

On Coffee: Drinking and Thinking

I'll admit it, I'm hopelessly biased, but my son is a world-class Mr. Coffee expert. Kevin regularly travels to three different continents in search of relationships with farmers growing excellent coffee he can roast and sell in his San Francisco [café](#). Over the years he has shared his coffee knowledge (and bags of really *really* good coffee) with my husband and me. We now know the difference between utilitarian commodity coffee that is just a caffeine delivery system, and the complex flavors of a cup of specialty coffee that stands alone even without cream or sugar. For Christmas, he gave us the perfect coffee-making setup to take with us on a cruise, assuring us that we would have the best coffee on the ship.



Unfortunately, the fancy new hotpot for heating water was too fancy for the fire-conscious security officers, and they confiscated it during the cruise. So we tried drinking the ship's coffee, but much of the time it tasted like it had been prepared by someone who doesn't understand the importance of proportion between coffee grounds and water. One day I took a picture at breakfast to commemorate the day I absolutely could not drink the abysmally wretched beverage they called coffee. I'm just not that picky. I now have an "educated palate," but I'm not a picky person. Unless someone really crosses a line. And they did.

Now that I've been taught about coffee complexity and the role of terroir (the soil and climate where coffee is grown, just like with vineyards), I taste and appreciate coffee differently. It occurred to me that something similar, but far more important, happens to our thinking when we are taught biblical truth and values. Once our eyes are opened to God's

perspective and His presentation of truth, it changes how we process what we see and hear.

And, like developing a cultured palate for great (or not-so-great) tasting coffee, we develop discernment in spotting truth (or not-so-true) and error.

For example, I just received a phone call from someone who found me online and called to bounce some ideas off me. He said he thinks he's the Messiah because he has made several predictions that have come to pass over the past couple of years. I told him that he can't be the Messiah since the angel told the disciples that Messiah Jesus would return to earth the same way He left, through the sky and the clouds (Acts 1:11). And the Messiah is sinless and perfect, and since he is a sinner, he can't be the Messiah. I asked him what he was reading and studying in God's word, and he said that right now he's reading the Book of Enoch. I told him that Enoch was written by man, not supernaturally inspired by God, so it's not scripture. He needs to be reading and studying God's word, not man's word.

It's knowing God's word that allows me to compare this young man's thoughts to the truth of God and explain where his thoughts and feelings, while they feel right and true, are off base. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line." When we have the "straight line" standard of God's word, we can identify what crooked is.

Someone else recently expressed his understanding of the Trinity as "There's Father God, then Jesus is God as a human being, and the Holy Spirit is God in our hearts." He thought the Trinity was different expressions of God as He related to us. Because of having received good teaching and good Bible study skills, I was able to compare his thoughts to how the Bible reveals truth about the three-Personed God: eternally existing, before there was a universe—Father, Son and Spirit

loving and adoring and delighting in each other totally apart from us. (Gen. 1:1-2, Eph. 1:3, John 17:5) The Trinity existed forever, long before there were people.

It's nice to be able to tell the difference between great coffee and good coffee and dreadful coffee, but it's far more important to be able to tell the difference between spiritual truth and error, between wisdom and foolishness, between God's thoughts and man's thoughts.

By the way, we finally figured out that we could have room service bring us a carafe of steaming hot water, which I poured over our wonderful coffee grounds to make what was still the best coffee on the ship.

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Christmas SHINY!

I love shiny.

I love sparkly, glittery, light-filled, dazzling *anything*.



My motto is, "If it don't shine, it ain't mine." And I'm not alone. When women visit Dallas, one of the most popular places

for friends to take them is to a huge [store](#) that sells thousands of pieces of costume jewelry with more bling than you can imagine.

Why do so many of us like shiny? I think it's because we are hard-wired for worship and we long for heaven where even the streets gleam with gold, and beautiful jewels and pearls abound. Heaven is a shiny, glorious place that radiates the beauty of a shiny, glorious Savior.

But our early "shiny" is a poor, sad imitation of the true glory of God. I especially love how God reveals Himself in the Bible through His *Shekinah* glory, where the invisible God makes His glory visible and weighty with importance and value.

We see more instances of the Shekinah glory in the book of Exodus than any other book in the Bible:

Moses and the Burning Bush: God appears to Moses as a fire within a bush that doesn't consume the bush, revealing Himself as the great I AM, calling Moses to lead His people out of slavery into the Promised Land.

In the cloud by day, pillar of fire by night. God led His people for forty years in their wilderness wanderings by a visible manifestation of His presence.

The cloud on Mt. Sinai where Moses met with God, and He gave Moses His rules for relationship in the Ten Commandments.

Moses asks God to show him His glory. While up on the mountain, Moses asks to see God's glory; God basically replies, "You can't see My face and live. While My glory passes by I will hide you in a cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand. Then I'll let you see My backside. That will be safe for you."

After seeing God's Shekinah glory, **Moses' face shone so brightly** that it hurt to look at him. It was reflected glory,

the way the moon reflects the sun's light. Still, it was so powerful that his face literally shone when he came down off the mountain to speak to the people.

The cloud of Shekinah glory covered the Tent of Meeting and filled the Tabernacle when they dedicated it. The glory was so intense Moses couldn't go inside.

We see the Shekinah glory one more time in the Old Testament, when Solomon's temple was dedicated, and God's glory fills the temple like it had filled the Tabernacle. Then we don't see it again for hundreds of years.

The next time in scripture we see the Shekinah glory is the night Jesus was born!

And while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem for the government's census, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory [*the Shekinah glory*] surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." (Luke 2:6-18)

But wait! But that's not all!

