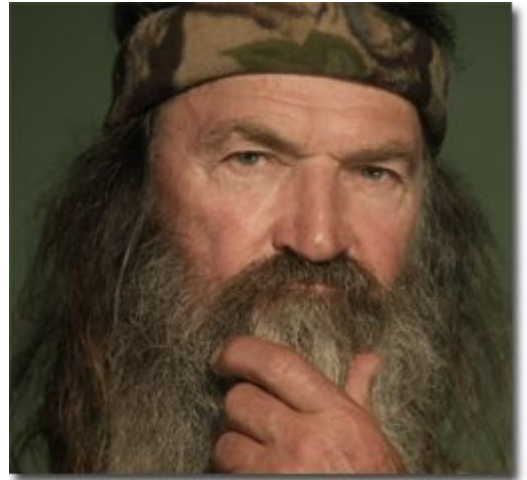


Did (Duck Dynasty's) Phil Get it Wrong? Is Homosexuality Sin?

In one of the biggest social media flaps since social media was invented, Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson openly said that homosexuality is sinful. Then the cyber world blew up in a clash of worldviews—the progressive, whatever-floats-your-boat perspective of A&E, the cable network that profits greatly from



the Robertsons' TV show, against the traditional biblical view of sin and sexuality. A lot of people think that Phil's old-fashioned morality is not only antiquated but unfair.

Is it? Is homosexuality a sin? If people are born gay, why would God condemn people for being the way He made them? What kind of God would do that?

Let me answer those questions in reverse order. First, how do we know that people are born gay? This idea is a newcomer on the scene of human history, arising only within the past hundred years—maybe only fifty. We “know” it because people keep saying so, and people say so because, looking into the rear view mirror of their lives, many of those who eventually identify as gay recall always feeling different, “other than.” According to the spirit of the age, that means they were always gay. Which means sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex.

But think about a newborn baby. Is he or she sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex? No, of

course not. That is an emotional development issue that will arise years down the road. Consider a toddler: how does one find the gay kids in a church or daycare nursery? You don't. But even in toddlers, some temperament and personality differences have surfaced, the kinds of differences that can lead to a child feeling "other than."

Little boys who are emotionally sensitive, artistic and creative, can be uncomfortable around the rough-and-tumble boys who are far more physically aggressive, sporty and relationally insensitive. It doesn't mean they're gay, it means their design, their God-chosen kind of masculinity, is different. They're probably going to feel "other than," and later on someone will label that as gay. It's not.

Little girls who have athletic gifts and abilities, who don't care for pink or dresses or nail polish and are often natural leaders, can be uncomfortable around the girly-girls who are interested in very different things. It doesn't mean they're lesbian, it means their design, their God-chosen kind of femininity, is different. They're probably going to feel "other than," and later on someone will label that as lesbian. It's not.

People are not born gay, which is a constellation of beliefs and feelings about oneself and others that is the result of many interactions with many people over many years. Just like people are not born prejudiced. Or entitled. Or English speaking, for that matter. But all those things can become so entwined with a sense of self that it feels like that's who one is.

Recently, my husband was talking with a new friend who struggles with same-sex attraction. His friend said it was hard growing up in a slender "case" (body type) and so sensitive, and that's why he was gay. My husband pointed out that he, too, had the same body type and was emotionally sensitive, that that was their design. Ray talked to him about

the [gender spectrum](#) for different kinds of masculinity as God's creation, and his friend absolutely lit up with gratitude. He had never heard that the way God had made him didn't mean he was gay, it meant he was gifted, and he had never heard an "everstraight" like my husband acknowledge that boys and men can live on that end of the spectrum and not identify as gay. There is another way of explaining the feeling of "other than" that honors both the person and the God who made them in a way that has often not been appreciated or affirmed.

But let's turn to the first question: is homosexuality a sin?

It's important to define your terms. What do you mean by homosexuality? Our culture has clouded the biblical perspective of the issue. Do you mean being same-sex attracted? Or do you mean "stepping over the line," actually engaging in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships? What Phil Robertson did, which is part of the firestorm, is to shine a light on what the Bible says: all sex outside of marriage is sin, both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. Our sex-saturated culture finds that offensive and unacceptable. Sex is seen as a right and a basic need of life, when it is neither.

