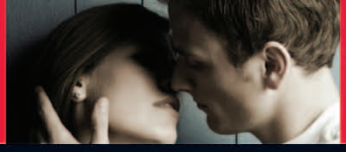


enrichment

Enriching and equipping Spirit-filled ministers ■ Summer 2011

Sex and the Church: the conversations we need to have

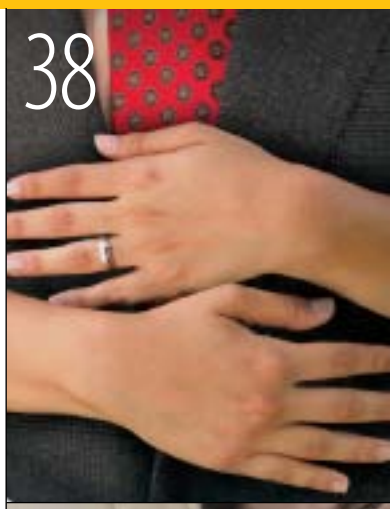
As standard-bearers
in a permissive culture,
the Church has a two-fold mission:
to affirm God's design for human sexuality and
to critique those cultural values and practices that deface it.

Summer 2011 / Volume 16 / Number 3

sex and the Church: the conversations we need to have

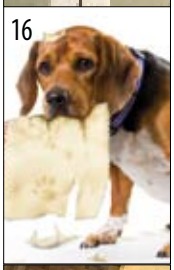
continued on page 6

ENRICHMENT (ISSN 1082-1791) is published quarterly (January, April, July, October), ©2011 by The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802. Assemblies of God ministers may reproduce nonbyline material from *Enrichment* in church publications, giving credit to the journal. Except for brief quotations, signed articles may not be reprinted without permission of the authors. Subscription rates: USA –1 year $24; 2 years $42. Outside USA add $30 per year for postage. Subscriptions: All subscription correspondence, including change of address, should be sent to *Enrichment,* Customer Services, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802, phone 1-800-641-4310. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, Missouri and at additional mailing offices. Printed in the USA. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *Enrichment,* 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802.**



 continued from page 5

Summer 2011 / Volume 16/ Number 3



eshorts

ejnews&trends

ejonline

shop talk columns & departments

Next Time in **enrichment:**

THE WAY OF HOLINESS

In our hurry up, bustling, secular world, it is essential that we pause and consider the matter of holiness. God calls us to be holy because He is holy. In the next issue of *Enrichment*, we will examine the theological foundations of holiness; compare and contrast true holiness with pseudo-holiness; outline best practices for ministers to cultivate holiness through worship, preaching, and discipleship; and offer guidelines for cultivating holiness individually, corporately, and socially.

Read interesting and thought-provoking essays from Craig Bloomberg, Dan Crabtree, Jennifer Gale, Cheryl Bridges Johns, Byron Klaus, Howard A. Snyder, Carol Taylor, Derek Tidball, Gary Tyra, George O. Wood, and others.

enrichment

Enriching and equipping Spirit-filled ministers

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
George P. Wood

MANAGING EDITOR
Rick Knoth

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Richard Schoonover

ART DIRECTOR / ADVERTISING COORDINATOR
Steve Lopez

OFFICE COORDINATOR
Connie Cross

DESIGN
Dave Danielson, Lucas Key, Steve Lopez, David Mayne, Sarah Simmons

PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE EXECUTIVE PRESBYTERY

George O. Wood (general superintendent), C. Dan Betzer, James T. Bradford, L. John Bueno, Warren D. Bullock, Douglas E. Clay, Richard L. Dresselhaus, Douglas E. Fulenwider, L. Alton Garrison, J. Don George, Saturnino Gonzalez, A. Elizabeth Grant, Larry H. Griswold, R. Bryan Jarrett, Nam Soo Kim, John E. Maracle, Jesse Miranda, Jr., H. Robert Rhoden, Clarence W. St. John, Zollie L. Smith, Jr.

ADVERTISING
For information on print or online advertising, call Steve Lopez at 417-862-2781, ext. 4097; go to enrichment journal.ag.org (click on Advertise); or E-mail advertising-enrichment@ag.org.

ADVERTISING POLICY
Enrichment does not endorse any advertiser or product. Claims made in an advertisement are the sole responsibility of the advertiser. **Enrichment** reserves the right to reject any advertisement that is inconsistent with the journal's objectives, editorial convictions, or Assemblies of God doctrine.

E-MAIL:
enrichmentjournal@ag.org

WEBSITE:
www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org

Member of:
Evangelical Press Association
Pentecostal Press Association

eshorts
Summer 2011

LEADING THE WAY

The Association Conundrum

As an effective leader, our inner circle is vital to our success. Being yoked with like-minded, success-oriented people is crucial. Paul wrote, "Don't become partners with those who reject God" (2 Corinthians 6:14, THE MESSAGE[1]).

On the other hand, being an effective Christian leader has an added dimension. Jesus said, "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life" (Matthew 28:19, THE MESSAGE).

As Christians, we need to view our associations in two distinct ways.

1. We must populate our inner circle with those we can trust with our inner most feelings. My inner circle has less than five members. Each of them provides an outlet for my fears and anxieties. They listen and understand, without passing judgment. This is our safe zone as we comply with 2 Corinthians 6:14.
2. We must also be around people who do not share our beliefs. The only way to comply with Matthew 28:19 is to meet nonbelievers. We go beyond the safe relationships and reach out to those who challenge our comfort zone.

I made the mistake of alienating my existing friendships once I became a Christian. Christian leaders taught me to surround myself with other Christians and disassociate with those holding different beliefs. Big mistake. We need to show unbelievers the love and mercy of the Lord. I missed a golden opportunity to lead them.

As Christian leaders, bridging the gap between our inner circle and all others allows us to fulfill our mission. We can accomplish this by being transparent and expressing our commitment to God in our everyday actions.

JAMES CASTELLANO, Emmaus, Pennsylvania

NOTE

1. Scripture taken from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

DIGITAL DISCIPLESHIP

INTERESTING TIMES

An old Chinese proverb states: "May you live in interesting times." I do not think there has ever been a more interesting or more exciting time to do ministry. The technological tools at our disposal have totally reshaped my portfolio as a pastor.

When I went to seminary, the blogosphere did not exit. There was not an Introduction to Blogging class in the curriculum. But now, blogging makes up 20 percent of my portfolio as lead pastor of National Community Church. I used to think my daily blog (www.evotional.com) supplemented my weekend message. I now think it might be the other way around. More people read my daily blog than listen to my weekend messages.

Blogging is the way I share what God is doing in my head and in my heart. As National Community Church grows larger, blogging enables me to carry on a conversation with everyone in the church. The comment feature even turns it into a dialogue.

My blog is a discipleship tool. It is one way I mentor, teach, and cast vision. I like to think of it as digital discipleship. It is not a replacement for one-on-one, face-to-face discipleship. But it is a 1000 mg supplement in the spiritual diet of blog readers.

My blog is a vital part of my pastoral calling.

MARK BATTERSON, Washington, D.C.

FROM BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS

What Young Women Want

A new survey[1] among millennial women (MW) offers interesting insights regarding their life goals. Ninety-six percent identified "being independent" as their single most important life goal, with the more traditionally held values of marriage, family, and wealth coming in at the bottom of the list. The survey further defines this independence in terms of their desire to "shape their own future." Although they have not clearly defined this future, they relish the idea that finding their own brand of success is more important than meeting a predetermined societal goal. And the context in which they seek to define this success is a network of peer mentors with whom they share and receive advice.

What an opportunity this provides church leaders to be key influencers in helping these young women become all they hope to be. To do so, leaders need to keep a couple of issues in mind:

1. **Success is in the eye of the beholder.** MWs will not automatically conform to a traditional standard of womanhood. They need the space and freedom to define their identities and life goals.

