

# What God Says About Sex – A Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

*Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we lose sight of God's perspective, sex can degrade into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.*

## The Pickle Principle

It's not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God's gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world's perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.



Counselor [Waylon Ward](#) offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls “the Pickle Principle.” In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture, absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world's sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure.[{1}](#) Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.[{2}](#)

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together.[{3}](#) It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It's like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His "pickled people" out of the world's brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

## **Sex is God's Invention! The Purpose of Sex**

Sex is God's idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men's and women's body parts to complement each other. He created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of

them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife, we can express and enjoy God's two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called [What God Says About Sex](#),<sup>{4}</sup> Eric Elder says that intimacy really means "into-me-see." It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, "warts and all," to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive "till death do us part." The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.<sup>{5}</sup> God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.<sup>{6}</sup>

Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God's intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another's love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very *other*

beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God's intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.

## **So . . . What Does God Actually Say?**

A lot of people believe the Bible says, "Sex is fun and it feels good, so don't do it." Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God's great idea in the first place! But God's view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world's perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage.<sup>{7}</sup> As I said above, sex is so powerful that it's like the difference between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what's best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God's own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special,<sup>{8}</sup> a gift that we can only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents "ghosts" in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify

God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[{9}](#) God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires," which means "until the time is right."[{10}](#) As I minister to sexually broken people,[{11}](#) most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It's for adults. *Married* adults.

God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it's ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality.[{12}](#) In fact, God says to offer not even a *hint* of sexual immorality.[{13}](#) That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you're not physically touching another person's body doesn't mean it's not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.[{14}](#)

Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God has created for me?[{15}](#) This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn't build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another

question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I'm about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with *His* supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.[{16}](#)

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, "Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!"[{17}](#) In fact, God wants married couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.[{18}](#)

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

## **Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much**

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin.[{19}](#) Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies,[{20}](#) but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It's pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, "In the

counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you.”[\[21\]](#)

The pickling brine of our culture’s increased sensuality says, “If it feels good, do it. You’re entitled.” But while this belief about sex may *feel* good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn’t meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He’s doing, and we do well to follow.

## Notes

1. Waylon Ward, *Sex Matters: Men Winning the Battle* (McKinney, Texas: Allison O’Neil Publishing Company, 2004), 7. This book can be ordered through Waylon’s Web site, [www.mercymatters.com](http://www.mercymatters.com).

2. Ibid., 8.

3. Gen. 2:24;1 Cor. 6:15-16.

4. Eric Elder, *What God Says About Sex* (Inspiringbooks.com, an imprint of Eric Elder, 2006). Contact [www.WhatGodSays.com](http://www.WhatGodSays.com) for more information.

5. Hebrews 13:4.

6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated “sexual immorality”), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. SoS 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.

10. SoS 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries ([www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org)), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don't struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse is a common denominator.

12. 1 Cor. 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.

14. Matthew 5:28.

15. Elder, *What God Says About Sex*, 37.

16. Colossians 1:29, Ephesians 6:10.

17. SoS 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

19. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 16.

20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

21. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 17.

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# What I Wish I'd Heard Growing Up

I have the privilege of helping to moderate an online forum for women who struggle with same-sex attraction. One of the things that all the people in this ministry share is a history of hurtful relationships with their families, especially their same-sex parent. (With some of them, the major wound came from not connecting with their same-sex peers as they were growing up, but all of them have some level of difficulty with their parents.)

Someone started a discussion thread called "Things I Wish I'd Heard Growing Up." In addition to making my heart break, I thought this list, from a variety of ladies, was also instructive about what love sounds and looks like:

Ruth, you are beautiful. You mean the world to me.  
You are important in my life.  
You have a gift.  
I love you.

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We love you no matter what.  
We accept you no matter what.  
You are "perfect" in my eyes.  
You are beautiful to me.  
I love you just the way you are!

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You are important  
I want you

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You are smart  
I love you (from my dad)  
God loves you just the way you are  
You are special to me  
You are worth everything to me  
I'd do anything for you

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We wanted you  
You are important  
Your feelings matter  
I won't drink/do drugs anymore  
Your dad loves you

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You matter.

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Something I wish I'd seen: my parents looking happy to see me.

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What would YOU like to do?  
I'm glad you're a girl and it's all right to be, 'cause it's safe.  
I don't need to touch you. I can just love you.  
You can fail and I'll still love you.

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No matter what happens to you, we will still love you.  
You don't have to be perfect, we will still love you.  
I believe you.  
Don't ever be afraid to tell or ask us anything. We won't hate you or disbelieve you. We will do our best to help you. Even

if we are afraid or nervous sometimes.

Something I wish I'd seen and heard: My parents praying with each other, depending on each other, being transparent with each other.

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I never met my biological father; he died two months before I was supposed to meet him. I always wish I could have heard him say he loved me and was proud of me. I wish I could have hugged him.

I wish my mom would have said, "Hey, let's spend some time together," and not have it be because she wanted to lecture me on something.

You are worth my time.

Let me do that for you.

You have done a great job (and not followed by a "but..." that wipes out what was just said)

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I wish I was told that I was lovable and likeable

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And here are mine:

I'm sorry you had polio. Tell me about what it's like to live with a handicap. Tell me what your heart feels about that.

You are not damaged goods, and you don't have to strive to prove yourself acceptable. You already are.

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*Lord, these are the cries of so many of our hearts. Let us hear You affirming us, loving us, singing over us with joy, telling us that You delight in us!*

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/what\\_i\\_wish\\_id\\_heard\\_growing\\_up](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/what_i_wish_id_heard_growing_up) on April 14, 2009.

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## Frasier Worldview Check

I got hoodwinked tonight.

I was watching re-runs of the old NBC television show Frasier—based on the minor character from *Cheers*, Frasier Crane—when I found myself agreeing with Frasier’s words describing Judaism. It wasn’t until later that night, as I passed those words through my worldview filter, that I came to realize something was wrong about Frasier’s comments. Frasier (at least the writers) was not giving Judaism a fair shake.

