How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change

Sue Bohlin presents her personal testimony of how Christ led her to a biblical worldview understanding of her physical state. She explains how understanding her situation ministered to her and others spiritually and emotionally.

The most unique and distinctive thing about me is something I absolutely HATED when I was growing up. I’m one of the last polio babies. I got polio when I was eight months old, in October of 1953, just a few months before the vaccine was developed. My left leg was paralyzed from the hip down, but a couple days after I got sick with polio, some limited use started to return to my virtually dead leg.

Polio left me with one leg shorter than the other, one foot smaller than the other, weakened muscles, and a serious limp. I had several orthopedic surgeries and went to physical therapy once a week. Every day until I was 14, I did exercises with a weighted boot strapped onto my shoe. I would cry, “But I don’t *want* to do my exercises!!!” and my mother would insist, “But you *have* to do your exercises!!!” Before I learned to walk, I was fitted with a full-length steel and leather brace. I was so glad when the movie *Forrest Gump* came out, because my kids were able to see what braces looked like, since they never knew that part of my life!

Polio profoundly affected my body, but it only crippled my body a little compared to what it did to my self image. I hated the way I looked. I hated what the polio had done to me, and I despaired every time I looked in the mirror, thinking, “Ugly! You are so UGLY!!”

So I got good at two things. One was repressing the polio altogether. I got in the habit, which I actually have to this

day, of avoiding looking in mirrors, or seeing my reflection in store windows, or even acknowledging my shadow. I don't want to see the way I walk, because it hurts to see the way I walk. I consider myself an expert on denial; in fact, one of these days I have to get that T-shirt that says, "Call me Cleopatra—Queen of Denial!"

The other thing I got good at was a very special fantasy. It was so private, so personal, that I never even wrote it down. I loved to fantasize that when I grew up, I would become a princess, and my polio troubles would be behind me because those sorts of things don't bother princesses! Now, the chances of a vacuum cleaner salesman's daughter from Highland Park, Illinois, becoming a princess are mighty slim, but I loved my fantasy.

In high school, the polio got in the way of dating. No one seemed able to just accept *me* as someone worth going out with. I had friends who were boys, but hardly anyone was interested in anything more than friendship. My sixteenth birthday was bittersweet because I was "sweet sixteen and never been kissed." High school boys then, like now, weren't exactly paragons of sensitivity and acceptance! My self-esteem dropped even lower.

I went to college at the University of Illinois to work on a degree in Elementary Education. One day in my sophomore year, something happened that changed the entire course of my life.

A friend was handing out flyers inviting students to see that evening's performance of an illusionist-magician. I thought, "Great! I love magic!" I love to see women get sawn in two, and the fake levitating, and all that David Copperfield sort of stuff, and I started to get excited about it. But then I noticed the small letters at the bottom of the flyer: this performance was sponsored by a campus religious organization. "Forget it," I thought. "I am NOT interested in Jesus freaks." But as the day wore on, I felt like a huge magnet was pulling

me to the performance, and I found myself buying a ticket and planning on going. I'm so glad I did.

The illusionist, Andre Kole with Campus Crusade for Christ, was excellent. But I don't remember his magic nearly as much as I remember his message. For one thing, he stopped halfway through the evening and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to take a short intermission. After the break I'm going to use my illusion to illustrate some spiritual principles. If this will offend you, I want to give you an opportunity to leave during the intermission." I thought, "What in the world is this guy going to say?" Besides, I had spent one whole dollar on my ticket and I was going to get my money's worth!

When he started again, he said some things I'd never heard before, but which were quite intriguing. He quoted a famous philosopher who said that we each have a God-shaped vacuum within us, and nothing will fit that shape or fill that emptiness except for God Himself. He quoted someone else who had said that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. He pointed out that there's a huge difference between Christianity and "Churchianity." Churchianity, he said, is man trying to earn favor with God, trying to work his way to heaven. But Christianity as the Bible explains it is a relationship. It's God reaching down to man and calling us into an intimate friendship with Himself, not because of anything we deserve or anything we can do to please Him, but because He desires to have a relationship with us.

Andre Kole really got my attention when he asked, "Do you know what a Christian really is?" I thought, "Of course I do! A Christian is someone who isn't Jewish!" But he said that according to the Bible, Christian means "Christ-in-one," and that a true Christian is actually indwelled by Jesus Christ Himself. That blew me away.

Then he said, "I'm going to use my illusion to illustrate some points. Just as there are physical laws that govern the

physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern the spiritual universe.

The Four Spiritual Laws

“The first law is that God loves you and He offers a wonderful plan for your life. When Jesus was on earth, He said, ‘I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.’ Now what do you suppose He meant by ‘abundant life’? I think He meant a life filled with purpose and joy and direction and fulfillment. But as you look around the world today, you see that, obviously, most people are not living that kind of life. Something is terribly wrong.

“That brings us to the second spiritual law: Man is sinful and separated from God. We don’t like to use the word ‘sin’ today, but it’s a word the Bible uses a lot. It’s actually an archery term, and it means missing the mark or the target. It doesn’t matter if you miss the target by one inch or one mile, you’re still missing it. God commands us to be holy and perfect, just as He is holy and perfect. But we don’t even meet our *own* standards, much less God’s!

“The Bible also tells us that ‘the wages of sin is death.’ That means that the penalty for missing the mark of being absolutely perfect and holy is death—not only the physical death of our bodies, but that when we die, we can’t ever be with God in heaven. It means the death of our spirits as well. And once we commit one sin, there’s nothing we can do to restore ourselves. We’re stuck. There’s a huge chasm between us and God, and there’s nothing we can do to cross it.

“That’s where the really good news comes in. The third spiritual law is that God has provided a solution to this dilemma. Since the Bible says that the punishment for sin is death, someone has to die because of our sin. God didn’t want us to have to pay that penalty, so He sent His own Son, Jesus, from heaven to earth. He took on human flesh—that’s what

Christmas is about—and lived a perfect life. Then He died a heinous death on a cross, even though He was innocent, and He died in our place. Three days later, God raised Him from the dead because He was pleased with Jesus' sacrifice."

Now, I had heard a lot of this stuff before when I was growing up in church, but it had never had any impact on me. I knew a lot of religious facts, but they didn't affect my life in any way. I believed that George Washington was the Father of our Country, I believed that Abraham Lincoln was the best president (I was from Illinois, remember. . ."the Land of Lincoln"!), and I believed that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. They were all in the same category in my head, and they all had the same affect on me— which is to say, none at all.

But I had never, ever heard what he said next, the fourth spiritual law. "Each of us must accept Christ's gift of eternal life *personally*." He explained that Jesus was offering each of us the gift of eternal life, which means not only going to heaven when we die but, starting that moment, He would live His powerful, holy, beautiful life from INSIDE US. Whoa!! This was a *totally* new concept!! I thought that God stayed in His corner of the universe, and I limped along in my little corner, and never the twain shall meet. But suddenly I was hearing something completely new and different—that God Himself loved me so much He wanted to come live IN MY HEART!!!! As I sat there, reveling in this new information and this incredible offer, I saw that all along, I had thought I was doing all right with God because I was basically a "good girl." But now I realized that I was missing the boat entirely, because I had never entered into a personal relationship with God at all; I had been caught up in rules and rituals and traditions, and had rejected them all because they had no meaning to me. And here was God offering me HIMSELF instead of those dead rules and rituals and traditions!

My whole spirit cried out in one big “YES!!!!!” It felt rather like a flower turning to the sun and bursting forth in full blossom. Andre Kole prayed a short prayer, which I followed along in my heart, but my real prayer consisted of one incredibly joyful “YES!!!”

I went home to my dorm, where I told my roommates, “Guess what? When I left tonight, we were in a triple, but now we’re in a quadruple, because Jesus is now living in my heart!” They just groaned, “OH NO!! You got RELIGION!!” They dismissed what I was saying: “We know what this means, Sue. There’s a guy involved in this somewhere. We know how you work. Every two weeks or so you fall in love with somebody new, and whatever the guy believes, that’s your new philosophy. Last month you were in love with Tony Hunter, and you thought you were Jonathan Livingston Seagull! So this is nothing more than a fad, and it will pass when THIS guy doesn’t work out either.”

So my roommates waited for the fad to pass. That was 1973.

Just a fad? No way!

It wasn’t a fad, and it didn’t pass, because my new relationship with Jesus Christ was the most real thing that had ever happened to me. My life became a perpetual surprise box. No one warned me that when God came to live inside me, He’d be making all sorts of wonderful changes! They just started happening.

For one thing, my language cleared up. When I was still at home, I was a “good girl.” But when I went to college, my crippled self- esteem made me crave the acceptance of my friends. And since they all had mouths like sailors, I started talking like that too. I was never really comfortable with it (because princesses don’t swear!). But within about two weeks of the night I trusted Christ, I realized that it was as if God reached down into my vocabulary box with a great big soapy sponge and cleaned out all the garbage that was in

there—without asking Him to!

I discovered that, for the first time in my life, I wanted to go to church. The friend who had invited me to the Andre Kole show also invited me to his church, which was a block from my dorm but somehow I had never noticed it. I didn't even own a dress, but I got one, and went to church of my own free will for the first time in my life. I made a startling discovery. The church was filled with college students who were there because they WANTED to be, not because their parents had made them go! From the very first time I went, I was captivated by the lights on in everyone's eyes. These people were honestly joyful and so glad to be there! Not only that, but they sang all the verses of the hymns, with enthusiasm! This was a *whole* new experience for me. Then, the pastor got up and taught us from the Bible, relating it to our 20th-century lives. I loved it!

And the third thing that happened was a new hunger to read the Bible. I didn't own one of those, either. I had tried it a couple of times; when I was in elementary school, a priest had told us one day that if we wanted to read a love letter from God, to go home and look in our family Bible and read the epistles. So I tried it. Didn't look like any love letter *I* wanted to read! It was too hard to understand, and seemed so dull and boring, I shut the dusty book and put it back on the shelf. Another time, another priest told us that if we wanted to see how the end of the world would happen, to read the last book of the Bible. What a disaster *that* was! But now I really wanted to read and understand the Bible, so I went to the college bookstore and found the Living Bible, a modern-day paraphrase that I could easily understand. In the first few pages, I found just what I needed: "If you're new to this book…" It gave a suggested order for reading certain books, and I knew I had the help I needed. I couldn't wait for 4 o'clock every day, when I could go back to my dorm room and read about Jesus, this new, wonderful Friend who was now

living in my heart.