2. **Mentoring is a team sport.** MWs are social networking experts, so the idea of a single mentor (voice) in their lives is inconceivable. Groups of mentors will offer them the best hope for finding themselves.

RANDY WALLS, director of continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

NOTE

1. Levi Strauss & Co. Shaping a New Future Study, October 2010.http://www.levistrauss.com/news/press-releases/new-global-study-reveals-independence-trumps-marriage-wealth-and-professional-su. Accessed 11/30/2010.

YOUNG PASTOR

For Bitter or Better

Last year my family endured a crushing betrayal, an unexpected trial that spilled messily into family relationships. For several months the situation grew increasingly worse, occupying the bandwidth of my brain.

During this season of difficulty, I had a conversation with my mentor — a seasoned pastor with decades of ministry experience. I do not remember too many things he said, except for one sage piece of advice: "God often sends trials into the lives of pastors so they can model the Scriptures for their congregation."

Somewhere in the middle of my family's suffering it dawned on me that I was not enduring this trial alone. As a young pastor, the eyes of my people were on me. My experience was setting a tone for the church. Would we be a church that exhibits forgiveness or a church that tends toward bitterness?

I was aware of people in my congregation suffering worse betrayals than what I was enduring. My reaction to unfair treatment would be a more memorable sermon than any text on forgiveness. If I routinely lambasted my critics, sought rhetorical revenge, or plotted ways to get even — I would give my people ample reason to lash out at their enemies.

My trial presented a God-given moment to demonstrate what I was preaching. If the people in my church saw God working through me toward forgiveness, they might find that same hope in their own struggles.

I began to relish Sundays where I could share honestly of my own pain. I found great strength in the hope and comfort of the Scriptures. The pulpit became a place where God met me in struggles and lifted me to a higher place.

God allows Satan to attack the life of every believer, and that includes pastors. We often painfully present our struggles before our people in ways that seem highly unfair. We can react in one of two ways. We can respond with anger toward the people involved, or we can use painful moments as vivid, real-life lessons that help move us toward greater levels of forgiveness and faith.

DANIEL DARLING is author of *Teen People of the Bible: Celebrity Profiles of Real Faith and Tragic Failure.* Visit http://www.danieldarling.com

UTHTRAX

Career *or* Calling?

Tugging. Churning. My heart and my stomach forced me forward. John Maxwell, issuing a challenge to over a thousand students in the arena, confronted us: "Make your life count. Commit to full time Christian service." As an eighth grader, how was I to know all that this meant? I just knew I *had* to follow through.

That call defined my teen years and my life. When temptation overwhelmed me, my calling empowered me. When confusion pulled me, my calling directed me. Pointing to the path of honoring God, my calling determined my steps.

The apostle Paul discovered that God had set him apart from birth. From the beginning God had called him by His grace because it pleased God to reveal His Son through Paul's life (Galatians 1:15). Paul was set apart. He was invited, summoned to reveal the good news. Is the call on the lives of our students anything less?

Our students *need* a calling. God used a pastor to speak truth into my life. Are you that voice in the lives of your students? Are you challenging them to lose their lives to gain what they cannot lose? Are you challenging them to live by more than rules; challenging them to live for their purpose?

Career or calling? Challenge your students to hear from God, to ask, "What is Your will for my life?" instead of the mantra, "What will I do with my life?" Before "What college?" encourage them to ask, "What calling?" You may be the voice they have been waiting to hear.

LYNN COWELL, Charlotte, North Carolina

LEADERSHIP PITFALLS

The Comparison Trap

It started off innocently. At the insistence of my publisher, I needed to create a social network in preparation for the release of my new book. In looking for examples, I began to explore literary websites. I was soon overwhelmed by the multiplied successes of established authors. My one book seemed insignificant in comparison.

I do not feel so bad when I read Scripture and find other leaders succumbed to comparison as well. No doubt Saul was satisfied with the thousands he put to death until the women raved over the ten thousands David slew. The comparison trap can ignite distorted feelings such as:

- **Inadequacy.** We gauge our self-worth and significance by using those around us as a benchmark.
- **Envy.** We sometimes covet those who appear more popular and successful.
- **Despondency.** Our past or present situation dictates our life rather than maintaining a hope in the future God has planned.
- **Pride.** At times we compare ourselves with those around us to pump up our deflated self-images. Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like *other* men (Luke 18:9–14).

When we mull too long over God's blueprints for someone else's ministry, we will have trouble discerning our own. When Peter asked about John along the shore, Jesus answered, "What is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:22). We avoid the comparison traps most effectively by pursuing Christ's plan for our own life rather than trying to duplicate what He intended for someone else.

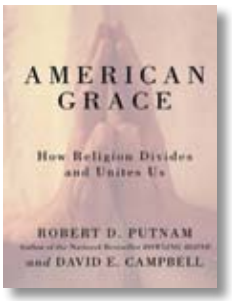
PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri

RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

American Grace

American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us is fast becoming a go-to resource for describing how America's religious landscape is being reshaped. Robert Putnam and David Campbell provide a revealing insight into American religion that continues Putnam's observations in his classic, *Bowling Alone*.

The authors recount several seismic religious shocks since WWII. The first came during the upheavals of the 1960s when religious affiliation dropped significantly.



During the 1970s and 1980s, a conservative response to the 60s yielded the rise of evangelicalism. Since the 1990s, young people, turned off by the linkage between faith and conservative politics, have abandoned organized religion.

The current religious landscape includes the fact one third of Americans have switched religions at some point in their lives. Young people are more likely to oppose abortion, but accept gay marriage. But the authors argue that growth of those rejecting organized religion is only a spike, not a permanent trend. The young are not, in general, committed secularists.

Religious experience, with a message of grace, hope, and reconciliation, appeals to people. In fact, the authors argue religious Americans are nicer, happier, and better citizens. They are more generous with their time and money. They are more likely to join voluntary associations and attend more public meetings. Religious Americans are three to four times more socially engaged than the nonreligious.

Putnam and Campbell basically argue that church attendance — becoming part of a religious community — is the key to breaking social isolation because it provides relational vibrancy and a willingness to give to purposes that benefit the community.

For more information see www.americangrace.org.

BYRON KLAUS, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

TIMEWISE

Managing To-Do Lists

A to-do list should inspire a person to accomplish tasks, and not look overwhelming. A little strategy makes a list more doable.

Considerations When Creating the List

- Be specific, not general, on listing tasks (not, plan Fred's funeral, but individual steps such as, visit Fred's family or write the eulogy).
- Define your goals and main responsibilities, then keep related tasks a high priority.
- Maintain a next-day list separate from a list of all jobs or weekly goals.
- Make a new shortlist at the end of each day so you start with a plan the next morning.
- Time how long it takes to do tasks so you will know how much time to allocate in the future.

Tips To Manage the List

- Divide large tasks into steps (under plan Sunday's sermon, list: decide talking points, outline the sermon, etc.).
- Designate specific time for larger tasks (a.m./p.m., minutes or hours).
- Delegate. Get help by passing tasks to a committee, other workers, or volunteers.
- Delay what is not needed now by putting it on a calendar a week or month out.
- Ditch the unimportant. Realize there are tasks you do not have time to do.
- Decrease expectations and thus your workload (great power points are nice, but do the basics when there is no time for adding bells and whistles).
- Do not get distracted. Decline time wasters and designate times people can call.
- Do allow time for unexpected/divine calls by scheduling free time.

