonestreet's recent Breakpoint commentary^{1} relates how Facebook deleted a pro-lifer's post quoting Saint Augustine, about focusing on the sins of others to avoid examining our own. Facebook says St. Augustine's comment violated community standards.
- YouTube has restricted a quarter of Dennis Prager's conservative videos, including one on the Ten Commandments (because it mentions murder).
- Smarter Every Day's resident engineer (and winsomely outspoken Christ-follower) Destin Sandlin created three powerful videos explaining how YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are being manipulated to control what we see.^{2}
- A single pro-LGBT activist convinced Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Google to remove the [Living Hope Ministries](#) app, grossly misrepresenting LHM's mission and activity as dangerous and even "life-threatening." The app was filled with expository teachings of various books of the Bible, weekly devotions, and personal testimonies of God's transformational work. The app had happily resided on all platforms for more than three years.

This app was removed for supposedly being life-threatening to LGBTQ youth, yet the same hosts offer more than a dozen pro-gay apps that are designed to encourage sexual exploration and provide a means for individuals to hook-up for anonymous sex—an activity that has proven to be dangerous and even life-threatening.^{3}

These are examples of the Thought Police in action.

This is why it is more important than ever before for our thinking to be more shaped, more informed by the truth of the Word of God than by the gatekeepers of Big Tech.

For example, we need to embrace the truth of 1 Corinthians 6, describing the first century church that had former

homosexuals in it:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you.** 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.” (vv. 9-11, emphasis mine)

I keep thinking about personal friends of mine, and their families, that the Thought Police don't want the world to know about: men and women who have turned from a gay identity to finding their identity in Christ, who have reconciled their faith and sexuality to honor and glorify God in it. Some have developed an attraction to their now-spouse, and are happily living faithful lives of service in their churches and in the world. Some report that their same-sex attractions haven't changed, but instead of a blaring, controlling force, they have retreated to white noise in the background of their lives. Their stories are real, and life-giving, and fulfilling.

But you won't know about it if the Thought Police have their way.

Notes

1. www.breakpoint.org/2019/07/the-point-saintly-censorship/
2. www.smartereveryday.com/
3. www.livehope.org/2019/04/23/lightintodark/

This blog post originally appeared at
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“My Daughter Says She’s a Boy—What Do I Do?”

A real question from a real mom: “Sue, my daughter insists she’s a boy. She has rejected all things feminine since she was a toddler. Now as a 15-year-old she says there’s a mismatch between her brain and her body. She wants “top surgery” (a double mastectomy) and testosterone to bring her insides and outsides into alignment. She says God made her this way and He doesn’t make mistakes so she is embracing a transgender identity. What do I do?”

Oh sister. I am so sorry. I can only begin to imagine the pain, the chaos, and the conflict this is causing in your family.

Let’s start with, what do we know is true?

1. God loves her. She is very dear to Him. He made her in His image and likeness. He sent His Son to give His life for her, proving once and for all how infinitely precious she is. And He may just be especially tender toward her, when we consider Isaiah 42:3—“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;”
2. The Creator God made her a girl. He has plans and purposes for her as a female.
3. She’s only 15, and her pre-frontal cortex won’t finish developing for another 10 years. She’s not in a position to judge accurately the long-term effects of choices she makes today.
4. You are an adult, and you can see the long-term effects. It’s essential that you not cave to pressure.
5. This issue is so rife with conflict and political

correctness that everything I'm about to say will make someone furious.

What do you do? Well, first, you **love her well**. You stay focused on the wonderful gifts and talents and personality that you appreciate about her, and you keep affirming her for these aspects of who she is. Her sense of self, her sexuality, is not WHO she is, it's HOW she is. For right now.

Like any child or teenager (or adult, for that matter), she longs for her parents' acceptance—but acceptance is not the same as approval. Acceptance means acknowledging their experience, and their perception of reality, without endorsing the conclusions they come to or the choices they make. (Consider that God accepts us, Romans 14:18 and 15:7, but He certainly doesn't approve of everything we do!)

Loving her well means listening in order to communicate that you are seeking to understand her. It means showing compassion. Believing that one is transgender is *hard*. Those with internal conflicts about their gender are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, a sense of not belonging, and often have thoughts of suicide. She needs your tenderness.

What else do you do? **Educate yourself about this issue**, so you can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) to your daughter and to friends and family as this comes into the light.

Gender Dysphoria is a thinking disorder, not a body disorder. If your daughter announced she were a cat, or a unicorn, how would you deal with that? Dr. Phil McGraw teaches that the first test that one's thinking is rational is that it has to be grounded in objective fact^[1]. Our sex—male or female—is an objective truth that becomes apparent at birth. God, who knits us together in our mother's womb where we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13-14), is the one who chooses and then reveals His plan for our gender. That is objective fact. If someone thinks or feels that they are something other than

what God has made them to be, it's their thinking that is skewed, not their body. Unfortunately, our culture is very good at elevating feelings above objective truth, and that is at the core of the transgender issue.