But the Bible never condemns same-sex attractions, which constitute temptation and not sin. People generally discover, not choose, that they are drawn to the same sex, and [there are very good reasons for this](#). As with all temptations, God says to stand against them and not give into them. It is foolishness to define oneself by our temptations and weaknesses! (Much better to define ourselves the way God sees us, as His beloved child who desperately needs Him.)

So define homosexuality. If you mean simply feeling "other than" and different, complicated by being drawn to members of the same sex, then homosexual attractions are temptation, not sin. If you mean acting on those attractions to engage in

emotionally dependent and/or sexual relationships, then according to the Bible's standards, yes that is sin. Note how God addressed Cain's struggle with feelings and temptations: "Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7) So it really comes down to feelings vs. behavior. The feelings are not necessarily sinful (although sin begins in the mind, where attractions can cross over the line into the sin of lust, regardless of the object of those attractions), but behavior always is. We need to keep homosexuality in the context that God does: pre-marital sex, adultery, same-gender sex, incest, and sex with animals: anything outside the marriage bed (defined as one man and one woman, Gen. 2:24) is sin.

Many people have a faulty concept of a distant, scowling god sitting on his throne looking for people having a good time so he can be mad at them, looking for an excuse to hurl thunderbolts at them for daring to enjoy themselves. The God of the Bible is not Zeus. Jesus corrected many aspects of our misunderstandings of His Father. He is a loving God who put guardrails on the treacherous mountain road of human sexuality. He doesn't condemn people who run off the safety of the road by crashing through the guardrails He put in place; He knows that the natural consequences of running off the cliff are their own discipline. God says, "Don't have sex outside of marriage" because He loves us and knows that sex outside of marriage brings pain to the soul (as well as dishonoring everyone involved, including Him).

God doesn't make anyone gay, but He is full of compassion for those who find themselves with same-sex attractions. He warns us against all kinds of sexual sin because He knows how destructive it is when we violate His intention and design for our bodies and souls. He wants so much better for us.

This blog post originally appeared at

Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn't

July 17, 2013

Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven't needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical "us/them" dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted “gay to straight” change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but “flesh management,” using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding values, which until recently was still found on their “About Us” page:

*While we have never met anyone who “chose” to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. **Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.*

We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God’s creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

What I see here is a statement pointing to God’s standards, God’s intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one’s sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can’t stop being sinners and can’t stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, “I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader’s Conference except this past year, and have

always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God's truth, and encouraging people not so much to be "straight" but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: 'Proclaim God's Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.' Nothing has changed for us."

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you what it *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It doesn't mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It doesn't mean that there isn't any help for those dealing with this issue, either for themselves or a loved one.
- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.
- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

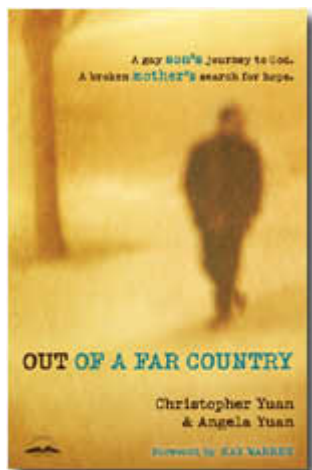
Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt

The Power of a Mother's Prayers

Oct. 23, 2012

Jesus' most famous parable in Luke 15 tells the story of a rebellious young man usually dubbed "the Prodigal Son" who demanded his share of his father's inheritance while his dad was still alive, shameful enough, but then went off into "the far country" to squander it on riotous living. A modern-day prodigal and his mother have written their story, telling parallel stories from each one's perspective. The son's "far country" included drug dealing, living it up as a party animal, and gay promiscuity leading to a diagnosis of AIDS. But God brought both mother and son out of the far country to Himself.