KAREN WHITING, author and speaker

UPWORDS

Guidance

My wife and I took an 8-day rafting trip down the Grand Canyon several years ago. Neither of us is young or a fitness buff. After a day of shooting rapids, however, our guide often offered us opportunity to take a short walk up one of the smaller side canyons. While the walks may have been short in linear distance, they almost always involved considerable vertical distance and climbing rock faces that would give a mountain goat pause.

Our guide was experienced. He had been over these routes many times before. He knew every niche, crevasse, handhold, and foothold. When we came to an impasse along the trail, he came alongside and gave us explicit directions on how to get our bodies over the obstacle.

"Put your right hand here. Now put your left foot here. Okay, now scoot your rear end onto this little rock shelf." As we followed the guide's instructions, in an amazingly short time, and with unbelievable ease, we found ourselves past the obstacle and merrily on our way to view the spectacular scenery that lay beyond.

The application to our spiritual walk could not be more obvious. Our Savior is our Guide and He is experienced. The Bible says He has been tempted in all the same ways we have. He knows the way because He walked it before us. If we will listen for His voice, and then do what He says, we will walk the promised way of escape and be on the way to enjoying the blessings that come to those who overcome.

JACK AIKEN, Eagle River, Alaska

UNCHURCHED

Answering 5 Excuses: Why I Don't Go to Church

Both non-Christians *and* Christians give many excuses for not attending church. But having ready responses might encourage some to come. Here are five possible responses:

1. **Church people are hypocrites. You would not believe what a "Christian" did to me.** No one perfectly keeps God's commandments or practices all they preach. If we were perfect, we would not need a Savior (Matthew 9:12,13).
2. **I don't have time. I sleep in and catch up on Sundays.** God knows we need rest and money. So giving our time and money is a matter of faith. When we give our time and money to God, He makes what we have left over go further than the whole amount did before (Matthew 6:31–33).
3. **I don't have nice clothes.** What you wear is not important (1 Samuel 16:7). Being in church in whatever you have to wear is important.
4. **I don't need to attend church. I can worship God anywhere.** True, but how do you get to know God? A good Bible-teaching church helps us dispel wrong ideas about God and correctly understand Him through His words to us in the Bible (Romans 10:14,17).
5. **Church isn't important.** Attending church does not earn us salvation. Salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8,9). But does ignoring or neglecting such a great gift honor God? We should not attend church because we *have* to, but because we *want* to (Psalm 122:1).

If we meet excuses head on, perhaps more will come to church to grow in faith and meet the Savior.

DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado

GROUP LIFE

Time and Group Dynamics

Group meetings range from small Bible studies, mentoring, steering committees, to congregation worship services.

Define Each Group

- List what groups meet, how many participate in each, and the mission and goals of each group.
- Set review dates to evaluate each group.

Understand group dynamics

- Small groups offer a personal level of transformative interaction.
- Mentoring nurtures intimate, personal growth through an experienced mentor and is best kept to the same sex.
- Steering committees are more business and goal oriented.
- Worship services, open to all, are usually larger and focus on God.

Engage members

- Small groups: Use personal greetings, discussions, prayer needs, and chats about individual lives.
- Large groups: Use greeters, singing, reading responses, and reflective questions, such as asking people to reflect on blessings before an offering.
- Steering committees: Use agendas, member reports, and assign tasks to utilize member skills.
- Mentoring: Encourage listening and responding to mentee's needs.

Use time wisely

- Define the purpose of each group. Group meetings need to focus the *bulk of its time* on purpose. For example, if members use half the time to discuss prayer needs, but it is not a prayer group, suggest using prayer slips or e-mailing prayer requests between meetings.
- Prevent drifting by reminding members of mission/goals. Be flexible to give time for members in need.
- Ask: Is each group still needed? If the purpose has been met, dissolve the group to free members for new commitments.
- Be sure the group is strengthening bonds with member appreciation.

KAREN WHITING, author and speaker

Tips for **Welcoming** *New Members to Small Groups*

After attending a small-group Bible study for several years, I noticed how difficult it could be for new members to feel comfortable and become part of the group. Here are six ways to help groups assimilate newcomers.

1. **Mail a welcome card** signed by everyone in the group. There is nothing like a personal note from other members to encourage a newcomer.
2. **Do not make them stand out.** It is hard enough to come to a small class for the first time. Overwhelmed by stares, questions, teasing, and hugs, I have seen many newcomers look like they wished they could slink back out the door. Welcome them briefly, then turn attention away from them by diving into the lesson.
3. **Do not put them on the spot.** Avoid questions like "Why do you want to be in this group?" or interviews like "Tell us how you came to know the Lord." Give a brief introduction then learn about them in the coming weeks while allowing them to learn about others at the same time.
4. **Let them observe first.** Allow newcomers to hear how others respond and interact in the group.
5. **Let them in on group jokes and lingo.** Our group adopted the acronym STOD ("same thing only different") when a member's Bible study answer was essentially the same only in different words.
6. **Share any rules.** For example, if you will start on time whether everyone is there or not, encourage people to come, even if they are late.

DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

The 2008 economic downturn and its continued ripple effects have had significant impact on Christian organizations. Shrinking budgets are a current reality that is painfully obvious. Seventy-two percent of all organizations have had to lay off employees. The inevitable results are negative for employee morale and productivity, particularly among the highest-performing employees.

The Best Christian Workplaces Institute has researched and identified why downsizing improves some organizations, while making things worse for others. Successful organizational downsizing combines integrating downsizing with a coordinated change process. The openness of an organization to accept and execute change is critical to a successful downsizing. Another factor is the organizational culture. An organizational culture that values discipline, support, and trust will be in a position to successfully execute their mission.

Christian organizations have unique factors related to current economic challenges. But the decision process in downsizing is much easier to communicate and understand if leaders connect it to the mission and vision of the organization. Clear communication of a well-understood plan for downsizing can mitigate against the inevitable decrease in trust caused by such action. Linking structural change to the mission of the organization, rather than need to lay off employees because of budget cuts, is critical to minimizing employee fall-out. The research of Best Christian Workplaces Institute reveals that the best practices they describe have led to nearly half of all downsizing attempts resulting in improved organizational performance.

Visit www.bcwinstitute.com for more information.

BYRON KLAUS, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

FROM TIME TO ETERNITY

Clinging to the Cross

My pastor-father had a fascination with the cross. He loved the Good Friday hymns. In his study he had many books on the Atonement. There was even a crucifix above his desk.

During my father's 14-year battle with cancer, he often meditated on Isaiah 53:5: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (TNIV[1]).

My dad hoped for complete healing, but when his oncologist announced he had only weeks to live, I began to pray for dying grace.

I did not know my prayer would be answered in part due to a small hand-carved wooden cross a friend gave my dad. "It's a holding cross, a meditation tool," the person explained.

For the last month of my dad's life, he clutched that little olivewood cross continuously. Whether watching *The Price Is Right*, or a *Gaither Homecoming* video, he held tightly to that cross. When members of his small group dropped by or the hospice nurses attended to his needs, he clung to that cross. What had been his focus in living defined his hope in dying.

The night my dad died, I sat by his bed reading the Bible to him. Although he was unresponsive to my voice, his right hand continued to cradle that little cross. He was holding it securely when he took his last breath.

Ever since his death, the familiar lyrics of *The Old Rugged Cross* have new meaning.

"So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, 'til my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it someday for a crown."

GREG ASIMAKOUPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington

NOTE

1. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, Today's New International Version TNIV©. Copyright 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of International Bible Society®. All rights reserved worldwide. TNIV and Today's New International Version are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

WHAT IN THE WORLD

THE ULTIMATE DAY OF RECKONING

Few people impacted 20th-century Christianity like Corrie ten Boom. This Dutch-born woman helped harbor Jews in her parents' home in Holland during the Nazi invasion of her homeland. As a result, the Nazis' sent ten Boom to Ravensbrueck concentration camp in Germany in fall 1944. Her parents and sister lost their lives, but amazingly ten Boom survived.