In the episode, Frasier’s son Freddy is celebrating his thirteenth birthday. Freddy’s mother is Jewish, which makes Freddy Jewish as well. The thirteenth birthday is a special one for Jewish children; it is the point in their lives when they become adults. To commemorate their passage into adulthood, a celebration is in order: a *bar-mitzvah*.

Frasier’s friend Roz knows that he is not Jewish, and asks him what that’s like for him. His response is what hoodwinked me:

*Roz: Is it weird to have a son brought up in a different religion from yours?*

*Frasier: Not at all, Roz. It’s a faith that espouses love, compassion, duty, education, and art. All values which I cherish.*

What tricked me was not what Frasier said but what he didn’t

say. Jewish culture definitely espouses love, compassion, duty, education, and art. I completely agree. Several friends who have helped me through dark times in my life have been Jewish. I feel a special affinity for the Jews as a Christian because I read the Hebrew Bible as a part of my own Christian Bible— essentially the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

But Frasier made no mention of the Hebrew God, who is the central figure of their faith. He is their Creator, Sustainer, Protector, and Savior. The Hebrew Bible is the story of this God and his special, chosen people. How then could Frasier have completely ignored Him?

To be fair, Frasier was merely speaking about the points of Judaism with which he agrees. We all understand that intuitively as soon as we read the dialogue. However, if these aspects of love, compassion, duty, education, and art are the only elements of Judaism that resonate with him, then I suspect he does not truly identify with the heart of the Hebrew faith because he has not mentioned anything about their God.

Granted, this represents one comment in one episode. However, there may be something else going on beneath Frasier's words. When asked about the apparent conflict between Frasier's religious beliefs and his son's, in some sense he responds by saying that they are not so different. But he only says they are not so different in those five specific aspects: love, compassion, duty, education, and art. If he's saying that's all there is to Judaism, then I would have to disagree.

Philosophers have a fancy name for what Frasier did: *reductionism*. He has reduced Judaism down to smaller constituent parts which, when reassembled, do not recreate the whole. It seems unfair to equate Judaism solely with these five aspects because many other causes, beliefs, or even organizations can be characterized as espousing precisely the

same principles, but not be Jewish in the least.

For example, Ancient Greece had a culture that espoused all such principles, yet it had no particular religious affiliation at all. Culturally we could also consider Italy during the Renaissance, or even the Chinese under the Tang dynasty.

Yet, cultures like these that valued love, compassion, duty, education, and art are in other ways very dissimilar to Judaism. Similarities do not equate to identity. That is, just because a religion or culture shares certain attributes does not mean that they are the same in essence. However, *reductionism* falsely makes them seem equivalent just because they share some traits.

So there must be more to Judaism than just these five aspects mentioned by Frasier.

Frasier's religious synopsis may not seem like a very big deal because it is, after all, only one statement. But this one sentence is not what bothers me. I run across people making claims like these all the time in conversation, in magazines, news, practically everywhere. It's sloppy thinking, really. I just want to encourage us not to slip into *reductionism* ourselves—and further, to be even more careful about what we take in, keeping that worldview filter on at all times.

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**“Jesus Contradicts the O.T.**

# Law, Especially Regarding Homosexuality!"

You point out that the Old Testament forbids homosexuality. Yes it does, but Jesus' teachings in the gospels have superseded the primitive teachings of the O.T. For example in Matthew 5:17-34 Jesus systematically rips apart some of the most important Jewish laws. When he says he has come to fulfil the Law, he is not talking about the Pharisees' law, he is talking about God's Law. People who say that Jesus agreed with the Jewish laws are completely wrong– even an idiot can see this.

People who practice homosexuality in their own homes, with each others' consent are not breaking the law "love your neighbor as yourself." They are not harming anyone! What is harmful though is the constant attack by you so-called Christians on them which provides gay people with much misery. I am not homosexual myself – the reason why I am sticking up for gay people is because I am a Christian. Wake up to the fact that the law of loving your neighbor has replaced the O.T. laws.

Your essays clearly show you have some degree of intelligence – why can't you see that Jesus' law is in contradiction to the law of the Jewish scriptures?

Hello \_\_\_\_\_, Thanks for your e-mail. I will try to respond to your comments as best I can.

*You point out that the O.T. forbids homosexuality. Yes it does, but Jesus' teachings in the gospels have superseded the primitive teachings of the O.T. For example in Matthew 5:17-34 Jesus systematically rips apart some of the most important Jewish laws. When he says he has come to fulfil the law, he is not talking about the Pharisee's law, he is*

*talking about God's law. People who say that Jesus agreed with the Jewish laws are completely wrong – even an idiot can see this.*

I'm sorry, I fail to see which laws Jesus is ripping apart in this passage. What I see is that He is going beyond the LETTER of the law, to the SPIRIT of the law, to make it abundantly clear that Yahweh is concerned with the motives and intentions of the heart and not merely surface obedience. If a person holds to the SPIRIT (or intention) of the law, he will also obey the LETTER of it. This is a long way from "ripping apart" the law.

I do agree with you, however, that the Lord Jesus did not agree with the Jewish laws that were like fences built around the inspired laws of God, but which were not, in themselves, laws of God. Those laws don't appear in the Bible though. The commandments against practicing homosexuality, however, were not Jewish laws, but God's laws.

*People who practice homosexuality in their own homes, with each others consent are not breaking the law "love your neighbor as yourself." They are not harming anyone!*

Morality aside, ask any physician how healthy the homosexual lifestyle is. Ask the Center for Disease Control how healthy the homosexual lifestyle is. Ask counselors who are trying to help people leave the homosexual lifestyle and get beyond their painful homosexual desires. Talk to the parents, siblings, spouses and children of practicing homosexuals and ask if they are not harming anyone.

Let's put the homosexual issue aside and substitute another deviant sexual lifestyle. Do you think you would write to someone and say, "Men who are attracted to pre-school children and entice them into their homes to have sex with them, are not breaking the law 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" In



fact, these men are loving these children—isn't that admirable? They are not harming anyone! The men are enjoying the sex, and the children are enjoying the attention...and what child doesn't enjoy attention?"