Because I am privileged to walk with a number of people out of their own personal "far countries" of homosexuality, *Out of a Far Country* was a compelling read for me. But because I am also a mother, Angela Yuan's testimony of trusting Christ and then entrusting her beloved son into His hands again and again as a faithful prayer warrior, was deeply encouraging as well.

I was reminded of several lessons on prayer through this book.

First, *it's better to pray big than to try to micro-manage the outcome.* Angela continued to relinquish her own desires for her son to the Lord's better plan, which was for Christopher to walk in his true identity as a beloved child of a loving heavenly Father. When her son was angry and rebellious, she

kept her eyes focused on the Lord instead of Christopher. She writes, "I started fasting and praying, asking God for wisdom and discernment. I had no idea what it would look like, but I had a clear sense that Leon and I needed to step aside and get out of the way so that God could work in Christopher's life."

When Christopher was three months away from graduating from dental school, he learned he was expelled because of his foolish, illegal and sinful choices. His parents went to meet with the dean. Both the dean and the son expected the senior Yuans to put pressure on the school, but instead, Angela said, "Actually, it's not important that Christopher becomes a dentist. What's important is that Christopher becomes a Christ follower. Leon and I have flown down to Louisville to tell you"—I looked over at Leon—"that we will support whatever decision you make. I only pray that my son will turn to God."

And he did. It didn't happen until he was incarcerated for his drug dealing, but God answered the far more important prayer.

Second, let go of your time line. We are such impatient people! We start praying and we want God to answer in the next day. Or week. Or month. But while He is at work behind the scenes, unscrambling the mess we tend to make of our lives, we don't think He is listening or answering. Angela prayed for years for God to bring Christopher out of the far country, and when He did, it was glorious. Christopher went from prison, where he met the Lord Jesus, to Moody Bible Institute, and then graduate school at Wheaton College, and now has a worldwide ministry telling his/their story and bringing great glory to God in the process.



Third, prayer is essential for the spiritual battles against

the forces of darkness. Christopher's choices to engage in ongoing sexual sin, drug use and wild living went hand-in-hand with a spirit of rebellion and a strong delusion. Both of these involve demons, because his sinful choices opened up doorways to demonic influence. The Yuans' book provides plenty of examples of the spiritual blindness that resulted. But Angela's faithful time in the Word of God and intercessory prayer tore down the strongholds that held her son captive to his fleshly desires and his spiritual bondage. She turned a shower stall into her prayer closet, where she spent literally hours every day immersing herself in the Bible and prayer.



Fourth, *remain thankful.* When Christopher called his parents to tell them that he had been arrested and was in jail, Angela recognized this as the answer to her frequent prayer: *Lord, do whatever it takes to bring this prodigal son out of that far country to you.* For the first time in years, she knew that where her son was, and that he was safe. She grabbed a length of adding machine tape and wrote down that blessing. And then, as God unfolded His glorious plan for drawing Christopher to Himself and then redeeming the pain of his rebellion, she kept adding to the blessing list over the years. When I heard her tell her story at an [Exodus International](#) conference several years ago, she held up her rolled-up blessings list and let it drop: it's about six feet long! Christopher tells me it's almost full on the second side as well. Choosing to focus on the ways in which God continues to bless us in the midst of suffering, developing an attitude of gratitude, keeps us from losing heart in a hard situation.

Fifth, *persistent prayer changes the one praying.* Desperation for her son drove Angela Yuan to an incredible intimacy with her Savior. Her daily time in His word and her gift of intercessory prayer drew her heart ever closer to Him. *Out of*

the Far Country isn't just a story of a mother's and son's spiritual journey, it is an inspiration to "always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).



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

“How Do You Answer a Person Who Says You Can't Take the Bible Literally Because It Promotes Killing Homosexuals?”

How would you answer a person who says, “You can't take the Bible literally because it promotes killing homosexuals” (Lev 20:13)?

There are a number of things that one might say to this, but I

will mention just a few. In addition, I will not only speak to the issue of interpretation, but will also address some of the issues which give rise to a statement like this. Of course, we must also remember that there is oftentimes a lot of anger behind a statement like this. Hence, it is important to remember that while we always want to speak the truth, we want to be careful to do it in love. This is the most important thing to bear in mind in responding to someone making such a claim. We want to be kind, gentle, and patient in our response. But concerning the response itself, here are a few things that occur to me as I think about this issue.