Following the war, ten Boom wrote books (most notably *The Hiding Place*) chronicling her experiences. She also developed a worldwide itinerant speaking ministry. At one church far from the camp where the Nazis had killed her family, she recognized the former German guard responsible for their plight. The man, now a professing Christian, extended his hand in friendship. He did not recall her, but nonetheless was the recipient of ten Boom's forgiveness.

Although ten Boom never married, countless spiritual children credit her as the one who gave birth to their faith. This humble God-fearing woman did not take credit for much of anything. Her simple grave marker in a Southern California cemetery gives all the glory to her Savior. It reads: "Jesus is Victor!"

Corrie ten Boom died on April 15, 1983 (her 91st birthday). While millions of Americans filed their tax returns on the annual day of national reckoning, ten Boom filed before the King of kings on the ultimate day of reckoning. It is likely she heard, "Well done, … good and faithful servant. ... enter … into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21,KJV).

GREG ASIMAKOUPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington

WHEN IN DOUBT

Coming to Christ Early vs. Later in Life

Have you ever noticed differences between Christians who grew up in a Christian home and became believers at a young age and those who did not grow up in a Christian home but came to Christ later as an adult?

I recently heard a man speak about being disturbed by Christians who asked him how to share their faith. If we were passionate about Jesus, it would be easy to share about Him, right? He then told stories about how, as a little child, he watched his mother witness to waitresses, people at the grocery store, and everyone she met.

I thought, *It must have been nice to have that example to follow.*

It seems there are other differences and misunderstandings between these two types of Christians. What do you think about these general observations?

There are lessons we can learn about evangelism and discipleship from both groups.

DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado

BELIEVING AT A YOUNG AGE	BELIEVING WHEN OLDER
Heard the gospel and just believed.	Needs more information about why we believe.
Wonders why other do not just believe.	Wonders why Christians cannot explain what they believe and why they believe it.
When they try to tell others about Jesus, people refuse to believe.	Did not understand the beliefs of Christianity because did not understand the words used.
Understands simple things like how to pray.	Needs to learn by watching, observing, studying.
Wonders why people will not listen.	Does not want to sound preachy like other Christians.

HOLY LAUGHTER

Introducing The twitter Bible

I was skeptical when, in 1982, *Reader's Digest* offered The Holy Bible as one of its condensed books. The Eight Commandments? The Ten Disciples? The Last Snack? So, I'm also concerned about the latest version: *The Twitter Bible.*

"Had a very good work week, but looking forward to a day of rest." I AM
"Feeling really bad. Must have been something we ate." Adam and Eve
"Dream isn't working out exactly as planned." Joseph
"Pharaoh wants to kill my son. I'm a basket case." Jochebed
"I've been out in the desert way too long." Moses
"My last performance should bring down the house." Samson
"Nothing interesting happens around here. Think I'll relax in the tub." Bathsheba
"Just found out Elizabeth and I are going to be first-time parents in our old age. I'm speechless." Zechariah
"Mary, you're WHAT?" Joseph
"AMBER ALERT! Twelve-year-old male. Last seen at Temple." Joseph and Mary
"Herod's wife wants my head. I'm sure it's just a figure of speech." John the Baptist
"Follow me. And not just on Twitter." Jesus
"We finally got rid of Jesus, that troublemaker." Caiaphas
"Just closed a real estate deal to die for." Ananias and Sapphira
"Busy day persecuting Christians." Saul
"Busy day being persecuted as a Christian." Paul
"Returning soon; can't give exact date and time." Jesus

JAMES N. WATKINS, Upland, Indiana

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The Great Schism Between Eastern and Western Christians

In 1054 A.D., two strong-willed men conflicted and split Christianity in two. Here is the background.

In 1043 A.D., Michael Cerularius became patriarch of Constantinople. In 1049 A.D., Leo IX became pope. Leo wanted Cerularius and his eastern church to submit to the authority of Rome. The pope sent his emissaries to meet with Cerularius in Constantinople. When Cerularius refused to meet with them, these representatives excommunicated Cerularius on behalf of the pope. Cerularius responded by excommunicating the representatives. In declaring that the other was not a true Christian, these two powerful bishops split the church.

Long before their individual feud, however, there were considerable differences between Christianity in the east and the west. Eastern clergy could marry, were bearded, and conducted services in the language of the people. Western clergy were celibate, clean-shaven, and conducted services in Latin, even if the local population knew no Latin. In 1089 A.D., Pope Urban II tried to salvage the situation by revoking the patriarch's excommunication and promoting the First Crusade as a means of reuniting east and west. It did not work.

VICTOR M. PARACHIN, Tulsa, Oklahoma

UPSIDE-DOWN PERSPECTIVE

FILE IT UNDER

" 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8).

It's that time again. Time to sort through the stack of papers piled on the corner of my desk that need to be filed, paid, read, or thrown away. The bills are paid, but I still do not have time to read. Thus, the ad for the spring ensemble went into the trash screaming for another chance.

As I sorted through the leftover pile, I found some notes I had scribbled for an upcoming teaching series. I had written "WHY?" at the top. This is a question we often ask in times of loss: lost opportunities, relationships, health, finances, loved ones. *If God can do anything, why didn't He? Why weren't my prayers answered?*

We wear ourselves out looking for answers, getting stuck at the "why" questions of life. Our flat human perspectives cannot process God's multidimensional, eternal reasons. I glanced down the page at my own "why" questions; questions that will probably never be answered this side of life. So I grabbed a file folder and wrote on the tab *"Things I don't understand,"* dropped my list inside, filed it away, and moved on.

Each one of us needs to have a similar file — whether tangible or in our heart — to place things that have no reasonable answer. File your "why" questions under *"Things I don't understand"* and walk away from any emotional bondage or bitterness. Instead, trust God's eternal purposes in the midst of disappointment and loss and move on to the blessings the rest of life has to offer.

PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri

ej News & Trends

Compiled by JOHN W. KENNEDY

OCCASIONAL ATTENDEES MAY NOT BE GRASPING BELIEFS

Images: iStockphoto

While evangelical Christians may know more about the Bible than non-Christians, pastors should not assume those sitting in the pew know much about Scripture or basic Christian tenets.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life survey examined a range of religious knowledge among all Americans, including comprehension of Scripture, basic beliefs of various faiths, and leading figures in religious history. The good news is those who attend church faithfully are more informed than the casual attendee.

"People with the highest levels of religious commitment — those who say they attend worship services at least once a week and that religion is very important in their lives — generally demonstrate higher levels of religious knowledge than those with medium or low religious commitment," the report states.

Evangelicals correctly answered an average of 5.1 out of seven Bible questions right, higher than atheists/agnostics (4.4) and Jews (4.3), but lower than Mormons at nearly 6. Those who read Scripture regularly, talk about their faith with family and friends, and read books dealing with their own religion, exhibit more understanding than the occasional attendee of worship services.

"The most pronounced differences are between people with the highest levels of religious commitment and everyone else," the report declares. "On questions about the Bible, people with high levels of religious commitment get more questions right."

Overall, Americans — and Protestants as a whole — correctly answered only half of the questions, 16 out of 32. Atheists and agnostics scored highest, with an average of 20.9 right responses, followed by Jews at 20.5 and Mormons at 20.3.

Mormons scored best on the dozen questions about Scripture and Christian beliefs, with an average of 7.9 correct, topping the 7.3 for evangelicals.

Among all Americans, 71 percent answered a multiple-choice question correctly that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. And 63 percent identified an open-ended question that Genesis is the first book of the Bible. In another question without suggested responses, 45 percent of all polled (and 71 percent of evangelicals) correctly named all four Gospels.