But it wasn’t the immediate changes that I want to talk about. Far more important are the long-term changes that God has been working in my life, healing my self-image and helping me deal with the polio.

Healing a Crippled Self-Image

The more I read and studied the Bible, the more I learned to see myself as God said I was, and realized that what He said was so much more accurate and trustworthy than how I felt. I’m a woman, and the way I felt about myself completely depended on external things like whether my hair was clean, whether I was wearing make- up, and the time of the month. So I could wake up, force myself to look in the mirror, and whimper in defeat—then, 30 minutes later, not be so depressed once I’d had a chance to do something about myself. But as I learned to embrace the truth about what God said I was, that it was more valid than my fleeting feelings, it profoundly changed the way I felt about myself.

When I studied Genesis, the first book of the Bible that explains the beginnings of everything, I learned that when God made Adam and Eve in His image, that made them infinitely valuable—not because of themselves, but because of their Creator. And, because I’m descended from Adam and Eve, I learned that I was also made in the image of God, and that makes me infinitely valuable as well. But this was a truth I only learned in my head; I didn’t learn it in my heart until my first son was born.

The whole time I was pregnant with Curt, I prided myself on being a thoroughly modern, non-emotional mother. I knew that newborn human babies weren’t particularly beautiful, as compared to, say, newborn lambs. When I saw my baby, I was going to say, “Yes, that’s a baby all right. Take him and clean him up, and when you bring him back we’ll bond.”

And then Curt was actually born.

When I first laid eyes on this child who was made in my husband's and my image, this child that God had made by taking Ray's intangible love for me and my intangible love for him and creating a tangible baby that we could hold and love, I thought, "WHOA! This is THE most BEAUTIFUL baby the world has ever seen!" I instantly fell in love with this little bundle of baby, and he was infinitely valuable to me, NOT because of anything intrinsic with him—I mean, all babies do is eat and sleep and poop and cry—but because he was made in our image.

A few days later, in the hospital, I had him on my lap doing a finger and toe check, and just sort of smelling his awesome newborn-baby smell, when I suddenly realized with a rush of mother- tiger protective love, that IF ANYONE SO MUCH AS LAID A HAND ON THIS CHILD, I WOULD PERSONALLY TEAR THEM LIMB FROM LIMB!!!! I didn't know I could love anyone that much, but I loved my baby with a ferocious, passionate love that surprised and overwhelmed me. (Okay, okay, I realized this was probably hormones, but it sure felt real enough at the time!) Then, as I lay there in the hospital bed overtaken with these strong emotions, I suddenly realized something else: that if I, being such a finite and limited human being, could love my child so ferociously and passionately, how much more must my heavenly Father, who is infinitely huge and powerful, love me? God loved me even more ferociously and passionately than I could imagine, and that meant that even if the rest of the world thumbed their noses at me and rejected me, if I knew that God loved me like that, it wouldn't matter.

Another truth that God used to heal my broken self-image came when I read in the gospel of John that "as many as received Christ [and I had], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." I learned that simply being a human being doesn't make us a child of God—that just means we are creatures made in His image. I became a child of God when I trusted Christ to save

me from my sins, and according to what Jesus said, I was born again at that point into God's family. Shortly after I learned about being a child of God, I came across one of my favorite names for God in the Bible: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Then suddenly I put the two things together: if God is the King of Kings, and I am a child of God, then the female child of a King is a PRINCESS!!



I made it!! When you look at me, I might not look like much on the outside, but I know that I am a princess on the inside because my heavenly Father the King made me one when I became His child!!

The Hole in My Soul

The other area where God keeps working with me is the whole issue of polio. After I'd been a new Christian for a few months, I heard about a counselor who was sometimes able to pray for people and they received physical healing. So I made an appointment and went to see her.

I said, "Look, I've had polio almost all my life and I don't want it anymore. Would you please pray for me and heal me?"

She replied, "Well, I must tell you that sometimes God chooses to heal people in heaven, but first, tell me about how you feel about your polio."

"I don't like it, and I want you to heal me."

“Not so fast. How do you feel about God for letting this terrible thing happen to you?”

“Everything’s fine with God and me. Could we just get on with this?”

“No, wait. Having polio is an awful thing. Aren’t you just a little bit angry with God for letting this bad thing happen to you?”

I instantly thought, “Good girls don’t get mad at God,” and said, “NO, I’M NOT ANGRY WITH GOD!! Please, just pray for me and I’ll get out of here.”

The counselor smiled gently at me and said, “Sue, I’m afraid that no amount of healing is going to happen in your life until you’re honest with God. I can see that you have a great deal of anger and bitterness and resentment toward God for letting you have polio, and you need to deal with that first.”

“You’re not going to heal me?” I asked plaintively.

She shook her head and said, “I’m not the One who does the healing. I think you need to go pray about what’s going on inside of you first.”

I was terribly disappointed. I had had such hope that finally—FINALLY—I would be rid of the awful, horrible effects of this disease! Polio had ripped a huge wound in my soul as well as damaging my body, but this woman wasn’t going to do things my way. Sadly, I got in my car and drove home.

Along the highway, I prayed, “God, this woman seems to think I have all this anger and bitterness and resentment stored up against You because of the polio. Is there anything to this?”

It was as if God said, “Finally, My precious daughter, you ask the right question!” I realized that I had been stuffing a lifetime of disappointment and pain into an emotional basement, and God was opening the door that I had kept shut

for years. Feelings and memories started coming back to me out of the basement, like the time I was about ten years old.

I knelt next to my bed one night and poured out my heart to God. “God, please PLEASE heal me! I *hate* this polio, You know how much I hate this polio! Please, please give me two normal legs! I hate my body, I hate limping, I hate doing the exercises with the boot, I hate going to physical therapy. I hate the lift on my shoe, and I hate having my left leg shorter than the other, and I hate having to wear such ugly shoes. Oh God, I want to go into a shoe store and buy one pair of beautiful shoes so bad! I hate having to wear different size shoes! And You know I can’t wear high heels with my leg and foot being so weak. And God, if I can’t wear high heels, how can I get married? Everybody knows that brides wear high heels on their wedding day! Besides, who would want to marry me with polio anyway? I hate this toothpick leg, and I hate *hate* HATE the way people stare at me in public, especially little kids. God, please PLEASE heal me tonight while I’m sleeping!”

Then I proceeded to help God out by giving Him helpful suggestions on how to go about healing me. “You can take the extra muscle from my right leg and transfer it over to my left leg. Then stretch the left leg so it’s as long as the right, and pull on my toes so they’re not crumpled up anymore. And in the morning I’ll run downstairs yelling, “Mom! Mom! God healed me!” and she’ll call the *Chicago Sun Times*, and it’ll be on the front page: “God Heals Suburban Girl.” And I won’t be able to go to school because I’ll need to go to a shoe store and pick out some beautiful shoes like everybody else’s, since my different-sized shoes won’t fit. Oh! And God, I’ll be able to SKIP down the street! I’ve never been able to skip!! It’ll be great! Now, I’ll just go to sleep and while I’m sleeping, You work a miracle. Then, in the morning, I won’t even have to throw back the covers to see what You’ve done. I’ll *know*.” I fell into bed exhausted, having poured out my hurting heart to

God, and so hopefully confident that He had heard me and would do what I asked.

In the morning, I was right: I didn't have to throw back the covers to see what had happened during the night. I knew without checking: absolutely nothing. NOTHING!! God had ignored me! I was *furious*. "God, how could You? I poured out my heart to You and You ignored me! You KNOW how much I hate the polio, You KNOW how much I want to be healed! It's no big deal for You to do this for me! If You could part the Red Sea, I know you could heal me! HOW COULD YOU????" Then suddenly, I realized that, in my little ten-year-old heart, I was yelling at God, and I was horrified. Good girls don't get mad at God! So I took all the feelings of anger and disappointment and grief and stuffed them all down in my basement, along with all the other feelings I'd stuffed down there over the years.

And now, here I was, 20 years old, and all these feelings and memories were flooding back, and I realized that the counselor was right. I *did* have a huge amount of anger and bitterness and frustration stored up against God. . .and I didn't have a clue as to what to do about it. I'd never heard anyone speak on "What To Do When You're So Mad At God You Want to Spit in His Face." That sounds blasphemous! But that's how I felt, and I didn't know what to do about it.

So I prayed, "God, I don't know how to handle all these feelings, so I'm asking You to show me what to do. And God, it looks like You're not going to heal me of the polio either, are You? So please help me deal with it. I've always hoped that when I was grown up, it would magically go away, but that isn't going to happen. You're going to have to show me how to deal with the polio, too."

God is faithful, and He answered my prayer. In two ways.

God is Always in Control

First, I learned what has been the single most comforting truth I've ever learned as a Christian: that God has always been in control, and nothing has happened to me that He did not allow to pass through the grid of His love and purpose for my life. It was as if there were a suit of armor around me from the moment I was conceived, and nothing has touched my life that God did not purposely allow to get past the armor. I did not get polio by accident; there was a reason for it. When God saw that polio virus heading for me, He allowed it to do the exact amount of damage to my body that was in His plan for me. But once again, this was a truth I only learned in my head, and the heart-understanding didn't come until the day I took my second son Kevin to an immunization clinic for a shot.

I held him in my arms so that he was facing outward, his little thigh exposed. When the nurse stuck him, he wheeled around, and just before letting out a huge yell, he fixed me with a look of intense betrayal. I knew that if he had been able to put into words what he was feeling, he would have screamed, "You're my MOTHER!! I can't believe you let this woman attack me with that huge STICK!!" I thought, "Oh Kevin, I know you can't understand why I would allow this woman to attack you with that stick. Honey, I *drove* you here so she could attack you with that stick."