I think that when children and adolescents claim to be the opposite sex, it's really about **not fitting into gender stereotypes**. You said your daughter "rejected all things feminine" since she was very small. That was about pink and purple sparkly princess dresses and bows in her hair, right? And she hated them? I respectfully suggest it wasn't femininity she was rejecting, it was a certain KIND of femininity, the stereotype we as a culture (particularly a culture infected with Disney princess images) label feminine. God also delights to make sporty, athletic, very physical and competitive girls who don't really care for frilly, girly-girl clothes. They can have a hard time playing house because nobody wins! These girls are still sensitive and compassionate, still emotional and verbal, but they'd rather be outside climbing trees and throwing perfect spirals to the neighborhood boys. These are not inferior girls, they're not lesser-than girls, they're just not in the majority. They are girls who love sports and are good at it, or girls who don't care for dresses or nail polish, or girls who just don't get the superficiality of many of their girl peers. They are the kind of girl God made them to be. When they are supported and celebrated for the kind of girl they are, their sense of disconnect with their femininity can decrease as their awareness of God's good creation of femininity increases.

Please see my post [The Gender Spectrum](#) for more information.

Sometimes, **the impact of various kinds of abuse** can make a girl think that it is neither good nor safe to be a girl. They can convince themselves that if they were a boy, they could protect themselves and they wouldn't be at risk because boys don't get abused or molested. (Which, of course, is not true!) The solution is not to impersonate a boy and mutilate her

body, but to get help processing the deep soul wounds of abuse and molestation.

Just as depressed people can often take comfort and refuge in the idea of ending their pain through suicide, those who experience a sense of misalignment with their birth sex can put their hopes in transitioning to the opposite sex through cross-hormone therapy and ultimately surgery. But very few are aware of the testimonies of those who regret doing this. Walt Heyer of sexchangeregret.com has recently released a book, *Trans Life Survivors*, comprised of letters and emails from people who are very sorry for what they did to their bodies: the ongoing medical problems and the deep sense of loss at mutilating their bodies.{2}

I know you are afraid of your daughter committing suicide because that is the drum that is constantly beaten by the pro-trans side: "If you don't cooperate with your child's plans to transition, there's a high suicide rate when kids are not supported in their preferred gender identity." That is a bone-chilling fear, one my husband and I personally know in our family. But you should know two things: first, it's not necessarily true. See the article "The Suicide Myth" here: www.transgendertrend.com/the-suicide-myth/ Second, we do know that the suicide rate is 20 times higher in those who DO transition.

In a commentary titled "Sex Reassignment Doesn't Work: Here's the Evidence," Ryan T. Anderson writes,

When 'the tumult and shouting dies,' it proves not easy nor wise to live in a counterfeit sexual garb. The [most thorough follow-up of sex-reassigned people](#)—extending over 30 years and conducted in Sweden, where the culture is strongly supportive of the transgendered—documents their lifelong mental unrest. Ten to 15 years after surgical reassignment, the suicide rate of those who had undergone sex-reassignment surgery rose to *20 times that of comparable peers.*" {3}

(Emphasis mine)

This means that the risk of suicide is far greater In those who transition, than those who don't.

Be aware of the power of social media. One of my heroes is Collin Karchner, who is “on a crusade to save teens from social media’s potential destruction to their self-esteem and mental health, and empowering parents to reconnect with their kids.” (savethekids.us/) I am amazed at the number of young lives he is saving by showing them how destructive social media can be, and the good that happens when teens cut themselves off from the negativity online. The destructive forces of social media certainly manifest in the growing numbers of kids and teens thinking they are transgender.

Recently, my colleague Kerby Anderson had me on his Point of View radio program talking about Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria, which is a part of social contagion. He posted this article on the ministry website: pointofview.net/articles/rapid-onset-gender-dysphoria/

Tumblr is a magnet for young girls, who are extremely vulnerable to the ideas and images on social media, and it is egregiously pro-trans. You should know about this social contagion phenomenon on that platform here: 4thwavenow.com/tag/tumblr-trans-contagion/

As I said above, educate yourself. But know that the pro-trans activists have been extremely successful at shutting down the voices of those concerned about the full-steam-ahead transgender agenda. You’ll have to do some digging.

Check out the work and the writings of psychologist Dr. Kenneth Zucker, who counseled over 560 children and teens with gender confusion at his clinic in Toronto over 35-40 years. He found that when kids were able to go through puberty naturally, Gender Identity Disorder (a phrase he coined) resolved in 98% of boys and 80% of girls. This is profound!

Apparently, there is something about the rush of the correct hormones during puberty that resets things internally in the vast majority of adolescents. The best treatment for those who feel at odds in their body is to wait and watch.