Yet only about half (52 percent) of evangelicals could correctly identify Martin Luther in a multiple-choice question as the person who inspired the Protestant Reformation. And just 28 percent of evangelicals (compared to 16 percent of all respondents) realize that Protestantism is the only faith that teaches salvation through faith alone. A mere 15 percent of evangelicals picked Jonathan Edwards in a multiple-choice question as a preacher during the First Great Awakening.

In answers about faiths of others, 64 percent of evangelicals knew that Joseph Smith was a Mormon, 52 percent that the Koran is Islam's holy book, 47 percent that the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday, 31 percent that Vishnu and Shiva are central figures in Hinduism, and 29 percent that nirvana is an aim of Buddhism.

The Pew survey indicated that those who have taken a college-level religion course scored an average of 22.1 correct on the 32-point test, compared to 12.8 right for those with no college education.

Contemporary Worship May Boost Attendance

There is a definite correlation between church growth and embracing contemporary worship, according to research by Faith Communities Today.

While likely to stir anxiety in most denominations, the number of congregations changing worship styles is nonetheless rising.

Congregations that have greatly changed worship styles in the past 5 years represented one in eight in FACT's most recent study, compared to one in 11 in 2005. FACT reports that congregations that retain a traditional style of worship are less likely to see an increase in attendance.

"The affinity between contemporary worship and growth is clear," says David Roozen, author of the report.

In addition, FACT says more congregations with a contemporary worship service report a sense of God's presence compared to those with traditional styles.

Contemporary worship has been a growing trend in Protestant churches for the past two decades. While the rate of change appears to have peaked in evangelical congregations, FACT reports it still is accelerating in mainline Protestant churches.

Despite the positives, FACT says only finances and leadership cause more arguments in churches than debate over worship styles. Roozen says fights about worship often become entangled in conflict in more profound types of disagreements among church members.

Addressing Child Sex Abuse — From the Pulpit

Legal experts have long urged pastors and church boards to implement policies that reduce the risk of and liability for cases of sexual misconduct of children that might occur on church property or at church-related events (see *Enrichment*, Spring 2010).

Some victims and counselors suggest an additional strategy would be helpful: addressing the issue from the pulpit to encourage victims experiencing abuse at home to come forward.

"Pastors must understand the magnitude of the abuse," says Nicole Braddock Bromley, author of the books *Hush* and *Breathe*, which document her recovery from childhood sexual abuse. "If they don't address the topic, they are doing an injustice not just to the church, but to the whole community."

Nancy Rivas, a Christian counselor with Meier Clinics in Wheaton, Illinois, says even raising the subject and acknowledging its reality helps congregants become more comfortable discussing sexual abuse.

"When pastors make an effort to explicitly address these issues it is better than silence," says Rivas, who attends Living Water Community Church, an Assemblies of God congregation in Bolingbrook, Illinois. "The more proactive the leadership is, the more helpful it is. The most important part is being open to the idea that they might be talking to people to whom this is happening."

Vanguard University sociology professor Elizabeth Dermody Leonard suggests how to treat children justly is a natural sermon topic for Mother's Day or Father's Day.

"It has to be an issue that we address," says Michael Fleming, pastor of First Assembly of God in Whitehouse, Texas. "By not addressing it, we are kept from protecting our kids. We've got to get the dialogue started."

Among the members at the Whitehouse church is Amanda Richardson, author of *Saved From Silence: My Journey Back From a Childhood of Abuse*. Richardson has told her story at the church of how she endured abuse as a teen at another church, even through a leader in youth group.

"As pastor, I hope no one has to go through it alone like Amanda did," Fleming says.

CHARITABLE GIVING REMAINS STRONG THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

The recession that cost many Americans their jobs and put a dent in the incomes of a lot of those who remained employed didn't affect charitable giving all that much according to an analysis by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA).

The Winchester, Virginia-based organization reported that its 1,475 members generated $12.10 billion in income in 2009 in the midst of the recession, virtually identical to the prerecession figure of $12.11 billion 2 years earlier.

"It is very significant that this segment of the giving world was resilient and maintained itself during a difficult time," says ECFA President Dan Busby. "Our report suggests a strong commitment of givers to the Christian faith and the generosity of God's people."

Despite the economic downturn, donations to some charities — especially ones focusing on compassion care — showed noticeable growth between 2007 and 2009. For example, the ECFA reported that giving to child sponsorships rose 25.7 percent in the span. Increased contributions also were realized by ministries devoted to orphan care at 11.6 percent, to adoption agencies at 9.1 percent, to rescue missions and evangelism outreach, both up 8.6 percent, and to children's homes at 5.5 percent.

International missions contributions rose 6.5 percent while domestic missions giving edged up 0.3 percent. Short-term missions dipped 4.1 percent in overall revenue between the reporting periods.

Some humanitarian ministries took a hit during the recession, including prison outreaches declining 17.5 percent in income, alcohol and drug rehabilitation organizations down 7.9 percent and pregnancy resource centers off 3.6 percent.

As a whole, ECFA member denominations reported a 3.2 percent drop in donated income, while local churches fell 2.6 percent in giving. Still, contributions to evangelical causes appeared to fare much better than other charities. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* reported that donations to the nation's 400 charities that raise the most funds from private sources fell 11 percent in 2009, compared with the previous year, representing the worst annual drop in two decades.

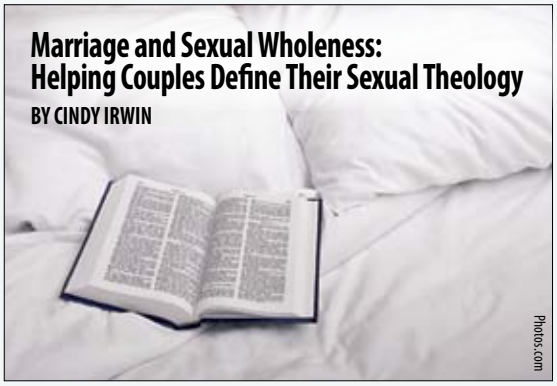
ej online

Web-only articles

www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org

Marriage and Sexual Wholeness: Helping Couples Define Their Sexual Theology

BY CINDY IRWIN



"God's ideal is for His children to be sexually whole. This process should begin on the day a child is born to wise and empowered parents," says Christian sex therapist, Cindy Irwin. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. To combat the growing sexual dysfunction in Christian families, Irwin urges pastors to teach a biblical theology of sexual wholeness. Pastors who do this will help their congregation understand that, "Sexual wholeness is the delightful, bliss-filled peace that comes from being sexually complete. Nothing is missing. Nothing is broken."

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Church History, 1550 to 1900 A.D. (Part 2)

BY LYNN D. KANAGA

The invention of the printing press paved way for the accessibility of Scripture for the common people and opened the door for religious reform in the established church. While we associate the names Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Wesley, and others with this reform, many are unaware of the role the Holy Spirit played in their lives. Kanaga says, "Without question we cannot deny there are many verifiable incidents in church history that tell of the Holy Spirit's gifts being poured out, even in the darkest hours of church history." This article chronicles some of these incidents.

The Sexually Healthy Pastor (unabridged)

BY ROBERT K. BURBEE

When it comes to sexuality, "Pastors are expected to not only inform their people of the truth, but also to live lives exemplary of that truth," states licensed psychologist and therapist, Robert K. Burbee. But not all pastors can fulfill this expectation because they have compromised their sexual integrity. While exploring some of the reasons why pastors compromise their sexual integrity, Burbee brings a message of hope as pastors "humbly acknowledge their dependence on God's transforming power in their lives to know the full blessing of God's plan for their sexual fulfillment."