First, this particular law was only given to ancient Israel under the terms of the Old Covenant. But God is not relating to anyone under the terms of this covenant today. Rather, God is now relating to all men under the terms of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8). Hence, this is not a law which should be implemented today. In addition, I think it is also important to point out that this passage does not PROMOTE killing homosexuals. This is simply false—and it is important to say so. This particular law requires that those who engage in homosexual activity be put to death. Even under the Old Covenant, a person with homosexual inclinations or attractions, who refused to act on them, would NOT be put to death. What is at issue here is homosexual *activity*—not homosexual attraction. Hence, even interpreted literally, this law does NOT promote killing homosexuals. Rather, it stipulates that those who engage in homosexual *activity* are to be put to death. But again, it is important to remember that God is no longer relating to mankind under the terms of this covenant.

Second, the law reveals the awful truth about human sinfulness and the holiness of God. God takes sin very seriously and his holiness and moral perfection require that He deal with it as it deserves. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, homosexual behavior was not unique in meriting the sentence of death.

Adultery (Lev. 20:10), blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), murder (Exod. 21:12), striking one's father or mother (Exod. 21:15), kidnapping (Exod. 21:16), cursing one's father or mother (Exod. 21:17), and other acts as well, all merited the death sentence under the Old Covenant. Even Sabbath violations received the death sentence (Exod. 31:14). Hence, homosexual activity was not unique in meriting the death sentence under the terms of the Old Covenant.

Third, God disapproves of ALL sexual sin—not just homosexual activity. God disapproves of adultery, fornication, rape, incest, bestiality, as well as homosexual sin. Again, homosexual sin is not unique in being prohibited by God. All sexual sin is prohibited. The Bible allows for sexual activity only within the confines of one man/one woman heterosexual marriage. Any kind of sexual activity outside of this is sin—whether that sexual activity be homosexual, heterosexual, sex with animals, etc.

Fourth, the moral law is based upon the morally pure and morally perfect character of God. If the Bible really is the word of God, then homosexual behavior (along with all other sexual sin) is sin. All such activity, then, would constitute a violation of God's moral law.

Finally, I think we can agree that we should not ALWAYS interpret the Bible "literally." The Bible, after all, does contain a wealth of figurative and metaphorical language, and it would be inappropriate to interpret such metaphorical expressions literally. The problem in this case, however, is that the verse in question is not making use of such figurative or metaphorical language. Indeed, the writer is quite explicit in spelling things out for us. It would strike me as dishonest to suggest that this passage should be interpreted non-literally or metaphorically. What would it be a metaphor of? What would be the literal truth behind (or underneath) the metaphor? In addition, why should anyone think that God does not disapprove of sexual sin? What sort of

argument or evidence is there for believing that God's attitude toward sexual activity is essentially the same as that of a modern secular American? Why should we think that sin (all sin) is not a deadly serious issue to an utterly holy God? It seems to me that the statement you mentioned simply makes some unwarranted assumptions about God's attitude toward human sin.

Of course, the good news is that God has provided atonement for sin through the substitutionary death of His Son, and His resurrection for our justification. Anyone who is willing to turn from their sin, and trust Christ for salvation, can and will be forgiven and saved. No one needs to die for their sins (since Christ has already done so). But everyone who rejects Him and His sacrifice will have to pay for their sin themselves. Hence, we want to communicate, I think, that God takes sin very seriously. But He has also provided for our forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

Hopefully some of this will be helpful to you as you continue to wrestle with an appropriate response to claims of this sort.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted May 28, 2012

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When to Break a Promise

Oct. 11, 2011

An important part of integrity is keeping one's word. But are

there times when breaking a promise is the *right* thing to do? I think so. And I think God is honored when we do.