What I wanted to say, but it would have been pointless, was "Baby, I know how hard it is for you to understand what's happening. But my Mommy mind is so much bigger than your Baby mind, there's no way I can explain that I know what I'm doing, and I'm letting you hurt because I love you and I'm acting in your best interests, even though all you can feel right now is the pain. I'm so sorry, but you're just going to have to trust me."

I thought, "I'm going to take you home and give you some Tylenol, and you'll start to feel better, and in a few days

all the pain and discomfort will be gone, but the good medicine inside you will make you strong and healthy for many years. Some day you won't even remember that today happened, but the benefits of this shot will last for a long, long time."

Right about then we walked out into the sunlight, and God spoke to me very quietly, on the inside: "My precious Sue, I know how much you hurt because of the polio. I hate it too—in fact, I hate it even more, because it was never part of My perfect Creation in the beginning. When sin entered the world and spoiled everything, polio was unleashed into My beautiful world. I hate for you to suffer like this. But just as My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts, I can't explain to you what I'm doing with the polio any more than you can explain what you're doing to Kevin, and that his suffering is good. Sweetheart, you're just going to have to trust Me."

Then I realized that just as Kevin's pain was going to go away in a matter of days, leaving him years and years free from the pain from the diseases he wasn't going to contract, I needed to see the pain of my polio'd body in the scope of eternity. If my body lives to be 100, which is a very generous estimate, and I have to deal with polio for over 99 years, all that time is still only going to be the length of a pinprick compared to the billions and billions of "years" I'm going to live in heaven—in a *perfect* body. My life on earth does have it difficulties and pain, but it's still temporary when I remember that the majority of my life will be lived in heaven where all pain will be behind me. And just as Kevin's vaccination produced health in his body, I realized that God was using polio to produce character and depth and His kind of beauty in me, which will last for all eternity.

Giving Thanks for Everything

The other way God answered my prayer was in discovering a little book (Merlin Carrothers' *Power in Praise*) that said God wants us to give thanks for *everything* that happens to us. Not just *in* everything, not just the things we think will work out all right, but everything that comes into our lives. The reason we can give thanks is because of the first lesson I learned, which is that God is in control and has unseen, unknown purposes for what touches our lives. The Bible never tells us to FEEL thankful; it just says to give thanks, which is an act of the will and not of emotion. I looked it up, and sure enough, in black and white, there it was Ephesians 5:20. Even in the Greek!

The book is full of story after story of how God changed people's hearts when they thanked Him for things they hated but couldn't change, and I knew I had stumbled across some wonderful wisdom. I remember where I was the first time I told God "thank You" for the one thing I never, ever thought I could give thanks for: my polio.

"God," I started, "I certainly don't FEEL thankful for polio, but Your word doesn't say to go by feelings but by faith, and Your word says to give thanks for all things. So I thank You for letting me have polio. Thank You for my limp. Thank You for the problem that shoes constantly give me, and how hard it is to find them for my mismatched feet. Thank You that I will never be able to wear high heels. Thank You for the way people stare at me. Thank you for all the physical therapy I had to go through, thank You for the boot, thank You for the surgeries, thank You for the brace I had to wear. Thank you that I don't know how well my body will hold up as I get older. I thank You for all these things."

As I disciplined myself to say "thank You" for these things I hated but couldn't change, something interesting started to happen. I realized that saying "thank You" enabled me to

relinquish all the pain and anger I had stored up in my emotional basement, and God took it away and replaced it with His peace. Pain had carved huge caverns in my heart, but now instead of being filled with all the negative emotions I had hidden in there, all that space was now filled with peace and a marvelous joy that came from trusting in the One who loves me perfectly. (In fact, since I'm only 5 feet tall, sometimes I think I'm bigger on the inside than I am on the outside!)

Something else that was interesting happened as I made myself give thanks for this horrible thing I hated but couldn't change. In addition to giving thanks by faith but not by feeling, I found that there were a bunch of things that I could easily, and with feelings of gratitude, give thanks for. I thank God for my parents, who loved me enough to make me exercise and endure surgeries so that I could walk as well as I did. I thank God for my husband, who, even though he's a runner, has never made me feel in the least bit inferior for not being able to keep up with him, and who is exceptionally gracious and sensitive in making allowances for my limitations. I thank God that if I had to have polio, it was in my leg and not in my arms. I'm a calligrapher, and it would be awfully hard to do hand lettering with my toes! I thank God that, even though I have to use a wheelchair in places like airports and amusement parks and malls, when I get to where I'm going, I can get up and walk. And there isn't a day that goes by that I don't thank God for my handicap permit! I get the best parking spaces!

I love happy endings, but this story doesn't have one. At least not as far as my earthly life is concerned. I still have to discipline myself in my reactions and attitudes concerning my body, because I'm now forced to deal with post-polio syndrome. 30 to 35 years after the onset of polio, a whole new set of symptoms crop up: bone-crushing fatigue, increasing muscle weakness, and pain. So far I don't have much trouble with the pain part (thank You LORD!!!!), but I've had to

completely restructure my lifestyle to accommodate a body that is losing strength and ability.

One day, as I was reading 2 Corinthians 12, I puzzled over Paul's re-statement of what God told him concerning his thorn in the flesh: that His power was perfected in weakness. I knew there was a nugget of comforting wisdom in that, and asked God to reveal to me what He meant. He answered my prayer one day when I was looking out a large plate glass window. Next to it was an expanse of brick wall. I was able to look out through the window and see not only a beautiful landscape outside, but I noticed that the sunlight was streaming in through the window. The sun was shining on the other side of the brick wall, too, but I couldn't see it. Then I realized that a glass window is fragile, transparent, and easily broken, but it lets the light shine through. A brick wall is strong, opaque, and is difficult to break it down, but nothing gets through it. When we are weak, whether physically or emotionally, we're like the fragile glass window, and God's power can stream through us, bringing power where we are powerless. When we're strong, like the brick wall, it's difficult to trust God because we're content in our own human strength—but no light, no supernatural power comes through. I am at the place where I'd rather be a window than a wall, because I want God's power and light to shine through me more than I want strength within myself.

At the time of this writing, I've had a chance to share my story with over 10,000 women, and I've never yet found a person who didn't have some sort of private heartache. Everyone has something about herself that she hates but can't change. Mine is on the outside, but for the majority of women, their heartbreak is on the inside. Allow me to encourage you to think about two things as you consider *your* private heartache.

What To Do With the Things You Hate but Can’t Change

First, think about how much God loves you. He proved it once and for all by sending His only Son to die a horrible death in your place, so that you could be reconciled to Him. One truth has been of untold comfort to me: His love is stronger than my pain.

Second, the way to truly relinquish the anger about your private heartache is to give thanks for it. It occurred to me one day that every difficulty in our lives is a beautiful gift wrapped in really ugly wrapping paper. That’s because God loves paradoxes, and He wraps His best gifts in tremendously daunting “paper.” Imagine if someone held out a gift to you wrapped in the newspaper that had spent several days at the bottom of the garbage can, soaked in chicken juice (ew YUCK!) and covered with coffee grounds, with maggots crawling all over it. You’d say, “What in the world kind of gift could possibly be inside such a grotesque wrapping?”and shrink back from it. But God does exactly that. Many of us never get past the paper to open the gift. But that’s what giving thanks will do for you—get you past the ugly wrapping paper to the choice gift inside. For me, it was a heart full of peace and joy. For others, who were sexually abused for example, it’s the delight of discovering He will restore the chunks of your soul that other people stole from you. For still others, it’s learning that even though you never had the earthly Daddy you should have had, you have a heavenly Daddy who loves you more perfectly and intimately than you can ever know till heaven.

But giving thanks is not a magic formula; it doesn’t do any good unless you first have a personal relationship with God by knowing and trusting His Son, Jesus Christ. It is essential that you turn from depending on yourself and your own efforts, and trust Jesus to save you from your sin, placing yourself in God’s hands. If you’re feeling like there’s a rope wrapped

around your heart and it's being tugged from the other end, please let me encourage you to identify that as God Himself, pulling you toward Himself and saying, "I love you! I created you to be in fellowship with Me! Please come to Me and give Me yourself so I can give you Myself." If that's what you're feeling, I suggest you tell God something similar to what I'm going to share with you, and what Andre Kole shared with me the night I trusted Jesus:

"Dear God, I realize I'm a sinner and You are a holy, perfect God. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die on the cross in my place. I trust Him now to save me from my sin and to come live inside me. Please make me into the person You want me to be. Amen."

"My Friend is HIV+"

A person I love very much was diagnosed as being HIV positive. He was infected at the age of 16. If he had been diagnosed with cancer or some other disease the first thing people would say or think is "How terrible, I will pray for this person." or "I'm sorry. " They would also wonder about the injustice of it. Unfortunately, that is not the reaction a person gets from the church when they let people know they have AIDS. The first thing they want to know is "How did you get it. "

Because of this reaction my friend has been totally turned off to Christianity. No one at are chuch knew about him because he was afraid of what people would say. Only his family knew. One day at church the subject of AIDS came up and quickly his fears were realized. Comments such as it being God's judgment and people getting what they deserve for making immoral choices. You should have seen his face. He was shattered. So was I.

I know that not all churches are like this but so far I havn't found one that wasn't. I try and tell myself that this is not our savior talking. If he were here he would forgive and love the person afflicted with this disease. I try to talk to him about Jesus loving and healing the leper. But faced with what is said in our church its hard for him to remember that.

There are so many people struggling with this terrible disease. People who make the same bad choices lots of teenagers in the church are making, but fortunately they only got pregnant or got someone pregnant. They were lucky enough not to get AIDS. When someone repents, God casts that sin as far as the east is from the west. Too bad we can't do that. It doesn't matter how you got the disease. That person needs to be shown the love of Christ. Don't wait until it's your loved one. Learn the facts about this disease. CHURCH, I beg of you don't let ignorance stop you from being a witness. We are His hands and feet. Lets use them to show a group of people rejected by the church His love. God has not rececte those who have AIDS. He is loving them and He is expecting us to do the same. Please pray about this issue.