Ten Tips for Maintaining Sexual Integrity

BY JOE DALLAS

Sexual integrity and purity are important. Some, while talking about sexual integrity, do not actively pursue this. Joe Dallas, noted author and program director, Genesis Counseling, says, "If you are serious about maintaining moral purity in your life, these practical tips for staying consistent and focused are written especially for you." But above all, Dallas challenges pastors to understand that: "Life is about more than keeping yourself sexually pure, as important as purity is. It is about knowing who and why you are, where your priorities lie, and where you are headed."

Wholeness in a Sex-Crazed World

BY TONY CERVERO

"Talking about sex is a sensitive subject because it is inherently and undeniably personal. It involves body and soul," says Tony Cervero. But, "The church has mainly addressed sex by rules and not with the understanding or mercy Jesus portrayed in the Gospels." What does it take to bring hope and healing to those bound by sexual sin and help others change their unbiblical attitudes toward sex and see the transforming power of Christ in their lives? In this article Cervero lays a biblical groundwork for healthy sexuality.

sex and the Church: the conversations we need to have

By George P. Wood

My wife Tiffany and I rarely watch live television. We subscribe to digital cable, so we record our favorite shows and watch them later. Doing so allows us to fast forward through commercials.

This past spring break my wife's sister-in-law (Melissa) and nieces (Sierra and Teagan) stayed with us. Sierra and Teagan are 7 and 5, respectively. They love to play with my son Reese, who is almost 3. One evening, while Tiffany and Melissa prepared dinner, I watched live television with the girls and Reese. We watched a home improvement show, if memory serves.

One commercial break featured two ads for sex-related products: an erectile dysfunction medication and a lubricant gel. A few seconds into the second ad, I frantically searched for the remote control and turned off the TV. Because I rarely watch live TV, I had never seen these commercials, and I was appalled that the kids were seeing them for the first time, too.

Later that night, after our children had gone to sleep, we adults sat down to watch a crime drama on network television. The word *sodomy* occurred just as Sierra, unbeknownst to us, had awakened, gotten out of bed, and padded into the family room. "What's sodomy?" she asked her mother.

"Something bad," Melissa replied as she hustled her daughter back to bed.

You probably did not open this issue of *Enrichment* expecting to read some of the words I used above. You may be offended that I used them at all. I sympathize with your surprise and indignation. The explicit commercials my nieces and son inadvertently saw shocked and angered me. The fact my niece learned a word and a concept related to sexual assault — neither of which should ever cross the mind of a young, innocent child — saddened me.

Sex pervades American culture. Unfortunately, its pervasiveness promotes permissiveness. American culture promotes sexual values and practices that contradict the biblical standard. This standard can be stated easily: Fidelity within marriage — understood as the lifelong union of a man and a woman — and chastity outside of marriage.

The Bible narrates stories of people who fell short of this standard. It also provides guidelines for what to do in the aftermath of such sins. But from Creation onward, the standard itself remains the same. God even uses it as a type of His relationship to believers.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

As standard-bearers in a permissive culture, the Church has a two-fold mission: to affirm God's design for human sexuality and to critique those cultural values and practices that deface it. Too often, all the culture hears from the Church is its "No!" to sexual sin. What it does not hear — because the Church does not preach it often enough — is God's louder "Yes!" to marriage and the human flourishing it promotes, not to mention His "Yes!" to single Christians who use their celibate status as an opportunity for expanded ministry in the Kingdom.

This issue of *Enrichment* — the topic of which the executive officers of our Fellowship specifically requested — seeks to fulfill that two-fold mission. It affirms the biblical standard of marriage and critiques deviations from it. It affirms fidelity and chastity, but offers guidance about how to experience restoration after sin. It critiques the pornification of our society that distorts people's understanding and deforms their practice of sexuality.

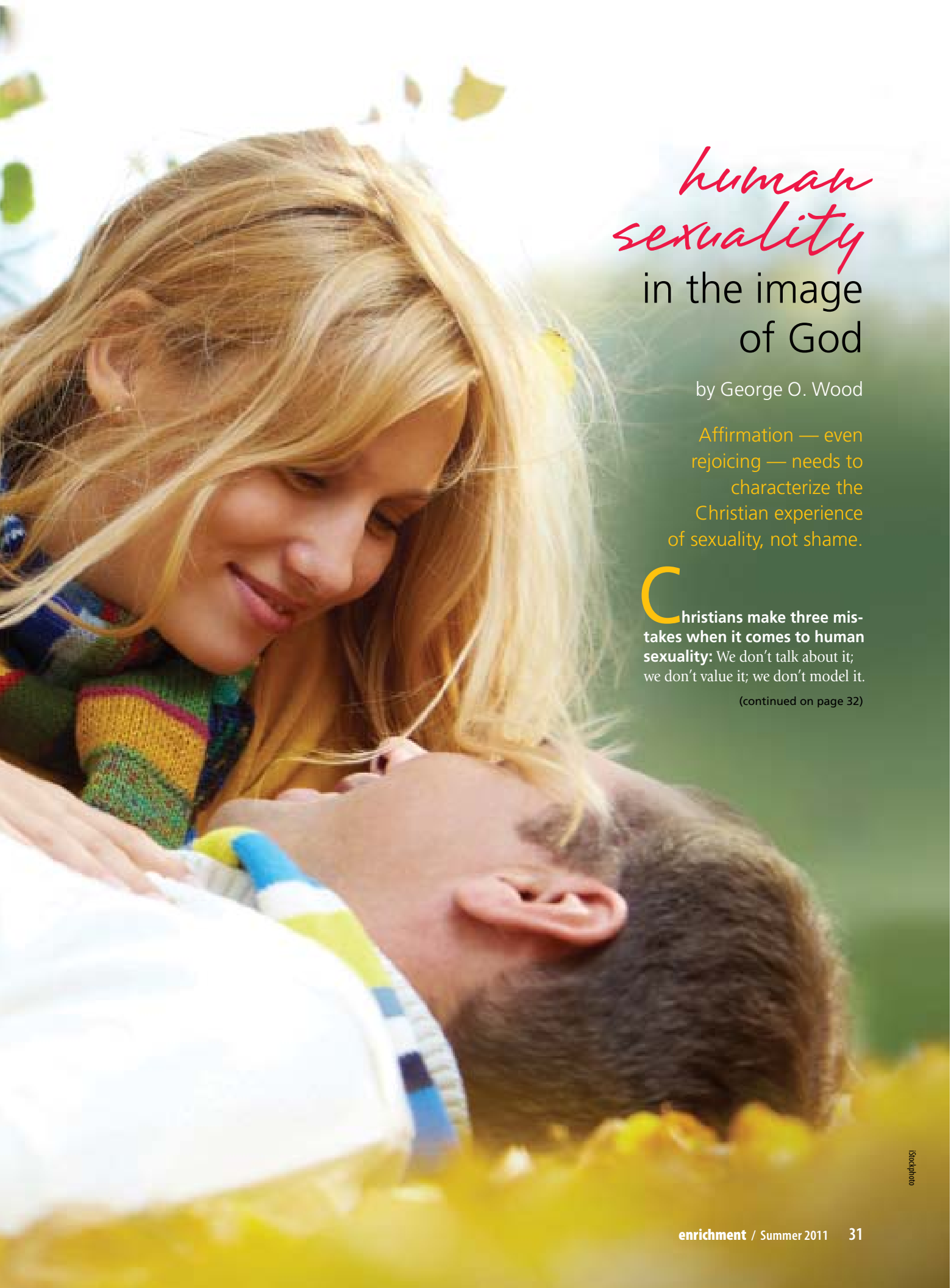
My prayer for my son and my nieces is that God will lead them to the kind of happy, healthy, and holy marriages that their parents experience. My wife and I back up that prayer with our own words and actions, which form our son's perception of what sexuality is. And in due time, in age-appropriate ways, we will begin having conversations with him about "the birds and the bees."