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

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

When women come to the point of recognizing these relationships are not God's intention for either of them, they often struggle with their promises as if they were inviolate and carved in stone. Yet the bigger issue—which they need help to see because brokenness keeps us bound up in blindness—is that keeping some promises means sinning against God. In that case, obedience to God is the better choice, even if it means breaking a promise that never should have been made in the first place.

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

Recently, a friend who is getting help extricating herself from a sinful relationship told one of her helpers, "But when my friend comes over to help me get out of bed in the morning because I'm depressed, I would be an awful person if she drove

all the way over here and I didn't answer the door and let her in." The helper wisely responded, "You're concerned about being an awful person for not answering the door, but you're in a relationship with a married woman! What about the adultery? Which one is the sin?"

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

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

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

The Gender Spectrum

When I use the term “gender spectrum,” you might think in terms of masculinity on one end and femininity on the other. We hear men being prompted to “get in touch with your feminine side.” (For some reason, women never seem to be exhorted to “get in touch with your masculine side.” Huh.)



But I don't think that's the way it works.

In Genesis 1, we are told that “God created them male and female” (Genesis 1:27). I think, rather, that there is one spectrum of masculinity and another spectrum of femininity. I also think that God is the one who chooses where on the spectrum babies are born, according to His design and for His pleasure and glory.

The Femininity Spectrum

I suggest that little girls come into the world at some point on a femininity spectrum. On one end is the girly-girl who comes out of the womb asking for the little flower headband to wear in the hospital nursery, and she keeps on running toward all things frilly and girly. She loves pink, loves to wear dresses and twirl around to “be pretty,” wants to wear nail polish and makeup just like Mommy (or like the other ladies she sees on TV).



Femininity Spectrum



Girly-girl.....Tomboy



On the other end of the spectrum is the tomboy jockette, who can't stand wearing dresses, wants to climb trees and play tackle football with the boys. These girls are often gifted athletically and many are natural leaders. When these little girls' type of femininity is supported and encouraged, they are comfortable in their skin just the way God made them. Wise parents also make sure they wear dresses and "act like a lady" when it's time to do that—with the promise that when they get home, they can put their jeans or sweats back on and be comfortable.

Sometimes, though, girly-girl types can morph into "mean girls" and inform the jockettes that they're not good enough as girls, and they can receive the message that it's not okay to be the kind of girl they are, the kind of girl God chose for them to be because He has a good plan for them. They can grow up not feeling secure in their femininity.

The Masculinity Spectrum

On one end is the rough-and-tumble boy—athletic, noisy, enjoys getting dirty. He bonds to other boys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaging in common activities or tasks, and tends to find

face-to-face interaction intimidating.



Masculinity Spectrum



Rough-and-tumble. Sensitive/creative



On the other end of the spectrum from the *athletic* boy is the *aesthetic* boy: emotionally sensitive, gifted in art, music, theater, dance, or some other kind of art. He usually avoids athletics, getting dirty, and anything having to do with balls coming at him. He bonds eyeball-to-eyeball, connecting to others' hearts through their eyes the way most girls do, but they are not girls. And then, of course, there is everything in between.

In our culture, we tend to define masculinity in terms of the rough-and-tumble type ONLY, but I don't think God agrees, since He delights to create so many sensitive boys and those who are a balance between the two. In fact, even as toddlers, they can reveal themselves by responding to another child's upset by dropping what they're doing and going over to pat them, soothe them, and attempt to comfort them: "You okay? It's okay." This sensitivity is a beautiful thing to behold, but it can get a little boy in trouble. Since we define masculinity so narrowly, it is easy to marginalize and shame the masculinity of the sensitive boy. Especially if his daddy

is a rough-and-tumble sort of man who is flummoxed by a little boy who would rather Daddy read to him than throw a football.

If the sensitive boy is affirmed in his type of masculinity, he can grow up to be a phenomenal husband, father, pastor, counselor, artist, musician, dancer—the list goes on. When tomboy girls are loved and accepted by their parents just the way they are, they can grow up to be great moms and teachers and scout leaders, especially of boys. If, however, they are ostracized for the way they are designed, they can burn with the indignity of being “other than.”