I am so very, very sorry to hear about this horrible experience. You are so right about the church's judgmental reaction and how it grieves not only the person who has it, and the people who love him, but the Father's heart.

The reason it's so easy for people to react so strongly is that, unlike cancer or stroke or other life-stealing disease, HIV is usually contracted through an immoral lifestyle choice, either sex or drugs. But, of course, as the disease has spread, innocent people get it from those who weren't innocent, and the accompanying unfair judgment just adds to the pain.

You're right, too, all churches aren't like this, but it's hard to find a grace-based church that knows the truth about how God accepts us no matter what. Our church, for example,

embraced a man who eventually died of AIDS, and he was greatly loved. But part of that process was educating them about their own risk to exposure to him, and assuring them that unless they came in contact with his body fluids they had nothing to worry about. Which is why some of us particularly delighted in hugging him and kissing him on the forehead to communicate that we cared.

Let me share something someone e-mailed me. I love this story and I bet you will too.

> ***Slandering The Blood of Jesus*** *One night in a church service a young woman felt the tug of God at her heart. She responded to God's call and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. The young woman had a very rough past, involving alcohol, drugs, and prostitution. But, the change in her was evident. As time went on she became a faithful member of the church. She eventually became involved in the ministry, teaching young children. It was not very long until this faithful young woman had caught the eye and heart of the pastor's son. Their relationship grew and they began to make wedding plans. This is when the problems began. You see, about one half of the church did not think that a woman with a past such as hers was suitable for a pastor's son. The church members began to argue and fight about the matter. So they decided to have a meeting. As the people made their arguments and tensions increased, the meeting was getting completely out of hand. The young woman became very upset about all the things being brought up about her past. As she began to cry the pastor's son stood to speak. He could not bear the pain it was causing his wife to be. He began to speak and his statement was this: " My fiance's past is not what is on trial here. What you are questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sin. Today you have put the blood of Jesus on trial. So, does it wash away sin or not?" The whole church began to weep as they realized that they had been slandering the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Too often, even as Christians, we bring up*

> *the past and use it as a weapon against our brothers and sisters. Forgiveness is a very foundational part of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the blood of Jesus does not cleanse the other person completely then it cannot cleanse us completely. If that is the case, then we are all in a lot of trouble. What can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus…. end of case!!! God Forgives.. So should we.*

Bless you, _____.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"Is it a sin for a married couple to masturbate during sex?"

Is it a sin for a married couple to masturbate during sex? In many cases a woman can't get an orgasm without proper stimulation.

If a married couple is making love, then nothing they do together is considered masturbation. It's all part of holy sex. (Masturbation is self-pleasure by oneself.)

You're right, most women can't have an orgasm without stimulation, which is how God planned it, I think. . . .the idea being that her husband would be the one to give her pleasure that way. The Song of Solomon even has a verse about the wife asking her husband to do exactly that: "Let his left

hand be under my head, and his right hand embrace me." (SoS 2:6).

Nothing a married couple does in the marriage bed is sin as long as it is mutually acceptable and it doesn't involve anyone else (for example, porn movies or fantasies that involve another person). I think God intends for us to experience far more freedom and enjoyment than a lot of people think! May I suggest you get an EXCELLENT book for married women called *Intimate Issues* by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus. Absolutely the best book on the subject for women out there, I think. Please also see our article What's God's Plan for Sex in Marriage?"

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Race and Racial Issues – A Biblical Christian Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at the issue of race from a Christian worldview perspective. The Bible clearly teaches that all people are valuable and loved by God with no distinction based on race. As Christians, we are called to set an example by seeing all peoples as worthy of our love and our respect.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Race has divided people in our world for millennia, and the

prejudice of racism is still with us today. So in this article we are going to focus on some important aspects of race and racial issues.

At the outset we should acknowledge that, although we will use the term “race” through this discussion, it is not a very precise term. First, the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups. But the Bible doesn’t provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences.

The Bible teaches that God has made “from one blood every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). Here Paul is teaching the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. We are all from one blood. In other words, there are no superior or inferior races. We are all from the same race: the human race.

Race is also an imprecise term in large part because it is not based upon scientific data. People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. It turns out that the so-called differences in the races is not very great. A recent study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.{1} And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. The remaining 94 percent is “within race” variation.

Let’s put it another way. All the racial differences that have been so important to people for generations are statistically insignificant from a scientific point of view. These differences are trivial when you consider the 3 trillion base pairs of human DNA.

A third reason the term “race” also lacks precision is due to

interracial marriage. While it is probably true that the so-called races of the world were never completely divided, it is certainly true that the lines are becoming quite blurred today. Take golfer Tiger Woods as one example. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

Isn't it ironic that at a time when racial lines are blurring more and more each generation, the government still collects data that requires individuals to check one box that represents their racial or ethnic heritage? A growing number of people are finding it hard to classify themselves by checking just one box.

The Curse on Ham

Sadly, one of the most destructive false teachings supposedly based on the Bible is the so-called "curse on Ham." Ham was one of Noah's three sons (along with Shem and Japheth).

In the past, certain cults and even some orthodox Christian groups have held to the belief that the skin color of black people was due to a curse on Ham and his descendants. Unfortunately, this false teaching has been used to justify racial discrimination and even slavery.

One group said, "We know the circumstances under which the posterity of Cain (and later Ham) were cursed with what we call Negroid racial characteristics."{2} Another group argued that "The curse which Noah pronounced upon Canaan was the origin of the black race."{3}

First, let's clearly state that the Bible does not teach that people with black skin color are cursed by God. This curse was not the origin of the black race or black racial characteristics.

Second, it wasn't Ham who was cursed but his son Canaan (Gen. 9:18-27; 10:6). Only one of Ham's four sons (Cush, Mizraim,

Put, and Canaan) was cursed, so how could all black people be cursed?

As it turns out, the curse on Canaan has unfolded in history. The descendants of Canaan were perhaps one of the most wicked people to live on earth. They were the inhabitants, for example, of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Third, even if a curse is given, the Bible clearly places limitations on curses to three or four generations. In Exodus 20:5-6 God says, “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

Notice that this passage seems to teach that curses based upon disobedience are reversed when people repent and turn back to obedience. So not only is a curse limited, obedience to God’s principles can break it.

Fourth, the Bible teaches that the fulfillment of the curse on Canaan took place with the defeat and subjugation of Canaan by Israel (Joshua 9:23; 1 Kings 9:20-21). This had nothing to do with placing black people under a permanent curse.

Although the idea of “the curse on Ham” has been dying a well-deserved death, it is still important to remember that not so long ago people were misinterpreting a biblical passage to justify their racism and discrimination. No one race or people group is inferior to any other. In fact, the Bible teaches that preferences based upon race, class, or ethnic origin are sinful and subject to God’s judgment (James 2:9-13). All of us are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) and have value and dignity.

Racism

Racism has no doubt been the scourge of humanity. It usually surfaces from generalized assumptions made about a particular race or cultural group. While it is wrong and unfair to assign particular negative characteristics to everyone within a racial group, it is done all the time. The bitter result of these racial attitudes is intolerance and discrimination.

Often racism goes beyond just individual attitudes. These racial attitudes can become the mindset of a particular people group who may use cultural as well as legal means to suppress another race. These cultural norms and laws can be used by the majority race to exploit and discriminate against the minority race.

Although racism has existed throughout the centuries, it gained an unexpected ally in the scientific realm in the nineteenth century. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. It was the last part of that title that no doubt furthered some of the ideas of racial superiority that flourished during that time.

It is not at all clear that Darwin meant to apply the concept of favored races in this particular book to human beings. In fact, he did write more on this subject later, but the provocative nature of the subtitle was enough to fuel discussions about racial superiority and inferiority. Later Darwinists took the concept far beyond what Charles Darwin intended.

So why do people hold racist attitudes? Three reasons are: feelings of pride, feelings of inferiority, and feelings of fear. Pride and arrogance fuel racism. When we are proud of who we are, we can easily look down upon those who are

different from us and do not manifest the same characteristics that we do. We can start believing we are superior to another person or race.

Racism, however, can come from the opposite end of the emotional spectrum: inferiority. We may not feel good about ourselves. So in order to feel good about ourselves, we disparage another person or race.

Racism also results from fear. We fear what we don't understand. We fear what is strange and foreign. Racial and cultural differences may even seem dangerous to us. Racial attitudes can surface if we don't seek to know and understand those who are different from us.

We should stand strong against racism and racist attitudes wherever we find them: in the society, in individuals, even within the church.

Biblical Perspective

We have already noted that the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups, but the Bible doesn't provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26 KJV).

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority. In Philippians 2, Paul admonishes the Christians to live in harmony with one another. They are to have a gentle spirit toward one another, and to let this gentle spirit be known to others.

Christians are also admonished to refrain from using class distinctions within the church. In James 2, believers are told

not to make class distinctions between various people. They are not to show partiality within the church. Showing favoritism is called sin and the one showing favoritism is convicted by the law. Surely these commands would also apply to holding views of racial superiority and inferiority.

Likewise Paul instructs Timothy (1 Tim. 5:21) to keep his instructions without partiality and to do nothing out of favoritism. This command would also exclude making racial distinctions based on a view of racial superiority.

Finally, we see that Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ. For example, he teaches in Colossians 3:11 that "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." This is a significant passage because it shows that Christ has removed four kinds of distinctions: national distinctions (Greek or Jew), religious distinctions (circumcised or uncircumcised), cultural distinctions (barbarian or Scythian), and economic distinctions (slave or free).

A similar passage would be Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Christ, our human distinctions lose their significance. No one is superior to another. A believing Jew is not superior to a believing Greek. A believing slave is of no higher rank than a believing free person.

Racism and racist attitudes are wrong. Christians should work to remove such ideas and attitudes from society.

Becoming Culturally Sensitive

Here are some suggestions on how to become more sensitive to differences in race and culture.

First, we need to take an accurate assessment of ourselves. Often our assumptions and predispositions affect the way we perceive and even treat others. A person who says he or she has no prejudices is probably in denial. All of us perceive the world differently and find it easier to accept people who are like us and harder to understand people who are different from us.