I would suggest that you would never say something like this, and I would further suggest that the reason such a large portion of our culture has decided that sex between two men using parts of their bodies that were intended for excretion, not sex, is acceptable, is a result of a carefully-planned disinformation campaign. It is not a result of something normal and natural and God-intended.

*What is harmful though is the constant attack by you so-called Christians on them which provides gay people with much misery. I am not homosexual myself – the reason why I am sticking up for gay people is because I am a Christian.*

It's interesting to me that you seem so devoted to the issue of "love," yet do not hesitate to cast aspersions on my relationship with Jesus Christ by calling me a "so-called Christian." This doesn't strike me as very loving, or am I missing something?

I'm also wondering if you read my entire article, or just bits and pieces. Because I strongly believe that the responsible Christian response to the homosexual movement is one of deep compassion for the individuals caught in unnatural, unfortunate desires while not compromising on what God has said about the homosexual ACT. In fact, I have received e-mail accusing me of "sticking up for gay people," to use your term.

People like me who speak out, agreeing with what God has said about homosexuality, are not causing all the misery gays experience. That happens long before someone even comes out or tells their first friend of these unwelcome feelings and attractions. There is misery inherent in a homosexual orientation; it means something is wrong, in the same way that

there's something wrong with someone who is sexually attracted to small children. And that's why these feelings need to be dealt with and healed, not celebrated as something good and beautiful.

(I will admit, with a great deal of sadness, that there has been a terrible amount of judgmental condescension from Christians towards homosexuals, that has, indeed, caused grief. There is no excuse for not making a distinction between the desires, which are wrong but unmasked-for, and the people experiencing them. I know God does.)

*Wake up to the fact that the law of loving your neighbor has replaced the O.T. laws.*

No, the law of loving your neighbor *sums up* the O.T. laws. At least the moral ones. If you keep all the moral laws of the Old Testament, you will be demonstrating love for your neighbor. Not stealing, telling the truth, not charging usurious interest against your neighbor, and keeping all sexual activity within marriage are all demonstrations of love for one's neighbor.

The law against homosexual actions is part of the moral code; the consequence of death by stoning is part of the civil code, which controlled how the people of God were to conduct their lives in a culture where God was their head and not a law-making king. It makes sense for the civil code to be done away with, because the people of Israel are no longer living under that system. But God has not done away with a single commandment of His moral code, because the moral laws are rooted in the person and character of God Himself.

What is it that makes homosexual activity sin? The fact that God has ordained sex to be the glue that holds *husband and wife* together. Sex is so powerful that it is only safe within the confines of marriage, because it acts like superglue between two souls. Tear them apart and you have broken hearts.

So why not make homosexual marriage legal? Because Ephesians 5 says that marriage goes beyond merely a civil convenience; it is an eloquent word picture that God ordained to help us understand the amazing unity within diversity of Christ and the church. Men and women are so different that it's a mystical union when they come together in marriage. Man and man coming together, or woman and woman, does not provide the dynamic difference that mirrors the "otherness" of Christ-and-the-church. Gay relationships are sameness, not otherness. So gay marriage can never be blessed by God because marriage means far more than simply living together, even having sex together. It's supposed to teach us something about God.

*Your essay clearly shows you have some degree of intelligence – why can't you see that Jesus' law is in contradiction to the law of the Jewish scriptures?*

Well, I do thank you for the compliment <smile>. . .I don't see it because it's not there. Have you read the whole New Testament? How about just the four gospels? If you look at what the Lord Jesus taught, one thing you'll see is that He mentioned two things people often overlook. One is references to Sodom and Gomorrah as places of judgment, which the Bible makes clear were judged for homosexual sin. Jesus believed in Sodom and Gomorrah, and He believed in the judgment they received. In fact, He was involved in sending the judgment. The other thing is His references to fornication, which means any sex outside of marriage. All homosexual sex is fornication. Even if there is some sort of religious ceremony, it's still fornication because you can't get around God's restrictions on marriage, which is one man and one woman. God is not impressed by our ceremonies when they disregard what He has established.

A lot of people like to talk about Jesus' law of love; what's intriguing to me is how they never balance it with the fact that Jesus also talked about holiness, and purity, and

justice. While it's true that many homosexuals love each other, that kind of love still falls short of God's standard of holiness. There's nothing holy about what God has called an abomination. That is not "the law of Jewish scriptures" as if they were written by scribes and Pharisees; that is the very word breathed by God Himself. There is no contradiction between the Old and New Testament when it comes to what is moral, what reflects the character of God. Homosexual sin is not love as God defines it, regardless of how the culture tries to persuade people it is.

Thank you for reading this far. I hope what I've said gives you something to think about. I also pray that the Lord gives you a higher esteem for the ENTIRE Word of God. Jesus said not one jot or tittle of it would pass away. That's a pretty high value on it. May we all value His word so highly.

Respectfully,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **Giving Can Improve Your Health; Science Says So**

Want happiness and fulfillment in life? Then practice giving, advises an influential medical professor.

It really is good to be good, claims Stephen Post, Ph.D., professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Science says it is so.

Post and coauthor Jill Neimark present evidence in their

recent book, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People.*<sup>{1}</sup> As head of an institute supported by philanthropist Sir John Templeton<sup>{2}</sup>, Post has funded over fifty studies [related to giving] at forty-four major universities. He's convinced that giving is essential for optimum physical and mental health in a fragmented society.

Post says research has produced remarkable findings: Giving protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease. If pharmaceutical companies could charge for giving, we might see ads for Give Back instead of Prozac, he speculates. One program, Rx: Volunteer, has some California HMO physicians giving volunteerism prescriptions to their Medicare patients.

## **All You Need is Love?**

Post and Neimark say around 500 scientific studies demonstrate that unselfish love can enhance health. For instance, Paul Wink, a Wellesley College psychologist, studied University of California Berkeley data that followed about two hundred people every decade since the 1920s. Giving during high school correlated with good mental and physical health across life spans. Givers experienced these benefits regardless of the warmth of their families, he found.