You should also know about Dr. Paul McHugh, for many years the Psychiatrist-in-Chief at Johns Hopkins University, who shut down the sex change clinic when he found that post-surgically, the patients still had their neuroses. In the 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."[\[4\]](#)

Be very skeptical of anything from WPATH, World Professional Association for Transgender Health. They are completely uninterested in providing any balance to their reports or articles, and their poorly designed studies have no control groups. (For more information, watch this video from pediatric endocrinologist Dr, Quentin Van Meter, "The Terrible Fraud of 'Transgender Medicine'" at youtu.be/6mt0lgeeD_c)

My last suggestion is the most important. **PRAY**. This is a spiritual warfare battle. The enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), and he is coming after our kids like nothing we've ever seen before. I have seen numerous people snatched from the enemy's claws as God does "spiritual cataract surgery," allowing them to see what they were blind to before, because of the faithful prayers of faithful parents and family members. Pray that the Lord will strengthen and protect your daughter from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Pray for the eyes of her heart to be enlightened so she can see the truth about herself (Ephesians 1:18).

Pray and don't give up.

Notes

1. drphilintheblanks.com, Living by Design Worksheets.
2. sexchangeregret.com/bookstore/
3. www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/sex-reassignment-doesnt-work-here-the-evidence
4. www.firstthings.com/article/2004/11/surgical-sex

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What is Art, Anyway?

When my dear friend Laura Helms told me about integrating her biblical worldview with how she teaches high school art, I was fascinated and asked her to write about her approach.



For the last nine years I have had the privilege of teaching visual arts in the public school system here in Texas. Each year I start off with one question on the board: "What is art?" Students give a wide range of answers but they usually land somewhere near the phrase "art can be whatever you want it to be."

This year I laid out an assortment of objects ranging from pottery to paintings to piles of trash that I pulled from the garbage can that morning. Through many giggles and lots of questions, many of the students still firmly asserted that all of these items could be considered "art." While you may agree or disagree with the used candy wrapper being called "art," art is a form of visual communication that encompasses the values and beliefs of the maker. Effective art communicates those beliefs clearly to the viewer. And I believe good art communicates truth to the viewer.

I don't get upset when my students hold the candy wrapper up as "art." I don't get upset because I know why they think that way. Matthew 6:22-23 says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" My primary goal as an art teacher is to help students learn how to see clearly. The goal is to teach them to look for truth—objective truth rather than subjective truth.

Art history is a reflection of what cultures believe about truth. The shift in western art movements closely correlates to changes in public value systems. Nietzsche famously wrote "God is dead" in the late 1800s. After two world wars, the rise of Nihilism in the West, and the elevation of reactionary self-determination supported by the growing popularity of psychology, artistic thought turned inward for answers to the human experience. Artists looked at a world going up in flames and thought to themselves, *Maybe it is true. Maybe I am on my own and this is all there is to life.* Artists created art in their own image, validating their own truths and personal beliefs. When our eyes do not work, we do not see clearly. It is not shocking, but it is heartbreaking. When we exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25), we hope to find life in things that cannot give us life.

I want to briefly share with you the journey my students take each year. Together we first identify our beliefs. What do you think the definition of art really is? What is the purpose of art? How do you know if art is good art? We start by identifying what we believe about “art.”

Next, we look at how we came to hold those beliefs. Together we look at history, philosophy and the evolution of Western thought. We talk about wars and Darwin, about appropriation and human rights. We look at the change in technology and how it influenced human interaction. We talk about religion and worldviews. We pinpoint large ideological shifts that show up in history. Did you know that the phrase “art is about personal expression” would have been laughed at before 1900? And the phrase “art can be what I want it to be” didn’t show up in public thought until the 1960s. As a class, we look at these origins and take note of how they have shaped our own thoughts and beliefs about art.

Once students can articulate what they believe about art and the origins of those beliefs, we take a second look. How do you know your beliefs are true? How has your understanding of art changed after your studies? Students think they are profound when they make grandiose statements like “art is whatever I want it to be.” The goal isn’t to change their beliefs. The goal is to teach them to see clearly.



I think we all need to go to art class. At our core, none of us want to be fools, trusting in false hopes. We all desire to see truth. It is my goal to help them learn how to seek it and find it. When was the last time you asked yourself, “How do I know this to be true?”

Now go make some good, weird art.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/what-is-art-anyway/
on April 30, 2019.

What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?

Sue Bohlin suggests four ways the resurrection of Jesus can make a difference in the lives of believers today.

What difference does the resurrection make—in our lives? It's the most important event in all of human history. Where's the "so what" for today?

I meditated on this question for weeks, eventually creating a list too long for this blog post. So let me share my favorites.

All pain and suffering will be redeemed and resolved.