Our cultural worldview affects how we perceive others. It affects how we evaluate what others think and what others do. So an important first step in becoming more racial and culturally sensitive is to evaluate ourselves.

Second, we should try to empathize with others. We must start learning how to look at life and our circumstances from the viewpoint of others. Instead of trying to make others think like us, we should strive to begin to begin to think like them. That doesn't mean we have to agree with their viewpoint, but it does mean that becoming empathetic will be helpful in bridging racial and cultural barriers.

Third, learn to withhold judgment. Tolerance (in the biblical sense of the word) is a virtue we should cultivate. We should be willing to put aside our critical thinking and judgment until we know someone better. Taking the time to listen and understand the other person will help build bridges and dismantle barriers that often separate and isolate races and cultures.

Fourth, do not consider yourself superior to another. One of the root causes of racism is a belief in racial superiority. Paul tell us in Romans 12:3 that a man should not "think more highly of himself than he ought to think." Differences in race and culture should never be used to justify feelings of racial superiority which can lead to racist attitudes.

Fifth, develop cross cultural traits. A missionary who goes overseas must learn to develop personal traits that will make

him or her successful in a new and different culture. Likewise, we should develop these traits so that we can reach across a racial and cultural divide. Friendliness and open communication are important. Flexibility and open-mindedness are also important. Developing these traits will enhance our ability to bridge a racial and cultural gap.

Finally, we should take a stand. We shouldn't tell (or allow others to tell) racial and ethnic jokes. These are demeaning to others and perpetuate racism and racial attitudes. Instead we should be God's instrument in bring about racial reconciliation. We should seek to build bridges and close the racial and cultural divide between people groups and reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. J. C. Gutin, "End of the Rainbow," *Discover,* Nov. 1994, 71-75.
2. Bruce McConkie, "Apostle of the Mormon Council of 12," *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake: Bookcraft,1958), 554.
3. "The Golden Age," *The Watchtower,* 24 July 1929, 702.

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Cool Stuff About Love and Sex

Hey, kids. Want to read some cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your folks? Hey, parents. Want to learn how to communicate with your kids about these important topics? Read on!

This article is also available in Spanish. 

Cool Stuff

Psst! Hey, kids! Want to hear some really cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your parents? Listen up! (But . . . how about closing your ears for the next few seconds?)

Hey, parents! Want to learn how to talk to your kids about sex in a way they will understand and relate to? Keep listening.{1}

OK, kids. You can listen again.

“A fulfilling love life. How can I have one? How can I get the most out of sex?” University students worldwide ask these questions. As I’ve spoken on their campuses, I’ve tried to offer some practical principles because I believe both pleasure and emotional fulfillment are important facets of sex. These principles relate to teens, too. Teens of all ages.

Sex is often on our minds. According to two psychologists at the universities of Vermont and South Carolina, 95% of people think about sex at least once each day.{2} You might wonder, “You mean that 5% of the people *don’t*?”

Why does sex exist? One of the main purposes of sex is pleasure. Consider what one wise man named Solomon wrote. Writing sometimes in “PG” (but not “R-rated”) terms, he said:

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;

Be exhilarated always with her love.{3}

Solomon's ancient love sonnet, the "Song of Solomon," is one of the best sex manuals ever written. It traces the beauty of a sexual relationship in marriage and is an openly frank description of marital sexual intimacy. You might want to read it yourself. (Would it surprise you to know that it's in the Bible? You can dog-ear the good parts.)

Another purpose of sex is to develop oneness or unity. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, Moses, the great Israeli liberator, wrote, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."{4} When two people unite sexually, they "become one flesh."

A third purpose for sex is procreation. That, of course, is how we all got here. You learn that in first year biology, right?

OK, so sex is for pleasure, unity, and procreation. But how can people get the most out of love and sex?

How to Have a Most Fulfilling Love Life

One way not to have a fulfilling love life in marriage is to concentrate solely on sexual technique. There is certainly nothing wrong with learning sexual technique—especially the basics—but technique by itself is not the answer.

The qualities that contribute to a successful sex life are the same ones that contribute to a successful interpersonal relationship. Qualities like love, commitment, and communication.

Consider love. As popular speaker and author Josh McDowell points out, those romantic words, "I love you," can be interpreted several different ways. One meaning is "I love you *if*—If you go out with me . . . if you are lighthearted . . .

if you sleep with me." Another meaning is "I love you *because*—because you are attractive . . . strong . . . intelligent." Both types of love must be earned.

The best kind of love is unconditional. It says, "I love you, *period*. I love you even if someone better looking comes along, even if you change, even if you have zoo breath in the morning. I place your needs above my own."

One young engaged couple had popularity, intelligence, good looks, and athletic success that seemed to portend a bright future. Then the young woman suffered a skiing accident that left her paralyzed for life. Her fiancé deserted her.

This true story—portrayed in the popular film, "The Other Side of the Mountain"—was certainly complex. But was his love for her "love, period"? Or was it love "if" or love "because"? Unconditional love (or "less-conditional", because none of us is perfect) is an essential building block for a lasting relationship.

Unconditional love with caring and acceptance can help a sexual relationship in a marriage. Sex, viewed in this manner, becomes not a self-centered performance but a significant expression of mutual love.

Commitment is also important for a strong relationship and fulfilling sex. Without mutual commitment, neither spouse will be able to have the maximum confidence that the relationship is secure.

Good communication is essential. If a problem arises, couples need to talk it out and forgive rather than stew in their juices. As one sociology professor expressed it, "Sexual foreplay involves the 'round-the-clock relationship.'"{5}

Why Wait?

After I'd spoken in a human sexuality class at Arizona State University, one student said, "You're talking about sex within marriage. What about premarital sex?" He was right. I was saying that sexual intercourse is designed to work best in a happy marriage and recommending waiting until marriage before experiencing sex.

This view is, of course, very controversial. You may agree with me. Or you may think I am from another planet, and I respect your right to feel that way. Here's why I waited.

First is a moral reason. According to the perspective I represent, the biblical God clearly says to wait.{6} Some people think that God wants to make them miserable. Actually, He loves us and wants our best. There are practical reasons for waiting.

Premarital sex can detract from a strong relationship and a fulfilling love life. Too often, it's merely a self-gratifying experience. After an intimate sexual encounter, one partner might be saying, "I love you" while the other is thinking, "I love it."

Very often premarital sex lacks total, permanent commitment. This can create insecurity. For instance, while the couple is unmarried, the nagging thought can persist, "If he or she has slept with me, whom else have they slept with?" After they marry, one might think, "If they were willing to break a standard with me before we married, will they with someone else after we marry?" Doubt can chip away at their relationship.

Premarital sex can also inhibit communication. Each might wonder, "How do I compare with my lover's other partners? Does he or she tell them how I perform in bed?" Each may become less open; communication can deteriorate and so can the

relationship. Premarital sex can lessen people's chances to experience maximum oneness and pleasure. I'm not claiming that premarital sex eliminates your chances for great sex in marriage. But I am saying that it can introduce factors that can be difficult to overcome.

A recently married young woman told me her perspective after a lecture at Sydney University in Australia. She said, "I really like what you said about waiting. My fiancé and I had to make the decision and we decided to wait." (Each had been sexually active in other previous relationships.) She continued: "With all the other tensions, decisions and stress of engagement, sex would have been just another worry. Waiting 'till our marriage before we had sex was the best decision we ever made."

Wise words. I waited because God said to, because there were many practical advantages, and because none of the arguments I heard for not waiting were strong enough.{7}

The Vital Dimension

So far we've looked at "Why sex?", "How to have a most fulfilling love life," and "Why wait?". Consider now the vital dimension in any relationship.

Powerful emotional factors can make it difficult for teens to wait until marriage for sexual intercourse or to stop having sex. A longing to be close to someone or a yearning to express love can generate intense desires for physical intimacy. Many singles today want to wait but lack the inner strength or self esteem. They may fear losing love if they postpone sex.

Often sex brings emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it. As one TV producer told me, "Frankly, I think the sexual revolution has backfired in our faces. It's degrading to be treated like a piece of meat." The previous night her lover had justified his decision to sleep around by

telling her, “There’s plenty of me for everyone.” What I suspect he meant was, “There’s plenty of everyone for me.” She felt betrayed and alone.

I explained to her and to her TV audience that sexuality also involves the spiritual. One wise spiritual teacher understood our loneliness and longings for love. He recognized human emotional needs for esteem, acceptance, and wholeness and offered a plan to meet them. His plan has helped people to become brand “new persons” inside.{8} He promised unconditional love to all who ask.{9} Once we know we’re loved and accepted, we can have greater security to be vulnerable in relationships and new inner strength to make wise choices for safe living.{10}

This teacher said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”{11} Millions attest to the safety and security He can provide in relationships. His name, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth. Though I had been a skeptic, I placed my faith in Him personally my freshman year in college. Through a simple heart attitude, I said, “Jesus, I believe you died and rose again for me. I ask you to enter my life, forgive me, and give me the new life you promised.” He forgave all my flaws—and there were (and are) many of those. He said His own death and resurrection—once I accepted His pardon—erased my guilt.{12} That was great news!

Marriage with Jesus involved can be like triangle with God at the apex and the two spouses at the bottom corners. As each partner grows closer to God, they also grow closer to each other. Life doesn’t become perfect, but God’s friendship can bring a vital dimension to any relationship.

Parents and Kids

A nationwide survey of teens asked the question, “When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?” Forty-nine percent of teens responding said it was their

parents. The next closest response was “Friends” (16 percent). Eleven percent said the media influenced their decisions about sex the most. Only 5 percent said it was their romantic partner.{13} Kids, lots of your peers think that it is important to consider how their parents feel about sex.

And teens feel that talking with their parents about sex can make important sexual decisions easier. In a subsequent national survey, teens overwhelmingly expressed that they could more easily postpone sexual activity and avoid getting pregnant if they could only talk about these matters more openly with their folks.{14}

But there’s a problem. Too many parents are unaware how important what they think about sex is to their teens. Parents often think that their teenagers’ friends are the strongest influence on their teen’s decisions about sex. Yet teens don’t consider their friends as being nearly as influential as parents think they are.{15}

And mom, you are really, really important!