Matthew 2 tells us about the magi, the wise men from the east, who traveled to Jerusalem in search of the baby King of the Jews. They followed a star that moved until it stopped right over the house where the toddler Jesus and his family were living.

My husband Ray says it wasn't a natural conjunction of planets or stars, since they don't move like that and certainly don't stop over a house. In his Probe article "[The Star of Bethlehem](#)," he suggests it was the Shekinah glory leading the Magi to Jesus.

The same Shekinah glory we see in Exodus appears in the Christmas story. So much of the Old Testament points to Jesus, and we get to see it start to unfold in the Christmas story.

God is all about connecting the dots so we understand how things fit together. Not so we can enjoy the intellectual satisfaction of puzzle pieces interlocking, but so we can truly grasp that He made us for Himself, He made us for relationship with Him.

The Shekinah glory in Exodus points to the glory revealed in the Christmas story, where the Son leaves heaven and comes to earth as a perfect, sinless human, fully God and fully man. He lives a perfect, sinless life then dies on the cross to take the punishment for our sin onto Himself. Three days later He rises from the dead and He is alive today.

Little Baby Jesus isn't still in the manger: He is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven in glory!

Shiny, resplendent, luminous glory. And that is the *real* reason I love shiny. It reminds me of Jesus, of heaven, of what lies ahead for those of us who have trusted Christ.

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Rejection is Protection

Last week I got a text from my son: “Mom, I’m in Nairobi [Kenya]. Please pray they let me in Burundi tomorrow, I just heard they may not be issuing visas at the airport tomorrow like last year.” Well, they didn’t. He had to fly back to Nairobi to get a visa through the American embassy, a process that added days and expense to his plans. We prayed and God said no—or, more accurately, “Not yet.” Eventually he was able to get the visa, enter the central African country and visit with coffee growers.

God had closed the door for what turned out to be a few very dangerous days. When we asked Him to open the door to Kevin, He said no.

But “rejection is protection.” Kevin learned that while he was traveling and running around Nairobi trying to get his visa, murderous violence had been exploding in Burundi. It was quite possible that as an outsider, he might have been seen as a spy or an aid to opposition forces in that extremely volatile country. God’s closed door, as disappointing as it was, was His loving protection. (Which continued on my son’s trip: he flew out of Paris just hours before the Nov. 13 attacks, after which the president closed the borders and shut down international flights.)

Rejection is protection when God is sovereign. And He always is.

His “no” feels like rejection because we don’t get what we want, but there’s always a bigger story at play.

In 2002 I was invited to speak at women’s retreat in Germany and immediately said yes. “Don’t you want to pray about it?” our pastor friend asked with a smile. “Oops. Yes, I supposed I should.” So I did—and within an hour I had a strong, unmistakable unsettledness in my spirit, a lack of peace that all but shouted “NO!!!” That made absolutely no sense to me, and with deep regret I told our friend that for whatever reason, God had said no. But it made perfect sense six months later when, during the weekend of that women’s retreat, my husband was hurt in a serious car wreck. God knew I needed to be home instead of Europe. His “no” was love; His rejection was protection.

(By the way, when I was privileged to speak at that church’s retreat in 2013 and 2014, I showed a picture of my husband’s totaled car. I wanted them to see evidence of God’s loving sovereignty in play.)

My friend Ann ran for the school board in her city and lost. A wise spiritual director, helping her process the “ouch” of this disappointment, was the one who pointed out that sometimes rejection is protection. Ann tells me she has probably used that phrase a hundred times in responding to people’s stories of God’s closed doors and answers to prayer that weren’t what they wanted.

How many times have we wept over relationships that didn’t work out, only to realize later how disastrous they would have been? Or, if we were already involved with *that* person, we would have missed meeting and marrying our spouse?

Garth Brooks made this concept famous with his song “Unanswered Prayers,” which I would argue is a great name for a song but lousy theology because “no” and “not yet” are answers to prayer!

Rejection stinks. It always does. But it usually means protection because God is a good, good Father who's always looking out for us.

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Ways to Minister to a NICU Family

My sweet friend Kayla Grey has been dear to me since she met her husband-to-be at Probe Ministries' Mind Games camp several years ago, where I get to teach. It has been a joy to walk with this wise, smart, loving, godly young woman as she married and had her (first) two sons, the second of whom had a difficult delivery and spent nine hard, hard days in NICU. I loved this post on her blog [Renown and Crowned](#) so much I asked if I could share it here.



The overwhelming nature of the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) can paralyze even the most organized families. Suddenly you are living a life you never planned, and since you didn't plan to live this way, figuring out what you *need* becomes a daunting task in and of itself.

Friends and family may say this simple phrase: "Let us know if there's anything we can do to help." (or the variation "Let us know how we can help.")

In our experience, we wanted to be able to say, "This is how you can help!" – but we didn't even know where to start. We didn't spend a huge amount of time at the hospital until about day 4, and we didn't really have an idea of how quickly Trooper would come home until then. It was hard to know what to ask for at the beginning.

As the week progressed, we became more aware of what would help us in our situation. If you're looking for ways to help a NICU family, here are some ideas to consider. *Note: Because each family has different dynamics, these will not all apply to everyone. If you aren't sure whether one of these ideas would truly help the family you're ministering to, be sure to ask them.*

- **Journal and pen** – I found out quickly how the days blended together in my memory, and I wanted to record the journey for recollection later. My sister also suggested using a journal to write down what doctors and nurses reported when, so you would have a written record if you were getting 2 or 3 differing opinions.
- **Gift cards** – Sometimes you just need to get out of the hospital. Sometimes you need a bite to eat that isn't cafeteria food. And sometimes you need "food" that will get you through the transition-to-home stage. Gift cards for grocery stores can also be helpful.
- **Gas cards** – Particularly if the family has a decent commute to the hospital, gas cards can ease any

budgetary concerns that might play into the frequency of their visits.