I've [lived in a body with a disability](#) since I got polio at eight months old and was paralyzed from the waist down. I got some use of my left leg and hip back, but I had to wear a steel and leather brace for the first several years of my life. Every step I've taken, I have limped. I had several orthopedic surgeries and 14 years of physical therapy.

We used to sing a song in church that made me cry Every. Single. Time.

You Hold Me Now [{1}](#)

For eternity
All my heart will give
All the glory to Your Name

No weeping, no hurt or pain
No suffering
You hold me now
You hold me now

No darkness, no sick or lame
No hiding, You hold me now
You hold me now

The first time I walk without a limp will be in my resurrected body, in heaven where there will be no polio, no weakness, no limping. There will be no scooters in heaven. No wheelchairs. No walkers.

No insulin pumps.
No percussion vests for cystic fibrosis.
No cochlear implants for the deaf.
No braille books or signs for the blind.
No dentures or dental implants.
No prosthetics.

All the technology and tools we have developed to help people deal with life in a fallen, broken world will be obsolete and never needed again. The fallen, broken world will be resurrected too! Full of glory and beauty and strength and perfection.

What difference does the resurrection make? It affects [how I live through times of pain and suffering](#). I know I can bear it if there is a purpose and God is going to make everything right.

The resurrection means all pain and suffering is temporary, and there is meaning to it.

The resurrection means God sustains me through the difficult times because He is doing a beautiful thing in me that I will only be able to see and appreciate in my resurrection body.

A second difference the resurrection makes is that **heaven is real, so we don't have to fear death.**

The resurrection means that if we are believers, if we have trusted in Christ, when we cross over from life on earth to life in heaven, we will be with Jesus and with all the people, starting with Adam and Eve, who put their trust in Him.

It means we can look forward to being reunited with our loved ones who have died.

I'm looking forward to seeing my daughter Becky again. She's been with Jesus 42 years. I'm looking forward to being there when our sons Curt and Kevin meet their sister, who was born and died before they came along. I'm looking forward to seeing my mom and dad, my grandparents and other family members, including my wonderful cousin George who just moved to heaven last week.

We can look forward to meeting super distant family members and even people we heard about but never met, like the apostles and Saint Augustine and Corrie Ten Boom and Billy Graham.

And since heaven is real, it means we don't have to fear death.

When we put our trust in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, death is merely a doorway into the next life. We leave our bodies and step across the threshold of heaven to be with Jesus.

There are so many stories of what a difference the resurrection makes in the life of a believer as they face death!

Recently I posted a question on Facebook asking friends to share dying stories of heaven-bound believers. I got so many delightful responses!

“My friend Charla was a hospice nurse for many years. She tells of one man, O.J., on his deathbed. His best friend, Floyd, had gone to heaven several years earlier. O.J. had been comatose for a day or so. Charla said he was peaceful and close to death as she sat with him, holding his hand and speaking soothing words to him. All of a sudden, with his eyes still closed, O.J. broke into a brilliant smile, lifted his other hand up into the air and said expectantly, ‘Floyd!’ and he went right to heaven! Charla said she’d held his hand on Earth as Floyd grasped his hand in heaven.”

“In the last moments of my father’s life, he was beaming with joy as he saw his friends on the other side waiting for him. He held up his hands, greeting them by name, ‘Brother Harold! Brother Bob!’”

3 weeks before my believing aunt passed, she saw her husband who had died several years before, in white robes reaching out his arms to her. Then while in the hospital, Aunt Rose walked by a statue of Jesus and paused as if talking to him. My cousin asked, “Mom, are you talking to Jesus?”

She said, “Yes, and He said, ‘Hang in there Rosie, you’ll be with Me shortly.’” A few days later, she told my cousins what she was seeing as the curtain between heaven and earth grew more and more transparent.

She exclaimed that heaven was so beautiful, so filled with warmth and kindness. Her daughter asked her if it was like Hawaii and she laughed and said, “No, it’s like a warm summer afternoon in Wisconsin.” The week she died, she started seeing Jesus in a white robe, and then the day before she died the robe turned gold. That night she told my cousin, “Go to bed. You’re keeping me from meeting Jesus.” She died several hours

later.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means when loved ones die, it's just a "see you later" rather than a forever goodbye.

It means that as you get rolled from pre-op to the operating room and get ready to undergo anesthesia, you can relax in peace knowing that if anything were to go wrong during surgery, you'd wake up in heaven.

It means being legitimately concerned about the dying process hurting, but not concerned about what happens one minute after death.

The resurrection means death has been robbed of its power and its sting.

Another difference the resurrection makes is that ***we become more aware of the unseen, eternal world.***

Since Jesus said He had come from heaven, and that He would rise from the dead in 3 days—*and then He did!*—that validates everything He taught about the unseen and eternal dimension of life.

We can become more aware of the fact that we live in two worlds at the same time, the seen and physical world and the unseen spiritual world (2 Corinthians 4:18).