A major report based on two University of Minnesota studies involving national data found that teens having close relationships with their mothers are more likely than teens lacking close relationships with their mothers to delay first intercourse. The report authors note, “previous studies have shown that mothers tend to have a greater influence than fathers on teens’ sexual decision-making.”{16}

What can a parent do to help their teens develop positive, healthy sexual attitudes and behavior? Here are some ideas:

- Develop close, loving relationships with your kids from the time they are young.
- Model the types of behavior and attitudes you wish them to emulate.
- Listen to them and treat them with respect.
- Talk about sex, your own values, and why you hold them.

- Help your teen think through their life goals, including education, and how teenage sexual activity might affect their dreams.
- Discuss what types of media are appropriate for your son or daughter to consume.

Making sexual decisions can be hard for teens today. Parents and teens can help each other by becoming close friends and by communicating. It's not always easy, but the rewards can be significant.

Notes

1. Parts of this article are adapted from Rusty Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," Every Student's Choice, 1996 and Rusty Wright, "Safe Sex?", Cross & Crescent LXXXI:4, Winter 1994-95, pp. 19-21.
2. Kathleen Kelleher, "Entertaining Fantasies? Don't Worry, Everyone's Doing It," *Los Angeles Times,* August 15, 1995, E1. She cites Harold Leitenberg of the University of Vermont and Kris Henning, "now at the University of South Carolina Medical School".
3. Proverbs 5:15-19 NASB.
4. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
5. Emily Dale, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, 1975.
6. 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.
7. For a summary of arguments for premarital sex, with responses, see Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," op. cit.
8. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT.
9. John 3:16; 13:34-35; 17:20, 23, 26; 1 John 4:7-21, 5:14-15.
10. Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:16-24; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.
11. John 8:32 NASB.
12. Luke 24:44-47; Colossians 2:12-14.
13. "Faithful Nation: What American Adults and Teens Think

About Faith, Morals, Religion, and Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, September 2001, p. 5; http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/keeping.pdf.
14. "With One Voice 2002: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, December 2002, pp. 2, 26, 27; http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/WOV2002_fulltext.pdf.
15. Ibid., pp. 2, 22-23.
16. "Teens' Closeness With Their Mothers Linked to Delay in Initiation of Sexual Activity, Study Says," Kaiser Daily Reproductive Health Report, September 5, 2002, http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/print_report.cfm?DR_ID=13275&dr_cat=2. The words quoted are those of the Kaiser Report summary of what the University of Minnesota research authors communicated.

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Romantic Hyperbole: A Humorous Look at Honesty in Love

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

It would be a great way to express my enduring affection for my wife. I would find seven romantic birthday cards and give

one to Meg each day for a week, starting on her birthday. It would continue a sweet tradition begun before we married.

Each card would have a simple picture that would tenderly convey our feelings for one another. Inside would be an endearing slogan or affirmation to which I would add a personal expression of my love for her.

I didn't foresee that Day Three would bring an ethical dilemma.

I carefully selected the cards and arranged them in an appropriate sequence. Day One showed a cute puppy with a pink rose. Inside: "You're the one I love."

Day Two featured a picture of a little boy and girl in a meadow with their arms over each other's shoulders. The slogan: "Happy Birthday to my favorite playmate."

Day Three depicted a beautiful tropical sunset: bluish pink sky, vast ocean, silhouetted palm trees. You could almost feel the balmy breeze. Inside: "Paradise is anywhere with you", to which I added personal mention of places holding special memories for us: an island vacation spot, a North Carolina hotel, our home.

I completed the remaining cards, dated the envelopes, and planned to bestow one card each morning of her birth week. Then reality happened.

You see, I had agreed to go camping with her for Days One and Two. Camping is something Meg thrives on—outdoor living, clean air, hiking, camp fires. It's in her blood. Camping is something I did in Boy Scouts—dust, mosquitoes, noisy campers, smelly latrines. It ranks just below root canals on my list of favorites.

We camped at a state park only fifteen minutes from our home. On her birthday morning, she liked the fluffy puppy. Day Two,

the cute kids made her smile. So far, so good.

Meanwhile, I was tolerating camping, doing my best to keep my attitude positive. The food was OK; the bugs were scarce. After two days, I was ready to go home as planned. Meg wanted to stay an extra day. We each got our wish.

Once home and alone, I pulled out Meg's card for "Day Three," the one with the tropical sunset and the "paradise is anywhere with you" slogan.

Should I give her the card? I had chosen to leave the campground. "But," I reasoned with myself, "the slogan was true lots of the time."

I settled on a compromise, a post-it note on the envelope explaining, "You may find that this card contains just a bit of romantic hyperbole."

Might giving it a clever-sounding label defuse my hypocrisy?

The echoes of her laughter still reverberate through our home. I got off easy.

"Speak the truth to each other," wrote a Jewish sage. "Speak. . . the truth in love," advocated a first-century biblical writer. Wise advice for just about any relationship.

"Romantic hyperbole" has become a humorous gauge of truthfulness in our relationship, a test for honesty. Neither of us enjoys every location on earth. She feels some sporting events are a waste of time. I can get bored at shopping malls. But as long as we are honest with each other about our feelings, the bond seems to grow stronger.

That's no hyperbole.

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Love Myths

Soul Mates

In this article we are going to focus on a few of the myths surrounding love and romance that can have a negative effect on dating and marriage. Some of these ideas have become so pervasive in our society that it may seem heretical to label them as myths. But as we will see, they can have a devastating impact if they are accepted uncritically.

The first myth is the belief that you will know when you meet "the one." Of course, this assumes that there is only one person who is right for you—a soul mate you must find and marry. Garry Friesen in his book *Decision Making & the Will of God* (along with many other Christian writers) question whether there is *only* one right person for you to marry. But I will set aside this theological question to focus on some relevant practical issues.

First, is the problem of a false positive. We have all heard stories about couples who met and immediately one or both of them knew they were going to marry the other person. Often we call this "love at first sight." But we don't hear as much about the many other people who met, thought they had met "the one," but later decided not to get married or ended up getting married and then divorced.

Certain people come into our lives and we immediately "click" with them. Why? We carry around in our minds a template of what that certain ideal person may be. It is influenced by our family background, our own expectations, books, movies, and personal experiences. When that template comes into our lives sparks fly. We may not even know much about that person's

social, family, and religious background, but we are immediately attracted to him or her. We may feel that he or she is “the one,” but over time our relationship may surface concerns that might be detrimental to a successful marriage. Unfortunately, many people can be blinded by a belief that they have met “the one” and thus ignore important warning signs.

Second is the problem of the false negative. We also no doubt have heard stories of couples who weren’t attracted to each other when they first met. Many didn’t even like the other person. Only over time did they get to know each other and began to see admirable qualities in what became their marriage partner.

Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* (New York: Pedigree, 2000) says we are a romance-addicted society. We love movies with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, but life is more complicated than what is portrayed in movies with skillfully written plots, blended music, beautiful actors, and exotic locations.

Choosing a marriage partner requires more than romance and emotion. For every story someone tells of finding “the one” and experiencing “love at first sight,” there are many more where those initial emotions turned out to be wrong.

Two Peas in a Pod

The second love myth is the belief that you should be similar to your partner. This myth is quite pervasive in part because there is some truth to it. Obviously, there should be some common basis of belief within a marriage. The Bible warns Christians not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” (2 Cor. 6:14) And there should be some common areas of social and cultural similarity.

But I believe we should question the prevailing belief that

your life partner should be the same age, height, and race while having the same interests, gifts, and abilities. As some marriage counselors have said, “If your mate is exactly like you, then one of you is redundant.” Strong marriages celebrate the differences and work to have each person’s gifts and abilities complement the other. One partner may be good with the finances. The other partner may be good in the kitchen. One partner may be good at details. The other partner may be able to look at the bigger picture and plan for the future. Each partner’s gifts complement the other partner’s gifts.

In many cases, having a similar partner can actually be a source of conflict. Kevin Leman has found that two “first-borns” bring their perfectionist tendencies into a marriage. They will often “pick” at each other leading to increased marital conflict. Does that mean that two first-born children should never marry? Of course not. But they might want to reconsider whether they want to marry someone who is so similar to them.

What about differences in age? Couples should obviously consider the implications of vast differences in age in terms of energy level, hobbies, activities, and friendships. But there is also good reason to begin to rethink the prevailing assumption that compatibility must be based upon similar ages. Once again different ages and life experiences might be a significant way to bring complementarity into a marriage.

The same could be said about difference in ethnicity. Not so long ago, society frowned upon so-called mixed marriages. Today, more and more marriage partners come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. While we still tend to marry people who come from the same social and cultural background, this trend seems to be changing.

The key point is this: you don’t have to be similar to your partner to have a good marriage. In fact, your differences might actually help you to complement each other in marriage.

Annoying Habits

Now I would like to focus on the question of whether little annoying habits are unimportant in a long-term relationship.

When we are in love, little things like bad manners or chronic lateness may seem insignificant. Besides, we reason, we can always change our partner later on so that this is no longer a problem. We may even convince ourselves that these little annoying habits are kind of cute.

Well, they may seem cute in the courtship phase of a relationship, but they usually don't stay cute once you are married and have to deal with them every day. In fact, small habits often grow into bigger habits once they are indulged.

The book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* describes a study done by Professor Diane Femly at the University of California-Davis. The researcher asked people why they married and then why they divorced. The reasons for both were often quite similar. The only difference is that what was once sweet had now turned sour.

For example, a person might say: "I married him for his incredible sense of humor." When asked why they broke up, she might say: "He was always silly, he was a lightweight." Another person might cite her partner's creativity and spontaneity as a big attraction, but later said of her spouse that he was "a dreamer" who "couldn't stick with any one thing, couldn't plan anything ahead of time."

So it wasn't that these people didn't know who they married. Their spouse hadn't changed, but their tolerance of their habits had changed. What was a minor annoyance before they married, became a major reason for their breakup later on.

Frankly, I believe one of the real tests in a marriage are the minor annoyances of everyday life because they accumulate day after day. A quirky habit might be even attractive when you

first encounter it, but with daily repetition can become annoying and irksome.