- **Bags of snacks** – One family gifted us with 3 large sacks of snacks and breakfast foods. This was so helpful for us, especially on the days we forgot to eat a “real” meal because of logistics or meetings. *Note: Be sure to check with the family to see about any food allergies.*
- **In-home meals** – It amazed me how one meal being brought in could free up so much mental power. Plus, if the meal was large enough, there could be leftovers for another meal or two!
- **Activity bags** – Hospital waiting rooms can be rather difficult for older siblings. A new coloring book, play-dough, or a puzzle could be a welcome diversion from the mundane.
- **Visiting with, listening to, praying with them** – We all have a story to tell . . . and sometimes, telling someone who’s “outside” of the emotion and doctors’ orders begins the process of renewal and recounting God’s goodness, even in the NICU world. Even if you can’t fully relate to where the family is experiencing, listening is a huge help.
- **Older child care** – Is there an older sibling who’s stuck in the midst of back-and-forth? Spending an hour reading books or coloring can allow Mom and Dad to sit with the littlest child together.
- **Fill their freezer** – Figuring out what to cook after arriving home can be an unnecessary source of stress. Prepare (or buy) some casseroles to be frozen. This way, the family can use them as slowly or quickly as needed.

Are you long distance from the family in need? You can help, too!

- **Snacks from Amazon or Walmart.com** – Let the technology of the Internet do some of the work for you! If there is a Walmart near the hospital, you can select snacks (or

even microwaveable meals!), purchase them online, and have them “shipped” Site to Store. The family could then send someone to pick up those items, without paying a penny. Amazon, on the other hand, can be a bit more pricey, but you can have more obscure snacks or groceries sent straight to their home.

- **Practical needs** – By the same token, paper goods can come in handy when the transition-to-home takes place. Paper plates, paper towels, toilet paper, and the list goes on. . . . You can help keep the family well stocked so they don’t have to make a midnight run for toilet paper.

Send Scripture verses as encouragement and reminders of Truth. **Pray.** Tell them you’re praying. Ask how you can pray more specifically – especially for Mom and Dad individually as they pour themselves out for their little one. Ministry doesn’t have to be a one-size-fits-all for NICU families, and it probably shouldn’t be. Look at the gifts God has given you, the things you enjoy doing to help others, and start there. *You may be just what that family needs “for such a time as this.”*

Your turn: *If you have experienced the NICU world, what was the best help you received? What would you suggest NICU families ask for when the “How can I help” question arises?*

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amily](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/ways_to_minister_to_a_nicu_family) on Nov. 3, 2015.

I've Got a War Room—Now What Do I Do?



Millions of people have seen the summer blockbuster movie *War Room*, many of them challenged to be more intentional about prayer. Some have even cleaned out a closet or a corner to make their own War Room.

But the movie, for all its motivation to experience the power of prayer, did not provide instructions on what and how to pray. Other than eating potato chips in secret!

Prayer is not about sacred words or flowery religious language. Biblical prayer is about talking to God, heart to heart. Here are some suggestions for what to do in the War Room.

Many people have found it helpful to follow the structure of the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Directing our prayers and thoughts in this particular order aligns the heart with God's heart.

Adoration: This is simply telling God how great He is, focusing on His character and praising Him with words. The book of Psalms is one of the best place to find truths about God and tell Him about it. Several years ago, I went on a treasure hunt as I read through the Bible, drawing a box around every title and name of God I encountered, and writing them down on the blank pages at the back of my Bible. Simply reading some of the titles of God back to Him constitutes adoration. ("You are the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! You

are the Bright and Morning Star! You are the Ancient of Days! You are the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth!")

Confession: Quietly consider what unconfessed sin you need to bring out in to the light. Confession means to agree with God. You may not even feel remorseful about it (yet), but it is still important to agree with God that sin is sin and you were wrong. ("Lord, I confess being short-tempered with my family yesterday. I confess yelling at that driver who cut me off in traffic. I confess going all day without once thinking of You. I was wrong. Please forgive me.")

Thanksgiving: Consider the things God has given you, the things He has done for you, just in the past 24 hours, and tell Him "thank You." The discipline of keeping a gratitude journal provides lots of things to give thanks for. The great thing about being mindful of what God is doing so we can give thanks for them, is that it makes us more sensitive to the many ways in which He shows His love and concern for us throughout each day, which kicks up our gratitude meter, which overflows in more and more thanksgiving, which leads to a joyful heart.

Supplication: NOW we get to the part of asking for the things we need or want, or which we would like to see God do in our lives and in the lives of others. It really helps to keep a list of our requests, just like we see in the movie, so we have a record of how and when God answers them.

This is one of the most misunderstood parts of prayer because often, people mistake having faith in the answers they want, with having faith in the God who answers prayer in His time and in His way. It's fine to ask (not demand, and not presume) for what we want, but it's important not to have unrealistic expectations of getting everything we ask for like a spoiled little kid. (This is one of the reasons people lose heart and can lose their faith—they aren't trusting the God who sees the big picture and knows what is good for us and what isn't, they

are looking for the answers to their prayers on a timeline usually faster than the one God is on.)

What should we pray for?

Our daily needs (see also: the Lord's prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," Matthew 6:11), financial provision ("your Father knows what you need before you ask Him," Matthew 6:8), relationships ("it is not good for man to be alone," Genesis 2:18), peace in our relationships ("Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you," John 14:27) . . . whatever comes to mind.