It's these sensitive, gifted boys that are most at risk for embracing a gay identity, especially when others wound them by slapping false labels on them, even from a young age: gay, queer, homo, fag. Tomboy girls, especially the ones gifted athletically, are quickly tagged with ugly false labels as well: lez, queer, gay. They can easily think, “What do others know that I don't know? If they say it, it must be true.”

But it's *not* true. They're not gay, they're gifted. If only they could be helped to see themselves that way!

Our goal as adults should be to help all children grow into gender-secure, emotionally healthy kids who are glad God made them a boy or a girl, and are comfortable in their own skins just the way God made them. I think it starts with affirming the different kinds of masculinity and femininity. It's ALL good!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_gender_spectrum
on January 4, 2011.

Mommy Blogger Outs Her 5-Year Old Son

Last week, a mommy blogger caused a firestorm with her blog post [“My Son is Gay”](#) about how her 5-year-old dressed up for Halloween as Daphne from Scooby Doo. Her little boy had had second thoughts about wearing the costume, afraid that people would make fun of him, but she pushed him to wear it to his preschool. “Who would make fun of a child in a costume on Halloween?” she wrote.

Well, lots of people. And she was angry.

“If you think that me allowing my son to be a female character for Halloween is somehow going to ‘make’ him gay then you are an idiot. Firstly, what a ridiculous concept. Secondly, if my son is gay, OK. I will love him no less. Thirdly, I am not worried that your son will grow up to be an actual ninja so back off.”

Her post generated more than 26,000 comments and has gone viral as people blogged about it (like this one).

This mom doesn’t have any problem with the idea that her son who likes bright colors and is attracted to a female costume might be gay, but I wonder what his dad thinks.

There is another way to think about boys like this. They don’t have to be gender-confused; they are just created by God to be artistic, creative, and emotionally sensitive. They love color and texture, they revel in nuances in sound and light, touch and smell. They are God’s gift to us: the musicians, the artists, the poets, the actors. When these boys are supported in their God-given flavor of masculinity (especially by their fathers), they can grow up to be great men who contribute their gifts to the church, to the world, and to their families. They make great counselors, pastors, teachers—and

husbands and fathers.

My dear friend Ricky Chelette from Living Hope Ministries wrote an insightful article "[Parenting the Sensitive Soul](#)." He allays the fears of a growing number of parents of young boys who come to his office concerned that their boys are too girly. And Ricky, an incredible artist, writer, singer, cook—and devoted husband of 20 years—tells them their boys are not being effeminate, they are merely expressing their giftedness. He writes about what he explained to a worried dad:

"I reassured the father that his son did not want to be a girl and the only person that was really saying anything about him being a girl was the dad. But why then was this boy drawn towards things which were typically identified as more feminine than masculine? Simply, he was a very sensitive soul.

"Sensitive boys are real boys. They simply are extremely gifted with particular giftings that manifest in emotionally and aesthetically expressive ways. His little boy's obsession with women's shoes were not because he wanted to be a girl, but more because he was aesthetically and visually oriented—and women's shoes are much more visually exciting than the black, brown or burgundy of men's shoes. Women's shoes have sparkles, bobbles and bows. They come in every color imaginable and are in different shapes and textures. They are an aesthetically gifted boy's dream! And he was not trying to identify as a girl when he grabbed his mother's skirt, put it on, and twirled around. To him, it was similar to our experience of going to the fair and doing drop art projects where we drop paint on a spinning paper and watch it splatter, but even better. As he moved, he created art and beauty as the colors whirled around him and flowed up and down in the air. Better yet, he was the center of it all!

“The dad looked at me with disbelief, but with a sense of relief. ‘Do you mean he really isn’t trying to be a girl?’

“‘Absolutely not,’ I replied. ‘He is simply trying to express his giftedness as best he can. You have a very artistic young man with amazing potential to make this world a more beautiful place. He has the creative and masculine heart of God. You have the privilege of finding ways to affirm those gifts and channel them in a way that he can grow as gifted man of God!’

“It was as though I just found the lost key they had been searching to find for years; suddenly despair was replaced by hope and relief. But those feelings of relief were just as quickly followed by a look of bewilderment.