Other research says that giving correlates with lower teen depression and suicide risk and with lower depression among the elderly. Studies at Stanford and elsewhere found links between frequent volunteering and delaying death. Post says giving even trumps receiving when it comes to reducing mortality.

Give more; enjoy life and live longer? Maybe, as Jesus famously said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>{3}</sup>

Illustrations abound of givings personal benefits. Millard

Fuller, a millionaire, gave away much of his wealth at age thirty. He and his wife, Linda, sold their business and affiliated with Koinonia Farm, a Georgia Christian community. They built houses in Zaire and then founded Habitat for Humanity in 1976 to help needy people build affordable homes. Fuller's goal was to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth. Get rid of shacks!

Today Habitat volunteers have constructed over 225,000 houses, helping over a million people in over 3,000 communities worldwide. Countless volunteers attest to the personal satisfaction their involvement brings.

## **From Playmate to Orphan Care**

Post and Neimark relate an intriguing tale of a former *Playboy* model who has devoted her life to helping poor kids in Haiti. Susan Scott Krabacher's childhood helped her connect with the hurting children she now serves. Sexual abuse, her mother's psychiatric breakdown, multiple foster homes, and her brother's suicide took their emotional toll. In her late teens, she became a *Playboy* centerfold and moved into the *Playboy* mansion.

Ten years of playing mixed with depression. Eventually she reconnected with the faith of her youth. Observing Haiti's poverty prompted her to learn more of the biblical take on life. The foundation she and her husband started runs three orphanages for 2,300 children. "I work long hours," Krabacher notes, "put up with unbelievable sacrifice, bury too many children, and get no compensation but love, which is the greatest freedom you can know and the most important thing in the world."

Post would agree. Do you desire happiness, love, safety, security, loyal friends, true connection, or a benevolent and hopeful world? He has one answer: Give. You'll be happier, healthier, and live longer. Love cures, wrote the esteemed

psychiatrist Karl Menninger. It cures both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.

## Notes

1. Stephen Post, Ph.D., and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), [www.whygoodthingshappen.com](http://www.whygoodthingshappen.com).
2. Institute for Research on Unlimited Love: [www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org](http://www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org).
3. [Acts 20:35](#) NASB.

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# Giving Can Be Good for You: Science Says So

## “All You Need is Love”

Do you want happiness and fulfillment in life? Then practice giving, advises an influential medical professor.

“It really is good to be good,” claims Stephen Post, PhD., professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. “Science says it is so.”<sup>{1}</sup>

Post and coauthor Jill Neimark present evidence in their book, [Why Good Things Happen to Good People](#). The institute Post heads has funded “over fifty studies [related to giving] at forty-four major universities.”<sup>{2}</sup> He’s convinced that giving is essential for optimum physical and mental health in a

fragmented society.

Post says research has produced remarkable findings: “Giving protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease.” If pharmaceutical companies could charge for giving, we might see ads for “Give Back” instead of “Prozac,” he speculates. One program, “Rx: Volunteer,” has some California HMO physicians giving volunteerism “prescriptions” to their Medicare patients.[\[3\]](#)

Post and Neimark say around five hundred scientific studies demonstrate that unselfish love can enhance health. For instance, Paul Wink, a Wellesley College psychologist, studied data that followed about two hundred people every decade since the 1920s. Giving during high school correlated with good mental and physical health across life spans.[\[4\]](#)

Other research says that giving correlates with lower teen depression and suicide risk and with lower depression among the elderly. Studies at Stanford and elsewhere found links between frequent volunteering and delaying death. Post says giving even trumps receiving when it comes to reducing mortality.[\[5\]](#)

Give more; enjoy life and live longer? Maybe, as Jesus famously said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 NASB). Both Jewish and Christian biblical texts admonish us to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Mt. 22:39 NIV). I don’t know about you, but I find it fascinating to explore these ways that contemporary science and social science often highlight the value of ancient biblical principles.

Post presents research to support the value of ten ways of expressing giving love. Here we will examine four of them: compassion, humor, loyalty, and listening.

“Love cures,” wrote the esteemed psychiatrist Karl Menninger. It cures “both the ones who give it and the ones who receive



it.”{6}

## Compassion's Benefits

Illustrations abound of giving's personal benefits.

Millard Fuller, a millionaire, gave away much of his wealth at age thirty. He and his wife, Linda, sold their business and affiliated with Koinonia Farm, a Georgia Christian community. They built houses in Zaire and then founded [Habitat for Humanity](#) in 1976 to help needy people build affordable homes. Fuller's goal was “to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth. Get rid of shacks!”{7}

Today, Habitat volunteers have constructed over two hundred twenty-five thousand houses, helping over a million people in over three thousand communities worldwide.{8} Countless volunteers attest to the personal satisfaction their involvement brings. And they're in over ninety countries. In Amman, Jordan, for example, I had lunch with the Habitat director there who involves compassionate volunteers in the Middle East.

As I reflect on his work, I'm reminded of another Middle Eastern leader who showed great compassion. One of His followers wrote, “When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36 NIV).

Stephen Post says “we're hardwired to open our hearts and to care—and in fact, compassion is important for the survival of the species.”{9} He cites preliminary psychological research in which “compassion significantly reduced depression and stress.”{10}

In that light, consider the intriguing tale of a former *Playboy* model who has devoted her life to helping poor kids in Haiti. Susan Scott Krabacher's childhood helped her connect

with the hurting children she now serves. Sexual abuse, her mother's psychiatric breakdown, multiple foster homes, and her brother's suicide took their emotional toll. In her late teens, she became a *Playboy* centerfold and moved into the Playboy mansion.

Ten years of playing mixed with depression. Eventually she reconnected with the Christian faith of her youth. Observing Haiti's poverty prompted her to learn more of the biblical take on life. The foundation she and her husband started runs three orphanages for twenty-three hundred children. "I work long hours," Krabacher notes, "put up with unbelievable sacrifice, bury too many children, and get no compensation but love, which is the greatest freedom you can know and the most important thing in the world."[\[11\]](#)

## **Humor – Good Medicine**

There are intriguing parallels between some modern social scientific findings and time-tested biblical life-lessons. One of these involves humor. An ancient proverb says, "A joyful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22 NASB).