But we get a head start when we pray God's word. This is great War Room material! Consider praying for one's spouse (even a future spouse!) or children or friends the great prayers recorded by the apostle Paul.

"Lord I ask that _____ may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that he will walk in a manner worthy of You, to please You in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of You; strengthened with all power, according to Your glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to You, Father, who have qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (Colossians 1:9-12)

"I pray that You would grant _____, according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in his heart through faith; and that he, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that he may be filled up to all the fullness of You." (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Consider praying a Psalm, such as Psalm 1:1-3—

"I pray that _____ would be blessed, that she would not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

I pray her delight would be in the law of the Lord,
And in Your law she would meditate day and night.

I pray she would be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,

Which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither;

And in whatever he does, she would prosper."

Spiritual warfare was one of the elements of the War Room movie, and prayer is how it is battled and won. For the simplest form of it, we can look to how Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17. He asked His Father:

- To keep His disciples safe from the evil one (v. 15)
- To set them apart in the truth (v. 17)
- For oneness (v. 21). The context was oneness within the Body of Christ, the church, but this is a powerful request to pray for our marriages as well.

I am also intrigued by His prayer in v. 23, "You have loved them just as You have loved Me." Most people have no idea of just how much and how great the Father's love is for us—He loves us the exact same way and the exact same amount as He loves His Son! I love to pray that God will allow my loved one to grasp this truth, which corresponds to the Ephesians 3 prayer above.

Jesus also prayed for Peter before his spectacular, epic failure when he denied his Lord, that his faith would not [completely and utterly] fail, and that after he turned back, that he would strengthen his brothers. Praying for our loved ones' faith not to fail, and for God to redeem and use any lapses and stumbles, is a powerful way to pray for them.

An important part of War Room prayer strategy, just as in physical war, is to remove obstacles to effectiveness. In Mark 11:25, Jesus said, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.” An important thing to do in anyone’s War Room is to examine our hearts for any unforgiveness and deal with it.

Well, I think that’s a good start on your War Room! Would you like to add any suggestions? Comment below!

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on Sept. 22, 2015

Should We Go to Our Gay Neighbors’ Wedding?

“Sue, I love my sweet gay neighbors, and after the SCOTUS decision I figure we’ll be invited to a wedding. Do we go?”

Christians take different positions on this question, just as Christians take different positions on the issue of homosexuality in general and same-sex marriage in particular. I believe that regardless of our feelings on this issue and about our friends and loved ones, we need to follow what the Word of God says.

Both Old and New Testaments clearly state that homosexual behavior is sin. Regardless of how we feel about those who engage in it, the Word of God is internally consistent on this issue: all sex outside of marriage, which is restricted to one

man and one woman in a lifetime covenant, violates God's created intent for us. And that includes homosexual sex. Redefining marriage does not change the unnatural, sinful nature of same-gender sex (Romans 1).

A wedding is a communal event where society gathers together to witness the union of two people coming together to start a new family, a new building block of community. The point of a wedding is that the guests witness, support, bless and approve the marriage. Contrasted to lovers making promises to each other in a private intimacy, the communal witness and celebration of a wedding elevates and formalizes these vows as a covenant (a promise on steroids), and the new one-flesh union becomes a recognized part of the community.

So there is a huge difference between having dinner with gay neighbors, and attending their wedding. When people attend a wedding, it makes a statement. Attendance at a wedding means one is offering support, approval and blessing to the couple.

I suggest that since God has already spoken clearly about the nature of homosexuality, He would not contradict Himself to endorse and celebrate what He has declared to be sin (Leviticus 18:22). Neither should we.

Beyond that, the scriptures also direct us not to support other people's behaviors that God calls sin:

"Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph. 5:11).

1 Timothy 5:22 instructs us not to "take part in the sins of others. . ."

How can one attend a gay wedding without participating in "deeds of darkness," without "taking part in the sins of others"?

To be consistent, Christians should examine why we attend any

wedding. Since the Bible is equally unequivocal about believers marrying unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14), it would be wrong to attend that wedding as well. It would be saying, "I support, affirm, bless and celebrate this union." Just like going to a wedding of a Christian who dumps his wife without biblical grounds to marry a younger trophy wife. No!

Lots of people scoff at this position: "God is a God of love! Who are you to judge anyone's love?"

It's true, God IS a God of love, and He has described love for us:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous;
love does not brag and is not arrogant,
does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,
does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

If love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but God has declared that same-sex relationships are not right, then it is not loving to engage in unrighteousness. If same-sex relationships are outside God's created intent for human sexuality, then it is not loving to support and bless relationships that grieve God and will result in pain down the road for the people involved.

So, to answer my friend's question: "How can you attend a gay wedding without making a clear statement of support and endorsement, approval and blessing? And since you know what God says about the nature of their relationship as sin, what statement would you be making as His ambassador?" I encourage my friend to keep loving her wonderful neighbors, to continue to be their friends and to be salt and light to them.

But not to go to their wedding.

And if they ask why, to kindly and lovingly say, “I am a Christ-follower, and He has spoken about His intention for marriage. Just as He loves you more than you can imagine, I love you too, but I’m so sorry, I can’t stand with you that day. But I’ll look forward to visiting with you, as usual, on the other side of that day. And I will be praying for you.”

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Raising Gender Healthy Kids

Emotionally healthy children who grow up to be emotionally healthy adults are comfortable in their own skin, in the gender God chose for them. These days, when a child shows non-stereotypical gender behavior, people start to freak out, afraid that their child is actually the opposite sex on the inside.

