

Your Work Matters to God

Sue Bohlin



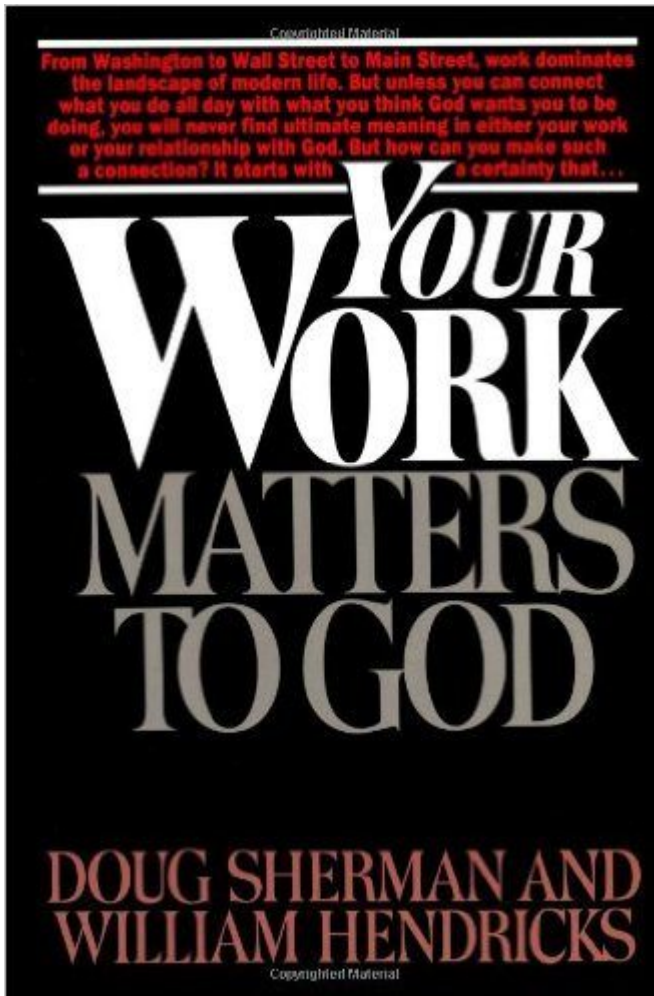
Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.





In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*,^{1} Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, “Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence.”^{2}

First, let’s explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other *real* dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you’ll have to get your sense of importance,

fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, “Who am I, and why am I important?” That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You’re suddenly a “nobody,” and you are not important because you are not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, “What impact will this have on my career?”

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life. [{3}](#) He wants us to have a biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work. [{4}](#)

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

In this article, we’re examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don’t really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn’t charge them with, “Go and make disciples of all nations which aren’t in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies.” No, He said, “Here’s the garden, now cultivate it.” He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe *only* eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won't last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you're wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother's womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: *time*. It's okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness *now*, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn't eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there's everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, "Real work is serving God, and then there's what others do" (which sets us up for condescension), or "Real work

is serving God, and then there's what I have to do" (which sets us up for false guilt and a sense of "missing it").

It's an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we're making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It's unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what's going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn't lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our *only* priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory. [{5}](#) Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we'll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!

How God Wants Us to See Work

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here's a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, *as if you were serving the Lord, not men*, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It's helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn't notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, "I see you. And I appreciate what you're doing." Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world *before* sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God's good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is

the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! [6](#)

Being happy in our work doesn't depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

Why Work is Good

In this article we're talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God's work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn't contribute to what He doesn't want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God's gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people's physical needs. Other jobs meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.
2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to

provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, “If one will not work, neither let him eat!” {7}

3. Through work we meet our family’s needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” {8}

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. {9}

5. Through work we love God. One of God’s love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. {10} We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that’s why our work matters to God.

Notes

1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.
3. Philippians 1:21
4. Romans 12:1, 2
5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, *The Message*.
7. 2 Thess. 3:10
8. 1 Tim. 5:8
9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the

fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

10. Matthew 22:37-39

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The Tug of War of Reason and Faith in C.S. Lewis's Favorite Novel

Byron Barlowe



Byron Barlowe examines the timeless battle between reason and faith in C.S. Lewis's novel—his favorite—Till We Have Faces. Are they mutually exclusive or can they balance one another? How do we reconcile them? "To rationally look at love and logic and to gaze along, to creatively depict and model its living out, may

soon be all that is left to us to reach a new generation."

"You think the gods have sent you there? All lies of priests and poets, child . . . The god within you is the god you should obey: reason, calmness, self-discipline."

- The Fox, Greek tutor in *Till We Have Faces*[\[1\]](#)

"Heaven forbid we should work [the garden of our human nature] in the spirit of . . . Stoics . . . We know very well that what we are hacking and pruning is big with a splendour and vitality which our rational will could never of itself have supplied. To liberate that splendour, to let it become fully what it is trying to be, to have tall trees instead of scrubby tangles, and sweet apples instead of crabs, is part of our purpose."

- C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*[\[2\]](#)

A strong relationship between C.S. Lewis's conceptions of Contemplation and Enjoyment persists throughout his novel *Till We Have Faces*. It seems most fruitful for today's apologist to examine two primary characters' relationship to the concepts in this way: the Greek slave-tutor known as the Fox, represents cold, hard, factual rationality which grudgingly gives a nod to the divine, but only in a limited, controlling way. He represents Stoicism more than any other school of thought. Meanwhile, the barbarian-pagan Priest of the god Ungit represents a less worldly wise, more mysterious and superstitious faith, rooted in earthy experience (fertility rites, blood sacrifice, etc.). Either worldview can limit human nature, truth and meaning. The Greek-infused contemplative life-view (nowadays seen most strongly in Modernism and its irreligious pupils), largely eschews the heartfelt experience of the latter, while the latter's religiosity often dismisses the thoughtful, discerning caution of the former. This artificially strict dichotomy and lack of balance shows forth at every turn in the Church today, creating a blindly loyal fideism with few answers for contemplative questions; or we see, in an

overcorrection, a clinical, spiritless, formulaic religion of pure reason. The former, an unreflective *modus operandi*, chills—and according to testimonies of many apostates and atheists, creates—skeptics, who much like the Fox, seizing on pure reason, ceaselessly explain away the immaterial and numinous. In doing so they, like the Fox’s star student Orual, act as plaintiffs against God or the gods. One apologist recently found that nearly all the young men he surveyed who serve as leaders of college atheist/agnostic groups in the U.S. were raised in church and attended Christian youth groups. Given the ubiquity of broken families, where little love borne of God-given freedom exists—much like the main character Orual’s situation—and know-nothing, superstitious Christians, it is no wonder that a mass exodus of youth from the Church continues. One antidote to the current state of imbalance of Contemplation (reasoned examination toward applied wisdom) and Enjoyed faith (in Lewis’s sense, experientially realized) may be to use and model the dual approach of Lewis’s *The Four Loves* alongside *Till We Have Faces*. To rationally *look at* love and logic and to *gaze along*, to creatively depict and model its living out, may soon be all that is left to us to reach a new generation.

In the mythic *Till We Have Faces*, which we will discuss here, the dual (and often dueling) dynamics of reason (often couched in secularized religion) versus mystical religion (often superstitious) interplay in various characters. It may help to explore these chief characters Lewis creates to embody the story of clashing worlds and worldviews, as well as the Fox’s prize student, Orual. Meanwhile, we will briefly attempt to apply the lessons Lewis teaches apologists into the modern milieu.