I love to snorkel in the Caribbean. I love being able to look at the beautiful fish and corals of the underwater world while effortlessly breathing the air of the above-water world. I love functioning in two worlds at the same time.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means we can operate in two worlds simultaneously.

It means we can learn to focus on the unseen, eternal realm as more real than the temporal realm.

It means we can intentionally become so much more effective in our prayers because we start to see we truly do release God's power into other people's lives and situations when we pray.

Operating in two realms at the same time means we can sit in our living rooms and release the light of God's truth and power into legal and political situations in our nation's capital.

We can be walking or driving in our cars wherever we are and pour the grace of God's power into the hearts of persecuted Christians on the other side of the world.

We can read or hear the news on the internet or the newspaper and lift up events and needs and problems to the throne of God no matter where they are.

The resurrection means we can wear "invisible snorkel gear" and operate in the earthly realm and the spirit realm at the same time.

A final difference the resurrection makes is that ***we will be married to Christ.***

The church, the body of Christ, will be married to our heavenly bridegroom Jesus.

The greatest earthly marriages are still only a foretaste of the ultimate, perfect marriage between the Bride of Christ and the Lamb.

The best, healthiest earthly marriages are still between two broken, fallen sinners who hurt and irritate and annoy each other and are in constant need of forgiveness.

The very best marriages are not ultimately fulfilling and completing because only Jesus can fill and complete us. There are still times of loneliness and not being understood and wondering, "Is this as good as it gets?" Yes, because earthly marriages are not the ultimate purpose of your life.

If you are single, even if by God's grace you are content in your singleness, there is still a longing for connection that eludes you on earth because you were made for a deep and perfect union and connection with Jesus.

What difference does the resurrection make? It means we will be bound up with the rest of the body of Christ to become His bride.

And these three differences that the resurrection make, I believe, are only the tip of the iceberg.

1. Hillsong Music, words and music by Joel Houston & Aodhan King

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on April 16, 2019.

Princess Warrior, First Responder

One of my favorite things to talk about is [the Gender Spectrum](#), because I think it provides a very helpful understanding of people. Instead of a single spectrum with masculinity on one end and femininity on the other, I believe God has created a masculinity spectrum and a separate femininity spectrum.

The masculinity spectrum runs from the rough and tumble, athletic and physical kind of males on one end, to the sensitive, artistic, creative kind of males on the other—and everything in between. Although Western civilization tends to equate masculinity with the rough and tumble guys, I think that is a stereotype that gets in the way of appreciating the divinely created range of masculinity.

The femininity spectrum runs from the girly-girl on one end to the tomboy girl on the other. And just as with the masculinity spectrum, Western civilization tends to equate femininity with the stereotype of pink-loving, cosmetic-wearing girls who twirl in dresses to be admired. God delights to make plenty of females who are gifted athletically, are often natural leaders, and don't really care for the stereotypical appearance-oriented manifestations.

My belief is that Jesus Christ is the whole masculinity spectrum all at once, and as boys and men grow in Christlikeness (which is the goal of spiritual maturity), they will take up more bandwidth on the spectrum. Rough and tumble

guys grow in sensitivity and compassion, and sensitive/artistic/creative men grow in their physicality and willingness to initiate and lead.

It seemed to me that a similar growth into taking up more bandwidth should happen on the femininity spectrum as well, as spiritual and emotional growth would produce a fuller-orbed experience of God's beautiful intention for His beloved female image-bearers.

I have certainly observed this happening in fully devoted followers of Christ. I have seen tomboy girls become more comfortable in their feminine skin, especially those who didn't particularly like being female because of abuse or a lack of connection with other girls growing up. It's been good to see women who protected themselves with a hardened, tough outer shell grow softer and more trusting of the Lord and other women. But I've wondered, what happens when girly-girls start taking up more bandwidth on the femininity spectrum? How do they grow and change?

One of the things I love about my tomboy girl friends is their fiercely protective willingness to fight—bullies, injustice, evil. Most of them are not in the least interested in protecting their non-existent manicures or messing up their fancy, fussy outfits (since they don't own any). Some of them grew up with a burning desire to defend the defenseless, and they were frustrated at the unfair rule that girls weren't supposed to fight. And some of them felt shamed for this supposedly unfeminine passion.

Instead, in our culture, girls are usually expected to fall in love with Disney princesses and see themselves as a princess. Now, there's nothing wrong with being royalty. In fact, when I tell my story of trusting Christ and entering into His family, I share my childhood dream to grow up to be a princess. It was a major lightbulb moment of my life to realize that I am now a child of God, who is the King of Kings, and the female child

of a King is a princess! Then I pull out my tiara and pop it on my head. I totally own the princess identity.

But one day I realized that the Bible's call to engage in spiritual warfare is not gender-related in the least. Every believer is called to don the armor of God and do battle with demons with the Lord's protection and in His strength (Ephesians 6:1-18). The person who does warfare is a warrior, right?