“‘But how do I do that? How do I affirm him in those gifts when I obviously don’t even understand what he is thinking or why he is doing what he is doing?’”

Read the rest of his article to find out: [Parenting the Sensitive Soul](#).

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/mommy_blogger_outs_her_5-year_old_son
on Nov. 9, 2010.

Watching Transformation Happen

Last week I was privileged to attend the annual [Exodus Conference](#) along with a thousand people coming out of homosexuality, as well as some family members and people like

myself who minister to them. Nothing has built my faith in the power and the loving heart of our life-changing God like my decade-long involvement in this kind of ministry.

I got to experience the power of answered prayer as I stood in worship with a divorced couple whom I have known online for several years but met at the conference. The husband had gone AWOL for the past year, choosing to pursue his feelings instead of his identity as a beloved child of His Father. He told me "something" kept drawing him back into the light: with a smile, I told him that Jesus has His hook in his heart because he belongs to Jesus! And there he was, reconnecting with his God and his wife in worship and the beauty of repentance.

I got to hear the testimony of a beloved young woman, deeply wounded, whom I have watched soften and become so much like her Jesus over the past several years. As we were singing the words "Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow," she suddenly and violently experienced the memory of being a sexually abused five-year-old, sitting in the tub with blood everywhere. In the pain of that moment, the Father met her there with the same words He had spoken to [Sy Rogers](#), that evening's speaker, about his sexual abuse: "Daddy sees, and Daddy's sorry." As His compassionate love washed over her, healing came.

And I got to see actual physical transformation in a dear lady with whom I have been walking out her repentance from lesbianism. As she has dared to believe that God really means everything in His word, especially about His love for her and how He sees her as a precious, beautiful, beloved daughter, change has come. She has gone to great lengths to drink in her Abba's love in intimate ways (and has taught me what that can look like in the process). Halfway through the week, she caught a glimpse of herself in a plate glass window and was amazed to realize that her posture had changed: she was walking more upright and confidently, assured that she was "a

real person” (her words). At the end of the week, she said she believed the change in her was permanent and lasting. She finally feels solid, not hollow. That’s the power of God’s healing love.

And that’s why it is such a joyful privilege for me to serve people whose thorn in the flesh is unwanted same-sex attractions. As their SSA drives them to Jesus, transformation happens.

And it is beautiful.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/watching-transformation-happen/ on July 21, 2009.

When We Forget What is True

Sue Bohlin blogs about a conversation with a friend struggling with temptation because she had forgotten what is true.

Sunday morning as I was getting ready for church, the phone rang. It was one of the women from the online support group I help moderate for those struggling with same-sex attraction.

“Hi, Em.”

“Sue, can you talk?”

“I have two minutes.”

“OK, then in two minutes tell me again why homosexuality is wrong? I’m at an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] retreat and there are so many women here I could really connect with and they keep turning out to be gay. And the leader is wonderful, but she’s a former nun who is just so happy and content with her

lesbian partner. I can't remember why I'm supposed to be fighting against what I want."

"Oh. Well, okay. . . [*Lord, help! Give me Your wisdom here!*] Homosexuality is wrong because it's not God's plan. Because He created man and woman to be complementary to each other. Because two women can have a wonderful friendship but were never meant to meet each other's needs in that way. Because lesbianism is about trying to fill your heart by drawing from another woman's heart, but that one's as needy and empty as yours. Because two people of the same sex cannot possibly reflect the 'unity with diversity' of the mystery of the union of Christ and the Church, where two very different, very other beings are somehow one. Because it's two of the same, not two who are different, coming together as one. Because homosexuality is idolatrous—remember, it puts the other person, or what they give you, or the relationship on a pedestal where only God should be. Because when you give yourself to what God has called sin, it costs you the intimacy with Jesus that your soul craves."

"Right. Right. . . . But Sue, it doesn't feel like it. The others here seem so happy and content, and I'm miserable."

"I'm so sorry, Em. Fighting our flesh will absolutely make us miserable. You're doing the right thing. Don't give in! Ask Jesus for help! Press *hard* into Him!"