First, Lewis revealed the predominant worldview, the Fox’s philosophy, early in the novel as he tutored Orual. His Platonic views were summarized thus, “‘No man can be an exile if he remembers that all the world is one city,’ and ‘Everything is as good or bad as our opinion makes it.’”^[3] As a well-taught classical Greek, he sets out to import real learning into the barbarian kingdom to which he is enslaved. Orual admired her “grandfather’s” constant quest for

knowledge and carried on his tendency to question, Socratically, all that went on. Yet, since her dear Fox, always the philosopher, seemed “ashamed of loving poetry (‘All folly, my child’), she overachieves in philosophy to “get a poem out of him.” [4] Foretelling the dismissiveness and globalizing of the numinous by today’s naturalistic thinkers, the Fox scoffs at surpranatural / supernatural explanations with a curt, “these things come about by natural causes.” [5] In an ancient instance of positive-mental-attitude-laced freethinking, he lectures, “we must learn, child, not to fear anything that nature brings.” [6] When Orual’s sister Psyche goes about ostensibly healing the townspeople, and Orual asks about the validity of the claims, Fox the Naturalist characteristically keeps the options limited but somewhat open. “It might be in accordance with nature that some hands can heal. Who knows?” [7] Herein lies a bit of epistemic humility, somewhat disingenuous it seems, something this writer detects quite a lot among materialist-naturalists.

The Fox’s framework of Platonic forms emerges in his assessment of Psyche’s ethereal beauty, “delight[ing] to say, she was ‘according to nature’; what every woman, or even every thing, ought to have been and meant to be, but had missed by some trip of chance.” [8] While talk of gods peppered his language (“Ah, Zeus” and “by the gods”—more than curses?), fate seems to drive the universe’s cause and effect. He considers suicide and opines about returning to the elements in death, fatefully acquiescing, to which Orual beseeches, “But, Grandfather, do you really *in your heart* believe nothing of what is said about the gods and Those Below? But you do . . . you are trembling.” His Gnostic-tinged response: the body fails me. I am a fool, being trapped in it so long. [9] From what little the writer knows of Greek theology, its progeny thrives in and out of the Church today as an admixture of practical atheism, pantheism and pragmatism. Lewis sneaks in the side door of the skeptical fortress by characterizing so strongly the Fox, whose loving humanity belies his deadening philosophy. If Lewis’s retelling of ancient myth can be refashioned again, or better, simply read, truth and meaning may get through.

On the second worldview, Lewis sets forth the theme of a grounding darkness, holy and otherworldly, chiefly through the pagan Priest of the local goddess Ungit. The Priest served as prophet, harbinger of judgment. He repeats the warning of Ungit's all-hearing ears and vengefulness to the irreligious king on two occasions[10] He carries out shadowy, ancient rituals without explanation and in dark places, sticky with blood offerings. Even outside the dank and sacred temple, "every hour the Priest of Ungit walked around [the sacred fire]," narrates Orual, "and threw in the proper things." [11] Throughout, Lewis equates the *holy* with the mysterious, the hidden and darkened. Divine silence, corresponding to the biblical God's hiddenness and holiness, presents as a major theme of *Till We Have Faces*. The Priest offers few and brief explanations.[12] The god judging Orual in the afterlife allows her lifelong complaints to speak for themselves. Her resultant epiphany balances the equation between reason and religion, witty words and wordless (if corrupted) wisdom, and reconciles the silence: "I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word [of inner secret] can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble we think we mean?" [13] These characters serve as foils for one another, a creative way to tie Modern rationalism to man's inexorable and entirely unnatural acknowledgment of both the spiritual, or numinous and the moral law.

Sixteen years previous, Lewis had published *The Problem of Pain*, wherein he explores this undeniable yet insanely irrational or rather supernaturally revealed sense of numinous awe and moral law inherent in every man and culture. As if foreshadowing the clash of worldviews in discussion, Lewis writes, "Man . . . can close his spiritual eyes against the Numinous, if he is prepared to part company with half the great poets and prophets of his race, with his own childhood, with the richness and depth of uninhibited experience [the Fox, to a high degree, or] . . . He can refuse to identify the Numinous with the righteous, and remain a barbarian, worshipping sexuality, or the dead, or the lifeforce, or the future [the old Priest]." [14] The concepts of Contemplation and Enjoyment intertwine through a scholar and a man of the altar, through the gods and humans alike. In

life and in myth, “men, and gods, flow in and out and mingle.”[\[15\]](#)

The Fox’s and Priest’s views of one another and each other’s worldview clashed like contemporary apologetic debates. The Fox saw the Priest’s work as “mischief”[\[16\]](#) and nonsense. “A child of six would talk more sense” was the Fox’s response to the apparent contradictions of the Priestly doctrines regarding the Great Offering.[\[17\]](#) Contrarily, the Priest reflexively dismisses the Fox’s Greek wisdom. According to Orual, “like all sacred matters, [a sacred, acted ritual] is and it is not (so that it was easy for the Fox to show its manifold contradictions).”[\[18\]](#) Yet, “even Stoicism finds itself willy-nilly bowing the knee to God.”[\[19\]](#) The Fox at times let down his learned persona, evidencing the axiom that man is inherently religious. Yes, he gave a regular nod to the gods, and at the birth of Orual’s sister Psyche he says wistfully, almost wishfully, “Now by all the gods . . . I could almost believe that there really is divine blood in your family.” Though his comment regards the family bloodline, one picks up here and elsewhere a religious man, who then quickly covers the sentiment with appeals to reason, even rationalization. Such characterization seems both autobiographical on Lewis’s part and testimony to his many dealings with materialist, humanist, secularist, liberal Christian, and unbelieving scholars and laymen.

The Priest’s mythical, experiential religious conviction versus the Fox’s worldly wisdom weaves itself through a climactic showdown. A death sentence falls on Psyche as the Accursed, to be offered to the goddess Ungit. (Here is the clash of wills between man and the divine in a crisis of state and religion so often seen in history.[\[20\]](#)) “Ungit will be avenged. It’s not a bull or ram [sacrifice] that will quiet her now,” pronounces the Priest.[\[21\]](#) He mentions “the Brute,” who legend says will take away the human sacrifice. In classic rational fashion, the King challenges, “Who has ever seen this Brute . . . What is it like, eh?” In this moment, the Fox presents himself as the King’s counsellor, living out his reasonable *raison d’etre*. Prosecution-style, he determines that the Brute only exists as an image, a shadow, six-year-old nonsense. The Priest dismisses this as “the wisdom of the Greeks,” and seeks the peoples’ fear as a fallback position. (Interestingly, many

who either believe in or dismiss the supernatural and mystical seek strength in numbers, popular opinion to make their case, which is no argument at all.) The high stakes exchange illustrates the gravity and consequences of the age-old clash. If religion is to be followed, it must be regulated by reason; if reason is to properly play its part, it must bow to realities beyond its grasp.

The Priest and Fox provide an extremely stark contrast of views during this conflict. The Fox presents a compare-and-contrast list of the Priest's teachings, revealing what he believes defies the Law of Non-Contradiction.[\[22\]](#) The Priest first responds to the abstractions by appeal to concrete realities. Greek wisdom "brings no rain and grows no corn." He portrays such constricting logic as unable to offer "understanding of holy things . . . demand[ing] to see such things clearly, as if the gods were no more than letters written in a book . . . nothing," he continues, "that is said clearly [about the gods] can be said truly about them . . . Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood."[\[23\]](#) The apologist cannot help but think of the frustration of trying to communicate the mysterious paradoxes of spiritual truth and meaning to skeptics who demand only linear logic from a naturalist point of view. (The Fox continually appeals to "the Nature of things" and says "according to Nature.") One must also guard against becoming Fox-like, limiting inquiry and explanation merely to that accessible to the physical senses and human reason. Either philosopher or accommodating priest / poet can make that mistake; via their opposite approaches, whether overly from man's reason or God's assumed reasons, deny the paradoxes of reality.