A related issue is the iceberg problem. Most of the mass of an iceberg is below the surface. Likewise, most of the really difficult problems a person may have will stay below the surface during the dating and courtship phase of a relationship. Many couples, in fact, awake on their honeymoons to an entirely different person than the one they thought they married.

Here are a few issues to consider:

> • *Cleanliness: what might at first seem like an admirable lack of vanity may indicate a general lack of personal hygiene.*
>
> • *Neatness: although keeping things in order may seem like a small thing, it can develop into a major problem in marriage reminiscent of scenes from "The Odd Couple."*

The bottom line is this: consider the long-term impact these little annoying habits will have in your marriage, *before* you get married.

Living Together

Next I would like to look at the question of living together before marriage.

In our society today, cohabitation has become an extension of dating and courtship. Couples see living together as an audition for marriage, reasoning that you want to get to know someone intimately before you marry them. Although the logic seems sound, it not only goes against biblical injunctions but against sound sociological research.

A 1999 study by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead released through the National Marriage Project at

Rutgers University confirms earlier studies about the danger of cohabiting and added additional detail. They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. Whitehead says that living together is “a fragile family form that poses increased risk to women and children.”

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. “Women tend to see [living together] as a step toward eventual marriage, while men regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment.” And people who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems, and instead will seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

The National Institute for Healthcare Research has found that couples who live together and then marry report less satisfaction in their marriages than other couples. Scott Stanley at the University of Denver has found that cohabiting couples who get married have a significantly higher rate of divorce than those who did not live together.(*A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Josey-Bass, 1998)

Couples argue that living together will provide important information about how a partner will behave and interact once married. But a cohabiting person may be quite different from a person within marriage. Marriage is a commitment for life, while cohabitation is usually a commitment for a season. That makes a big difference in a relationship. It’s like the difference between being in a play and auditioning for the play. In the first example, you are in the stage production and working to make the play the best it can be. In the second example, you are trying out for the play and have much less invested.

Couples may also argue that they can live together and

eventually get married when they are ready for children. But will that day ever come? The living together arrangement actually erodes a foundation of commitment rather than strengthening it. And if the woman becomes pregnant during cohabitation rather than marriage, it is less likely that the children will have a legal (and committed) father.

Living together before marriage may sound like a good idea, until you look at the facts.

Got Problems? Have Kids

Finally I would like to conclude by focusing on the idea that children bring a couple closer.

To begin, let’s acknowledge that Psalm 127:3 says that children are a gift from the Lord. Children are wonderful. A Christian family with children is delightful.

The issue here is the prevailing belief that bringing a child into a relationship that has problems will improve the situation. There is good evidence to believe that is not the case. If anything, a child can increase the tensions that are already present. Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* believes this may be the most damaging myth of the 25 myths she addresses in her book.

The fantasy that children will increase love and intimacy needs to be balanced by the reality that child-rearing also involves time and energy that can increase stress, fatigue, and worry. It will also decrease privacy and communication between partners. Unfortunately, many young couples may underestimate the impact of children on their marriage and be unprepared for the constant daily attention necessary to be a successful parent.

While having a child may be one of the most intimate things a man and a woman can do, the erosion of intimacy after the child arrives often surprises many couples. Even before the

child arrives, a pregnant mother often begins to feel fat and unattractive. Once the baby arrives, she must give most of her time and attention to the child. On the positive side, she is madly in love with the child but may tend to squeeze her husband out of the picture. On the negative side, she may be so exhausted from caring for a child all day that she has little energy left for her husband.

Even good marriages must work hard not to allow their marriage to be pulled into two parallel worlds. It is natural to begin to divide tasks and focus on those, but couples need to schedule "date nights" and "talk times" to make sure their two worlds intersect. Isolation is a natural drift in any marriage. Children and children's activities can increase isolation if marriage partners don't attempt to counter-program against the pressures that naturally will push a couple apart.

Couples should also plan ahead for a time when children are not a constant focus of the marriage. In my article on *The Second Half of Marriage,* I talk about the time when children begin to leave the nest. No longer does the marriage have to be child-focused. It should return to a partner-focused marriage. Even while a couple is traveling through "the valley of the diapers," they should keep a clear focus on the need to invest time, energy, and emotions in their partner.

Children are a gift from the Lord, but couples should understand their impact on a marriage. If a marriage has problems, having children will not bring that couple closer.

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“My Racist Parents Disapprove of My Boyfriend”

I am a Christian. I have had a boyfriend for almost three years. He is a wonderful guy…inside and out. He is a strong Christian and we have great chemistry and are very like-minded in our habits, finances, etc. I love him very, very much.

The only thing is that we are an interracial couple… with him being Chinese-American and me being white. There are some cultural differences in that his family depends on him for support….and that worries me. (That in the future, he will never leave his family so we can start our own family.)

Also, he loves his mother and sister dearly and I feel that he compares me to them…which I can never meet up. I can’t help but to feel jealous for the way he loves and puts his sister on a pedestal. I compare myself to her frequently and it is killing my confidence.

Furthermore, my parents (they are non-Christians) strongly disapprove of our relationship because of his race.

I guess my questions are: 1) What does the bible say about interracial dating/marriage and 2) Should I obey my parents or give in to their racism?

I am just overwhelmed and have lost myself in all these problems. I know God will keep us together if it is in His will…but I could really use some godly truth and insight to all these things. Can you offer some insight into my problem?

The Bible makes distinctions between two kinds of people: believers and non-believers. It says nothing about interracial marriages. We have an article on that here: www.probe.org/what-does-the-bible-say-about-interracial-marriages/

Obeying your parents is a command for children. Once we become adults, we are commanded to *honor* our parents. The difference is that once we're adults, we take our direction directly from God. We honor, not obey, our parents by listening to what they say and seriously considering it, and then doing whatever God leads us to do.

However, the cautions you express about your relationship are very serious and should be explored even if your parents were 100% for your marriage. You not only have a cultural difference, you have a situation where your boyfriend's relationship with his mother and sister could very well be more important than his relationship with you. That's why Gen. 2:24 (later re-emphasized by Jesus Himself) says that a man should leave his mother and father (both physically and emotionally) and cleave (i.e., stick like Superglue) to his wife. If a man's primary emotional connection is to his family of origin instead of his wife, the marriage will be in trouble from day one.

You need to have a very frank talk with him about his emotional priorities. It may well be that this is a matter of your perception and not his reality, because of your own insecurities. If you fight jealousy and insecurity NOW, there's a good chance it will only get worse. That's a part of finishing growing up that you need to deal with before you marry anyone, but spend some time finding out who you are and what your strengths and "gift package" are so that you are content with YOU. If you're content with yourself and able to accept yourself, you won't waste emotional energy comparing yourself with others.

One other thing: if your boyfriend's emotional warmth toward his mother and sister is actually healthy and he would truly have no problem putting you first, then the fact that he has a good relationship with them is a good thing. It's when men are hostile and disrespectful toward female relatives that there is a red flag. (The other red flag is when a man bonds more

with his female relatives than with his male relatives.)

I would suggest that you spend more time talking to him about this, especially your fears that he will never leave his family so you can start your own. There are many, many forces against marriages today. If you get married knowing that both families are not in agreement, you are adding a huge amount of stress to your relationship, because I can verify after 28 years of marriage that you don't just marry a person, you marry a family.

You need to read some good books on Christian marriage: FamilyLife.com is a wonderful resource.

In the wise words of Dr. Laura, sometimes love just isn't enough.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

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St. Augustine

Former Probe intern Tim Garrett explains that St. Augustine's The City of God *and his* Confessions *reveal not only a brilliant mind, but demonstrate his abiding concern to announce God's righteousness in His dealings with man.*

Who Was St. Augustine?

One of the most remarkable things about a close reading of Church history is that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. In the New Testament we find that a man who called

himself “the chief of sinners” due to his murderous hatred toward Christians was saved when Christ Himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus. What is clear from the account in the ninth chapter of the Book of Acts is that it was not Saul who was seeking Christ: instead, it was Christ who was seeking Paul.

In modern times we see a similar situation in the life of C. S. Lewis. In *Surprised by Joy,* he recounts the night that he knelt to admit that God was God by calling himself “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” Like the Apostle Paul, we can see that Lewis was perfectly prepared to be an apologist for the faith, but that preparation occurred *before he ever became a Christian!* It is only after the fact that we see how God was actively seeking the sinner.

In this article we will examine another reluctant convert, a man whose life and ministry has been crucial to church history. His name was Aurelius Augustine: we know him as St. Augustine of Hippo. But until his conversion, Augustine was anything but a saint! Born in the year 354 in North Africa, Augustine was raised by a Christian mother and a pagan father. The father’s main desire was that his son get a good education, while his mother constantly worried about her son’s eternal destiny. Augustine indeed received a first class education, but his mother was tormented by his indulgent lifestyle. Augustine became involved with a concubine at the age of seventeen, a relationship which lasted thirteen years and produced one son. Recognizing that sexual lust was competing with Christ for his affections, Augustine uttered the famous prayer “Make me chaste Lord . . . but not yet.”

While sexual passion ruled his heart, Augustine sought wisdom with his mind. After suffering enormous internal conflicts, Augustine submitted himself to Christ at the age of thirty-two, and soon thereafter became Bishop of Hippo. Augustine became a tireless defender of the faith, diligent in his role as a shepherd to the flock as well as one of the greatest

intellects the Church has ever known.

In this look at the life of Augustine we will focus on two of his greatest books—the *Confessions*, and *The City of God*. As we will see, Augustine's life and work is a testimony to the boundless mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Augustine's Youth

In a gripping television interview recently broadcast on *60 Minutes,* the man convicted of the Oklahoma City bombings spoke of his grievances against the federal government. During the interview, Timothy McVeigh revealed that his lawyers have filed an appeal that maintains that pre-trial publicity prevented him from getting a fair trial. Like many of us, McVeigh seems intent on avoiding the penalty of his actions; but rather than doing so by insisting upon his innocence, he is attempting to have the verdict thrown out due to a technicality.