Humor heals. Think about how you felt the last time you roared with laughter. Maybe a funny movie, a family situation, or an uproarious joke session had you even crying and gasping for air. Your abdominal muscles and heartbeat went wild. One Stanford psychiatrist "found that a hundred laughs is the aerobic equivalent of ten minutes of rowing."[\[12\]](#)

Stephen Post sees humor as a way to help others, "a very effective way of connecting, of lightening another's life as well as our own." Interviews with Holocaust survivors conducted by a Tel Aviv University researcher found that many cited humor "as a way of surviving trauma." Post notes that Ronald Reagan was a master of using humor to put other people [and perhaps himself] at ease. When President Reagan was shot

and at risk of dying, he quipped to the emergency room doctors, “I hope you’re all Republicans.”[{13}](#)

Of course, bitter humor can hurt rather than heal. But positive humor can help people relate and communicate openness. Post cites psychologist Robert Provine who monitored and analyzed over twelve hundred “bouts” of laughter in public places. Provine says shared, contagious laughter can be “an important signal you send to someone that says, ‘This is play. I’m not going to attack or hurt you.’”[{14}](#)

Humor is also important for a successful marriage, according to University of Washington psychologist John Gottman. He found that coping with issues “through dialogue, laughter, and affection” was a good predictor of whether marriages would last.[{15}](#)

On a Detroit TV talk show, the host and I were discussing my book, *Secrets of Successful Humor*. He asked about humor and marriage. I told him, “The secret of our marriage is that we take time two evenings each week to go out to a lovely restaurant. A nice dinner, some candlelight, soft music, a slow walk home. She goes Tuesdays; I go Fridays.”

It hit a nerve. The host roared, long and loud. Contagious laughter spread throughout the studio audience. We all enjoyed some communal fun that helped open us up to each other.

## **Loyalty Bonds**

A famous biblical proverb notes, “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need” (Prov. 17:17 NLT). Post believes that “Loyalty is love that lasts. . . . The commitment inherent in loyalty defuses our deepest existential anxiety.” He continues: “Broken covenants are hard to restore and never quite attain their state of original trust. It’s not easy to find loyalty in our society.”[{16}](#)

Marriage and friendship, of course, can be significant expressions of loyalty. University of Chicago demographer Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher co-authored the book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. Analyzing data from over six thousand families, Waite discovered strong correlations between marriage and longevity. Gallagher says their research demonstrated that, compared to similar singles, married folks “are physically healthier, live longer . . . experience less anxiety, depression, hostility, and loneliness, and are more likely to tell you that they’re happy with life in general. They have more sex than single people of the same age.” Of course there’s a caveat, Post notes. High-conflict marriages bring stress and can lower immune function.[{17}](#)

Friendships count, too. University of North Carolina sociologist Rebecca Adams’ frequent childhood moves had her attending thirteen schools by the time she entered college. She feels she learned how to *make* new friends but wasn’t as good at *maintaining* them. These experiences helped motivate her to study friendship. She’s discovered strong links between quality of relationships and mental well-being. Adams notes, “It’s been shown over and over again that friendship is more important to psychological well-being than family relations are. . . . Friendships are voluntary. So we’ll choose friendships that support our psychological well-being.”[{18}](#)

Men can learn a lot from women about friendship. Male and female friendship styles often differ, Adams says: “Men define their friendships in terms of shared activities, and women define them in terms of conversation. For men, a friend is their fishing, golfing, or bowling buddy. For women, a friend is someone they can confide in.” Of course there are exceptions, but Post notes that emotional intimacy is what nourishes friendships most.[{19}](#)

Giving love through compassion, humor, and loyalty all contribute to our well-being. But, is anybody listening?

## “I’m Listening”

The television comedy *Frasier* was one of the most popular TV series in U.S. history. It’s been called “a thinking person’s comedy.” Reruns are ubiquitous, about six episodes daily in our area. Frasier Crane, the protagonist, is a caring, sensitive, cultured—but insecure and sometimes pompous—Seattle radio psychiatrist who always greets his callers with, “I’m listening.” Yet sometimes he becomes so wrapped up in himself that he tunes others out. He’s not alone. In one amusing scene, Frasier’s ex wife, Lilith (also a psychiatrist), tries to converse with Frasier’s brother, Niles (yet another psychiatrist), about an especially weighty matter. Niles, focused on a video game, doesn’t pay her sufficient attention, prompting Lilith to exclaim, “Is there a *chair* here I could talk to?”

I confess that in our home, my wife Meg sometimes has to use Lilith’s line to get my attention. (Mind you, I don’t confess that it’s as often as *she* might *claim*!) But listening is a powerful form of affirmation and an important tool in understanding and communication. Solomon, a wise Jewish king, wrote, “What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!” (Proverbs 18:13 NLT)

Stephen Post writes, “When we truly absorb another’s story, we are saying, ‘You count. Your life and feelings and thoughts matter to me. And I want to know who you really are.’” He claims that listening can help both the listener and the one listened to. New studies indicate: “Listening activates the part of our brains hardwired for empathy. . . . When we listen to others in pain, their stress response quiets down and their body has a better chance to heal.”[{20}](#)

Post says that without a good listener, we can feel terribly alone, “like the psalmist in the Bible who cries out, ‘No man cared for my soul.’” He continues, “This has led some scholars to call the God of the Psalms a God of listening. Our need for

a listener is an inherent aspect of all prayer.”[\[21\]](#)

So, giving love is good for you. Science says so. Compassion, humor, loyalty, and listening are important ways you can express giving love. Is it as intriguing to you as it is to me that contemporary science and social science are often in harmony with age-old biblical counsel? Makes me think I should read the Bible more often.