Ironically, Orual's conversion to real belief in the numinous—halting and years-long—begins during this fight. Though she'd "have hanged the Priest and made the Fox a king" if she could, she realized the power lay in the Priest's position.[\[24\]](#) Her convincing comes in a climactic moment, when pressed at literal knifepoint to stop prophesying the unwelcome judgment, the Priest shows unearthly peace, calm, and indeed a willingness to die. "While I have breath," he intoned, "I am Ungit's voice." Resolute and full of faith at death's door, his was

evidence beyond reason, much as the testimony of Christ's Apostles in their martyrdoms. This was not lost on Orual, who narrates, "The Fox had taught me to think—at any rate to speak of—the Priest as of a mere schemer and a politic man" who pretended and said whatever would provide him power or gain, in Ungit's name.[\[25\]](#) The Fox's prize student now saw through personal experience—the kind he taught her to guard against—that the Priest was sincere unto death. "He was sure of Ungit."[\[26\]](#) He may have been mistaken or misled, but he did not pretend. One of the modern apologist's greatest arguments is a convinced life and a faith, well-tested, sometimes right in front of the skeptic. The ultimate witness: a life and death scenario.

After a lifetime, in the afterlife, the Fox repents of his constraints and biases of the supernatural and religious. In this, Lewis communicates a truth applicable today. "I taught [Orual], as men teach a parrot, to say 'Lies of poets,' and 'Ungit's a false image.' . . . I never told her why the old Priest got something from the dark House [of Ungit] that I never got from my trim sentences . . . I made her think a prattle of maxims would do, all thin and clear as water."[\[27\]](#) How like so many testimonies of those who, in our day, come to Christ after years of dismissing and rationally ruling out the reality of the transcendent. Words are cheap and book knowledge only gets one so far, the Fox admits. What a mirror of teachers who lead people of faith away from that which requires revelation using smart-sounding verbiage. Hence, for those enamored with the Richard Dawkinses of our time, a reading of this novel may be the foxiest way of all to reach them.

Orual is a product of her own Need-Love[\[28\]](#), which is serviced alternately by her Fox-taught Greek rationalism and belief in humanoid gods, whom she thinks she can control. As a young woman being flirted with by a prince on the lam, she characteristically staunches true emotions. "I had a fool's wish to lengthen" the encounter, she says. "But I came to my senses." On her odyssey to save her sister from a supposedly evil god, Orual blocks every sentiment with controlling motherly logic, eschewing all glimpses of and desires for the divine. She chooses to outwit the gods. She ends up the pawn in the hands of the gods, however

gracious, that she fancied to be her equals.

The Orual-Queen-Psyche's-twin character spends a lifetime employing Greek wisdom learned under the Fox to seek out life's mysteries of human and divine relations, up to the bittersweet end, constantly denouncing the gods for the woes she experiences. Face to face with divinity, her bitter hiding reveals her glorious humanity. Now, true-faced, she is free. Up until then the helpless, yet defiantly and impressively skillful independence she exhibits as a mothering sister, and later as regent, so well illustrate fallen human defiance of the true God of the Bible, seen most vividly in well-educated apostates and atheists today. Those unbelievers, consumed by angry confusion regarding suffering and life's seeming futilities, should find both empathy and resolution in this novel.[\[29\]](#) While doing excellently (in human terms) for a lifetime, as Orual did, one can still deny the existence of the divine while cursing the god's or God's supposed effects on mere mortals. Orual's torturous private thought life increasingly revealed her sin nature, which she turned back into ravings against the fate of the gods. Control was her only weapon, until the deaths of all who propped up her life and kingdom, and until visions of her corrupted affections forced humility upon her. Such desperate machinations to live a meaningful life in the face of deadening routine punctuated by tragedy, in turn, raises the biggest questions of life: Why are we here? Are we mere mortals or eternal beings with a destiny? If the latter, what or who determines our fate—is there really meaningful choice or only divine whim or something else? Lewis creates multi-layered characters who live out the quest for ultimate answers.

In another resolution of sorts, the myth comes full circle through the Fox and priesthood back to Greece. Arnom, the new Priest of Ungit, adds a notation on Orual's book (at our novel's end) entreating anyone travelling to Greece to take it there,[\[30\]](#) which may ironically imply that the barbarians had something to teach the world's greatest philosophers. Likelier, Arnom, who put himself under the tutelage of the Fox, meant to dedicate the Queen's life saga to a greater civilization. Is this a symbolic merging and maturing of the two schools of thought

and faith? A reference to Arnom as “priest of Aphrodite,” likely indicates his fuller “Greekification.” Whether this change was for ill, good or neutral is hard to say. Perhaps the former priest of the crude barbarian goddess Ungit was effectively sending a message, as if to preach: “To those in Greece, supreme land of learning and reason, place of the gods of the philosophers, we commend you this account of a Being beyond description who revealed our Queen’s aching fallenness, journey into redemption, and glorified revelation as a goddess in her own right.” This writer’s weak grasp of Greek mythology and theology notwithstanding, it seems clear Lewis offers much resolution of reason and religion, of the contemplative and the Enjoyed, however incomplete it must naturally be.

[1] C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, (San Diego and New York: A Harvest Book / Harcourt, 1956), 302-303.

[2] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, (San Diego and New York: A Harvest Book / Harcourt, 1960), 117.

[3] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 8.

[5] *Ibid.*, 10.

[6] *Ibid.*, 14.

[7] *Ibid.*, 31

[8] *Ibid.*, 22.

[9] *Ibid.*, 17-18.

[10] *Ibid.*, 15,54.

[11] *Ibid.*, 14.

[12] Ibid., 15-16, etc.

[13] Ibid., 293-294.

[14] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940), 14-15.

[15] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 301.

[16] Ibid., 33.

[17] Ibid., 49.

[18] Ibid., 268.

[19] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 13.

[20] From the little the writer knows of Plato's *Republic*, there seem to be echoes of it here in the Fox's views. Worth exploring.

[21] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 46.

[22] Ibid., 49-50.

[23] Ibid., 50.

[24] Ibid., 51.

[25] Ibid., 54.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 295.

[28] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 2 ("Affection").

[29] The writer plans to use the novel and its contemplative companion, *The Four Loves*, to reach out to a struggling apostate with mother issues on both sides of

her adoption.

[30] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 308-309.

The Spiritual Brain

Heather Zeiger

Heather Zeiger keys off The Spiritual Brain by Beauregard and O'Leary to critique the materialist position that belief in God is simply in the neurons of the material brain. The Christian worldview is non-materialist and recent experiments bear out its power of explanation over and against the materialist worldview.

The Worldview of Neuroscience

The popular worldview held in neuroscience, or the study of the brain, is materialism. Materialism says that humans are only physical beings, which means there is no possibility of an immaterial mind or a soul. On the other hand, non-materialists would say that humans have both a physical aspect and a spiritual aspect. As Christians, we are non-materialists, and would say that we are both physical and spiritual because God, a spiritual being, created us in His image. However, our physical bodies are important because God gave us bodies suited for us.

But what if materialism were true? First, self-consciousness would just be an evolutionary bi-product; something that randomly evolved to help our species survive. Secondly, we would just be a product of our genes and our environment, so free will or the ability to make decisions would be an illusion. This implies that our thought life, our prayers, and everything that dictates our identity is nothing

more than neurons firing.[{1}](#) And from this we can conclude that our beliefs are unimportant because we really can not trust them anyway. They might be caused by a misfiring neuron. But is this what the data shows us?

In this article we will be looking at some examples in neuroscience that seem to contradict materialism, and to guide us we will be using the recently released book, *The Spiritual Brain* by Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary. We will look at some experiments materialists have tried to do to explain religious experiences and their effects on the body. Then we will look at some experiments that can only be explained from a non-materialistic worldview. Finally, we will see how the data from neuroscience fits within a Christian view of the mind and brain.

The Spiritual Brain does not take a distinctly Christian perspective. So while the studies within this book do not necessarily confirm or deny that Christianity is the "best" religion, it is still useful for apologetics. First, it allows us to break through the language barrier between a materialist and a Christian by looking at data in general neuroscience terms. Second, science studies the world around us, which is God's general revelation, and while this gives us truths about the character of God and His creation, our interpretation of the data must be filtered through the lens of the special revelation of God's Word.

Is God All in Our Heads?

Is there a part of our brain that creates God? Are some people genetically predisposed to being religious? A materialist would say "yes" to these questions. However, as the book *The Spiritual Brain* shows us materialists have not been successful in proving this.