Voila—the opportunity to be a princess warrior! Or a warrior princess, either one works, satisfying both ends of the femininity spectrum. Justice-fueled protectors who want to go to war or even just fight the bully on the school bus have every biblical invitation—it's actually a command!—to give themselves fully to the God-given desire to fight in a way that glorifies God. Girly-girls fulfill a larger vision for femininity when they move beyond a self-oriented focus on looking good, shopping, disdaining sports, and the domestic arts, and give themselves to standing firm against evil and serving others in intercessory prayer.

Recently, though, I had another lightbulb moment when the women's director at my church, addressing a "Leaders of Leaders" equipping time, told us that we are first responders. Invoking the image of 9/11 when firefighters ran into the burning buildings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, she pointed out that we are also first responders when we deliberately walk into spiritual burning buildings to rescue those trapped by faulty, unbiblical thinking. We're first responders when we're willing to have hard conversations with those struggling with where scripture teaches unpopular and uncomfortable standards. We are first responders when we're willing to walk people in conflict through the steps of biblical conflict resolution (Matthew 7:3-5, 18:15-17). We are first responders when we are willing to reach out and love the unlovely and difficult. We are first responders when we are willing to walk a woman through spiritual warfare material to

identify places she has given the enemy a foothold in her life and help her take back internal real estate that should belong to Jesus.

So, regardless of where a woman finds herself on the femininity spectrum, she can glorify God as she trusts Him to expand and grow her into a more well-rounded follower of Christ. Even (and especially) if that includes pink nail polish and spiritual firefighting gear.

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How Bad is This Conversion Therapy Thing?

As pro-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) voices and values grow louder and more insistent in the culture, what about those people of faith who experience same-sex attraction and don't want it? What are they supposed to do with feelings and desires at odds with their faith? How are they supposed to learn to reconcile their faith and their sexuality?

The cultural narrative has become, “LGBT represents normal, healthy variations in human sexuality, so everyone should support and



celebrate all forms of sexual diversity. And if you don't, we're going to punish you, shame you, and squelch your voice.”

Part of the punishing and shaming includes outrage over “Conversion Therapy.” A growing number of states outlaw it. What makes it so bad and why are people so angry about it?

What is Conversion Therapy?

Conversion Therapy is usually defined as therapy designed to change a person's sexual orientation. But is that what it really is? Therapy is a shortened form of the word “psychotherapy,” which means the treatment given by a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist, a social worker, or a licensed counselor. So Conversion Therapy isn't therapy without a professional counselor of some kind, with the goal of changing someone's sexual orientation.[\[1\]](#) But do a Google search for organizations being labelled as doing (or even promoting) Conversion Therapy—which will include a number of churches—and you'll find neither element happening.

Conversion Therapy is the current buzzword that instantly communicates something that smears hate, shame, judgment and probable suicidality in those who undergo it, forced or not. It is not acceptable to say there's anything wrong or unhealthy about any form of “sexual diversity.” Those that do—for example, anyone who holds to a biblical, traditional view of marriage and sexuality—are labeled as haters, bigots, prudes, outdated . . . and wrong.

Anne Paulk, director of Restored Hope Network, describes it as “an ideological term used by the GLBTQ activist community and their supporters who seek to link compassionate spiritual care and talk therapy with horrible, clearly disreputable practices.”[\[2\]](#)

These “disreputable practices” include stories of some extremists who used torture, pain and punishment to try and exorcise homosexuality from people. Most notably and recently, the movie *Boy Erased* purports to show the true story of a teenage boy whose parents sent him to a strict camp that left heartbreaking wounds on his soul. (It should also be noted that the producers took a number of creative liberties to produce the most dramatic moments of the film, none of which actually happened per the book.) The cultural narrative lumps extremists with all those engaged in helping those with unwanted homosexuality, painting them all with a broad brush of condemnation.

Helping Those Who *Want* the Help

A number of ministries and churches actively seek to help those who don't want their same-sex feelings or their discomfort with their gender. Or, even if they don't fight against their feelings, they want to live lives honoring to God despite their desires, which means not giving into them. These ministries and organizations neither offer nor promise conversion of homosexual attractions into heterosexual ones. That would be like offering to make someone stop loving chocolate and start loving kale. Not gonna happen, right?

But they can teach what God's word says about sexuality, discipleship, and living a life pleasing to God. They can help people (note: choose to, not be forced to) submit every area of their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ, including sexuality. There are many who define and identify themselves by their sexuality; God's word calls us to define and identify ourselves by our relationship to Him.

Human sexuality is a complex, many-layered issue comprised of a lifetime of experiences, perceptions, habits, and ways of thinking. There's nothing simple about it. It has also, for every one of us, been impacted by the Fall and the pervading presence of sin.

But Is Change Even Possible?