Good news! There are things parents can do to raise gender healthy kids, girls who are content to be girls and boys who are glad to be boys. Without resorting to artificial stereotypes, either.

First, loosen up your expectations of what boys and girls should be like. A friend of mine now in college was recently exasperated when the instructor taught that “Little girls play with dolls and wear dresses.” Carol shot back, “I was NEVER like that!” My friend preferred to climb trees and ride her skateboard, and absolutely hated it when her grandmother tried to teach her to make gravy because “that’s what girls do.” And it really irritated her that her brothers never had to do any kitchen work because “boys don’t do that sort of thing.”

Narrow gender stereotypes don't honor the creativity of the God who makes varieties of girls and boys on a femininity spectrum and a masculinity spectrum (my blog post on [the Gender Spectrum](#) has been helpful to a lot of people; please read it!).

When parents can relax about the kind of boy or the kind of girl they have, it is easier to support and encourage children according to the way God designed them. Some boys are not the rough-and-tumble, athletic type; they are born emotionally sensitive, more relational than most boys, often creative and artistic. I know one little boy who pretty much danced out of the womb, and has been dancing ever since. That's his gift, his divine design. His family loves it, loves him, and supports him fully. Some girls just aren't the girly-girl type; they are natural athletes and gravitate toward more classically masculine interests, but God intended them to be more of the tomboy feminine. Like my friend Carol.

Second, cultivate warm, affectionate, respectful relationships in your family—between husband and wife, between mom and children, and between dad and children. Emotionally healthy, gender healthy kids are grounded in the security of parents who love each other and their children. A hurtful relationship with the same-sex parent is the biggest contributing factor to a later development of homosexuality, but there are other forms of brokenness that can also arise from hurtful family relationships.

Third, appreciate the different contributions from mothers and fathers. God created the complementarity of male and female (Gen. 1:27) for our good and for His glory. Moms and dads are not interchangeable, which is why He intended for families to be led by a mother and a father.

Here are some suggestions from Ricky Chelette, my esteemed colleague at Living Hope Ministries, who has been helping parents deal with gender issues for decades, my friend Anne

Paulk, author of *Restoring Sexual Identity* . . . and from me:

Fathers and Sons

- Strongly connect with your son at an early age.
 - Affirm the son's identity as a boy.
 - Take interest in him and his interest(s). Be his #1 fan.
 - Demonstrate love by word and deed. He needs to hear you say "I love you, son."
 - Love his mother and assure her security and safety.
 - Powerful affirmation: "You're good enough, you're strong enough, and you have what it takes."
 - Always give affirmation, attention, and affection ([The "Three As"](#))
-
- Don't feel rejected by the mother/child relationship.
 - Draw out your son ("Hey, let's be guys together!").
 - Show him what maleness is.
 - Do things together. Even a trip to the grocery store or Home Depot counts.
 - Cultivate a habit of "thumbs-up" attitude of affirmation. Look for things to affirm.
 - When he doesn't get it right, don't dismiss him and send him to Mom.
 - Encourage and affirm "be-like-Dad" behavior.
 - Be physical. Boys need safe male touch.
 - When giving hugs, let kids (both boys and girls) pull away first.

Mothers and Sons

- Push your son towards his father and encourage their relationship.
- Affirm your son's masculinity.
- Point out the differences between you and him, between him and his sisters, etc.
- Allow for emotional distance and independence. Don't try to keep him bound to you like a baby.

- Demonstrate positive, safe touch with him (not just spankings).
- Love and respect his father.
- Bring other boys into the home and encourage connections with other boys.
- Reinforce the father's role.
- Tell him that being a boy is wonderful, and you're glad God made him a boy!
- Build up the similarities to his daddy.
- Refuse to diminish the glory of the father/son relationship; don't get in the middle of it.
- Affirm what is valuable in your son's father so your son can model it.
- Nurture and comfort with empathy, but allow your husband to nurture differently (aggression nurturing), such as "Hop up, you're OK." Boys need to learn to develop a thicker skin from their dads.
- Don't insist that he look you in the eyes when you're having a difficult conversation (except when it's time to apologize). It's especially threatening and painful for most boys. Take a walk or drive with him where you are shoulder to shoulder, or talk to him in dim lighting (such as bedtime), to encourage him to open up to you.

Fathers and Daughters

- Love and build up your wife, and make sure she feels secure and safe.
- Affirm your daughter's femininity with words and deeds.
- Be your daughter's "protector."
- Tell her she is loved and beautiful 3X more than you think is necessary.
- Love and serve her. Set the bar high for the man she will marry.
- Girls are tactile. Touch is the key to your daughter's heart. Appropriate touch is SO powerful and necessary.
- Girls are verbal, so words are also very powerful. They need

to hear words of affirmation more often than boys.

Mothers and Daughters

- Respect and honor your husband.
 - Affirm your daughter's femininity.
 - Show her what strength and nurture together look like.
 - Love your daughter, don't compete with her.
 - Do girly things together early and often. She needs to learn to be a girl from you.
 - Communicate feelings, not weakness.
 - Continually develop and demonstrate a healthy relationship /romance with your husband.
-
- Be confident so she can admire you.
 - Stand up for what is right in godly femininity, in the family and in the world.
 - Demonstrate biblical femininity: relational, nurturing, vulnerable, responsive, and beauty (for an excellent article on this, read [A Real Woman: Defining Biblical Femininity](#) on the Living Hope website.
 - Pursue contentment; enjoy life where you are right now.
 - Model Christlike submission to God, husband, authorities.

And finally: pray, pray, pray for your children!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/raising-gender-healthy-kids/ on July 28, 2015.

Why Have So Many Christians and Churches Become Pro-Gay?

A recent email from a friend: "Sue, I'm seeing more and more 'evangelical' churches come out in support of gay marriage.

Also, Christian friends are changing their views on the validity of the LGBT lifestyle being acceptable for a Christ-follower. I start worrying that I'm missing something, and even start questioning my beliefs."

No, my dear friend, you are not missing something, but it *is* a good time to question (not doubt) your beliefs so you can be more convinced than ever that the Creator God has not changed and neither has His word.

I think there are two big reasons so many confessing believers in Christ have allowed themselves to be more shaped by the culture than by the truth of God's word, drifting into spiritual compromise and even into apostasy (abandoning the truth of one's faith). This is not a new problem; the apostle Paul urged his readers in Rome, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within. . ." (Romans 12:2, Phillips).

Reason One: Rejecting the Authority of God's Word

The bitter fruit of several decades of shallow preaching, teaching and discipleship is that many believers have been especially vulnerable to Satan's deceptive question to Eve in the Garden of Eden: "Did God really say . . .?" When Christians ignore or flat-out reject the unmistakably clear biblical statements condemning homosexual relationships, they are playing into the enemy's temptation to justify disobedience by making feelings and perceptions more important than God's design and standards.

There are now two streams of thought on same-sex relationships and behavior, the Traditional View and the Revisionist View. The Revisionist View basically says, "It doesn't matter what the Bible actually says, it doesn't mean what 2000 years of church history has said it means, it means what we want it to say."

People are redefining the Bible, gender and marriage according to what will let them do what they want, when they should (in my opinion) be asking the insightful question posed by Paul Mooris in *Shadow of Sodom*, “[A]m I trying to interpret Scripture in the light of my proclivity, or should I interpret my proclivity in the light of Scripture?”

The Bible	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>
<p>The Bible is inspired by a Holy God and is inherently true and trustworthy. The Bible is written by men, but divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and is sealed by a God of truth and authority.</p>	<p>The scriptures which traditional Christianity understands to condemn homosexuality [such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10] have either been mistranslated, yanked out of context or were only appropriate to the culture of that time. Therefore, we no longer have to follow passages we don't like.</p>
Sexuality	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>
<p>Sexuality and sex are God's good gifts to men and women.</p> <p>While sexuality is an essential attribute of human nature, our Creator did not intend it to be the defining characteristic of humanity.</p>	<p>Sexuality—the feelings and attractions one feels for other people—is God ordained, diverse, deeply personal and morally permissible. One's sexual orientation, whatever it is, should be celebrated as one of God's good gifts.</p>
Gender	
<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>

<p>God created both male and female in His image, and each gender reflects different aspects of the <i>imago Dei</i>. God's sovereign choice of gender for every person reflects His intention for that person's identity; it is one of the ways in which he or she glorifies Him as Creator.</p>	<p>We are free to make a distinction between sex and gender. Sex is biological maleness or femaleness at birth, and gender is how one feels about their "true" maleness or femaleness internally. Based on Galatians 3:28, "there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."</p>
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Marriage

<i>Traditional View</i>	<i>Revisionist View</i>
<p>Marriage is God-ordained between one man and one woman in a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal relationship. The Bible begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve, and ends with the marriage of the Lamb (Jesus) and the Bride (the church). The complementarity of husband and wife express God's intention of both genders in marriage.</p>	<p>Homosexual behavior is appropriate within the confines of a committed, loving, monogamous, lifelong, Christ-centered relationship.</p>

Both individual Christians and churches have drifted into endorsing same-sex relationships because it always feels better to follow one's flesh than to follow Jesus' call to "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24).

Reason Two: Snagged by the Gay Agenda

In addition to those several decades of shallow preaching, teaching and discipleship I mentioned earlier, many believers have not been submitting themselves to the truth of the Word

of God. By default, then, they were easily shaped and swayed by the six points of a brilliantly designed "Gay Manifesto" spelled out in a book called *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. Originally published as an essay called "The Overhauling of Straight America" that was published in a gay magazine, the authors laid out this plan which has been executed perfectly in the United States. (The quotes below are from the essay, found [here](#))

1. *Desensitization and normalization of homosexuals in mainstream America.* Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and often as possible.

"The principle behind this advice is simple: almost any behavior begins to look normal if you are exposed to enough of it at close quarters and among your acquaintances.

"In the early stages of any campaign to reach straight America, the masses should not be shocked and repelled by premature exposure to homosexual behavior itself. Instead, the imagery of sex should be downplayed and gay rights should be reduced to an abstract social question as much as possible. First let the camel get his nose inside the tent—only later his unsightly derriere!"

2. *Portray members of the LGBTQ community as victims.* Indoctrinate mainstream America that members of the LGBTQ community were "born this way."

"In any campaign to win over the public, gays must be cast as victims in need of protection so that straights will be inclined by reflex to assume the role of protector."

"Now, there are two different messages about the Gay Victim that are worth communicating. First, the mainstream should be told that gays are victims of fate, in the sense that most never had a choice to accept or reject their sexual preference. The message must read: 'As far as gays can tell,

they were born gay, just as you were born heterosexual or white or black or bright or athletic. Nobody ever tricked or seduced them; they never made a choice, and are not morally blameworthy. What they do isn't willfully contrary – it's only natural for them. This twist of fate could as easily have happened to you!'"

3. Give protectors a just cause: anti-discrimination

"Our campaign should not demand direct support for homosexual practices, should instead take anti-discrimination as its theme."