Dean Hamer, geneticist and author of the book *The God Gene*, proposed that some people are more religious than others because they have one DNA letter that is different from non-religious people.[{2}](#) While this story was touted as a breakthrough in the media, the scientific community was not amused. Hamer's

experiments were not well-defined, and no one could replicate them.[{3}](#)

Another popular theory is that people that have a religious experience may be suffering from mild forms of temporal lobe epilepsy. Basically, a misfiring in the brain causes people to be obsessive about something, like religion. These scientists speculate that people like Mother Teresa, Joan of Arc, and the apostle Paul are likely candidates for temporal lobe epilepsy.[{4}](#) Epilepsy specialists, however, do not believe that religious experiences are characteristic of temporal lobe epilepsy, and usually seizures are not associated with peace, tranquility, or religious visions. Also, temporal lobe epilepsy is quite rare, yet over sixty percent of Americans have reported having some kind of religious or mystical experience. And as we will see, many parts of the brain are involved in religious experiences, while temporal lobe epilepsy is much more centralized.[{5}](#)

Perhaps one of the strangest experiments to hit the popular media was that of the God Helmet. Neuroscientist Michael Persinger claimed that religious people were more sensitive to magnetic fields, and that electromagnetic radiation was what prompted religious experiences. He developed a helmet that produced strong electromagnetic waves. Several people who tried on the God Helmet reported having a religious or mystical experience of some sort. However, there were some fundamental flaws in the whole setup, including the fact that Persinger never published his results and did not have brain scans to back up his statements. Eventually, a group of scientists from Sweden, using a double-blind test, proved that the God Helmet was really the power of suggestion. The electromagnetic waves didn't cause the religious experiences.[{6}](#)

Experiments That Don't Mind

All of these failed experiments presumed that there is no God and there is no spiritual component to people. We have shown, however, how the evidence from neuroscience doesn't seem to fit the materialistic worldview. As we will see, some experiments reported in *The Spiritual Brain* cannot be explained from this

worldview. What we will find is that they fit nicely within a Christian worldview.

The first example is obsessive compulsive disorder therapy. Obsessive compulsive disorder, or OCD, occurs when a person has distressing or unwanted thoughts that dominate their thinking, and these obsessions trigger an urge to do some kind of ritual behavior, also known as a compulsion. The interesting thing about OCD is that the person knows that the obsession is irrational and the ritual won't really fix it, but their feelings tell them otherwise. Scientific studies have shown that the brain is actually misfiring. The part of the brain that tells a person, "There's a problem, do something to fix it," is firing at the wrong times. OCD is a clear case of a healthy mind and a malfunctioning brain.

A materialistic worldview would say that the only way to treat OCD is by *physically* fixing the bad neurons. However, the treatment that actually works involves the patients *mentally* fixing the bad neurons. Patients learn to take control of their OCD by recognizing when their brain is misfiring, and try to starve the urges to do the ritual. After treatment, brain scans show that the brain of an OCD patient is starting to fix itself. The patient is changing his physical brain with his mind! [{7}](#)

Similar kinds of therapies have been applied to depression and phobias. [{8}](#) In both cases, *The Spiritual Brain* reports instances where a patient's brain chemistry was directly affected by their mind.

Another phenomenon that can't be explained from a materialist's worldview is the placebo effect. The patient is given a medicine that they are told will help them, but in actuality they are given a sugar pill. Interestingly, the patient's belief that the sugar pill will help them has caused measurable, observable relief from symptoms. Many doctors say that a patient's attitude oftentimes can help or hinder real medicines or therapies from working. [{9}](#)

The ability of the mind to change the brain's chemistry does not fit within a materialistic worldview. But as Christians we know that our minds are very real

and can have a very real effect on our physical bodies.

Can We Take a Brain Scan of God?

As noted previously, the popular worldview among neuroscientists is materialism, which essentially means they do not account for or acknowledge spiritual effects on the brain nor do they believe that there is a spiritual component to the person. This would mean that even religious experiences are just our neurons firing. Materialists would claim that either the effects of religious experiences, including prayer, are neurons misfiring, or the person is faking it.

On the other hand, Christians believe that there is a spiritual realm, and there is a spiritual component to human beings that we call the mind or the soul. We believe that when we pray that we are actually praying to God who is real and separate from us, not just a figment of our imagination.

Mario Beauregard, one of the authors of *The Spiritual Brain*, took brain scans of Carmelite nuns while they were remembering the deepest and most poignant religious experience they had had.^{10} Using functional MRI and QEEG he hoped to see what parts of the nuns' brains were active.^{11}

Dr. Beauregard and his lab found that religious experiences involved many brain regions at once, which rules out materialists' suggestion that there is some kind of "God spot" in the brain.^{12} They also found that brain scans during these religious experiences were very complex and consistent with something other than merely an emotional state. Lastly, they determined that the data did not have any of the markers one would expect to see if the nuns were faking it or lying.

This is all that the data can tell us. Physical machines cannot prove the existence of a spiritual God. But as the authors of *The Spiritual Brain* point out, what these experiments do show is that certain explanations, namely materialistic ones, are inadequate for explaining the data in neuroscience. The nuns are experiencing something beyond what materialism can account for.

Prayer is complex and more than just emotional contrivances, so from a Christian worldview, the results are not surprising.

The Christian View of the Mind and Brain

Experiments such as the God Helmet and theories about temporal lobe epilepsy did not work because their premise was that God was something we made up ourselves. However, as Christians we know this is false. The Bible says that God is the creator and is distinct from His creation, not made from it.

The results of experiments with OCD, phobias, depression, and the placebo effect do not make sense to materialists because the mind seems to affect the physical brain. However, we know from Scripture that the mind, or the soul, is an essential part of our being. James 2:26 and Luke 8:55 show us that when the soul leaves, the body is dead, and when the soul returns, the body is alive. Also, passages such as Matthew 26:41 and Romans 8:10 and 11 tell us that our spirit can affect what our bodies do and keep us from sinning. Passages about the resurrection such as in 1 Corinthians 15 discuss the distinction between our spirit and our physical body.

Lastly, the experiment with the Carmelite nuns showed that during a deeply prayerful experience, their brains display signs of a very complex interaction that is going on. As Christians, we believe prayer is a way to interact with the Creator Who is separate and distinct from us. While this experiment does not prove God's existence, it is reasonable to conclude that it is the level of complexity we would expect to see if someone were interacting with something distinct from themselves.

At one time people feared that neuroscience would be the death of God. The fear was that science might prove that everything that we do, including prayer and worship could be reduced to neurons firing in our brains. Hopefully, you are convinced that neuroscience actually points us towards God. There is evidence for

a spiritual component of the human self. And, the evidence is consistent with what we would expect from a Christian worldview.

Notes

1. Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007) 3, 4.
2. Ibid., 48-50.
3. Ibid., 51, 52.
4. Ibid., 58, 64.
5. Ibid., 72, 71.
6. Ibid., 79-100.
7. Ibid., 126-130.
8. Ibid., 133-140.
9. Ibid., 141-142.
10. For a detailed account of the Carmelite nun experiment see Beauregard and O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain*, 255-288.
11. Two things we must keep in mind. First, usually the brain will take the same pathways when it remembers an event as when the event actually happened. Second, this experiment can’t tell us what the nuns were actually thinking, but it can tell us what kind of brain activity was occurring.
12. Beauregard and O’Leary, 42-44.
13. For more articles and information on the subjects covered in *The Spiritual Brain* see Denyse O’Leary’s blog, Mindful Hack, at mindfulhack.blogspot.com.
14. See also Kerby Anderson’s article “Mind, Soul and Neuroethics” at www.probe.org/mind-soul-and-neuroethics/.

A Doctor's Journey with Cancer

Rusty Wright

When you suddenly learn you might have only 18 months to live, its a good time to sort out what really matters in life.