Ever hear the pejoratively-used phrase "Pray away the gay"? That's as effective as praying away fat. A prayer like, "Please Jesus make me stop wanting people/things/food I shouldn't" has never worked because He doesn't have a magic wand. He says to all those who want to be His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). That means saying no to ourselves and to our flesh, the part of us that operates independently of God. The apostle Paul instructs us in Romans 12:2 to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . . ." Cooperating with God to renew our mind means submitting our thoughts and habits to Him, "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). The call to surrender every part of us, including our sexuality, as the way to obey and honor God, is a difficult one, and it takes community. It takes the support of other Christ-followers to walk alongside us, pray for us, speak God's truth to us, encourage us, challenge us, restore us when we stumble and fall, and help us keep going.

Change is not only possible, it is the mark of things that are alive. And it is the fruit of the gospel. Lasting change comes not from human effort but from supernatural transformation as we surrender to the work of God in our lives. We experience change as we are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christlikeness produces change in how we think, what we believe, how we see ourselves and others, our behavior, and finally—like the caboose on a train—our feelings. But there's no point in trying to change the feelings apart from the rest of the process.

Discipleship is often what's happening in ministries and churches that are smeared with the label of "Conversion Therapy," being lied about and attacked by people who can't abide any position other than their own.

Next time you see the term "Conversion Therapy," know that it's not about shutting down bad therapists. It's about shutting up people who agree with God about sexuality.

1. I am indebted to the amazing Joe Dallas for his crazy-great analysis and tender compassion concerning this issue, particularly this article: joedallas.com/2018/11/13/dances-with-snakes/

2.

www.wnd.com/2019/02/ex-gay-leader-jesus-still-transforms-lives/

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When Things Get Crazy on Social Media: Responding Biblically to Firestorms

Recently, a firestorm erupted over some viral videos of some high school students allegedly harassing a Native American veteran who was chanting and banging a drum. In a frenzy of name calling, people quickly ascribed disrespect, racism, and hatred to the students. The veteran made statements about the event that were also shared virally. Some media figures and a

lot of Twitter users blew up the internet, condemning the students for their interpretation of what they saw.

But then, more and longer videos showing the true picture of what happened became available online, and the student at the center of the original viral video released an articulate statement explaining what really happened. It has become apparent that the media had mischaracterized the event, and some media figures have actually apologized for jumping to premature conclusions.

We are in a new place in history, where the internet makes news available immediately, faster than the speed of thought and analysis. At least in the United States, we now live in a culture of criticism and rush to judgment before all the facts are in. This is fed by our postmodern loss of belief in truth. Without recognizing it, many many people no longer believe in Truth with a capital T, just individual truth with a lowercase t. We are encouraged to find and hang onto “our own personal truths” rather than pursue knowledge of what is actually True. (Ever heard the phrase “true for you, but not for me”?)

This loss of confidence in ultimate truth, combined with the technology to record and edit videos that provide what someone wants others to see disconnected from context, has brought us to this place where “fake news” is only distinguishable from real news by investigating the details, assertions and context of what is published and promoted.

That takes time. And deliberation. Neither one is a friend of those who want to manipulate how others think and react.

But we can protect ourselves from this manipulation if we will install a filter of the Bible’s sage wisdom that is even more true today than it was 2700 years ago when Solomon wrote Proverbs 18:17:

The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.

As [Dr. Phil](#) loves to say, no matter how flat the pancake, it always has two sides. And particularly with stories and videos going viral, there's always more information, there's always context, and there's always the worldview and agenda of those pushing the virality. The deeply beautiful truth of this proverb makes for an exquisite filter for every aspect of life. (See my blog post [Headed to the Courtroom](#))

What creates an online firestorm is people quickly jumping onto social media to comment, judge, and share. The immediacy of the social media universe feeds the bad habit of reacting instead of responding, of blurting out one's first thoughts before giving time to consider alternative explanations or perspectives. This is why the wisdom of the Lord's brother James shines through for us in 2019:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (James 1:19)

We should also take note of the keen observation that God gave us two ears and one mouth, so maybe we should listen twice as much (and as long) as we speak. Or tap. All three parts of this verse would have a profound effect on the frenzy of social media if more of us followed it!

One final suggestion for a filter as we experience this new post-truth, super-immediate, easily-manipulated world:

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

How do we read a Twitter or Facebook or Instagram feed to the glory of God? By inviting Him into the experience, lifting people and situations before His throne and asking for His blessing, asking Him to show ourselves and others what's true, and remembering that He sees all, knows all, and loves all.

How do we respond to social and news media accounts, rumors

and stories to the glory of God? By inviting Him into the way we process these, remembering His word that there's always more to whatever story we are hearing in the moment, and waiting to draw conclusions and take a position.

How do we post and comment on social media to the glory of God? By following His command in Ephesians 4:29–

You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear.