## Notes

1. Stephen Post, PhD, and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 15.
2. Ibid., 1.
3. Ibid., 7.
4. Ibid., 7-8, 48-51.
5. Ibid., 8-10, 68-69.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid., 25, 275.
8. [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)
9. Post and Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen*, 179-180.
10. Ibid., 184.
11. Ibid., 177-8; see also Susan Krabacher (as told to Kristi Watts), “Diary of a Playboy Centerfold,” *The 700 Club*, [www.cbn.com/700club/features/amazing/Susan\\_Krabacher061506.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/700club/features/amazing/Susan_Krabacher061506.aspx); accessed January 24, 2008.
12. Post and Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen*, 132.
13. Ibid., 133-135.
14. Ibid., 139-140.
15. Ibid., 141-142.
16. Ibid., 199-200.
17. Ibid., 203-205.
18. Ibid., 216-217.
19. Ibid., 221.
20. Ibid., 231-232.
21. Ibid., 234.

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# Overcoming Anxiety: Finding Real Peace When Life Seems Crazy

What makes you feel anxious? Being late or unprepared for work or appointments? Maybe unresolved interpersonal conflict. Airline travel? Public speaking? Fears of losing love? Serious illness or a friend's death?

Pressures from the trivial to the traumatic can prompt feelings of fearfulness or apprehension.

Once at a booksellers convention my wife and I spent an exhausting day on our feet promoting a new book. Late that night, after a reception crowd had thinned down to mostly authors and our publisher, we stood in a circle engaged in conversation. I had to leave her side momentarily to attend to a matter.

Upon returning to the circle, I walked up behind my wife and began gently to massage her shoulders. She seemed to enjoy this, so I started to put my arms around her waist to give her a little hug. Just then, I looked up at the opposite side of the circle and saw ... my wife.

I had my hands on the wrong woman!

In that instant, I knew the true meaning of fear. Fear of circumstances. Even fear of death! Confusion clouded my mind. Heat enveloped my back, shoulders, neck and head. My face reddened; my stomach knotted.

You've probably had embarrassing moments that generate

anxiety. What about more serious causes?

## Your Greatest Fear?

Fear of death is perhaps humans' greatest fear. In college, the student living next door to me was struck and killed instantly by lightning on a golf course one springtime afternoon. Shock gripped our fraternity house. "What does it mean if life can be snuffed out in an instant?" my friends asked. "Is there a life after death and, if so, how can we experience it?" Confusion and anxiety reigned.

If you can't answer the question "What will happen when you die?" you may become anxious.

How can you find real peace in a chaotic world? Consider a possible solution. It involves the spiritual realm.

As a university student, I wrote a paper for an abnormal psychology class investigating a biblical therapy for anxiety. I had come to faith as a freshman and found it brought me peace of mind. Complex psychological disorders often stem from more basic problems like anxiety, problems for which faith offers practical solutions.

I sent a copy of my paper to the author of our textbook, a prominent UCLA psychologist. A month later, he replied that he liked the paper and asked permission to quote from it in his revised textbook.

Somewhat amazed, I readily agreed. I also sent a copy of his letter to my parents in Miami, who were beginning to wonder about their son's campus spiritual involvement.

This professor felt that the principles in the paper—which certainly were not original with me—had both academic and personal relevance. Several months later, we met at his lovely home in Malibu overlooking the Pacific Ocean. As we sat in his back yard, this professor told me he lacked personal peace and



wanted to know God personally. I showed him a simple four-point outline based on one of Jesus' statements: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."[\[1\]](#)

We discussed God's unconditional love for us, our dilemma of being unplugged from Him and the flaws (selfishness and "sins") that result. I noted that Jesus, through His death in our place and return to life, came to plug us back into God by paying the penalty we owed for our sins.

## **Finding Real Peace**

This professor decided to place his faith in God and asked Jesus to forgive him and enter his life. We kept in touch. Later, over the phone, he told me that as he looked out over the ocean and saw the setting sun, "I really believe I'm a part of all this. Before I didn't, but now I do." He was seeing how he fit into God's universe. An internationally acclaimed scholar linked up with, if you will, the greatest Psychologist.

One of Jesus' earlier followers wrote to some friends about a divine aid for anxiety: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."[\[2\]](#)

Faith in God does not make life perfect and is no automatic solution to anxiety. Illness, chemical imbalance, emotional wounds and more can hamper coping. But a good starting place is to become linked with the One who loves us and knows best what makes us fulfilled.

Might it be time for you to consider Him?

## **Notes**

1. John 3:16 *NLT (New Living Translation)*.
  2. Philippians 4:6-7 (*NLT*).
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### Notes

1. John 3:16 *NLT* (*New Living Translation*).
2. Philippians 4:6-7 (*NLT*).

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## The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?

What does Christmas mean to you? Times with family and friends? Perhaps carols, cards, television specials. Maybe hectic shopping, parties, and eating too much.

All these and more are part of North American Christmas. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story—the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels—important, if at all?

May I invite you to consider eight reasons why the original Christmas story matters, even to you? You may not agree with

all of them, but perhaps they will stimulate your thinking and maybe even kindle some feelings that resonate with that famous story.

First, the Christmas story is important because it is. . .

## **A Story that Has *Endured***

For two millennia, people have told of the child in a Bethlehem manger; of angels who announced his birth to shepherds; of learned men who traveled a great distance to view him.[\[1\]](#)

That a story persists for many years does not prove its truthfulness. Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy survive in the popular imagination. But a twenty-century tenure at least merits our consideration. What deep human longings does the Christmas story portray? Why has it connected so profoundly with millions of people? Is the story factual? Curiosity prompts further investigation.

Second, the Christmas story is also . . .

## **A Story of *Hope and Survival***

Jesus' society knew great pain and oppression. Rome ruled. Corrupt tax collectors burdened the people. Some religious leaders even sanctioned physical beating of Jewish citizens participating in compulsory religious duties.[\[2\]](#)

Joseph and his pregnant wife Mary traveled a long distance to Bethlehem to register for a census but could not obtain proper lodging. Mary bore her baby and laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Eventually, King Herod sought to kill the baby. Warned of impending risk, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, then returned home after Herod's death.