Last December, Yang Chen, MD, dismissed an aching pain under his shoulder as muscle strain. Five weeks later, as the pain persisted, a chest x-ray brought shocking results: possible lung cancer that might have spread.

A highly acclaimed specialist and medical professor at the University of Colorado Denver, Yang knew the average survival rate for his condition could be under 18 months. He didnt smoke and had no family history of cancer. He was stunned. His life changed in an instant.

I wondered how I would break the news to my unsuspecting wife and three young children, he recalls. Who would take care of my family if I died?

Swirling Vortex of Uncertainty

When I heard his story, I felt a jab of recognition. In 1996, my doctor said I might have cancer. That word sent me into a swirling vortex of uncertainty. But I was fortunate; within a month, I learned my condition was benign.

Yang did not get such good news. He now knows he has an inoperable tumor. Hes undergoing chemotherapy. Its uncertain whether radiation will help. Yet through it all, he seems remarkably calm and positive. At a time when one might understandably focus on oneself, hes even assisting other cancer patients and their families to cope with their own challenges. Whats his secret?

I learned about Yangs personal inner resources when we first met in the 1980s. He worked at the Mayo Clinic and brought me to Rochester, Minnesota, to present a seminar for Mayo and IBM professionals on a less ponderous theme,

Love, Sex and the Single Lifestyle. With the audience, we laughed and explored relationship mysteries. He felt it was essential that people consider the spiritual aspect of relationships, as well as the psychological and physical.

Later he founded a global network to train medical professionals how to interact with patients on spiritual matters. Many seriously ill patients want their doctors to discuss spiritual needs and the profession is taking note.

Reality Blog

Now a patient himself, Yang exhibits strength drawn from the faith that has enriched his life. He has established a website www.aDoctorsJourneyWithCancer.net to chronicle his journey and offer hope and encouragement to others. The site presents a compelling real-life drama as it happens.

As a follower of Jesus, Yang notes [biblical references](#) to Gods light shining in our hearts and people of faith being like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. He sees himself as a broken clay jar through which Gods light can shine to point others who suffer to comfort and faith.

As he draws on divine strength, he reflects on Paul, a first-century believer who wrote, We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

A dedicated scientist, Yang is convinced that what he believes about God is true and includes information about evidences for faith. Hes also got plenty to help the hurting and the curious navigate through their pain, cope with emotional turmoil, and find answers to lifes perplexing questions about death, dying, the afterlife, handling anxiety, and more.

With perhaps less than 18 months to live, Yang Chen knows whats most important in his life. He invites web surfers to walk with me for part, or all, of my journey. If

Im ever in his position, I hope I can blend suffering with service while displaying the serenity and trust I observe in him. Visit [his website](#) and youll see what I mean.

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Castro's Staying Power

Rusty Wright

"I threw a rock at Castro!" my young friend beamed in our junior high classroom. He had recently migrated to Miami, part of a mass exodus fleeing the Cuban revolution.

Over the intervening years, many others have thrown rocks—real and figurative—at El Comandante. An Energizer Bunny of world rulers, he just kept on going. Only Britain's queen and Thailand's king had served longer as heads of state when Castro recently announced that, due to declining health, he would not continue his presidency.

Survivor

The aging socialist warrior has staying power. The *Guinness Book of Records* says his 4 hour and 29 minute UN speech in 1960 remains a UN record for length. His longest recorded speech in Cuba lasted 7 hours 10 minutes.

Castro counts 634 attempts on his life, ranging from poison pills to a toxic cigar. [\[1\]](#) Ten US presidents have served during his command. He survived the US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis the following year.

I remember as a child sitting on our living room floor watching [JFK demand](#) the Soviets remove their missiles. We were only 235 miles away, well within range. The world approached the brink, Khrushchev blinked, Fidel...and humanity...survived.

Several years later my parents' airline flight was hijacked to Cuba. Their surreal night in the Havana airport included individual government interviews, genuine risk of not being allowed to return to the US, and relief at finally taking off for home.

The controversial dictator inspires affection from compatriots who appreciate Cuba's high literacy and universal health care. Relatives of his political prisoners hold him in considerably less regard. And Cuba's economic woes are legendary.

He's Not Gone Yet

In stepping down, Castro emphasized he isn't planning to disappear: "This is not my farewell. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas. I shall continue to write under the heading of 'Reflections by comrade Fidel.' It will be just another weapon you can count on." [{2}](#)

What reflections are in Castro's future at a frail 81? Even globally influential leaders must face life's finish line. Often spiritual matters creep into one's thoughts during autumn years. Castro has reflected on them in surprising ways in the past.

In 1985 he said, "I never saw a contradiction between the ideas that sustain me and the ideas of that symbol, of that extraordinary figure (Jesus Christ)." [{3}](#)

Certainly Jesus displayed compassion for the poor and oppressed, significant Marxist concerns. But it's hard to envision the one who said "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" [{4}](#) jailing folks for disagreeing with him.

Years ago, Fidel wrote about a fallen comrade:

Physical life is ephemeral, it passes inexorably.... This truth should be taught to every human being—that the immortal values of the spirit are above physical life. What sense does life have without these values? What then is it to live? Those who understand this and generously sacrifice their physical life for the sake of good and justice—how can they die? God is the supreme idea of goodness and justice. [\[5\]](#)

Jesus, whom Castro admired, commented on this theme: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish.” [\[6\]](#)

Fidel Castro’s physical life will, of course, eventually end. His ideas and influence could survive for generations. But as he approaches that personal threshold we all must cross, might thoughts of his own spiritual future intrigue him again?

Notes

1. Reuters, Weird and wonderful: the facts about Fidel Castro, The Independent tinyurl.com/24yqvn, accessed February 19, 2008.
2. Reuters, Text of Fidel Castro’s Announcement, New York Times, February 19, 2008; at www.nytimes.com/reuters/world/international-cuba-castro-text.html, accessed February 19, 2008.
3. Reuters, FACTBOX-Quotes from Cuba’s Fidel Castro, February 19, 2008; at in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-32028720080219, accessed February 19, 2008.
4. [John 8:32 NIV](#).
5. Andrew Buncombe, When Castro believed in God: letters from prison reveal atheist leader’s spiritual side, The Independent, 26 February 2007; at tinyurl.com/36xnrs, accessed February 20, 2008.

6. [John 11:25-26 NLT](#).

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Responding to Poverty - As a Christian

Rusty Wright

Poverty's Devastating Effects

I can still remember the feelings of curiosity, confusion and discomfort I felt as I watched the young boys. "What did those kids want?" I wondered.

As a child visiting Cuba with my parents, I was startled when some boys at a city park opened our taxi doors, then held out their hands. Later I asked my mother, "Did they work there? Did they want a tip?" She gently told me they were begging. My young upper-middle-class North American sensibilities were jolted by the harsh reality of poverty I had never seen.

One summer during university, while visiting Tijuana, Mexico, I was stunned to see people living in the city dump. Later that summer, I spent time with a friend in one of Miami's ghettos. One day, as I drove away, I noticed an ambulance headed toward the apartment building near where my friend hung out. The next day, my friend told me a woman had shot the man who was trying to seduce her, then she shot herself. Shocking as that news was for me, almost as much so was

my friend's nonchalance. He seemed accustomed to events like this.

Those experiences kindled my personal interest in this theme. What is poverty? Why does it exist? How does it destroy minds and souls as well as bodies? What is a biblical perspective on poverty? And what should we do about it?

Income level and standard of living are often-used but insufficient measures of poverty. Some townships in South Africa and shanty towns in the Philippines make some North American housing projects seem like the Ritz.

Localized "relative deprivation" (i.e., large socioeconomic disparity between the poor and middle class) can multiply feelings of low self-esteem. Many social scientists emphasize psychological manifestations of poverty. Yale psychologist Ira Goldenberg defined poverty as "a psychological process which destroys the young before they can live and the aged before they can die. . . . [It] is a condition of being in which one's past and future meet in the present—and go no further." [\[1\]](#)

The precise economic line may be difficult to draw, but poverty's effects can be devastating. Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs says, "More than 8 million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. Every morning our newspapers could report, 'More than 20,000 people perished yesterday of extreme poverty.'" [\[2\]](#) They die from disease, lack of medicine, unsafe drinking water.