It was truly disturbing to see an articulate young man such as McVeigh coldly dismiss the mass murder of innocents on the basis of a legal technicality. In many respects, his demeanor reflects the contemporary shift in attitude toward sin and guilt that has had devastating consequences for society. As a nation, America has seen a shift from a worldview primarily informed by biblical Christianity to one in which the individual is no longer responsible for his actions. Now it is either society or how one is raised that is given emphasis.

Against this cultural backdrop it is truly therapeutic to read Augustine's *Confessions.* Throughout this wonderful book, which is written in the form of a prayer, Augustine freely admits his willful disobedience to God. Augustine's intent is to reveal the perversity of the human heart, but specifically that of his own. But Augustine was not intent on just confessing his sinfulness: this book is also the confession of his faith in Christ as well. Augustine, as he is moved from a

state of carnality to one of redemption, marvels at the goodness of God.

One of the most telling incidents in the *Confessions* is Augustine's recollection of a decisive event in his youth. He and an assortment of friends knew of a pear tree not far from his house. Even though the pears on the tree didn't appeal to Augustine, he and his friends were intent on stealing the pears simply for the thrill of it. They had no need of the pears, and in fact ending up throwing them to some pigs. Augustine's account of this thievery reveals a penetrating insight into our dilemma as human beings. Whereas today many want to blame their parents or their environment for their problems, Augustine admits that his sole motive was a love of wickedness: he *enjoyed* his disobedience.

This reflects one of Augustine's major contributions to Christian theology: his emphasis on the perversity of the human will. We would all do well to read Augustine's *Confessions* if only to remind us that evil isn't simply a sickness but a condition of the heart that only Jesus Christ can heal.

Augustine's Search for Wisdom

In his fascinating book entitled *Degenerate Moderns,* author Michael Jones convincingly documents how many of the intellectual gurus of the modern era have conformed truth to their own desires. Jones research reveals how Margaret Mead, Alfred Kinsey, and other prominent trend-setters intentionally lied in their research in order to justify their own sexual immorality. Sadly, contemporary culture has swallowed their findings, leading many to conclude that sexual immorality is both normal and legitimate.

However, when we turn to Augustine's *Confessions,* we see someone who has subordinated his own desires to the truth. The *Confessions* is an account of how Augustine attempted to

satisfy the longings of his heart with professional ambition, entertainment, and sex, yet remained unfulfilled. One of Augustine's most famous prayers is therefore the theme of the whole book: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee, O God." Only by submitting his own desires to the Lordship of Christ did Augustine find the peace that he was seeking.

But that submission did not come easy. Throughout most of his adult life, Augustine had been seeking to discover wisdom. But two questions were especially disturbing for him: What is the source of evil, and How can a Being without physical properties exist? Obviously, this second question was a barrier to his belief in the God of the Bible. In his search for answers, Augustine became involved with a group known as the Manichees, who combined Christian teaching with the philosophy of Plato. Plato's philosophy helped convince Augustine that existence did not require physical properties, but he found their answer to the question of evil problematic, and after eight years as a seeker left the Manichees.

Still, the most difficult barrier for Augustine was not intellectual, but a matter of the heart. He eventually came to the point where he knew he should submit himself to Christ, but was reluctant to do so if it meant giving up his relationship with his concubine. One day, while strolling through a walled garden, Augustine heard from the other side of the wall what sounded like a child's voice, saying "pick up and read, pick up and read." At first he thought it was a children's game. Then, acknowledging what he took to be a command of the Lord, he picked up a nearby Bible, and upon opening it immediately came to Romans 13:13-14, words tailor made for Augustine: "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticisms and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts." Augustine's search for wisdom was complete, as he acknowledged that wisdom is ultimately a *person*: Jesus

Christ. The wisdom of God had satisfied his deepest longings.

Augustine's Philosophy of History: *The City of God*

The United States is currently going through what some call a "culture war." On the one hand there are those who believe in eternal truth and the importance of maintaining traditional morality. At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that the individual is autonomous and should be free to live as he pleases without anyone telling him what is right or wrong. Until thirty years ago the first group held sway. Today, that same group is considered divisive and extreme by the "politically correct" mainstream culture.

But culture wars are not unique to modern America. In the year 410, mighty Rome was sacked by an invading army of Goths. Soon thereafter, the search was on for a scapegoat. In the year 381 Christianity superceded the ancient religion of the Romans as *the* state religion. This enraged those who favored the old state religion, who claimed that Rome had gained world supremacy due to the favor of the ancient gods. When Rome officially accepted the Christian God and forsook the gods, the gods were said to have withdrawn their favor and allowed the invading armies to breach the walls of Rome in order to demonstrate their anger at being replaced by the Christian God. Educated Romans found such an argument silly, but an even more serious charge was that Christians were disloyal to the state, since their allegiance was ultimately to God. Therefore, Christianity was blamed for a loss of patriotism since Christians believed themselves to ultimately be citizens of another kingdom¾the Kingdom of God.

Augustine responded to these accusations by writing his philosophy of history in a book entitled *The City of God*. Augustine spent thirteen years researching and writing this work, which takes it title from Psalm 87:3: "Glorious things

are spoken of you, O City of God." Augustine's main thesis is that there are two cities that place demands on our allegiance. The City of Man is populated by those who love themselves and hold God in contempt, while the City of God is populated by those who love God and hold themselves in contempt. Augustine hoped to show that the citizens of the City of God were more beneficial to the interests of Rome than those who inhabit the City of Man.

For anyone interested in the current debate between secularists and the "Religious Right," Augustine's argument is a masterful combination of historical research and literary eloquence. Christians in particular would be well served by studying this important document, since believers are often accused of being divisive and extreme, characteristics considered by some as un-American.

In Augustine's time, it was asserted that the values of Christianity were not consistent with good Roman citizenship. But Augustine's historical investigation revealed that it is sin that is at the root of all our problems: starting with Cain's murder of Abel, the sin of Adam has borne terrible consequences.

Much of Augustine's task was to demonstrate the consequences of a society that loses its moral compass. Augustine took it upon himself to demonstrate the falsity of the assertion that the Christian worldview is incompatible with civic life. Those who maintained that the acceptance of Christian virtues had had a direct bearing on Rome's fall did so primarily from a very limited perspective. The clear implication was that Christianity, a religion that asks its adherents to love their neighbor and pray for their enemies, had fostered a society incapable of defending itself against its more vicious neighbors.

Augustine's response was to demonstrate that Rome had suffered through numerous catastrophes *long* before Christianity ever

became the religion of the Romans. Actually, it was due to the respect of the Goths for Christianity that their attack wasn't worse than it was: they relented after only three days. Against those who claimed that Christians could not be loyal citizens due to their higher allegiance to God, Augustine reminded them that the Old and New Testament Scriptures actually *command* obedience to the civil authorities. And any assertion that Christianity had weakened the defense of the empire failed to acknowledge the real cause of Rome's collapse, namely that Rome's moral degeneracy had created a society where justice was no longer valued. Augustine quotes the Roman historians as themselves recognizing the brutality at the very root of the nation, beginning with Romulus' murder of his brother Remus.

Augustine's analysis came to conclude that the virtues of Christianity are most consistent with good citizenship, and then went on to show the biblical distinction between the founding of Rome and that of the City of God. Just as Rome's origins date back to the dispute between Romulus and Remus, the City of God had its origin in the conflict between Cain and Abel. The City of Man and the City of God have intermingled ever since, and only at the final judgment of Christ will "the tares be separated from the wheat." For Augustine, the ultimate meaning of history will be borne out only when each one of us acknowledges who it was that we loved most: ourselves, or God.

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Valentine's Day Brings Back

That Lovin’ Feeling

February is known for cold weather, presidents’ birthdays and Cupid’s delight. As Valentine’s Day approaches, hearts flutter, lovers sigh and Charlie Brown hopes that little red-haired girl will like the card he’s been gathering up the courage to give her.

Love, sex and amorous relationships have dominated the news over the past year. Not every culture is as comfortable as ours with public displays of affection. In one Malaysian state, laws ban total darkness in movie theaters “to prevent immoral acts like kissing, cuddling and other activities,” as one official explained it. Public kissing there usually rates a $70 fine.

In Venezuela, extended public kissing and embracing can get you arrested. “If you kiss for more than five seconds, the police will grab you,” complained one young woman whose friends were jailed. “It’s ridiculous,” groused a 24-year-old man. “Whoever invented this law must not have a girlfriend.”

Defining immoral kisses can be difficult admitted one policeman, but “when you see it, you should know it.” (Has he been reading U.S. Supreme Court decisions?)

Kids often have unique insights into adults’ urge to merge. A friend passed along from the Internet children’s answers to questions about love. What do people do on a date? Lynnette (age 8): “Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough.”

Martin (age 10) sees the bottom line: “On the first date, they just tell each other lies, and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date.”

When is it OK to kiss someone? Pam (7): “When they’re rich!”

Curt (7): “The law says you have to be eighteen, so I wouldn’t want to mess with that.” Howard (8): “The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them….It’s the right thing to do.”

How does one decide whom to marry? Allan (10): “You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dips coming.” Allan may find it prudent to slightly revise that theory in a few years.

This season pundits ponder, “What is genuine love?” Popular speaker Josh McDowell delineates three kinds of love that can inform kids’ (and adults’) attitudes: love if, love because of, and love period. Love if and because of are based on personality or performance: “I love you if you go out with me, if you have a good sense of humor, if you sleep with me. I love you because you’re attractive, intelligent or athletic.”

But the best kind of love says, “I love you period: even with your weaknesses, even if you change, even if someone better looking comes along. Even if you have zoo-breath in the morning. I want to give myself to you.”

Paul, an early Christian writer, eloquently described this unconditional love: “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. …Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever….”

Committed unconditional love could probably heal many romantic rifts. Solid spiritual roots that help produce it can help undergird stable relationships. And the children have noticed that families and adult relationships can use some strengthening.

How can a stranger tell if two people are married? Derrick

(8): By “whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids.” And how would the world be different if people didn’t get married? Kelvin (8): “There sure would be a lot of kids to explain, wouldn’t there?”

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