God's word has always been a source of great blessing, teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). But perhaps never more than right now!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/when_things_get_crazy_on_social_media_responding_biblically_to_firestorms on January 22, 2019.

Lessons From a Hospital Bed

In the last several months, both of my severely arthritic hips were replaced. In addition to the wonderful blessing that I am out of pain, the surgeries and recoveries were full of lessons pointing me to spiritual truths I am so very thankful for:



For a long time, I needed help getting in and out of my car. To be blunt, it was always noisy with involuntary gasps and screams of pain. And while my family and friends were so very glad to be of assistance, it was hard on them to witness me hurting so badly. Now that the pain is behind me, I keep hearing comments like, “Wow! It’s so great not to see your face contorted!” or, “Oh man! You’re not making the horrible sounds you used to make when you were getting into the car!” I told my husband the other day, “I have a feeling all that was a lot worse than I had any idea.” He nodded his head, “Oh yeah. It was bad.” While I am truly sorry that my sweet helpers had to see and hear what they did, it touches me that their compassion ran so deep. I have a new appreciation of what “rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep” (Romans 12:15) looks like, and how powerful it is to enter into another person’s highs and lows.

We have an amazing community group who love each other incredibly well. The night before my first surgery, they prayed over me. One of the men, with a twinkle in his eye, admonished me: "Sue, you may think this surgery is about getting a new hip, but it's not. It's about the people you're going to meet and minister to in the hospital. I just want you to remember—it's not about you, OK?" I know he said it to make me laugh, but his counsel bounced around in my head during both hospital stays. It allowed me to stay aware of the various people who came into my room, from doctors to nurses to housekeepers to the people delivering meal trays, praying, "How can I bless and encourage this person today, Lord?" It really WASN'T all about me!

I had heard from three different doctors, "You have two bad hips and they both need to be replaced." But I didn't sense the timing was right, especially with the expense of such huge surgeries and recovery. I learned yet again the importance of trusting God's timing; in February I turned 65 and crossed the amazing Medicare threshold, which covered basically everything. God's provision has been a huge part of this "adventure," including an exceptionally generous outpouring of gifts to a GoFundMe campaign for an expensive stem cell treatment that we had hoped would replace surgery, but it didn't. I learned again that the Lord is Jehovah Jireh, the God Who Provides (Genesis 22).

This adventure provided minute-by-minute practice in developing an "Attitude of Gratitude." During the first surgery, it seemed that every time I turned around there was another reason to say, "Thank You, Lord!" From the marvelous shock of waking up in the recovery room in no pain, to walking on my walker a couple of hours after surgery, to the joy of being able to stand again for the simple pleasure of brushing my teeth and washing my hands at the sink, to the delicious hospital food, to the lovely flowers friends brought, to the blessing of being able to fall back asleep after every

nighttime “visitor”—I was immersed in nonstop thankfulness.

The day after my second surgery, the Director of Food and Nutrition visited me to check on how the hospital was doing with the quality of the food and service. We had a delightful visit in which I was able to tell him about my immersion in thankfulness during my first hospital stay, but unfortunately I wasn't able to remember a lot of the things I was thankful for because pain meds made my brain fuzzy. “So,” I pointed to my journal next to my bed, “this time I brought my gratitude journal so I could record the many blessings despite the pain meds. And your food is one of them!” The director grinned and said, “Ah, so that's where the joy is coming from!” I loved that I was able to recognize a brother in Christ, and that he was able to recognize the connection between gratitude and joy.

The second surgery was a challenge for the surgeon because my hip bones are deformed from polio. I learned that there wasn't enough hip bone to anchor the new socket with screws, so she had to use surgical cement. She has high hopes that it will hold, but warned me that if the cement doesn't work over the long haul, “We'll be in big trouble.” So I started praying that the Lord would literally hold me together. Some of my astute friends pointed out that that is Jesus' job in Colossians 1:17: “In Him all things hold together.” The context is all of creation, so He can certainly handle one little hip!

I've already shared some of the other lessons I've learned in this adventure, about [how to handle fear](#) by sharing it with others and inviting the Lord into it and [how to handle unexpected grief](#).

But I'm pretty sure there are more lessons ahead. I just pray to keep my eyes open so I don't miss any of them.

Next Day Addendum:

I was right about there being more lessons, and I remembered one of them this morning as I easily stood up from my scooter to grab the coffee beans and mug from the cabinet for my morning cup of wake-up juice. After several years of not walking or standing because of the pain, I got out of a number of habits. Now I have to remind myself, “Hey! You can do _____ again!” I need to renew my thinking about what I can and can’t do, and in order to make these new ways of thinking permanent, I need to *practice* thinking differently. That’s how we experience spiritual transformation as well. One of my favorite verses is Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . .” We are transformed by intentionally submitting how we think and interpret life to the authority of God’s word. But we have to *practice* new ways of thinking in order to be transformed (as opposed to a momentary flicker of a thought).

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