Imagine how Mary felt. Traveling while pregnant would be challenging. Fleeing to another nation lest some king slay

your son would not be pleasant. Yet she, Joseph, and Jesus survived the ordeal.

In the midst of social and cultural challenges, the Christmas story offers hope and encouragement toward survival, hope of new life linked to something—someone—greater than oneself. One of Jesus' followers said Jesus' "name . . . [would] be the hope of all the world."[3](#)

So, the Christmas story is important because it has endured and because it speaks of hope and survival.

Reason number three: the Christmas story is . . .

## **A Story of *Peace and Goodwill***

Christmas carolers sing of "peace on earth." Greeting cards extol peace, families desire it, and the news reminds us of its fleeting nature.

I encountered ten-year-old Matt from Nebraska in a southern California restaurant men's room one afternoon. Alone and forlorn looking, he stood outside the lone stall.

"Could I ask a favor?" inquired the sandy haired youth. "The door to this stall has no lock. Would you watch and be sure that no one comes in on me?" "Sure," I replied, happy to guard his privacy. Matt noted, "In a lot of nice restaurants the stall doors don't have locks." "I know," I agreed. "You'd think they would."

After a pause, his high-pitched voice said, "You know what I wish? I wish there could be peace in all the earth and no more arguments or fighting so no one would have to die except by heart attacks." "That would be great," I agreed. "How do you think that could happen?" Matt didn't know.

"It seems that the Prince of Peace could help," I suggested. "Do you know who that is?" He didn't. "Well, at Christmas, we

talk a lot about Jesus as the Prince of Peace,” I explained.

“Oh, I see,” conceded Matt. “I don’t know about those things because I don’t go to church. Do you know what it’s like to be the only boy in your town who doesn’t go to church? I do.”

“Well, I’m a church member,” I replied, “but really the most important thing is knowing Jesus Christ as your personal friend. When I was eighteen, some friends explained to me that He died and rose again for me and that I could begin a relationship with Him. It made a big difference and gave me a real peace inside. He can also bring peace between people.”

By now, Matt was out washing his hands as his father stuck his head in the door to hurry him along. I gave him a small booklet that explained more. “Thanks,” smiled Matt as he walked out to join his family for lunch.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman in his bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence* tells of boarding a New York City bus to find a driver whose friendly greeting and positive disposition spread contagious warmth among the initially cold and indifferent passengers. Goleman envisioned a “virus of good feeling” spreading through the city from this “urban peacemaker” whose good will had softened hearts.[{4}](#)

The Christmas angel announced to some shepherds, “‘Don’t be afraid! . . . I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David!”[{5}](#) A crowd of angels then appeared praising God and proclaiming peace among people of good will.[{6}](#)

The Christmas story brings a message of peace that can soothe anxious hearts and calm interpersonal strife.

Reason number four: the Christmas story is . . .



## **A Story of *Family***

Christmas is a time for family gatherings. This interaction can bring great joy or great stress. Estrangement or ill will from past conflicts can explode.

Joseph and Mary had their share of family challenges. Consider their circumstances. The historical accounts indicate that Joseph's fiancée became pregnant though she was a virgin. Mary believed an angel told her she was pregnant by God. Now, how would you feel if your fiancé/fiancée exhibited apparent evidence of sexual activity with someone else during your engagement? Suppose your intended said that God had sanctioned the whole thing. Would your trust and self-esteem take a nosedive? Would you cancel the wedding?

Joseph, described as “a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace . . . [Mary] publicly.”<sup>{7}</sup> But an angel appeared to him in a dream, explaining that the child was conceived in her by God, and told him to “name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”<sup>{8}</sup> Joseph followed instructions and cared for his family. His continuing commitment to Mary and Jesus played a significant part in the boy's birth and early childhood. With God's help, the family overcame major obstacles. And so can your family.

Fifth, the story is Christmas is also . . .

## **A story of *Humility***

When kings, presidents, and other rulers appear in public, great pomp often ensues. From a biblical perspective, God came first not as a ruling king but as a servant, a baby born in humble circumstances. His becoming human helps humans identify with Him.

Imagine that you and your child are walking in a field and

encounter an ant pile with hundreds of ants scurrying about. In the distance, you see a construction bulldozer approaching. Suppose your child asks how to warn the ants of impending danger. You discuss various possibilities: shouting, holding up signs, etc. But the best solution would be if somehow your child could become an ant and warn them personally. Some ants might not believe the danger. But some might believe and take steps to ensure their safety.

Paul, an early follower of Jesus, wrote of the humility Jesus displayed by becoming human:

*Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven.* [{9}](#)

The Christmas story speaks of family and humility. But is it true? [{10}](#)

Reason number six why the Christmas story matters: it is . . .

## **A Story that Was *Foretold***

Jesus' followers noted numerous clues to his identity, prophecies written many years before His birth. [{11}](#)

The Hebrew writer Micah told around 700 BC of deliverance through a coming Messiah or "Anointed One" from Bethlehem. [{12}](#) We know that ". . . Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. . . ." [{13}](#)

Isaiah, writing around 700 BC, foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. He wrote, "The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." [{14}](#) The name "Immanuel"

means “God is with us.” Biblical accounts claim Jesus’ mother was a virgin when she bore Him. [{15}](#)

Additional prophecies concern the Messiah’s lineage, betrayal, suffering, execution, and resurrection. Peter Stoner, a California mathematician, once calculated the probability of just eight of the 300 prophecies Jesus fulfilled coming true in one person due to chance alone. Using estimates that both he and classes of college students considered reasonable and conservative, Stoner concluded there was one chance in  $10^{17}$  that those eight were fulfilled by fluke.

He says  $10^{17}$  silver dollars would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one coin with red fingernail polish. Stir the whole batch thoroughly. What chance would a blindfolded person have of picking the marked coin on the first try? One in  $10^{17}$ , the same chance that just eight of the 300 prophecies “just happened” to come true in this man, Jesus. [{16}](#)

In a similar vein, consider reason number seven why the original Christmas story matters. It is . . .