As I turned on the water for the shower, a scripture sprang into my head, full and insistent. I called her back.

"Got a scripture verse for you, Em. I think God wants you to grab onto this for all it's worth. 'There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death.' Proverbs 14:12. Got it?"

"Got it."

I am so proud of my friend for reaching out and asking to be

reminded of what she knows is true but has forgotten why. What a great example of why we need community, why we need friends who also walk with Jesus, why God doesn't want us to be "Lone Ranger Christians." *Lord, help me continue to surround myself with people who will speak truth to me, especially when I am tempted to forget it!*

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/when_we_forget_what_is_true on Sept. 9th, 2008.

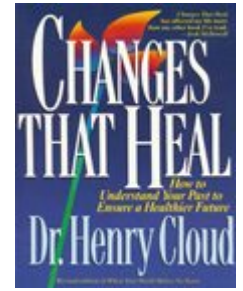
How Change Happens

On my recent trip to Australia (2010), one of the topics I was asked to address at a conference featuring a redemptive view of homosexuality was "Is Change Possible?" This is a controversial question because there are some loud, insistent voices in the culture who say, "Unless you never again have a homosexual thought or feeling, you haven't changed. And since no one admits to that, any claim of change is an illusion."

No one would apply that strict a standard to any other issue! Former alcoholics living sober and free from the chaos of their drinking for decades still would like a cold beer on a hot day, but that doesn't mean they haven't changed!

Is change possible? Change is part of life! But transformation is also part of what it means to be a Christ-follower. Understanding how change happens, on the other hand, is another matter. So I have been thinking about the process for a long time as I prepared for my message.

One of my favorite explanations comes from Dr. Henry Cloud in his book *Changes That Heal*. He gives a delightful application to one of Jesus' parables in Luke 13.



“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’ (vv. 6-9)

Grace and truth in this parable are symbolized by the actions of “digging around” and “fertilizing.” Using the trowel of God’s truth, we must dig out the weeds and encumbrances of falsehood, sin and hurt that keep the soil of our souls cluttered. In addition, we must add the fertilizer of love and relationship to “enrich the soil.”

As a Bible teacher, a lay counselor, and one involved in helping those deal with unwanted homosexuality, I have seen the truth of Dr. Cloud’s suggestion over and over again. As we study God’s word with an open heart and pursue knowledge of God and intimacy with Him in a personal relationship (“the trowel of God’s truth”), change comes when we identify the lies we have believed about life, about ourselves, about other people, and about God, and replace them with the truth. Change comes when we repent of how our coping mechanisms have become sin because they keep us from trusting God. Change comes when we forgive those who hurt us so we are no longer in bondage to those who left wounds on our souls. Change comes when we live in community, engaging with the Body of Christ who can be “Jesus with skin on” to us. Change comes when people love us

and accept us as we are so we can be courageous to deal with our “stuff” and cooperate with God in the changing, healing process.

Dr. Cloud continues,

But the Bible tells us that in order for grace and truth to produce fruit, we need a third key element: time.

Look again at verses 8 and 9. “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, Fine! If not, then cut it down.’” The gardener, who certainly symbolizes our Lord, the “author and perfecter” of our faith, realized that his work and the fertilizer need time to take effect. In short, *it takes time to grow*. And time alone will not do it. *Time must be joined by grace and truth*. When we respond responsibly to these three elements, we will not only heal, but also bear fruit.

We live in a microwave culture that has trained us to have unrealistic expectations about time. We want instant everything, and we hate waiting. I received an email from a young man in his early 20s who hated his same-sex attractions and wondered how long it would take to get rid of them. I explained to him that it’s not like a bad case of acne, it’s far more complex than that, and that it’s our experience that for people his age, three to five years of actively “digging around” in the soil of their hearts and minds produces lasting change. He thought that was too long. I wondered, “What will your life look like in three to five years if you keep going down the path you’re on? Bless your heart!”

Change is normative. Change is expected. Change is hard work, but we have the assistance of our divine Gardener to make it happen.

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