Homeless Assistance

The little girl was sleeping so peacefully on a cot in the nursery playroom. As I watched her, I imagined how she might have felt only a few days earlier, maybe trying to sleep in the tropical heat under a noisy highway overpass. Now she was inside a lovely, air conditioned room with nice toys. She and families just like hers could feel safe, clean and protected at Miami's Homeless Assistance Center, a

facility organized and run through a coalition of community leaders, government agencies, churches, and faith-based organizations.

By its twelfth year, Miami's Community Partnership for Homeless had helped over twenty-seven thousand men, women and children leave the streets for a better life. Their Homeless Assistance Centers are a community success story in which private and public sectors teamed to create a national model for eliminating homelessness. Would you believe all this started from a church Bible class?

My friend Alvah Chapman served Knight Ridder Publishers as president and chairman for fourteen years. (Knight Ridder owned, for example, the *Miami Herald*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *San Jose Mercury News*.) At retirement, he and his wife Betty participated in a thirty-nine-week church Bible study class that required personal application.

Alvah had become distressed observing the plight of Miami's homeless and the lack of community leadership. He recalls, "The county said it was a city problem. The city said it was a county problem. And the Chamber of Commerce was not sure it was their problem." [{3}](#) The Chapmans decided to tackle homelessness. "The commitment to 'do something' was very strong" in their hearts, he explains: "We made a commitment to our [Bible] class and to our God that we would together provide leadership to the homeless problem in Miami." [{4}](#)

Today the Homeless Assistance Centers [{5}](#) they founded provide meals, showers, clothing, temporary housing, laundry facilities, health care, transportation, and job training—helping residents get back on their feet with dignity. The success rate for departed residents has been as high as sixty percent, considered remarkable in this field. Churches and synagogues have provided evening meals, companionship, and encouragement.

Often the poor feel trapped in poverty with no way out. Vicious circles breed feelings of worthlessness and despair. Drunkenness, violence, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases are just some of the physical manifestations of

coping with life out of control. Efforts like the Homeless Assistance Centers can help break the cycle of poverty.

Helping the Total Person

Poverty brings multiple problems: physical, psychological, and spiritual. Which should we emphasize in seeking solutions? Consider three approaches.

1. The *Outside-In Approach* changes circumstances to alleviate stress factors. Education and job training can enhance employment and living standards, thus decreasing psychological problems. Right? Not necessarily. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis argued that an elimination of physical poverty may not by itself eliminate the culture of poverty.[\[6\]](#) Perhaps you know some wealthy but unhappy people.

2. The *Inside-Out Approach* emphasizes counseling to encourage self-help. Attitude change is important, but if the economic system blocks options, what then?

3. The *Total-Person Approach* blends the other two, treating humans as physical, psychological, and spiritual creatures. The often-overlooked spiritual area, properly tapped, can influence both poor and rich.

John Perkins, an African-American, left his poor rural hometown of Mendenhall, Mississippi, vowing never to return. His brother had been shot by a policeman in that racially oppressed town. Later, Perkins placed his faith in Christ and returned to Mendenhall to help.

The organization he founded facilitated an inexpensive health care center, cooperative farms, a cooperative food store, house construction, tutoring, and raising college scholarships. Perkins' emphasis has been on helping local people help themselves. At the same time he's said, "I believe that the only commitment able to bring [interpersonal and community] healing is a commitment to

Jesus.”[{7}](#)

Jesus of Nazareth emphasized the total person. He healed the sick and fed the hungry. He also told people how they could find meaning and fulfillment through faith in Him. Many Christian development programs have a similar focus, operating on the time-honored philosophy that if you give someone a fish you can feed them for a day; if you also teach them how to fish you can feed them for a lifetime.

World Relief, a Christian organization, provides worldwide disaster relief as well as self-help efforts like well-digging and agricultural training. Their microenterprise development programs establish community banking, savings and lending programs to help the poor become self sufficient. For example, a \$75 loan to a Cambodian grandmother allowed her to expand her small home-front stand. She repaid the loan in full, entitling her to another, slightly larger loan. Eventually, she could support her sixteen grandchildren and serve as a role model for women in her village.[{8}](#)

World Vision, the Salvation Army, and most major Christian denominations have programs to help the poor.

Money and Poverty

We’ve been examining physical, psychological, and spiritual factors related to poverty and its possible remedies. Consider a common question.

Will money given to developing nations solve their poverty problems? Maybe it will help, but the extent depends largely on how the funds are managed. Sadly, Africa, for instance, is replete with examples of crooked officials diverting financial aid and national wealth into their own pockets. For instance, Nigeria’s President Obasanjo estimates that corrupt African leaders have stolen at least \$140 billion from their people in the decades since independence.[{9}](#)

Obasanjo is a follower of Jesus who has tried to root out corruption in his own nation. The *New York Times* gives a glimpse into the task he still faces. Nigeria export billions of dollars of oil each year and returns thirteen percent of revenues from its states back to the states. The *Times* notes that “Much of that is siphoned off by corrupt regional officials who often pocket the money or waste it on lavish projects that do little, if anything, for ordinary people. For instance, one state produces a third of Nigeria’s oil and has an annual budget of more than half a billion dollars to spend on its three million people. But most of [that money] goes to white elephants like a mansion for the governor and his deputy.”[{10}](#)

On one of my speaking tours to Nigeria, a local doctor told me how businesses had adapted to the common custom of using bribes. Seems they started budgeting bribe money for their traveling representatives to use. The budget item was called public relations. But a problem arose when employees began to pocket the public relations money instead of using it for bribes.

Financial aid givers—nations, businesses and individuals—would be wise to focus on strict accountability measures and perhaps character education programs for government and business leaders and students in such situations.

In fairness, I should note that this corruption caveat has its critics. Columbia economist Jeffrey Sachs, who also heads an ambitious United Nations anti-poverty effort, feels the corruption charge is too often a simplistic explanation for poverty’s root problems. While I feel that corruption is indeed a major concern, I agree with Sachs that poverty is complex and situations differ. Disease plays a significant role. If people are sick with malaria or AIDS, its hard for them to help themselves. Sachs also advocates international commitments to economic assistance, scientific advancement, and justice.[{11}](#)

What Can You Do?

Would you believe that by losing weight, you could help the poor overseas?

Consider how some upscale U.S. secondary school students made a difference in Zambia.[{12}](#)

Student leaders at Wheaton Academy in suburban Chicago had a burden to raise \$53,000 from their fellow students for a schoolhouse in Zambia. They found little enthusiasm at first, but then they began to pray regularly. Things took off and they exceeded their goal. Over a three-year stretch, the Christian students raised nearly a quarter of a million dollars for HIV/AIDS relief in Africa. Students encourage each other to forgo movies, Starbucks runs, and even Christmas presents and prom dresses.[{13}](#) The campus chaplain estimates that ninety percent of students have participated financially to build the schoolhouse and a medical clinic and to feed a village's children for a year. Students feel a personal connection with their Zambian peers. Some have visited the village they support.

Even adults joined the effort. Now, what they did is great. I bet you're going to like this! It was a weight-loss fundraising campaign, the Zambia Meltdown. Fourteen teachers and administrators lost 460 pounds over 100 days. That brought in \$19,000 in pledges for lost weight. And get this: The headmaster and principal each lost 70 pounds.[{14}](#)

What can you do to help alleviate poverty? Consider some suggestions:

First, pray. God's concern for the poor far exceeds our own. Those Wheaton Academy students saw answers to their prayers. (Probably some faculty spouses did, too!)