4. The use of TV, music, film and social media to desensitize mainstream Americans to their plight as gay people

Over the past 25 years, gay characters, on TV especially, have captured the hearts of American viewers because they were attractive, funny, smart—the kind of characters viewers would like to be. No one was shown the dark underside of gay bars and bathhouses, or same-sex domestic violence, or having to get one's HIV+ status checked.

5. Portray gays and lesbians as pillars in society. Make gays look good.

"From Socrates to Shakespeare, from Alexander the Great to Alexander Hamilton, from Michelangelo to Walt Whitman, from Sappho to Gertrude Stein, the list is old hat to us but shocking news to heterosexual America. In no time, a skillful and clever media campaign could have the gay community looking like the veritable fairy godmother to Western Civilization."

Use celebrities and celebrity endorsement. And who doesn't love Ellen DeGeneres?

6. Once homosexuals have begun to gain acceptance, anti-gay opponents must be vilified, causing them to be viewed as repulsive outcasts of society.

“Our goal is here is twofold. First, we seek to replace the mainstream’s self-righteous pride about its homophobia with shame and guilt. Second, we intend to make the antigays look so nasty that average Americans will want to dissociate themselves from such types.

“The public should be shown images of ranting homophobes whose secondary traits and beliefs disgust middle America. These images might include: the Ku Klux Klan demanding that gays be burned alive or castrated; bigoted southern ministers drooling with hysterical hatred to a degree that looks both comical and deranged; menacing punks, thugs, and convicts speaking coolly about the ‘fags’ they have killed or would like to kill; a tour of Nazi concentration camps where homosexuals were tortured and gassed.”

This is how I see how we got to this place where so many people have been deceived. They didn’t anchor themselves to the Truth of the Word of God, and they opened themselves to the cultural brine of Kirk and Madsen’s plan to overhaul straight America.

And it worked.

I will close with three personal observations about this situation:

- Christians have bought into the culture’s worship of feelings over God’s unchanging revelation
- People love how being a protector of the underdog makes them feel
- Not enough of us Christ-followers are living lives that demonstrate the beauty and satisfaction of abiding in Christ

To my sweet friend who asked the question, let me say: God’s good gift of sex and the intimacy of the marriage relationship is still intended ONLY for one man and one woman for life. In the beginning, one (Adam) became two (when God formed Eve from

Adam), and then the two became one again. That is a deep mystery that makes all variations and deviations on God's intention *wrong*.

I am indebted to Hope Harris for her insight and analysis of this question.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/why_have_so_many_christians_and_churches_become_pro-gay
on June 30, 2015.

How Should We Handle Overwhelming Feelings?

What is the biblical perspective on how to handle overwhelming feelings?

There are healthy and unhealthy ways to do that.

The healthy way to deal with strong feelings starts with thinking wisely about feelings in general. [Our pastor](#) often says that feelings are real (we do feel them, often intensely), but they're not reliable (they make terrible indicators of what is true). So we should acknowledge them, but not be led by them.

Especially powerful, overwhelming feelings.

Allowing yourself to be controlled by your feelings is unwise and immature. The flip side of that is our example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. No one ever experienced the strength of horrific feelings like He did, to the point of sweating

blood. He allowed Himself to feel His feelings, but then He turned in trust to His Father, submitting to His will. He set the bar for how to handle overwhelming feelings: *feel the feelings, and trust the Lord.*

Often, though, especially in the young, people deal with their strong feelings in unhealthy ways.

Stuff them. One of my friends refers to her “vault,” the supposedly safe, impenetrable locker where all the painful feelings of her horrific childhood were supposed to stay stashed. Out of sight, out of mind, out of touch. Until the vault developed cracks, and those strong feelings of pain and shame and horror and fear started slipping out sideways into her relationships and her dreams.

This is not God’s plan for emotional health. David wrote in Psalm 51:6, “You (God) desire truth in my innermost being.” In Romans 1, Paul referred to those who “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18). Stuffing and denying feelings is not truthful. And it doesn’t make them go away. Someone even wrote a book titled, “Feelings Buried Alive Never Die.”

Let them explode. Without self-control, the angry person can vent his or her anger with verbal shrapnel and even physical abuse. Road rage, anyone? (I blogged about this in [The Problem with Heart Bombs](#).)

Self-injure. The “solution” of cutting, burning, skin-picking, hair-pulling, and other forms of self-injury has been growing in popularity over the past decade or so. These destructive behaviors can provide momentary relief by distracting attention to soul pain by causing body pain. When it becomes an addiction, the release of endorphins, feel-good brain chemicals, provides an additional reason to keep repeating it.

Those choosing to self-injure need an extra measure of grace and understanding, because their level of soul pain is especially high to go to that extreme. In addition to the

emotional pain, I believe they are experiencing a nasty spiritual warfare attack. Jesus said that our enemy, Satan, “comes only to steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10). The “slow suicide” of self-injury is a pernicious way to do that. I do think that cutting is a demonic suggestion, based on the story in 1 Kings 18 where the prophets of the false god Baal cut themselves trying to get the attention of their idol. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 10 that sacrifices made to the false gods of idols are actually sacrifices to demons, so there is a biblical connection between cutting and demonic influence. (I’m not saying anything about demon possession, which is not even a good biblical interpretation of the New Testament word *demonize*; rather, I think those who cut hear the whisper from the enemy, whose native tongue is lying [John 8:44]: “Cutting will help. Cutting will make me feel better. Cutting is the answer.”)

God’s word offers us some healthy ways to express strong, overwhelming feelings.