As a pastor, I believe the Church needs to have these conversations as well — with our children, between the adults of the congregation, and among our nonbelieving neighbors and friends. Human sexuality is God's creation, and therefore a good and appropriate topic — by way of affirmation and critique — for sermons, Sunday School lessons, small-group discussions, and neighborly conversations. Indeed, it's too important a topic to leave to TV commercials and crime dramas.

We offer this issue of *Enrichment* as conversation starters for your family and your church.

May God bless you richly.

GEORGE PAUL WOOD is executive editor of *Enrichment* journal and director of Ministerial Resourcing for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.



human sexuality in the image of God

by George O. Wood

Affirmation — even rejoicing — needs to characterize the Christian experience of sexuality, not shame.

Christians make three mistakes when it comes to human sexuality: We don't talk about it; we don't value it; we don't model it.

(continued on page 32)

iStockphoto

By not talking about sexuality, we let the world — rather than God's Word — set the agenda for how we understand and practice our sexuality. By not valuing it — or, rather, by preaching only *against* sex outside of marriage and not for sex within marriage — we let the world caricature us as killjoys and pleasure haters. And by not practicing sexuality as God intends within the lifelong relationship between a husband and a wife, we fail to show the world what a blessing marriage is and how it contributes to human flourishing.

In this article, I outline a biblical theology of human sexuality, focusing on our creation in the image of God. Perhaps you have never thought of sexuality in terms of theology. But our beliefs shape our behaviors, and our deepest beliefs shape them most effectively. If theology is what we believe most deeply about God, then it will determine our attitudes toward human sexuality as well as our practice of it.

The Bible and Human Sexuality

The Bible tells stories about the creation of humanity as male and female, as well as about how men and women have used and abused their sexuality (e.g., Genesis 1:26–28; 2:7,18–25; 3:16–20). It regulates sexual behavior through moral commandments and social laws (e.g., Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:1–30). It utilizes proverbs and poems to celebrate marital sexuality and warn against adultery (e.g., Song of Songs; Proverbs 7:1–27; 31:10–31). And it presents human sexuality as a parable of the relationship between God and humanity (e.g., Hosea 2:2–23; Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 19:6–9).

Traditionally, the Church has taught that lifelong marriage between a man and a woman is morally normative. It is a "one flesh" relationship that "God has joined together" (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6). Therefore, sexual behaviors outside that morally normative relationship are sinful and under God's judgment (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9–20).

Today, however, some revisionists argue that many forms of sexual relationship — not just marriage — are morally acceptable. Didn't Old Testament saints have numerous wives and concubines (e.g., Abraham, Jacob, Solomon), they argue? Doesn't the Law regulate — and therefore assume the acceptability of — concubinage (Exodus 21:7–11), polygamy (Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 21:15–17), levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), and divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1–4)? Given this diversity of biblical teaching, revisionists argue that traditionalists are wrong to assert that marriage (i.e., the lifelong union of one man and one woman) is morally normative based on biblical teaching. Further, they argue, given this diversity, there is little reason to deny marriage to same-sex couples, despite clear biblical prohibitions (e.g., Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). They ask, "If today's church disregards what the Bible says about concubinage, polygamy, and levirate marriage, why should we regard what the Bible says about homosexuality?"

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Jesus' Hermeneutic of Human Sexuality

To refute such revisionist arguments, we must pay close attention to Jesus' hermeneutic of human sexuality. On one occasion, some Pharisees approached Jesus "to test Him" about the lawfulness of divorce (Matthew 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12). Unlike many of the Pharisees who permitted divorce for almost any reason, Jesus prohibited divorce "except for marital unfaithfulness" (Matthew 19:9). Jesus' explanation for this prohibition emerges from His narrative hermeneutic of the Bible, a hermeneutic based on the movements of creation, fall, and redemption.

First, Jesus roots marriage in *creation*. He argues in response to the Pharisees — whose lax views of divorce disproportionately harmed women: *at the beginning* " 'the Creator "made them male and female" and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" ' " (Matthew 19:4–6, emphasis added; cf. Genesis 1:27 and 2:24).[1]


iStockphoto

Second, Jesus explained divorce in terms of the Fall. " 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way *from the beginning*' " (Matthew 19:8, emphasis added). Far from expressing God's intention for human sexuality, divorce expresses human sinfulness. The Law may make legal allowances for divorce, but the Law does not consider it morally normative.

Third, *redemption* makes it possible for people to conform their sexuality to the moral norm God revealed in creation. Jesus' disciples, reflecting a misogynist view of women, complained about His prohibition of divorce for any reason except marital unfaithfulness: "'If this is the case between a husband and a wife, it is better not to marry.'"

Jesus replied: "'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given'" (verses 10,11). According to Him, the morally acceptable alternative to marriage was celibacy (verses 11,12).

As Jesus' disciples today, we are those to whom He has given "this word." It behooves us, then, both to interpret human sexuality as Jesus did and to obey His teaching. Jesus rooted His teaching about human sexuality in creation, so let us take a closer look at the Bible's creation narratives.

Unity-in-Difference

The Bible begins with two stories about the creation of the world (Genesis 1:1–2:3) and its human inhabitants (2:4–25). Each contains an important statement about human sexuality.

- "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (1:27).
- "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (2:24).

These verses teach that God made humanity in His image. The relational aspect of God's image sheds light on human sexuality. According to Genesis 1:26,27, and 5:1,2, the image of God is not male in isolation from female, or female in isolation from male, but male and female in relationship with one another. The image of God is "unity-in-difference." The Bible expresses the unity of God's image using the Hebrew word *adam* ("man" or "humanity"), and expresses the difference using the Hebrew words *zakar* ("male") and *neqevah* ("female"). United in their sexual difference, male and female constitute humanity, which God created in His image.

This truth has enormous implications for our theology of human sexuality. First, *our sexual differences as male and female are good*. At the end of the first creation story, God surveys everything He has made and pronounces it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). There is no room for chauvinism or feminism here, as if God holds a bias toward either sex or seeks to eliminate the differences between them. He graciously creates them both. They both result from His choice.

In the second creation story, God creates man from "the dust of the ground" and woman from "one of the man's ribs" (2:7,21,22). In neither instance does God consult with either about the other. He makes them male and female because it pleases Him to do so.

Second, *our sexual differences point us toward unity with one another*. In the second creation story, God creates Adam first but declares, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (2:18). In Genesis 1:31, God pronounced His creation "very good." In 2:18, He says, "not good." Male and female together is very good; male without female (or female without male) is not good. God creates us for relationship.

So God creates a "helper suitable for [Adam]" (2:18,20). The Hebrew phrase is *ezer kenigdo*. Elsewhere, the word *ezer* is used to describe God (e.g., Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 118:6,7; Hebrews 13:6, referring to Psalm 118:6,7). Eve does not count for less than Adam because she is his helper, anymore than God counts for less than us because He is our helper. The word *kenigdo* indicates complementarity — that is, the difference of equals who need each other. Eve is different from Adam, but not less. The animals, by contrast, are both different from Adam and Eve and less than them.