Second, give. An ancient Jewish proverb says, If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you![{15}](#) Many fine organizations can use your donations to effectively fight poverty. New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof says, "Nobody gets more bang for the buck than missionary schools and clinics, and Christian aid groups like [World Vision](#) and [Samaritan's Purse](#) save lives at bargain-basement prices."[{16}](#) I would add [World Relief](#), the [Salvation Army](#) and your local church to the list.

Third, go. Maybe you can volunteer with [Habitat for Humanity](#) or an international mission group. CNN highlighted Campus Crusade for Christ college students spending Spring Break helping to rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. You even may want to devote your life or career to relief and development. It is a worthy cause. I like what Jesus' mother Mary advised: "Whatever He [Jesus] says to you, do it." [{17}](#) And another of those ancient Jewish proverbs says, "Blessed are those who help the poor." [{18}](#)

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16. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Bush, a Friend of Africa," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2005; <http://preview.tinyurl.com/y8wwoj>.

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Overcoming Anxiety: Finding Real Peace When Life Seems Crazy

Rusty Wright

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



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

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

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

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

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

I had my hands on the wrong woman!

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

You've probably had embarrassing moments that generate anxiety. What about more serious causes?

Your Greatest Fear?

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

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

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

As a university student, I wrote a paper for an abnormal psychology class

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

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

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

This professor felt that the principles in the paper—which certainly were not original with me—had both academic and personal relevance. Several months later, we met at his lovely home in Malibu overlooking the Pacific Ocean. As we sat in his back yard, this professor told me he lacked personal peace and wanted to know God personally. I showed him a simple four-point outline based on one of Jesus' statements: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." [\[1\]](#)

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

Finding Real Peace

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

greatest Psychologist.

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

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

Might it be time for you to consider Him?

Notes

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

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Grappling with Guilt

Rusty Wright

What Makes You Feel Guilty?

What makes you feel guilty?

Has a relationship gone sour and you find yourself agonizing about what might have been if you'd acted or spoken differently? Maybe your slave-driver boss hassles you for being behind. Are your kids wondering why they ended up with you as a parent?

These days, food guilt is common. With super-slim models gracing supermarket tabloids and magazine covers (admit it, now; you've peeked), even a fit, petite-sized former cheerleader can get depressed standing in the checkout line. "No-Guilt Nachos," offers a *Ladies' Home Journal* recipe.

America Online has a special guilt section dealing with "Relationship Guilt," "Parental Guilt," "Food Guilt," "Workforce Guilt," "Pricey Guilt," "I'm-a-Rotten-Person Guilt," "Stay-in-Touch Guilt," and "Trying-to-Please-Everyone Guilt." Whew!

Ever been late paying a family bill due to negligence or overspending? Been unfaithful to your spouse? Lied to the IRS or a friend? Been angry without reason?

When we fall short of our own - or others' - standards, guilt feelings can result. Unresolved guilt can bring anxiety, depression, ulcers, low self-esteem and more.

I am a recovering perfectionist. As a teenager, I could be pretty hard on myself. I once fouled out of a high school basketball game in the final seconds with our team ahead. The opposing player made his free throws, putting his team ahead. I felt bleak. Our team's desperation inbound pass went to midcourt, where a teammate caught the ball and threw up a prayer. The ball swished through the net as time expired. We had won. I was the second happiest player there. I probably would have excoriated myself had he missed.

A single man I know became involved with another man's wife. Her rocky marriage had sent her lonely heart wandering and his youthful enthusiasm and libido met many of her wants. They dreamed, schemed, sneaked, and rendezvoused. When discovered, he lied and sought to perpetuate the affair. Eventually, friends convinced him to break things off. He felt guilty for having the fling, guilty for lying about it, and guilty for dumping her.

Feeling guilty can cripple you emotionally. Serious ethical or moral lapses can bring blame and shame. A seemingly minor flaw can sometimes bug the daylights out of you. This article looks at healthy, biblical ways to deal with guilt, and how to know that you are really forgiven.

Some Causes of Guilt Feelings

Why does guilt affect us so, and how can we alleviate it? Some psychologists emphasize that problems in our past can plague us in the present. Inability to reconcile or move past unhealthy relationships with parents, siblings, teachers or classmates may color our emotions. Other authorities feel that people may be following overly rigid standards.

Suggested solutions have included discovering and resolving past hang-ups, relaxing moral codes or easing personal expectations. Certainly many people still suffer from past problems or set unrealistic standards. Forty-eight hours of tasks won't fit into one day, so don't necessarily castigate yourself when only half your ambitious to-do list gets accomplished. If you find yourself sneaking a diet-busting snack, maybe rewarding yourself occasionally is better than whipping yourself. But it seems wise to also consider that, at least in some instances, we may feel guilty because we are guilty.

If this is true, then therapy for a guilty person could begin with getting them to admit their shortcoming. That's not always easy.

Admitting you're wrong can be hard. Perhaps you've heard of the writer who

asked his domineering editor if he'd ever been wrong. "Yes," replied the editor. "I was wrong once. It was when I thought I was wrong but I wasn't."

University of Illinois psychologist O. H. Mowrer pointed out a common dilemma in trying to face your own shortcomings:

Here, too, we encounter difficulty, because human beings do not change radically until first they acknowledge their sins, but it is hard for one to make such an acknowledgement unless he has "already changed." In other words, the full realization of deep worthlessness is a severe ego "insult," and one must have a new source of strength to endure it.[\[1\]](#)

I understand this inner weakness problem. As a teenager, I found success through athletics, academics, and student government. I was attending one of my nation's leading secondary schools. President John F. Kennedy and actor Michael Douglas were alumni. But my achievements didn't bring the personal satisfaction I wanted. Guilt, anxiety, and a poor self-image often plagued me on the inside.

My first year in university, I met some students who said that the spiritual side of life offered a solution to the guilt problem. A relationship with God, they said, could give me the "new source of strength" necessary to face my own flaws and seek help. Because of them, I discovered practical reasons why faith could help me overcome my guilt.

A Solution to Guilt

The hit movie *Bruce Almighty* depicts God's attempts to contact the main character (played by Jim Carrey) by leaving a number on his pager. Turns out the phone number is valid in many area codes. After the film's release, people and businesses began getting calls from folks asking for God.

A Florida woman threatened to sue the film studio after twenty calls per hour

clogged her cell phone. A Denver radio station built a contest around the fluke. Some callers to the station seemed to think they'd really discovered a direct line to God. One even left a message confessing her adultery. [{2}](#)

Owning up to guilt can help clear your conscience.

Those college students I mentioned earlier had a joy and enthusiasm that attracted me. They claimed to have a personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. I couldn't believe it all. I kept returning to their meetings because I was curious and because it was a good place to get a date. Especially because it was a good place to get a date!

They explained that God loved me, but that my own self-centeredness or sin had separated me from Him. They said His Son, Jesus, died to pay the penalty for my sins, and rose from the dead so I could receive forgiveness as a free gift. Eventually, it made sense. [{3}](#) Through a simple heart attitude, I invited Jesus to enter my life, forgive me, and become my friend. There was no thunder and lightning, no angels appeared, and I did not become perfect overnight. But I found a new inner peace, freedom from guilt, assurance that I would be with God forever, and the best friend I could ever have.

Of course, my experience is not unique. Harvard psychologist William James, in his classic book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* cites Henry Alline who placed his faith in Christ: "the burden of guilt and condemnation was gone . . . my whole soul, that was a few minutes ago groaning under mountains of death . . . was now filled with immortal love . . . freed from the chains of death and darkness...." [{4}](#)

One early believer wrote: "God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross." [{5}](#) I found that my own guilt was gone, but I also had to draw on His power daily.

A friend of Jesus wrote, "If we confess our sins to him, he [God] is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong." {6} Some call this statement the believer's "bar of soap." We confess, being honest with God. He forgives and cleanses us.

But what if you don't feel forgiven? Is there such a thing as false guilt?

True or False?