Talk about them. The highly sensitive and emotional King David invited the Lord into his strong feelings, and he used words to express the agony of his heart. Many of the psalms are powerful expressions of the psalmists’ emotions. Consider Psalm 55:1-5 for example:

“Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not ignore my cry for help! Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles. My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats. They bring trouble on me and angrily hunt me down. My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can’t stop shaking.”

When overwhelmed by strong emotions, telling someone else who can be trusted to listen respectfully and with understanding is a healthy, constructive way to express feelings.

Writing one’s thoughts and feelings in a journal is a powerful

process to move the feelings from the inside to the outside. (I recently wrote about that here: [Pen > Puter](#))

Let yourself cry. Then there is God's good gift of tears. God created us with tear ducts as a way for strong feelings to leave the body, moving from our hearts on the inside to our cheeks on the outside, and that is much better, much healthier, than cutting so that the "red tears" flow.

Psalm 56:8 shows us that David was not afraid to let his tears fall:

"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book."

God considers our tears precious enough to collect!

Sometimes, though, people have trouble accessing their unshed tears. They are locked up inside. Often this is because of having made a self-protective inner vow, usually many years ago: "I will not cry." It was considered unsafe because crying resulted in shaming or being punished. When children make a personal inner vow like that, it functions like the cruise control on a car, controlling the speed. The little person who made the vow many years before created a hard and fast life-rule, and until it is addressed and renounced, it stays in place. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things." One of those childish things can be making an inner vow—which ends up, from the perspective of adulthood, being what the Bible calls a "foolish vow" (Lev. 5:4-6). And the wise thing to do with a foolish vow is break it, or renounce it or cast it off in Jesus' name. Romans 13:12 instructs us to cast off deeds of darkness, which this kind of vow would be because it is the opposite of trusting in God.

What should we do with hard, overwhelming feelings?

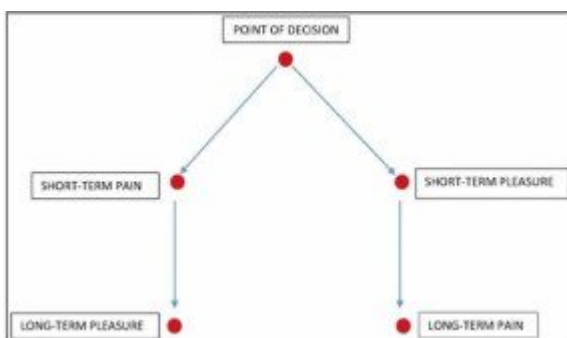
- Don't try to hide from them or stuff them.
- Acknowledge them and let yourself feel them. Invite Jesus into your feelings.
- Talk about how you feel, and what you're thinking, with a safe person.
- Let yourself cry them out of your body one tear at a time.

And follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man: *Feel the feelings, and trust the Lord.*

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Short-term What, Long-term What? Choose Well.

Of all the wisdom and insight I learned in a three-year lay counseling training, one really stands out. I think of this little chart as “the doghouse.”



Decision-making often involves choosing between short-term

pleasure or short-term pain. (Usually it's more like short-term inconvenience.)

Short-term pleasure often leads to long-term pain, and short-term pain often leads to long-term pleasure. What doesn't work, and is a horribly unrealistic expectation for life, is short-term pleasure leading to long-term pleasure! (Wouldn't THAT be nice?!)

Maturity and wisdom is displayed by the choices we make, especially when we exercise patience and self-control, not insisting on the instant-gratification jolt of "I want it NOW!!!" Many of our choices for pleasure in the right-now end up costing us down the road, causing pain later. You know, like that fourth brownie that tastes soooooo good in the moment, but then you can't zip up your jeans a few days later. Or indulging your child's demands and whims today because you want to be the "cool parent" and you want them to like you, but then you start to notice the ugliness of that child's sense of self-absorbed entitlement. Short-term pleasure, even when that pleasure is simply trying to avoid pain, results in long-term unpleasant consequences.

But when we recognize the value of self-control and self-denial in the present, so that we can reap the harvest of pleasure in the future, that's wisdom. Mark Twain advised, "Do one thing every day you don't want to do." That's good advice, but of course God thought of that much earlier! Using self-control and self-denial is how we fulfill the biblical idea of not indulging the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Getting up early to spend time in God's word costs you in the moment, but when it has become a habit, that daily time ingesting divine truth and wisdom transforms you. Putting a percentage of your income into savings is a discipline of self-denial in the present day, but it (literally) pays great dividends in the future. Even better, giving generously to Christ's Kingdom now means you're sending every penny ahead into your heavenly bank account where God will reward you!

One of my family members really resonated with “the doghouse” when he faced his alcoholism and made many, many decisions to choose the short-term pain of saying no to his desire to drink, and every day he now enjoys the long-term pleasure of a life he can fully enjoy in sobriety and self-control. Another man I know was faced with the decision to choose the short-term pain of integrity, owning and confessing his selfish behavior over several years, or the short-term pleasure of excusing and dismissing his choices that had hurt other people. He chose the short-term pleasure, and now lives in the long-term pain of diminished character and the loss of his family’s trust.

“The doghouse” is helpful for training children (and ourselves!) to think beyond the moment to what they want down the road. Do you want less stress in the morning by taking the time to get your books and clothes and lunch ready tonight? Short-term pain, long-term pleasure. If you give into the temptation to procrastinate (short-term pleasure), how much will you pay for it later (long-term pain)?

Jesus said, “If anyone wants to become My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) Denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus are all about short-term pain with major long-term pleasures!

“The doghouse” is a simple but powerful life-skills tool for your toolbox. What do you want to end up with, long-term pleasure or long-term pain? Choose well today.

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