## **A Story that Has *Substantial Support***

Can we trust the biblical accounts of the Christmas story? Three important points:

- *Eyewitness Testimony*. The Gospels—presentations of Jesus’ life—claim to be, or bear evidence of containing, eyewitness accounts. In a courtroom, eyewitness testimony is among the most reliable evidence.
- *Early Date*. Dr. William F. Albright, one of the world’s leading archaeologists, dated every book of the New Testament (NT) before about AD 80. [{17}](#) There is no known record of NT factual authenticity ever being successfully challenged by a contemporary.

- *Manuscript Evidence*. Over 24,000 early manuscript copies of portions of the NT exist today. Concerning manuscript attestation, Sir Frederic Kenyon, director and principle librarian of the British Museum, concluded, “Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”[\[18\]](#)

The Christmas story is notable for its enduring messages of hope, peace, goodwill, family and humility. It was foretold by prophets and has substantial manuscript support. But there is another reason for considering the story of Jesus’ birth, perhaps the most important.

Reason number eight: the Christmas story is . . .

## **A Story of Love**

Jesus’ followers taught that His conception and birth were part of a divine plan to bring us genuine peace, inner freedom, and self-respect. They believed the biblical God wants us to enjoy friendship with Him, and meaning and purpose. Alas, our own self-centeredness separates us from Him. Left to our own, we would spend both time and eternity in this spiritually unplugged state.

Jesus came to help plug us into God. Mary’s baby was born to die, paying the penalty for our self-centeredness, which the biblical documents call “sin.” If I had a traffic fine I could not pay, you could offer to pay it for me. When the adult Jesus died on the cross, He carried the penalty due all our sins then rose from the dead to give new life.

Jesus explained, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”[\[19\]](#) God can become your friend if you believe in Him, that is, if you trust Him to forgive you. He will never let you down.

Perhaps you are becoming aware of the importance of the Christmas story in your own life. Might you like to receive Jesus' free gift of forgiveness and place your faith in Him? You can celebrate this Christmas knowing that you are a member of His family. Perhaps you'd like to talk to Him right now. You might want to tell Him something like this:

*Jesus Christ, thanks for loving me, for dying for my sins and rising again. Please apply your death as the means of my forgiveness. I accept your pardon. Come and live in me and help me to become your close friend.*

If you made that decision to place your trust in Jesus, He has entered your life, forgiven you and given you eternal life. I encourage you to tell another of His followers about your decision and ask them to help you grow in faith. Call this radio station or visit the Web site [probe.org](http://probe.org) to learn more. Read the Bible to discover more about God. Begin with the Gospel of John, the fourth book in the New Testament, which is one of the easier ones to understand. Tell God what is on your heart, and tell others about the discovery you've made so they can know Him too.

Christmas is meant to celebrate peace and joy. Amidst the busyness of shopping, parties, presents, and fun, remember that the Prince of Peace came to spread peace and joy to all who believe in Him.

## **Notes**

1. Details of the Christmas story are in Luke 1-2 and Matthew 1:18-2:23.
2. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 printing of the 1883 original), i:372.
3. Matthew 12:21 NLT.
4. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), ix-x.

5. Luke 2:10-11 NLT.
6. Luke 2:13-14 NASB.
7. Matthew 1:19 NLT.
8. Matthew 1:21 NLT.
9. Philippians 2:6-9 NLT.
10. For more on evidence for Jesus, see [www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com](http://www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com) and [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).
11. For a summary of prophecies Jesus fulfilled, see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 141-177.
12. Micah 5:2.
13. Matthew 2:1 NASB.
14. Isaiah 7:14 NIV.
15. Matthew 1:18, 22-25; Luke 1:27, 34.
16. Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 99-112.
17. McDowell, op. cit., 62-63.
18. Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1940), 288; in McDowell, op. cit., 41. McDowell develops these points in pp. 39-41 ff.
19. John 3:16 NLT.

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## **"I Hurt So Bad Because I Miss My Boyfriend"**

I have been going out with my boyfriend for a year now, I love

him so much and there is no doubt he loves me. I always want to be with him but it's not possible at the moment because we are far from each other. I am at university in another country so we only communicate through the phone and emails. We are both devoted Christians, we love God and we comfort each other knowing that God has a purpose and plan for our relationship even as we long to be together.

My problem is I think about him a lot, I think about him sexually also. I long to be with him everyday and I tell him this. I dream of us being intimate, I pray about this and ask God for guidance. I love him so much and there is nothing in the world that I would want right now except to be with him. We are hoping to get married next year when I finish my studies but the thing is it's hard for me now, I just want to be with him. It hurts me worse when I see other people spending time with their loved ones, it makes me feel so lonely and I start thinking of the warm feeling that he makes me feel when I am with him.

I completely understand! My husband just returned from a missions trip out of the country for two weeks and I missed him so much I could practically TASTE it!

What you have isn't so much a problem as it is a painful condition of being separated. Your longing to be with him in every possible way is part of love. I would like to suggest that you turn your emotional energies (and you have a LOT of those for him, right?) from painful feelings into constructive prayer. Every time you find yourself missing him and longing for him, pray for him. There are many scripture prayers you can pray, and I think you would find it very helpful to make a special prayer journal into which you copy scripture that you turn into prayer for him. For example, consider Eph.1:15-19—

*15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,*

*16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;*

*17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*

*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

*19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.*

You can turn it into a prayer:

“I do not cease giving thanks for \_\_\_\_\_, while making mention of him in my prayers; that You, Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to him a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of You. I pray that the eyes of his heart may be enlightened, so that he will know what is the hope of Your calling, what are the riches of the glory of Your inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of Your power toward us who believe.”

You can use this time of separation to “log in” hundreds and hundreds of scripture prayers for your beloved, which you can read from your journal (even if it’s a collection of index cards) as prayers as you add to them.

Here is a web page to give you a head start on coming up with some great scripture prayers:

<http://www.believers.org/believe/bel117.htm>

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin