

June 2006

BA

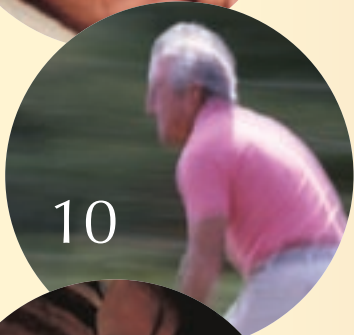
BIBLE ADVOCATE

Godly men, strong dads

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Coming in the July-August BA: patriotism, carnal warfare, church and state

In the June issue of *Now What?*: deliverance from homosexuality (<http://now-what.cog7.org>)

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Welcome to June!



This month is worth celebrating: weddings we attend, Dad's day on the eighteenth, and more. With school out and summer in, June launches the season of camps, conferences, retreats, and vacations for our church and our families.

That means more opportunities to grow in the grace and truth of Jesus and to share our blessings from heaven with others here on earth. One way to grow in Christ is to digest the contents of this issue. We begin with the struggles of men to express their emotions and to become godly fathers.

Then we turn to the swelling tide of homosexuality in this culture. If, as is often said, the church is a hospital for sinners rather than a museum for saints, why are there not among us more who struggle with same-sex attractions, just as we often worship with those who battle demons of strong drink, greed, gossip, and other kinds of lust?

The answer may be "They are among us, but we don't pin a label on them or perhaps even recognize them as homosexuals." If this is so, we should rejoice that the gentle Spirit of Christ is at work in the church.

On the other hand, could the answer be that we have so branded and stigmatized certain classes of sinners that they come to believe they are no longer welcome here?

Christians may apply a great deal more of grace and compassion toward wounded persons than we do. Without compromising the Word of truth, we should earnestly try to befriend disreputable sinners as our Lord did — and still does. Thank God, He befriended us!

More about June: At this writing, *The Da Vinci Code* movie is scheduled for release in May and should be in full swing in June. Caution: This is not the Enemy's first effort to turn the minds and hearts of God's people against His written and living Word, and it won't be the last. To help stem the tide of skepticism, we produced our own *Da Vinci Code* tract and mailed it to most readers with our annual funding letter in May. Please put the tract to good use where you live, and accept our thanks for your generous support of the BA. If you didn't get a tract or would like additional copies, contact us at one of the addresses on this page.

— Calvin Burrell



Do Big Boys Cry?

Exploring the complex territory of men and their emotions. by Dave Listul

Men are like mascara, some women say: They run at the first sign of emotion.

Little boys are taught early on that guys should be strong and brave — the John Wayne type who seldom show feelings. They're told, "Big boys don't cry!" Apparently, expressing emotions is a sign of weakness more nearly compatible with women than with men.

If you want to see a man cry, tune into TLC's *Overhaulin'*. Every week some poor guy is duped into thinking that his beloved old car has been stolen, when in reality it is being restored by a team of experts. The seven-day deadline presents nearly impossible odds, yet the brotherhood of mechanical artists somehow completes the task in time for a high-drama unveiling before the astonished owner. As TV cameras zoom in, the man is overcome at the sight of his restored masterpiece. He can't express himself, but those tears on his face tell it all!

What differences between men and women can help explain why men perceive and respond the way they do? Is expressing emotions outwardly more authentic than not expressing them? For clues to the "crying game," let's consider biblical, biological, and environmental factors that contribute to the struggle men face.

Design of emotions

Adam and Eve had a great marriage at the start. He didn't hear about all the men she might have married, nor did she listen to how wonderful his mother's cooking was. But were they

designed to feel and express their emotions in the same way? Did Adam ever choke up as he beheld the wonders of nature or blubber with joy after God created Eve? We may never know. With good purpose, God made both male and female as relational beings and equipped both sexes with unique emotional tools designed to match their God-given roles.

Healthy roles and emotions were the Master Designer's purpose from the start. We may suspect that the first man and woman were created so they would respond differently to their roles and responsibilities. Yet the emergence of sin damaged Adam and Eve's relational toolboxes, leading to distortion in how men and women interact and express themselves.

Male-bashing is all too common today, but we needn't emasculate our men anymore than we try to turn women into power-hungry males. Men are not intentionally distant and insensitive any more than women are deliberately moody and disrespectful. To this day the roles of men and women are still being redesigned, much to the chagrin of both genders.

Gender differences

What are some of the created differences between the sexes, and how are they relevant to a boy's ability or willingness to express his emotions?

Men may experience difficulty expressing their emotions due to, in part, biological and hormonal differences in their brains. Studies continue to find evidence of variations in behavior and brain function between the sexes only

a few months after birth. These studies tend to detect more variation in emotional *expression* than they do in emotional *experience*. Thus, brain differences between men and women may in fact contribute to the variations in their emotional expressiveness. Men and women may often experience or feel the same emotions, yet they express them through differing means.

Recent advances in brain imaging provide further evidence of how men and women use different parts of their brains to relate and solve problems. The average man is physically bigger and stronger than his female counterpart. He scores higher in independence, dominance, spatial and mathematical skills, rank-related aggression, and other areas. Men typically are practical thinkers who like to solve problems, make, fix, and do things; they often express their emotions and empathy through actions rather than words. Studies also reveal that men are more aggressive and dominating than women, using power rather than prose to win battles.

On the other hand, studies show that women fare better than men in relationships, in verbal and language skills, in

recognizing emotional overtones in others, in emotional expressiveness and empathy, and in security-seeking. Studies of different cultures also consistently identify women as crying more frequently than men, even in non-Western cultures where it may be considered OK for a man to cry. Thus, women tend to use emotional empathy that focuses on fostering and maintaining relationships. The areas of the brain that control these factors are actually larger in women than in men. Science has yet to determine whether these size differences are due to specialization and usage, much like a muscle that grows with use or atrophies with neglect.

Men's bodies and brains are different from women's. Some of men's greater difficulty with expressing emotions may be due in part to hard-wiring differences in the brain. Still, men *do* have the ability to express emotions – even if not as adeptly as women.

Then why don't they do this more often? Perhaps biblical and biological roles do not totally explain our behaviors. Let's look at another piece in our puzzle for why some big boys don't cry.

With good purpose, God made both male and female as relational beings and equipped both sexes with unique emotional tools designed to match their God-given roles.

A crying shame

Our society continues to promote emotional development for girls, while teaching boys that they shouldn't show signs of emotional vulnerability, fear, or hurt. Learning to be tough and aggressive, some boys never grow up to be emotionally healthy adults and are left with few emotional tools to deal with life. Boys cannot learn what they have never seen modeled in their own fathers or in other important male figures in their lives.

Boys who don't cry often become men who are ill-prepared to cope with the complexities of adult relationships that require successfully managing stress, conflict, and interpersonal relationships. These big boys don't cry for anyone; they can't risk it and thus pay the price. Men who cry may be perceived as weak and are more vulnerable to

attack and intimidation by other males. Authentic tears, on the other hand, can reduce stress and help control the levels of certain chemicals or hormones that manage moods.

Granted, some men grow up in healthy homes and learn to express themselves, even in tears. Yet the percentage remains lower than it should be. Many grown men lack the ability to cope emotionally, and they frequently become susceptible to stress-related illnesses and early death. No wonder men have higher rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, and other pathological behaviors.

Big boys can improve their ability to recognize and express their emotions. For some men it may seem too late in the game, yet they can by developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Despite the confusion society brings to the table, men

have no better example to follow than that of Christ. Men do not need to be more like women; they need to be more like Jesus.

What was Jesus like?

True, Jesus overturned the temple tables (Matthew 21:12) and called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers" (3:7) — demonstrations of masculine strength that most men relate to and want to model.

But Jesus was also gentle. He wept when Lazarus died (John 11:35) and when He approached Jerusalem days before His crucifixion (Luke 19:41ff). He showed compassion for hungry people (Matthew 15:32). He forgave the worst punishment (Luke 23:34) and didn't hide His dependence on God in His time of greatest need (22:42). Jesus displayed the full range of emotions and showed us how to be a "real" man (Hebrews 4:15). This is the example men should follow.

Inauthentic Man

What does the Inauthentic Man look like? In *The Silence of Adam* Dr. Larry Crabb says he is outwardly controlling, destructive, and selfish; but inside he is powerless, terrified, and angry. His depression, irritability, and anger often push others away and protect the frightened little boy inside from facing his own fears. The Inauthentic Man feels incomplete, struggles with limited ways of expressing himself, and uses either power or sex as his primary means of relating. He wouldn't dare let someone see him cry. Pride and a risk of showing weakness or vulnerability prevent him from seeking the help he needs, often leading to disastrous results (Proverbs 14:12).

This incomplete man may be a church leader or brother in Christ; yet he remains enslaved by a sinful need for power and control, keeping him from becoming an effective minister of the gospel. Focusing only on Jesus' outward displays of aggression, he misconstrues Jesus as an arrogant, powerful Savior with no signs of weakness.

— Dave Listul

Authentic Man

In his book *The Silence of Adam*, Dr. Larry Crabb takes Christ's example a step further by describing the Authentic Man. This man pursues faith in Christ that releases him from fear and condemnation and empowers him to be gentle and forgiving. He learns to lead people with conviction but can also submit to others with humility. He understands that choosing to live in Christ is not some kind of magic that ends at conversion; it begins a process of sanctification that can prevent further "calcification" of the heart and mind. True courage is revealed in the Authentic Man's life when he not only admits that he too is vulner-

able to emotional struggles, but also accepts the responsibility to do something about it.

The Authentic Man permits himself to be released from the sin and guilt of the past and doesn't blame his father or family for his actions. He no longer suffers in silence but chooses to expose emotional scars and allow Christ to heal and renew a right spirit within him (Psalm 51:10). He accepts adoption as a child of God and receives the Holy Spirit's power to overcome his fears and to re-parent the little boy inside who longs to be delivered (Romans 8:15, 16).

The Authentic Man becomes a "big boy" who can rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (12:5). He becomes like David, who mourned for Absalom (2 Samuel 18:33), and Peter, who wept bitterly after denying Christ (Matthew 26:75).

Submission and accountability

By now, we may assume that our big boy has become a man who can completely express himself. But as the saying goes, "No man is an island unto himself."

Christian men need godly friends and mentors who can help them maintain a healthy concept of what it means to follow Christ's example of masculinity. If men want to remain emotionally healthy and be big boys who lead and are not afraid to cry, then they must submit to other men and be held accountable for their attitudes, words, and deeds.

The Adversary seeks to destroy our lives and relationships, yet godly men can sustain their spiritual and emotional growth in



Christ when they remain firmly grounded in the Word of God and submit to one another. They need the Holy Spirit's power and discernment as they await the Lord's return. "As it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

I bet that many a big boy's eyes will glisten with tears when this comes to pass. **14**

A professional counselor in North Dakota, **Dave Listul** attends church in Alfred. For more information on men and their moods, you may e-mail him at davelistul@churchofgodalfred.com.



Questions & Answers

A recent publication of our church spoke of confession of sin as a continual experience for the Christian. Is it true that the most godly and trusting people sin a little every day?

It all depends on how we think of sin. If sin is mostly an outward violation of the great moral laws of God (see 1 John 3:4), then we may go many days without missing that mark badly enough so that anyone notices. No lying; no stealing; no murder; no adultery or idolatry; remember the Sabbath; honor your parents; and so forth. Some folks, like Paul in Philippians 3:6, have claimed to be blameless with regard to such a checklist.

But there are other biblical descriptions of sin:

Words: “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking” (Prov. 10:19; compare James 3:2).

Thoughts: “The thought of foolishness is sin” (Prov. 24:9, KJV; compare Matt. 5:28).

Unbelief: “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

Omission: “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Adding all the good we should have done, but didn’t, doubles our transgressions. “All unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17).

Failure to love as God loves: Matthew 5:48 elevates the standard of holiness to God himself, particularly in the area of loving our enemies.

Coming short: Romans 3:23 implies that to fall short of the glory that God intends for us is to sin. Verse 23b, written in the present tense, confirms that all people fall short of God’s glory regularly.

Putting all this together, a composite definition of sin in Scripture could read like this: “Sin is any thought, any word, any deed, any action, any failure to act, any habit, or any attitude that does not reflect the standards of God’s Word — either His written Word or His living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Who is sufficient for such perfection? Who can

attain it? No wonder Jesus taught us to pray “Forgive us our debts” with about the same regularity as we pray for daily bread (Matt. 6:11, 12).

We may also think of sin not so much as what we do (“I am not conscious of any sinful action this week or last”) but as what we were/are. We were born with a fallen nature, and we mostly obeyed it. Since coming to Christ by faith and receiving His Spirit, we no longer obey that sinful nature. Still, it lurks somewhere in our members and taints all our thoughts, words, and acts so that they do not perfectly reflect the image of God and Christ as we wish they did (compare Rom. 7:17, 23).

One wise pastor confessed that even after the best sermon he ever preached and the best prayer he ever prayed, he still sensed the need for confession (because of pride, self-interest, and inner feelings). The tear of repentance is always in the eye of those drawing nearer to their God. Why is that?

Because although sin no longer *reigns* in the life of the regenerate believer, it still *remains*. The sin nature is not yet eradicated, although it has been mortally wounded and is being daily mortified. Romans 6–8 addresses these issues at length.

The answer to your question can be stretched too far in either direction. Those who say they do not sin every day are probably not aware of all the biblical descriptions of sin, nor are they very much in tune with their own heart and mind.

Those who stress the inevitability of sin in a way that excuses them from its responsibility may not have yet found the narrow biblical path of holiness. It is the work of the Spirit to sanctify us wholly in Christ, and our only right response to sin is confession and repentance. This work is real, but it will never be complete until we come with Him to glory.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Outlive Your Past

by Joe Corrales

My dad eventually repented of a long and sinful life. He died a Christian.

When I was a boy, my father was physically and mentally abusive. He drank a lot and seemed angry about how life had turned out for him. Maybe he took matters out on me because I was the oldest child. Dad often ordered me around. The things I did to obey him were never right, leading to a tirade of insults.

As I grew, Dad's abuse accelerated from swinging a belt to punching me with his fists. Once, he knocked me out; I revived, and there he stood to knock me out again.

Like any kid in that situation, I harbored thoughts of getting even someday. Around age 13, I grew about six inches over one summer. I began to work out and even joined the school athletic teams. Though I was still pretty skinny, my dad noticed my growth and became paranoid. He'd say, "I know what you're doing. You're trying to get bigger so you can get even!" The abuse continued.

In high school I became a Christian and began attending church. I met my future wife and graduated. As the Vietnam War was winding down, I was called to serve as a non-combatant. I went through the training and

ate as though there were no tomorrow. The officers must have figured our bodies were all the defense we had, so they worked us non-combatants harder than anyone else. This training wasn't that hard for me, since I had gone through most of it at home anyway.

Arriving home on leave to surprise my family, I walked in on an argument between Mom and Dad. Although I had never seen my dad abuse my mother, I thought he was going to hit her. All the memories of past abuse came back, and I became angry. I tapped my dad on the shoulder and saw the surprised horror on his face (he had never seen me with an extra 50 pounds of military muscle). I picked him up, threatened him, and put him down again. He began to sob. After that, there was never any more violence in the family.

When I got out of the Army, Dad had become a follower of Jesus, and we both became active in ministry. One day he said, "You know, Joe, I did an awful lot of bad things in my life, but the worst was never raising you right. Now when people compliment me as if I had anything to do with how you live, those compliments hurt worse than any insult."

"Dad," I said, "I had a choice

to live just like you or to find the better way. Because of you, I saw what it was like to smoke, drink, and abuse your family, and I decided never to be like that. So, yes, you had a lot to do with what I am today."

He seemed a little shaken for a moment, then said, "Well, I guess I'll have to settle for that then." We embraced and buried the past forever. It wasn't hard to forgive a man who had changed so dramatically. He spent the rest of his life serving the Lord.

Are you using your abuse as an excuse? You are responsible for your own actions; the pains of your past will not excuse you. By the grace of God, you can have a life rich and full of promise if you decide to outlive your past. ■■

Joe Corrales, a bi-vocational pastor of Heart of Worship congregation in San Antonio, TX, also teaches and serves as head of the Computer Science Department at Palo Alto College.



Passing the Midlife Test



With a lift from beside and above, men can survive their middle years.
by Joel Blaylock

It's a pleasant afternoon for bicycling, complete with a firm, trim woman on skates gliding along the road where I ride. She is half my age and acts as if I am the most wonderful thing God ever created. My first thought is *I wish my wife liked to exercise. That would make a good connection point for us.*

I didn't make eye contact with her — at first. But as I continued riding my bike every day, she came up and we shared in an intriguing conversation. A fit 29-year-old female taking an interest in a 47-year-old man should have been my first clue that something was amiss. I was infatuated with her attention.

She talked about her work, and I listened. I talked about exercise, and she listened. *This is the first time I've felt this way in years,* I thought. *I feel alive, awake — like a youngster.* Her interest lightened my middle-age depression, and my bike rode faster. I felt like a million dollars.

I commented on the fancy helmet she wore and how nice the sunsets were in these parts. She smiled. I smiled. I made a joke about her cool, sporty car. She laughed, and we shared the moment. Then I realized that work and church had managed to crowd out too much of family from my life. This woman met a need I should have been developing in my marriage for years.

My late pastor once said of temptation, "Each one is like a snowflake — custom-designed to interest and entrap you." I was hooked, and as the sun faded, I rode home thinking about seeing this new friend again.

Finally, before it was too late, I came to myself — like the prodigal. After a struggle, I decided to work on relating with my wife and developing my walk with Christ. I asked God to help me find satisfaction in my current situation.

Later I came to realize that the encounter with this young woman was my midlife test. Thank God, I passed it. But many others do not because they don't understand what makes us vulnerable in our middle years.

Realities of midlife

For women, menopause signals an end to new motherhood. For men, midlife challenges our youth and manhood. We realize we'll never be as young as we once were, prompting all kinds of insecurities and even fears. It's our last chance to feel younger, to be seen with a younger woman, and to be free from the obligations and liabilities that middle age brings.

In the process, we may seriously question whether God really loves us for who we are; we certainly don't love ourselves very much now. We question the choices we've made to this point and ponder why God didn't help us choose more wisely. We question all we've been told so far and may even wonder about our salvation, our family future, and our daily routines. Often we blame others for our discontent.

Unfortunately, these are not often momentary thoughts or even one-year concerns. Sometimes a midlife crisis can last several years, coming and going as grief often does. Yes, the testing will end, but not until we have reconsidered all that we hold sacred.

Ruts and routines

The truth is that most of us in midlife tire of routine — even when it is reasonably pleasant and productive. Constant love can seem smothering, and the obligations of children and family can be hard to fathom for another five, ten, or twenty more years. We often feel we have lived the first half of our lives for others, so what can we do for ourselves now?

Church especially can seem methodical, and prayer may feel useless. Our lives seem too predictable, so we try to spice things up. Our wives often face similar issues. After the children are grown, they wonder, *Am I still desirable? Is this the best I can do? Do I still have choices in life?*

If so, I should make them while I can.

Depending on Christ

With age comes the knowledge that if we are to excel in life and reach our goals, then we'd better do it now — sometimes at any cost. Sin is like that. It tells us to seize the opportunity, or it will be gone forever. Eat this fruit, and you'll be like gods. Lies — easily believed, with life-long consequences.

Many midlifers take the bait and don't see the hook until they've made major mistakes. These aren't unpardonable, but many couples find adultery and the attendant struggles too much to bear. Their once-strong marriages end in ruin.

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Myths of Midlife

You may be wrestling with one or more of these thoughts:

I will be instantly happy with a new person in my life.

But reality says that this person will also require a relationship. Once the physical attraction diminishes, you must work constantly at knowing the person in a meaningful way.

Buying new things will fill the void. But reality says that new things satisfy only temporarily, while increases in debt and responsibility are permanent. Instead, find time to be alone with God and discover what you really want for the rest of your life. God cares most about your long-term happiness.

Question what you're feeling, and get back to reality. But like other types of grief, a midlife crisis can't be rushed. It takes time to sort out what you really want and need. You may help yourself and your spouse by limiting outside activity and making concrete plans to redevelop the marriage. For those whose spouse needs more time to sort out his/her life, your show of support by prayer and not smothering the one in crisis will make you more attractive.

For additional reading, see Jim Conway's *Men in Midlife Crisis* or Jim and Sally Conway's *Women in Midlife Crisis*, as well as other books by the Conways available at www.midlife.com/html/resources/books/r01_books.htm.

— Joel Blaylock

The Root of Obedience

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

Recently, I heard the story of a woman whose demanding husband had come up with a list of twenty-five daily tasks she was supposed to perform in order to satisfy him. As she worked her way down the list every day, her resentment grew. How she hated that list and the man who required her to live by it!

As you might expect, that marriage didn't last long. Some years later the woman fell in love with another man, whom she eventually married. Unlike her first husband, this man made no list for her but treated her with great respect. He honored her, and she came to love him deeply.

A few years into this marriage, the woman was going through some old records and came across a copy of the detested list from her first marriage. As she began to read it, she burst out laughing. She was doing every one of those twenty-five tasks — and a whole lot more — for her second husband. And she was loving it!

What made the difference? Her second marriage was rooted in love rather than in a checklist of duties and tasks.

The right obedience

Scripture indicates that God intends our relationship with Him to be like this woman's second marriage. He wants obedience that comes from the heart, that is based on love and respect for Him, and that results in peace and joy for us. Yet it seems that so many Christians don't have the joy that should accompany obedience. One hears sermon after sermon and reads article after article decrying the lack of commitment among Christians, the lack of financial support for the church, the lack of prayer and Bible study, the lack of participation in ministry, the lack of eagerness to share the gospel.

Could it be that so many of us fall short in these areas because our relationship with God is like the woman's first marriage? Could it be that we think of our Lord as a demanding husband instead of the lover of our souls? Are we too preoccupied with lists of requirements instead of being captivated by God's love? Are we too focused on what we think we must do for Him and not on what He has already done for us?

Consider how harshly Jesus

spoke about the most religious people of His day — those whose religion focused on their preoccupation with lists and duties. Quoting from Isaiah, He said, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:8, 9).

Clearly, God seeks believers whose hearts are knit to Him in love, not just followers who focus on the rules. After all, the first and greatest commandment is about love: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (22:37).

If we fail to obey this commandment, all other obedience amounts to little. And if we obey this commandment, all other obedience to God will be a delight.

Loving God

But how do we go about loving God? How do we get from a checklist of rules, perhaps based on fear, to service rooted in love? After all, love is not something one can simply turn on like a light bulb.

Part of the answer can be found in Jesus' comment to Simon the Pharisee about the sinful woman who poured perfume on His feet: "Her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Do we think of ourselves as did Simon, the honorable, conscientious citizen? Or do we think of ourselves as did the woman? How we answer these questions may have a great deal to do with how deeply we love God.

If we compare ourselves with other humans and focus on laws governing external obedience when we contemplate sin, we might think we're not such bad people. If I say to myself, *I don't lie or shoplift or commit adultery or take God's name in vain. I keep the Sabbath, go to church, pay tithe, honor my parents, treat my neighbors well*, then I consider myself a pretty decent, respectable person. Consequently, I don't see a lot of need for God's forgiveness, and I'm not likely to love Him very much.

On the other hand, if I reflect on the transcendent holiness of God and recognize that I fail daily to love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind, I may feel condemned and in need of a great deal of forgiveness. If I focus on the mercy and kindness of God and see that I am frequently unmerciful and unkind, I may sense my guilt and feel worthy of doom. If I think about Jesus' command to do good to those who despise me, I may feel convicted. If I focus on what it means to love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8), I am utterly condemned

because every day I fail to demonstrate this kind of love. When I read Paul's instructions "Do not be anxious about anything . . ." (Philippians 4:6), I am guilty because I am often anxious. When I read that Christ's attitude was one of complete humility and love for humanity and that my attitude should be the same (2:5), I am condemned because I frequently fail to have Christ's attitude. In brief, I fall far, far short of the love and holiness of God every day and, therefore, have much to be forgiven for. All I can do is fall down before Him and cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Along with knowing the magnitude of my sins comes a greater appreciation for the magnitude of God's love in forgiving me. On top of that, because I am in Christ, I don't live under the condemnation I so much deserve (Romans 8:1, 2). On the contrary, I am forgiven by the death of the Lord in my behalf and am seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6)!

How can I help but have great love for the God who sent His

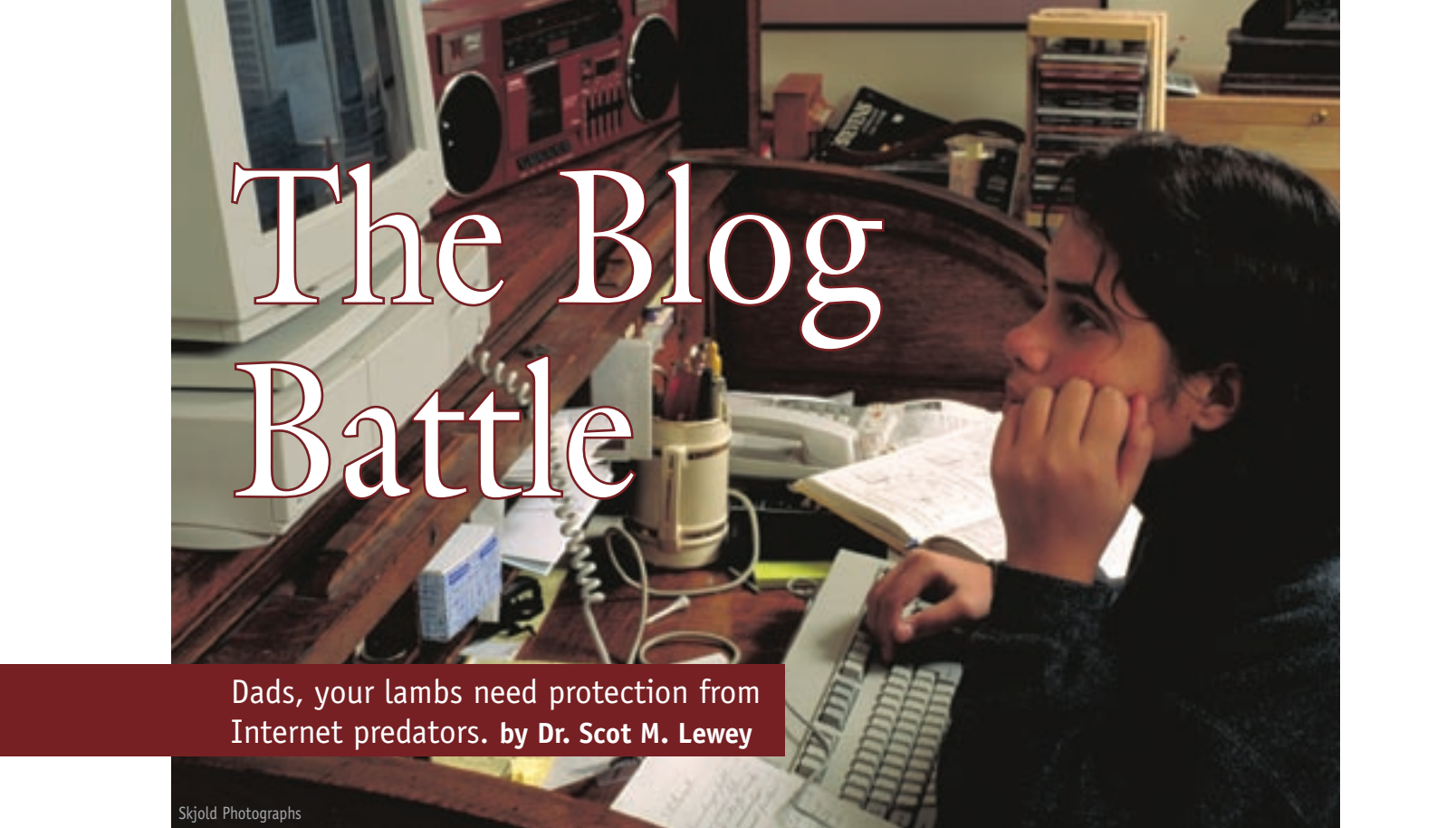
Son into the world to die for me? How can I help but honor and serve Him!

If we would focus more on the magnitude of God's love for us, we would find a great deal more love for Him in our hearts — love that would translate into cheerful devotion, eager obedience, and zealous service that can never be matched by checklist obedience. If in our personal devotions we would meditate on the greatness of God, the extent of His holiness, the depth of His character, and the expanse of His love, we would find ourselves loving Him a great deal more.

Unlike the husband described in the first marriage, our Lord cares deeply for us and honors us. We need only recognize that fact to find a whole new motivation for serving Him with every ounce of our being — a service that will bring us peace and joy and ever-increasing love for Him.

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

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The Blog Battle

Dads, your lambs need protection from Internet predators. by Dr. Scot M. Lewey

Skjold Photographs

As fathers, we would be horrified to see our teen's picture posted on a billboard with her name, school, phone number, and private thoughts in public view. However, your teen may already have such a billboard, known as a Web log (or blog), posted on the Internet in clear view of pedophiles and sexual predators. My teenage daughter did.

Millions of such blogs exist on social sites such as MySpace.com, Xanga.com, and Facebook.com. They are created by teens, many of whom don't know that anyone with minimal Internet experience can view them.¹ Parents and Internet experts now worry that these sites have become the new playground for sex offenders.²

Jesus said, "I assure you, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely

be a thief and a robber! . . . The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:1, 10). The Internet has provided an opening in the fence, allowing thieves entry into the sheepfold and easy access to our lambs.

Fathers are shepherds of their homes, not hired hands (v. 12). We are called to pray, protect, and lay down our lives if necessary for our families just as the Good Shepherd laid down His life for us (v. 11). After I read about several sexual assaults and murders of teenage girls linked to their Internet activity,³ my shepherd instincts were aroused to fight. To do this, I had to be properly trained through education and then take action.

Education

I learned that Web diary sites are free to anyone claiming to be 14 years or older and that they're easy to set up. Teens upload the

latest pictures from their digital cameras or cell phones and keep in touch with their friends through a Webring. With so many teens posting and receiving comments, the most popular of these sites, MySpace.com, gets almost three times the traffic of the search engine, Google.⁴

I also learned that though most teens don't disclose their real names in their personal profiles, they eventually disclose them through online postings, along with their age, address, and school.⁵ One expert refers to these sites as a "combination of a diary, a personal ad, and a cyber dating site . . . a public diary on steroids."⁵

Those teens who voice unhappiness with their parents, boy-friends or girlfriends, school, or life in general are wandering too close to the fence. Several recent reports tell of predators using online information to lure teenage

girls into meeting them before assaulting them and, in a few cases, killing them.

According to the Girl Scout Research Institute poll, 30 percent of teenage girls have been sexually harassed in online chat rooms, yet only 7 percent told their parents.⁶ The youth Internet safety survey revealed that 19 percent of young Internet users received unwanted sexual solicitation, 5 percent a distressing sexual solicitation, and 3 percent an aggressive sexual solicitation involving offline contact or requests for it.⁷

Action

What can fathers do with such information? First, we must accept that we are facing a spiritual battle for our teens, as Ephesians 6:12 says, and then engage ourselves in the war.

If our teens are regularly online, we must encourage them to be vigilant about protecting their identity and discourage them and their friends from posting personal information. Warning teens of the dangers of “talking” online to anyone they don’t know further helps protect them.

We can inform our teens that we know blogs and instant-text messaging are available on computers, cell phones, and wireless PDAs. We should review social Internet sites’ privacy and security policies with them before allowing them to start a blog.

Discussing our concerns openly, we should insist on an Internet usage contract that states the consequences of violations. Internet security advice and sample contracts are available from several resources.⁸ We should encourage our teens to immedi-

ately disclose any inappropriate or unsolicited messages without fear of losing their Internet privileges, provided they follow the online rules. We must insist that home computers are kept in the open with displays facing outward.

If we’re not sure if our teens already have a blog, we can search for it on the Web by entering their name or high school.⁵ Various Internet security monitoring software programs are available, including those that provide a complete history of online use by recording every screen shot and keystroke. Though some will consider this too intrusive, it is much less so than reading a private diary. Monitoring teens’ “online diary on steroids” is one legitimate way to protect them from predators.

Stand firm

We don’t have to live in fear of what may happen to our teens online. Rather, as shepherd-fathers we must

Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. Take a firm stand against him, and be

strong in your faith (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

In doing this, we won’t allow Satan to grab one of our lambs.



Dr. Scot M. Lewey writes and practices medicine in Colorado Springs, CO. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New Living Translation*.



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6. Web Wise Kids (www.webwisekids.org)
7. Wired Safety (www.wiredsafety.org)
8. Ibid.

Fathers are shepherds of their homes, not hired hands. We are called to pray, protect, and lay down our lives if necessary for our families just as the Good Shepherd laid down His life for us.

Live Pure

by Kurt Lang

Today, class, we will cover one of the most important virtues in life: purity.

Oops. Now I've gone and said it — the P word. Pardon my language. Who am I to go against what this titillating, tempting culture tells you about old-fashioned sexual purity according to the Bible? Who am I to

actually write about the P word in a magazine?

Who am I? I am a child of God, that's who. Because of His mercy and grace, I am loved as the most pure of God's creatures who ever was or ever will be.

And so are you if you trust the only Lord and Savior, Jesus. We are accepted by the Father in heaven as fit for His presence — forgiven, spotless, no wrinkle

or blemish of any kind. He loves us that much! And because He does, we want to live out that sort of purity in our daily walk with Him.

Wedding day

Now that we're standing in a common class, let's learn this lesson, OK? What is sexual purity? Think of a white blanket of snow covering the yard, untainted by dirt, footprints, or snowmen. It's clean, undisturbed, peaceful; but it sounds too cold, doesn't it? Think again.

Purity is the beauty of a bride in her white wedding dress. She wears the color and the dress proudly; they represent the new gift she will give her waiting husband on their wedding evening. They had earlier pledged to God and one another that they would not open the gift until the appointed day. Such a vow expresses love to God and to each other.

When it comes to your wedding day, will your stunning white represent a pure soul? Or will the traditional color merely cover what you really don't want others to know about?

Indelible print

But is purity really that big a deal? Why do your church and your parents always raise this subject anyway? Are they just



Skjold Photographs

trying to spoil your fun, using all those scare tactics? Sure, they are: STDs and AIDS are great fun, huh? Well, only if you're immortal and invincible!

The case for purity is not just about physical consequences, though; it goes much deeper than that. Every act of sexual intimacy between two people intertwines them not only physically but also psychologically and spiritually in a way that can never be reversed. Once the indelible imprint is made, we are never the same. It just makes good sense to take heed how we mate.

June is the traditional month for weddings, so give this some thought when you attend one soon. We, the Church of God, are like the bride, and Jesus is our bridegroom. Just as every girl who stands at the altar wants to be the most attractive bride possible for her guy, so we should be the most beautiful, holy, pure church we can be.

Every guy wants to stand tall and proud, accepting his beautiful bride to care for and love her. So does Jesus. Has the beauty of first-time marriage and the white purity of the wedding ceremony totally lost its meaning for us?

We should take this the more seriously because God assigns special significance to human sexuality. He sets the misuse of sex apart from other sins:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God

Top Ten Reasons a Christian Waits Till Marriage

1. For Jesus: First and foremost, we follow Christ.
2. For the Spirit: Don't you know your body is the temple?
3. For spouse: If you want a pure partner, then be one.
4. For baby: Little people grow better with a wedded mom and dad.
5. For health: A signed marriage license means safe sex.
6. For heart: Promiscuity often does emotional damage.
7. For home: Purity and monogamy energize marriage.
8. For happiness: "Blessed are they who do His commandments."
9. For the Word: "God said so" is reason enough for His kids.
10. For love's sake: The Love of God has won our hearts.

with your body (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, NIV).

Purity is not limited to your body and sexuality, of course. But if you get the lesson right in this area, the others will become a lot easier to master. If you're still wondering why God makes such a big deal here, don't stop studying until you get the answer from Him. Making up your own answer can't help!


Unchangeable message

As our spiritual father and creator, does God have the right to expect — even demand — purity in our lives? Of course He does! His message has not changed. When we get back to the bottom line, then, we must decide to be pure and reserve our sexuality for marriage, not just because some parent or youth leader says it's the right thing to do, but because we love God enough to do it all His way — not our selfish and lusty way.

Our culture wants you to believe that it's OK if you decide it

works for you to conduct yourself different than God teaches. Don't believe it. The same culture also wants you to believe that you evolved from monkeys or from a single amoeba, with no intelligent, supernatural design. Not quite!

Who you gonna believe: the God of the universe who cannot lie or a culture that comes up with stories like that?

Lesson ended. Questions welcome. 

Kurt Lang is director of the National FYC.



Online

Live Pure resources are available through the National FYC office. Visit our Web site at <http://home.cog7.org/ministries/nfyc/youthworker>, or e-mail us at nfyc@cog7.org.



When Homosexuality Hits Home

One family's growth in dealing with a member's sin. by Laurie Russell

Skjold Photographs

I hung up the phone with a strange feeling in my stomach. Something was wrong — very wrong — but I couldn't put my finger on it. The voices of my family on the phone were void of emotion in a way I had never heard before. But why? I would find out a few weeks later when they finally told me what my younger brother had announced to them: that he was homosexual.

There had been no external signs causing us to wonder if Brian was gay. He was not effeminate. He had dated a few girls here and there, though none seriously. He had become a Christian at a young age and had endeavored endlessly to grow in

his faith. Where did this surprise come from?

Questions and silence

Initially, each member of the family had similar reactions. Shell-shocked and almost paralyzed, we leaned much on our own understanding instead of turning to God. Our reactions took various forms.

My parents' first response was to question my brother: Was he ever sexually or physically abused without their knowledge? Did he feel neglected as a child? There must have been some external cause for his embracing homosexuality. Then they turned inward, spending hours in silent

turmoil. They mentally relived the past, wondering what they had done to bring this upon Brian.

In the year prior to receiving this news, my parents moved to a new state. This may have helped with their healing, as they had less pressure to answer a circle of friends for their new weariness. But it also hindered the process. Dad still had to put on a happy face and go to work each morning. My mother, on the other hand, began to withdraw, losing her desire to make new friends. Fear of others finding out about their son prevented both my parents from freely entering this new stage in life.

Storm of fears

My sister, Beth, was married with four children at the time of Brian's announcement. She too looked inward, bombarded with a storm of fears she had never before considered: Was this a hereditary thing? What was she now doing wrong that could lead or push her children into the gay lifestyle?

By analyzing every word and action in her household, Beth robbed herself of enjoying the differences that God gave each of her children.

New secret

I became engaged during the holiday season of this new revelation. My boyfriend, Mark, had invited me to spend the holiday with his family, and I had fallen in love with my future in-laws. Now, months later, I carried a new secret that I was not ready to share. Worse yet, I even hid it from Mark. What would he think? Would he wonder what kind of family he was marrying into? I was overcome with fear of my new family learning all about me.

My thoughts and emotions kept battling back and forth. I knew entering marriage with this secret would only damage the bond I was building with Mark. One night at dinner, the stress from carrying this burden alone peaked, and I shared it all with Mark. What a relief to learn that he would actually help lift the load. We cried and prayed together. What I once thought would divide us actually brought us closer together.

Outside help

As time went by, however, tension seemed to build for my family. My mom told me one night, "I keep praying for someone to talk with about this – someone removed enough so they won't be burdened but who knows me well enough to understand." We read books on the topic and asked God for that certain person to whom we could unload our feelings.

No help came quickly, but later God did bring special people who allowed each of us to vent our raw emotions, provided a shoulder to cry on, and spoke a guiding word. During this journey, I wondered why it took so long for God to send these people. Now I see that we would have tended to lean on them instead of learning to trust more fully in God.


Meanwhile, Brian turned to Exodus International, an organization that helps people find freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ. My parents attended one of their conferences with Brian, giving them more understanding of each other. They found peace in meeting other families who were dealing with homosexuality, and they found hope that healing could be genuine and complete.

Brian began group counseling and learned a great deal about

himself through the lives of others dealing with issues like his. The sessions enabled him to see certain patterns of thought and behavior he had fallen into. Pinpointing these pitfalls enabled him to begin breaking free from his bondage.

Working for good

Reflecting on the last seven years since my brother's confession, I see God's hand with us all the way. Brian continues with his counseling and is now romantically involved with a godly young woman who knows his "secret" and fully supports him.

I love my brother; I am so proud of him. He has grown from a frightened, self-absorbed person to one who looks outward and ministers to others. In His way and in His time, God is making good on His promise "that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). 

Laurie Russell
writes from
Lexington, KY.



Brian was not effeminate. He had become a Christian at a young age and had endeavored endlessly to grow in his faith. Where did this surprise come from?

by Israel Steinmetz

Help! My Friend's a Homosexual!

If your school is anything like the schools in my town, you probably suspect or know a fellow student who is a homosexual. Maybe it's obvious by the way he dresses, acts, and talks. Or maybe it's a deep, dark secret you've found out from him or from someone else. The question is, how do you treat the person and build a friendship? How should you talk about her when she's not around? How do you share Jesus with her? What should you think about her and her behavior? Let's check out what God says about homosexuality in the Bible.

First, homosexuality is a sin. A lot of talk out there says it's OK. Even people claiming to be Christians think the Bible doesn't really talk against homosexuality. But the Bible condemns it in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22) and in the New (Romans 1:24-27). It says that people who continue to practice homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). That's a pretty harsh statement — but true! Therefore, we have a responsibility to help homosexuals and other sinners meet Jesus so He can set them free from bondage and save them from death and damnation.

Jesus died for us while we were sinners (Romans 5:8); He died for homosexuals too. But how do we share Jesus with them? The most important question a Christian can ask is "What would Jesus do?" Well, think about what Jesus did when He met prostitutes, tax collectors, and other sinners whom the religious leaders hated and avoided: He ate with them, talked to them, showed them love and compassion, got to know them. He helped them see that He had a better plan for their lives, that He loved them and wanted to save them from their sins. He offered them freedom from their slavery to sin and an awesome new life in Him.

All the while, Jesus refused to take part in their

sins. That's important to remember, because it's easy to "go with the flow" and do the sinful stuff that your friends are doing. I think that's one of the reasons Jesus spent most of His time with His disciples. They really loved Him, trusted Him, and cared about Him; they could support Him. So be sure to spend a lot of time with the people who encourage you in your walk with Christ, whether that's parents, friends from school, or people from church. And don't forget to spend some time with your other friends who need Jesus.

To be a good friend and lead a homosexual to Jesus, show him God's love in practical ways. First, pray that God would give you a genuine love and concern for him. Then make sure you never gossip about him, that what you say about him is loving and kind.

Stand up for her when others make fun of her or try to hurt her. Remember, you're not defending her sinful lifestyle; you're defending a person who's alone and hurting and needs help. Many homosexuals don't have fathers living at home or are going through other tough situations with their parents. Some of them were molested when they were kids. They need your love and friendship to show them that God loves them and can heal them.

It's true that God won't allow fornicators, idolators, adulterers, those who covet, thieves, homosexuals, or other sinners into His kingdom; but He sure does want to save them, change them into new creatures, and invite them into His kingdom. If you're like most Christians, you met Jesus because someone loved you enough to tell you about Him and show you God's love. If you have a friend who's a homosexual, why not be the one who loves him enough to help him meet God?

WORLD



What would Jesus do or say about homosexuality?

Some students point out that this topic never comes up in the four Gospels, where most of Christ's teachings are recorded. Though Moses speaks of same-sex intercourse as an "abomination" (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) and though Paul writes against it as well (Rom. 1: 24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10), we look in vain for words from the Lord Jesus on this sensitive matter.

Does this mean, then, that Christ was neutral on the subject? Is it possible that He approved of sexual intimacy between persons of the same gender? Before we read consent into the Lord's silence on homosexuality, let's consider the bigger picture.

A hallmark of this age and culture is extreme tolerance toward almost every form of sexual expression and gratification. Pornography? Why not? Nobody is hurt. Fornication? Of course; everybody does it. Adultery? Housewives are desperate, you know. Group sex? It's trendy. Abortion as birth control? It's effective. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage? All in the name of love.

Such a permissive and promiscuous society as this can hardly escape being overrun with unwanted pregnancies, throw-away marriages, confused children,

angry teens, sexually transmitted diseases, damaged psyches, broken lives, and much more. How long will it take us to see the connection between the seeds of sexual misconduct we've sown and our current crops of disease and misery?

Jesus clearly saw the relation between choices and outcomes. His truth about this is powerfully told in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27). Lives built on Christ's teaching will withstand the storms, Christ says; but refusing His counsel leads to collapse. Yes, we are free to choose our own ways in life, but we are not free to choose the results. After exercising our freedoms, we sit at the table of consequences and eat what's there.

On the other hand, perhaps Jesus was *not* silent on the issues of homosexuality and gay marriage. Our Lord described sexual attraction as between a man and a woman (5:28), never between a man and another man. Creation order, He said, was one man and one woman joined for life. God made them male and female for this unique "one-flesh" purpose in marriage (19:4-6). Homosexual marriage has no place in these teachings of Christ, nor anywhere else in the Bible.

We must not read into Scripture any hyper-hatred for sodomy over other sins. Those who choose aberrant forms of sexual practice are not worse sinners. All sin defiles those who practice it; Jesus traced it right back to the heart from which it comes (15:18-20).

We may, in fact, recognize that the Scriptures are written primarily to Christians and other God-fearers, not to the world in general. To those of us who know the Lord and walk with Him, the Bible becomes our guidebook as we grow toward the character of Jesus Christ, who neither married Mary Magdalene nor was a gay lover of the beloved John.

Those who do not trust our Lord or commit themselves to obey His Word are not likely to repent from merely hearing a list of their sins. Better results may come as we share God's love for all and His desire to save those who come to Him through Christ. The Bible waits to teach and transform those who read in faith.

Since Jesus was a friend of publicans and harlots, we may be confident that He would befriend homosexual persons also. He is the friend of all sinners, not just a few.

Out of the Closet

Hope for Homosexuals

by Cheryl “C. J.” Heidemann

I grew up with the struggle of being different. As a female, I was attracted to other girls.

In the strong Christian home of my youth, such things were never spoken of. When I began to learn about homosexuality, I recognized the symptoms in myself and realized I was headed directly toward that lifestyle. Obviously, the church wouldn't approve of my “difference,” and that meant I'd struggle even more.

The truth is, it didn't really matter what the church thought. What mattered was how God felt about my homosexuality. I had convinced myself that He approved, but in time I learned that homosexuality is not a godly lifestyle and that God does not condone it. I also came to see that God loved me then just as He does now, though He did not love my choices.

God did not design anyone

to live in the delusion of homosexuality. He has a good plan of promise and not demise — of prosperity in spirit, soul, and body, a plan that requires us to turn from the selfish desires of our flesh.

Are you struggling with an attraction for others of your gender? Are you held captive by thoughts and emotions you don't know how to deal with? Perhaps you recognize some of the thoughts I had:

- No one cares about me.
- I'm imprisoned by my choices.
- I was born this way.
- I'm consumed with sexual thoughts.
- I feel trapped.

You might think these tendencies are normal, but conscience tells you that they're wrong. If so, there is hope to help you sort out your feelings, to know that you are loved and can love, that you can be a whole person. You

can begin your journey of hope and wholeness by examining three important questions:

- Where do I stand with God?
- What does the Bible say about homosexuality?
- What do I do with my homosexual feelings and behaviors?

Where do I stand with God?

The good news is that God values you. He loves you now, just the way you are. He loves you so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for you so that you might receive forgiveness and healing from sin and live with Him forever. Though you, like all human beings, were born in a fallen state, God did not create you to be a homosexual. Rather, He gave you a heart that seeks personal healing through a relationship with Him.

God knows what is best for you and wants to lead you into the lifestyle He chooses — not to



make it hard for you but to bless you. As He promised the ancient Israelites, “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Some people mistakenly think that the relationships between certain Bible characters were homosexual in nature. Jonathan and David, for example (1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1; 20:1ff; 2 Samuel 1:26), had a deep friendship, fought side by side in battle, and defended each other to the death. Being this tightly knit is certainly a deep love, but it need not be viewed as sexual. David’s moral downfall, in fact, stemmed

from adultery with another man’s wife.

When the Bible refers to sexual acts between persons of the same gender, it always does so in a negative way (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). This may seem like bad news to a practicing homosexual, but it is actually good news over the long haul.

The last of these four texts, for instance, groups homosexuals with those who commit other serious sins: “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were.” But this is immediately followed by a wonderful declaration of hope for those who turn and go God’s way: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (6:11).

Your choice to end a lifestyle of immoral sexual activity can give you things you never thought possible – in a personal relationship with Jesus.

What do I do with my homosexual feelings and behaviors?

The same question could be asked about any type of sinful feeling or desire: greed, lust, anger, jealousy. Temptations are not just sexual in nature. Sin is always

looking for an opportunity to seize the moment and gain the victory.

Sexual feelings and attractions are natural and normal. God did not create us to be unfeeling, unemotional robots but to be human beings full of love for each other. We can properly express this in many ways, but in His wisdom God has limited sexual relations to the state of marriage between one man and one woman.

When you express sexual love toward someone of the same sex or someone to whom you are not married, you are outside God’s plan for your life. You sin – that is, you “miss the mark” – and need God’s forgiveness. God gave Jesus Christ to pay for your pardon with His blood and make forgiveness available. Once you confess your sin to God, He will forgive you and draw you into a relationship with Him – one of wholeness and hope.

Receiving God’s forgiveness doesn’t instantly remove your homosexual feelings, however.

If you or someone you know struggles with homosexual tendencies, order *Out of the Closet*, the latest Light for Life tract available through the Bible Advocate Press. Contact the BAP for more information.

Passing the Midlife Test

continued from page 11

You don't get over being gay in a hurry. You must be committed to change, to take responsibility over your flesh. This requires God's supernatural power — the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:19, 20). With your commitment to change and dependence on His power, God will help you conquer temptation and be who He wants you to be.

What about you?

Over the last nine years, I've watched myself move from walking in the gay lifestyle to walking closely with Jesus. I have come to know the magnitude of God's love for me. It is far greater to be where I am now than where I was, filled with the darkness of wrong desires.

If you're experiencing what I went through, do not despair: God is for you, and He will be with you if you will invite Him into your life through trusting His Son Jesus. Do it now; He is waiting for you. Your life can bloom

and grow in ways you never thought possible.

But be patient with the blooming and growing. As you learn to focus on the love of God and on His teaching, your old nature will gradually lose its grip, and God's strength will increase. A teacher or counselor can encourage and advise you, especially as you begin this commitment.

As time passes, the struggle will be less difficult, and victory will become more a way of life. Then you'll realize that your mind has changed its focus from the temptations of sin to the things of God and the Bible. And that's the best place to be.

Cheryl "C. J." Heidemann ministers to homosexuals through CHOICES Ministry, Fort Collins, CO (choices_ministry@yahoo.com). Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.

Resources

The Father Heart of God, by Floyd McClung, Jr. (Harvest House)

False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction, by Dr. Harry W. Schaumburg (NavPress)

Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic, by Elizabeth Moberly (James Clarke Company)

Exodus International (www.exodus.to/; 888-264-0877)

Focus on the Family (www.family.org/)

Though church and prayer may seem dull at this life stage, we must persevere in them and depend on Christ to see us through. Paul's words to Timothy fit midlife men well:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. . . . Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:1, 22).

We often forget that God knows us and loves us just as we are. While we look at the body, He looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). He is full of compassion and remembers that we're only human, made from dust (Psalm 103:13, 14). While He lived in the flesh, Jesus faced every temptation we face, yet did not carry through to sin (Hebrews 4:15). What we can do in our middle years is follow what the writer of Hebrews urges: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16).

When we question everything else about ourselves and life, we can draw strength from these biblical truths. It will take time — as long as our crisis lasts. But doing so, we can pass whatever test midlife throws our way. **PA**

Joel Blaylock writes from Allen, TX.



Mail Bag



March musings

This issue provided interesting insight into the Ten Commandments. Your efforts are much appreciated.

M. L.
Loveland, CO

After reading the item by Richard A. Wiedenheft [and] "What Would Jesus Do?" [pp. 9, 12], I found I would answer differently than before. Like the early disciples, we try to bind others to keeping the law rather than bind our hearts to the Savior.

S. S.
Polo, MO

I believe the ten laws could save a nation from ruin [p. 18]. If a child is taught moral laws and if adults exemplify moral and ethical living, then most likely the child will grow up respecting others, and this attitude would be multiplied throughout the populace. We must share this view with our fellow citizens without causing insults.

C. J.
Hot Springs, AR

Reply by Israel Steinmetz: Keeping God's commands could save a nation from ruin. However, the purpose of my article was to state that keeping the commandments cannot save people from eternal judgment and a life apart from God. Only Jesus Christ can do this.

This is a time to shout out, not to hide ["Debating Decalogue Displays," p. 9]. It is a command to display His Ten Commandments: "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:9). Shame on you for even hinting that this is idol worship.

C. J.
Hot Springs, AR

Reply by Richard A. Wiedenheft: To be sure, the second commandment does not prohibit, as idolatrous, all displays of the Decalogue. Still, Jesus warns us that outward religious display can become a substitute for true worship. I don't believe He is any more impressed with physical religious displays now than He was with the temple of His day (Matthew 24:1, 2). He is far more concerned with the hearts and minds of His disciples than what is inscribed in government buildings.

My compliments on good, solid articles throughout this issue.

J. N.
University of Minnesota

Like your authors, we believe that "Governments serve best when they assure a level play-

ing field . . . so the gospel can move forward through . . . God's true children, by the power of the Spirit" ["Debating Decalogue Displays"] and that "No Court-approved display of morality can match the public exhibit of our lives" ["Blank Tablets"]. Thank you for the intelligent, enlightened presentation of this controversial issue.

L. and D. S.
Harrisburg, OR

Having the Ten Commandments in our hearts and not worrying about a public display is right on. However, when the author says we need a level playing field, he forgets that New Testament believers had nothing resembling that. They were harassed often by Jews and Romans. To wish for "a level playing field" today is wishing for what never was.

R. B.
League City, TX

Am I excited! This issue is second to none! What a great collection of important articles. I do not remember an issue of greater value. I am nearing 78 and am so glad to find God's dearest blessings in the kind ministry of His children. The writers went all-out to satisfy their heartfelt obligation to bring forth treasures from His Word, and did they succeed!

L. P.
Manassas, VA



God, help me dedicate this day to fast,
To teach my appetites their rightful place.
Help me to give my all to Thee at last,
Grant that I may see aught but Thy sweet Face.
In cashing fleeting pleasures, my soul falls
Into a great depression borne of greed.
My dishonest human nature builds walls
To keep You out and deny my true need.
There is no rest for restless souls but Thee;
Surrender to Thy will shall make me well.
Perhaps, in helping others to find You
Through this, will I then find my
own way too.

Carrie Ann Thunell

What's new with . . .

SWORD

- Retreat at Sis-Q Meadows, OR, July 19-23

National FYC

- Mission Possible, near Jasper, AR, July 16-23

Spring Vale Academy

- Fall enrollment
August 20-21

Publications

- New quarterly for July-September: *Romans* - Book 1

North American Women's Ministries

- National Hispanic Women's Retreat in Mesa, AZ, September 1-4

Missions Ministries

- Change for Your World offering in July

Ministries Training System

Calvin Burrell, Director

Summer Session Comes to Denver, June 12-22

The target audience for this Rocky MTS classroom is 120 men who attend our regional classrooms and sense God's call to pastoral service. By His grace, we expect up to 60 of these men to come for either five or ten days of intensive study in Colorado this month.

Much of Summer Session's appeal is the opportunity to learn from a few of the Church's best-qualified instructors. This year the slate of courses from guest faculty includes

- Flowering of CoG7 Traditions, by Dr. Tom Roberts
- World Class Pastor for a World Class Church, by Ramon Ruiz
- Pastoral Solutions to Church Problems, by Carlos Ceron
- World Religions, by John R. Kennedy
- Evangelism That Works and Applied Hermeneutics, by Richard Wiedenheft

Other teaching/mentoring staff for Summer Session include Elders Delvin O'Banion, Whaid Rose, Kenneth Moldenhauer, Raul Lopez Lopez, and Calvin Burrell.

If this Summer Session experience sounds right for you, it may not be too late to enroll. Call MTS at 303-452-7973 (English) or 713-674-5978 (Spanish). Or apply for admission online at <http://mts.cog7.org/home/>. If you can come for only one week, apply anyway.

CoG7 members, please pray for us at this year's Summer Session. Many of these students will be serving you and your churches in the years just ahead. And thank you for your support for MTS!



Student body, Summer Session 2004



Violet and Paul Chalus

Elder Paul Chalus passed away March 10, 2006, in Calgary, Alberta. He was born to William and Bessie Chalus near Gronlid, Saskatchewan, on June 4, 1930. He married Violet Keim on July 28, 1952. To them were born two children (Randy Chalus of Eugene, Oregon, and Glenda Kiesz of Sacramento, California) and five grandchildren.

Elder Chalus was ordained a minister in August 1967. He served as pastor in the Calgary church for many years and was Canadian District Superintendent from 1980 to 1994. Besides a loyal churchman, Paul was a skilled homebuilder and master carpenter.

Julio Martinez, pastor of the Montreal, Quebec church, has been appointed superintendent of the Church's Eastern Canadian District, effective July 1.



Church Doctrines

A revised edition of doctrinal statements and a proposed book on doctrines will be considered by the North American Ministerial Council meeting in Overland Park, Kansas, this fall.

While the Church has moved toward a more evangelical stance in recent decades, only a single doctrine – the nature and identity of Christ – has seen substantial change since 1988. Christ's deity

was studied at the 1996 council in Beaver Creek, Colorado, and was reaffirmed at the 2004 meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Some may wonder why the Ministerial Council would consider a revision of the Church's doctrine now, especially one that is essentially a paraphrase of the current beliefs. Elder Robert Coulter, chief architect of the revision, says that the proposed statements of faith depart only from the format of present doctrinal beliefs, not from their content. The new document, if approved by the ministers, will preserve the Church's current teachings under twelve main points and will provide fresh wording for many of the current 27 statements.

Elder Coulter believes that the proposed revision is superior to the current document because it represents the Church's traditional positions concisely and compellingly, which will appeal to today's inquirers:

"[The revision] presents the updated position taken by the NAMC on salvation by grace alone. It identifies the Church's view of the Ten Commandments in the new covenant and updates our thinking about Sabbathkeeping. It establishes our position that marriage is between one man and one woman and states our opposition to homosexuality and pornography. It preserves our prophetic outlook and hope of the Second Advent. It amplifies what we generally agree to be part of Christian living and witness. Most important, it clarifies the position of the NAMC on the deity of Jesus Christ and our perspective of the Holy Spirit. A concise statement on all of these cannot now be found elsewhere in one document."

The adopting resolution for this revision also calls for the compilation of a book setting forth the biblical basis for each of the Church's doctrines. It would include full chapters on the twelve doctrinal subheads: Bible; Deity; Man, Sin, and Death; Man, Salvation, and Life; The Church; Christian Ordinances; Ten Commandments; Sabbath; Marriage; Christian Living; Prophecy; and Kingdom of God.

You may read the proposed doctrinal statements online at www.cog7.org or request the BA office to send an electronic or printed copy to you. Also, CoG7 members may register their opinions with any ordained pastor or minister prior to the October 2-7 meeting. For more information about NAMC, contact President Loren Stacy at loren.stacy@cog7.org.



Miguel, Yahaira, and Daniel Alcantara were baptized into Christ by Pastor Eddie Villalba of the Denver, CO, Spanish-speaking church.



Brother Dwight Heholt introduces Elder Robert Coulter to the Roosevelt, NY, church on Sabbath, March 18. Elder Coulter was in New York City to teach MTS classes.



SWORD representatives met in Iowa March 16-19. Left to right: Christy Lang (director), Ana Renteria, Rebekah Lawson, Emily Smith, and Meghan Fauth.

Camps, Retreats, and More

June 6-11 - Midwest Youth Camp, Camp Sherwood Forest, Troy, MO; contact Tim Kendrick (t-kendrick1@ti.com; 972-880-2740) or Nathan Moore (iamnathan@gmail.com or 816-804-4620)

June 11-17 - Dover Family Camp, near Kingfisher, OK; contact Clarence Ullrich, 918-695-6036 or 918-482-5521

July 10-16 - Central District Youth Camp, Camp Cuivre in Troy, MO; contact John and Amy Marlin, 319-210-2396 or centraldistrictfyc@hotmail.com

July 16-23 - MISSION POSSIBLE, CoG7 campground, Jasper, AR; contact Kurt or Kristi Lang, NFYC directors, 541-517-1079 or nfyc@cog7.org

July 16-23 - Michigan Youth Camp, Long Lake Campground, Middleville, MI; contact Rex Miller, 616-534-7564 or kingmerex@aol.com

July 18-23 - Mt. Hope Youth Camp - Northern California; contact Jorge Perez (408-347-0448; nazaritemex@hotmail.com) or Teri Adame (916-687-6227)

July 19-23 - SWORD Camp, Sis-Q Meadows, OR; contact Meghan Fauth (sword-westcoast@cog7.org) or Kim Duncan (kjduncan@firstam.com)

July 23-30 - SE District Youth Camp, Camp Laphio, Raleigh, NC; contact Sandy Jones, 919-556-4434 or summeryouthcamp@yahoo.com

July 23-30 - SIS-Q Meadows Senior Youth Camp, Cave Junction, OR; contact Harold Ogren (541-689-1387; hogren@msn.com) or Greg Haffner (541-935-5361; haffnerg@earthlink.net)

July 30-August 6 - SIS-Q Meadows Junior Youth Camp, Cave Junction, OR; contact Ben and Joy Sandford, 509-737-1075 or seekerscampers@yahoo.com

August 4-6 - New York Family Camp, Kittatinny Camp, Barrysville, NY; contact Deb Crayton, 516-481-1591 or Deb14carrot@aol.com

September 1-4 - National Hispanic Women's Retreat at the Hilton, Mesa, AZ; contact Dora Cruz, 602-434-3902; Alejandra Ramirez, 202-812-0284; or Sylvia Corral, 209-869-0777

September 8-10 - Michigan Women's Retreat, Gladwin, MI; contact Esther Winchell, 989-791-3714; 989-274-0104; or winchell73@charter.net

International Tour

Out of India

Previously on this page we toured the work in India, with offices in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, where CoG7 efforts began in the mid-1900s. From that start the Church has spread to other states of this nation of more than a billion people. Elder George Hnamte led expansion into the northeastern states of Mizoram and Assam, now reporting some 114 congregations whose influence spills into the surrounding nations of Myanmar, China, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Here is a brief report of a recent gathering in the state of Assam that included our missionary from Nepal, leadership from Mizoram, and the general secretary of the Association of Churches of God (Seventh Day) in India (ACoG7I).

*— Bill Hicks, Director
G. C. Missions Ministries*

The core team of Deepak Shah (Nepal), George Hnamte (Mizoram), and Jacob Rao (Hyderabad, South India) reached Guwahati, Assam, on December 27, 2005. Elder Rao was met by Pastor Tawna and three youths (Maloma, Chhuatea, and David L. Hmar) from Mizoram, who had arrived the previous night. Maloma is the son of Mrs. Darzami, who sponsors the Assam church through the Mizoram Conference.

Pastor Susen Basumatary, the only full-time pastor for thirteen

congregations in the Assam District, came to the hotel for discussions about the situation there. His sister, Miss Malathi Basumatary, is also supported by the Mizoram Conference to maintain the Divine Primary School at Nagrijuli Village, where 35 students study.

The team left Guwahati the next day and traveled by bus to the Borengajuli Tea Estate, the venue of the Assam and West Bengal Conference. The road was in bad condition, so it took nearly six hours of a grueling and bumpy ride. After tea, we sat around a campfire singing hymns (no electricity in the church and conference venue) while the women prepared dinner.

The first session of the conference started December 29, with a message by Elder Hnamte in English. Subsequently, Elder Rao gave the sermon in Hindi and exhorted the delegates on being true witnesses for Jesus and following the twin towers of our faith (Revelation 14:12). He also informed delegates about the churches in India and urged the Assam pastor to submit registration forms to ACoG7I. Seventy-two delegates from thirteen congregations attended the conference. The team visited the church in Guri-ajahar Village, led

by Pastor Basumatary. They hope to rebuild a bigger church (and a guest room using the old tin sheets from the existing church) with funds from Missions Ministries (U.S.).

On December 30 Brother Rao discussed the twofold aims and statement of faith of the Church's International Ministerial Congress. He explained that the emphasis is more on the unity of the brotherhood among those who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," rather than on strict uniformity. This second session closed with a sermon by Deepak Shah.

On Sabbath, December 31, Brother Hnamte gave a sermon on baptism, and Brother Rao preached about salvation through Jesus. Then all went to a nearby lake, where twelve people were baptized. After lunch, we gathered for the valedictory meeting. The team members left Borengajuli in the evening and headed for Guwahati on their way back home.



Da Vinci Opportunities

Jesus was married and had children. He never rose from the dead, and the claim that He is divine was concocted long after He died. To top these off, both the Bible and Christianity are frauds!

These are just a few of the claims made in the book that everyone has been talking about, *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown. This gripping mystery novel has sold some fifty million copies, has remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for more than seventy weeks, and has captured the attention of Christians and non-Christians alike. By now, the movie version should be playing in theatres all over the country.

What's *The Da Vinci Code* all about? Brown's novel revolves around a religious relic, the Holy Grail, hidden for centuries and protected by a secret society whose members include the famous renaissance artist, Leonardo da Vinci. As the plot unfolds, numerous clues about the Grail are discovered in Da Vinci's paintings.

Christians should not be alarmed. Brown isn't the first to take a shot at Jesus and His followers. Christianity will still be in business long after the *Da Vinci* dust has settled. However, there are good reasons for concern.

Capitalizing on the biblical illiteracy and cynical sentiment of our culture, Brown has ingeniously packaged several anti-Christian arguments common to the academic community into fiction and intrigue — the language of the culture — and placed them near the water cooler. This furnishes ammunition for those seeking to discredit and destroy the gospel message. It provides support to those looking for reasons not to believe. Those weak in faith can be easily swayed, and those seeking truth can easily buy into the lie. Even though Brown's book is classified as fiction, he presents much of his information

as fact. How, then, should we respond as Christians?

First, view the book not merely as a threat to the gospel but as an opportunity to share Christ. By launching this all-out attack on the foundations of Christianity, Brown has actually called greater attention to Jesus. This has been true throughout history: Attempts to silence or discredit the gospel have only fanned its flame.

Second, be informed so you can speak intelligently on this subject when the opportunity arises. Resources to equip you for this challenge abound, including a Light for Life tract published by the Bible Advocate Press called *Deciphering 'The Da Vinci Code': Fact or Fiction?* Instead of a thorough treatment of the topic, this is an easy read and provides concise answers to questions raised by the book.

Third, shed some light on the Da Vinci deception. Many who read this book are already confused about spiritual issues. Just a little light from a Christ-follower could make a difference now and for eternity. Remember, it is always better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. The darker the night, the brighter the light shines.

Finally, pray. This battle is much more than Dan Brown vs. Christianity. It reveals the ongoing conflict between the kingdoms of darkness and light. Pray against the darkness. Jesus promised, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Pray that many will be set free by the truth of God's Word.

And don't forget to pray for Dan Brown, that like the apostle Paul, he may some day preach the very gospel he now seeks to destroy.

— Whaid Guscott Rose
General Conference President



National FYC

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