A reader who signed his e-mail "Guilt plagued" told me of his struggles:

A few years ago, out of desperation, I made a series of terrible mistakes. I am committed to the Lord and confessed my sins. I'm terribly ashamed and embarrassed about what I have done, and I feel ten times worse because I can't make restitution. . . . I'm having a difficult time processing the idea that He has forgiven me. . . . Please help me . . . what should I do? The guilt is eating me alive.

Sometimes we feel guilty because we are guilty. Other times we feel guilty without cause. Is your guilt true or false, and what can you do about the feelings? {7}

When my wife, Meg, was in graduate school at Stanford, she regularly parked on the street near her campus office. One afternoon she discovered a parking ticket on her windshield. During that day - while she was parked there - campus management had painted the curb red, signifying "No Parking." (The curb had never had paint during her tenure.) Was she guilty?

Her dilemma was both laughable and burdensome. Meg would have to either pay a fine or go to court. She appeared in court and told the judge what had happened. He dropped the charges. (I should *hope* he would!)

The law and the judge's application of it determined guilt or innocence. Similarly,

if we violate God's proscriptions, we stand guilty. If we do not violate biblical principles, then we may or may not be guilty.

If you know your guilt is real, your solution begins with placing your trust in Christ to forgive you. Once you have, and you become aware of sins in your daily life, simply admit them to God.

Keep short accounts with God. As the proverbial country preacher said, "I 'fesses 'em as I does 'em." Feelings may lag behind, but if you've admitted your sin to God, He has forgiven you.

What if you're unsure if your guilt is true or false, or if you confess your sins but still don't feel forgiven?

Consider *the Holy Spirit's guidance*. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to guide us into truth,[{8}](#) especially concerning sin.[{9}](#) If the Bible doesn't prohibit certain behaviors, you - if you're a follower of Jesus - can ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom about them. Jesus' brother James wrote, "If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you."[{10}](#) Discerning God's guidance is not a perfect science, but His inner conviction can help you sort things out.

Making Things Right

What do you do if you're not sure if your guilt feelings are legitimate, or if you don't feel forgiven?

Realize that *God's promises trump your own self-criticism*. Members of God's family can trust His opinion even when they don't feel like it's true. We can "set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."[{11}](#) Does your heart condemn you unjustly? You can say, "Listen, heart. I'm a child of God. I've confessed my sin and He says I'm forgiven. I refuse to believe your

condemnation.”

I recommend that you converse with yourself in private rather than in public! For a variety of psychological and spiritual reasons, your guilt feelings may not disappear immediately. Changing established emotional patterns can take time. Choosing to believe God is good starting point.

Realize also that *God's promises trump the real enemy*. This may be hard to swallow, but it's important. Jesus taught the existence of “Satan,” a “liar and the father of lies,” [{12}](#) the “accuser” of believers. [{13}](#)

I once considered myself too intellectual to believe in Satan. Our university mascot was the “Blue Devil.” To me, the devil was some guy in a blue costume with a pitchfork who ran around at basketball games. Then I heard that Satan the deceiver has some people so deceived that they don't believe he exists. Jesus' life and teachings eventually convinced me that Satan was real. If you experience false guilt feelings, realize that they may have a lower source. You needn't deny the feelings, but you can deny false guilt based on Jesus' friendship with you. [{14}](#)

You may need to *make restitution*. My second year in college, I swiped a plastic bucket from behind the lectern in the psychology lecture hall. It had been there every day during the semester. “No one wants it,” I convinced myself. “It deserves to be taken.” I used it to wash my car.

Two years later, I read a booklet about God's forgiveness. That bucket kept coming to mind. I not only needed to admit my theft to God. I needed to make restitution.

My booty long since lost, I purchased a new bucket and carried it sheepishly across campus one afternoon. Finding no one in the psychology building to confess to, I left the bucket in a broom closet with a note of explanation. Maybe a janitor read it. My conscience was clear.

After hearing of this stolen bucket episode in a lecture, one friend wrote his former employer to confess all the items he had stolen and to offer restitution. "We all probably have some plastic buckets in our lives," observed another associate.

Feeling guilty? You may just need to relax unrealistic standards in a stress-filled world. But you also may need to face genuine personal shortcomings. If you do, you can know that the complete forgiveness that Jesus offers is free and that His truth trumps all challengers.

This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, "Grappling with Guilt," *In Touch*, February 2005, pp. 18-20; Copyright © Rusty Wright 2005.

Notes

1. O. H. Mowrer, "Sin, the Lesser of Two Evils," quoted in Henry R. Brandt, *The Struggle for Peace* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, 1965).
2. Mitch Stacy, "'Bruce Almighty' Phone Number Annoys Many," *Associated Press/AOL News*, May 28, 2003.
3. For detailed information on Jesus and evidence to support His claims, see www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.
4. *The Life and Journal of the Rev. Mr. Henry Aline* (Boston, 1806), 31-40; selection abridged in Henry James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library/Random House, 1936 [original copyright 1902]), 214-215.
5. Colossians 2:13-14 NLT.
6. 1 John 1:9 NLT.
7. For more on false guilt, see, Kerby Anderson, "False Guilt," www.probe.org/false-guilt/ and Sue Bohlin, "It's Not Your Fault!" www.probe.org/its-not-your-fault/.
8. John 16:13.
9. John 16:8.

10. James 1:5 NLT.
11. 1 John 3:18-20 NIV.
12. John 8:44 NASB.
13. Revelation 12:9-10 NASB.
14. 1 John 4:4 NLT.

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Animal House Revisited: Fraternity Fosters Faith

Rusty Wright

College fraternities don't always have the best reputations. Wild parties, hazing, elitism, substance abuse, gang rapes and more help perpetuate the Animal House image that the film of the same name portrayed. Parents — and many students — might wonder why any sane person ever would want to join.

Though the weaknesses of university Greek-letter societies are often what grab headlines, numerous national fraternities and sororities try hard to change both their image and substance. Believe it or not, many were founded to promote character development and strong cultural values and are seeking to return to their roots.

For example, my own fraternity, Lambda Chi Alpha, has a vision "...to prepare and encourage collegiate men of good character, high ethics, and noble ideals to contribute positively to the world in which they live." Lambda Chi's annual North

American Food Drive has raised over 10.5 million pounds of food for the needy since 1993.

The liability crisis is one factor motivating “Greeks” to focus on character. In today’s litigious society, a tragic injury or death can prompt lawsuits that could put them out of business. Moderating local behavior helps perpetuate national survival.

But there is more going on here than mere survival. Often top leaders of national Greek organizations are deeply committed citizens who seek to live by and promote the principles their groups espouse.

Many Greek organizations were founded on biblical or quasi-biblical principles. Alpha Tau Omega (ATO) is one of the more prominent fraternities with over 240 active and inactive chapters and over 6,000 undergraduate members. ATO chief executive officer Wynn Smiley told me of his group’s convictions.

It seems that ATO was founded in 1865 by a 19-year-old former Confederate soldier who wanted to promote brotherly love as a means of helping to reconcile North and South after the U.S. Civil War. The organization that young Otis Allan Glazebrook founded was not religious but sought to foster reconciliation and brotherhood based on the self-sacrifice and unconditional love demonstrated by Jesus.

Smiley and his colleagues emphasize these roots in their recruitment and educational development. “Jesus made the most radical statements on love,” notes Smiley. An example: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”

Allen Wilson is ATO’s Spiritual Leadership Consultant. Most chapters have chaplains and Wilson travels to help encourage spiritual development. ATO even has a devotional book with inspirational articles by alumni and others on practical

themes like character, trust, humility, truth, servant leadership and persevering through disappointment.

Smiley readily admits that not every member or chapter exemplifies such values. But he points out that hidden personal hurts — from family illness to depression — plus students’ concerns for their own future, ethical dilemmas and faith raise questions that “brothers practicing brotherly love should help each other explore.” He says that “ATO is committed to talking about issues of faith” and to providing “a loving, trusting environment for brothers to explore, discuss, argue and perhaps even on occasion resolve questions.”

He is onto something significant here. Animal House, meet the competition.

Cool Stuff About Love and Sex

Rusty Wright

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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