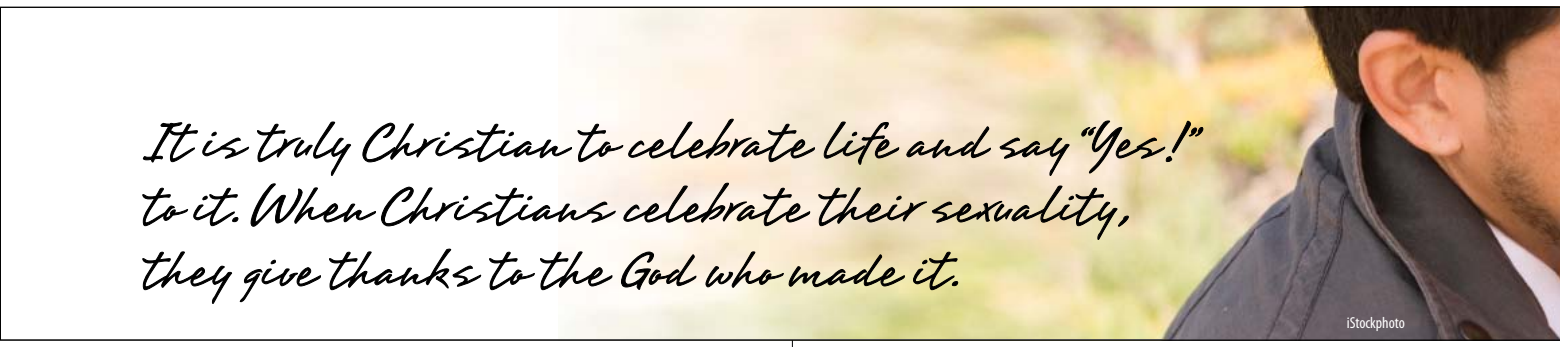
Anatomically and biologically, male and female complement — are suitable to — one another. Their relationship is generative. God blesses the unity-in-difference of the male and female and commands them, "'Be fruitful and increase in number'" (Genesis 1:28). This fact helps explain Paul's opposition to homosexual unions in Romans 1:26,27. Sin leads both women and men to "exchange" and "abandon" "natural relations for unnatural ones." Sinful humanity seeks unity without difference. Not surprisingly, the relationship is characterized by futility rather than generativity (Romans 1:21).

It behooves us to interpret human sexuality as Jesus did and to obey His teaching.

Third, *our sexual unity-in-difference points us toward God*. Scripture presents marriage as a picture of what our relationship with God should be and adultery as a picture of what our relationship with God all too often is (e.g., Hosea 2:2–23). In Ephesians 5:31,32, Paul treats Genesis 2:24 — the two "will become one flesh" — as a "profound mystery" about the relationship of "Christ and the church."

Our sexual unity-in-difference is a gift that prompts us to return humble praise to the Giver. For those who follow Jesus, there can be no separation of sexuality and spirituality. God

It is truly Christian to celebrate life and say "Yes!" to it. When Christians celebrate their sexuality, they give thanks to the God who made it.


iStockphoto

designed them to be mutually reinforcing.

Communication, Celebration, Creation

God created humanity in His image. The male-female relationship expresses this image through unity-in-difference. How does our sexuality reflect God's personality? And how does His personality shape His purposes for our sexuality?

COMMUNICATION

First, *God is a communicating person*. The first creation account highlights this fact with, "And God said" (Genesis 1:3,6,9, 11,14,20,24,26,29). God speaks creation into existence from nothing. Then He speaks directly to His human creatures, using words to bless, command, and give (1:28,29).

Prior to the Fall, God spoke with humanity face to face. Before sin entered the world, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (2:25). After the Fall, however, they hid from God out of fear. "'I heard you in the garden,'" Adam said, "'and I was afraid because I was naked'" (3:10).

The Bible tells the story of how God resumes face-to-face communication with us through Jesus Christ. Drawing inspiration from the first creation story, Paul writes: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Even that glorious knowledge is partial in this lifetime. Paul writes, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). How tender will this face-to-face knowledge be? According to John, in the New Jerusalem, "[God] will wipe every tear from [believers'] eyes" (Revelation 21:4). Picture a mother comforting her son, and you have a powerful and intimate image of how God will comfort His people when they see Him face to face.

God created the male-female relationship after the model of His own form of communication. That form of communication involves speech, but it goes beyond speech to personal knowledge, which is nonverbal. Genesis 4:1 uses the Hebrew verb *yada* ("know") to describe Adam and Eve's union. The knowing was sexual, which is why the New International Version translates *yada* in verse 1 as "lay with." But that sexual union was not merely physical. It was social, spiritual, and emotional as well. It was knowledge of another person at the most intimate level.

The sexual union of a husband and wife is so intimate that the Bible says, "the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Paul uses this one-flesh intimacy as an illustration of the face-to-face communication God desires with His people. It is a "profound mystery … about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Human sexuality is an analogy of the kind of intimate personal knowledge God desires with His people.

And the relationship God desires with His people shapes the way Christians think about human sexuality. Human sex is a form of communication. It unites husband and wife at the most intimate level. This intimate union is the first purpose of human sexuality.

CELEBRATION

Second, *God is a celebrative person*. God created pleasure. He receives pleasure: "The Lord takes delight in His people" (Psalm 149:4). And He gives pleasure. Jesus said, "'Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'" (Luke 12:32). The Psalmist sang, "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11).

It is blasphemy to say that Satan created pleasure. The *Playboy* brand of hedonism is a cheap knockoff and poor substitute for the kind of pleasure God intends His children to experience, not only in relationship with Him, but also in relationship with their spouse.

It is truly Christian to celebrate life and say "Yes!" to it. Paul writes, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). When Christians celebrate God's gift of salvation, they do so to God's glory. When they celebrate God's supply of their needs, they do so for Him. And when Christians celebrate their sexuality, they give thanks to the God who made it.

Writing to Timothy, Paul lists the prohibition of marriage among "things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1–3). By

contrast, he argues, "everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (verses 4,5).

The most immediate benefit of human sexuality is pleasure. God created the marriage relationship for husbands and wives to give and receive pleasure. Nothing is sinful in this giving and receiving. Rather, it is a second purpose of human sexuality.

CREATIVE

Third, *God is a creative person*. He creates the world, blesses it, and then commands its inhabitants to increase, both its animal inhabitants (Genesis 1:22) and its human inhabitants (1:28). God creates procreative creatures.

This is the third purpose for which God created human sexuality. Procreation is an obvious purpose of sexual intercourse. All of us are here because of it. Children will not enter the world without it.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that contraception is a sin.[2] Western society sometimes goes to the opposite extreme and views procreation negatively. Powerful voices in the media portray childbearing as financially burdensome, an obstacle to freedom and pleasure, and even environmentally irresponsible.

I believe contraception is a matter of Christian freedom. Each married couple is free to decide whether or not to use it. (That same freedom does not apply to elective abortion, which is a sin.)

And yet, I sometimes worry that many married Christians have adopted Western society's negative view of childbearing. If God blessed human sexuality and commanded men and women, "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28), then should not Christians have a bias in favor of procreation instead of a bias for contraception?

Pastor Sheldon tries to come up with a nonthreatening way to preach on sexuality.

The Spirituality of Sexuality

In the previous two sections, I outlined the theological foundations of a Christian understanding of human sexuality. Male and female reflect the image of God through their unity-in-difference. The purposes of their sexual union are intimate communication, celebration of sexual pleasure, and creation of new life. In this section, I offer suggestions about how Christians should daily live out their sexuality. Spirituality is "lived theology," so this section examines the spirituality of sexuality.

DIFFERENCES

First, we need to cultivate our differences as men and women. God created these differences to foster intimacy, pleasure, and procreation. So, they are good.

Difference does not entail either superiority or subordination. Rather, in marriage, difference entails mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21), interdependence (1 Corinthians 11:11,12), and reciprocal rights and responsibilities with regard to sexual intercourse (1 Corinthians 7:1–7).

In light of this mutuality, interdependence, and reciprocality, we might say that each spouse is *ezer kenigdo* to the other.

AFFIRMATION

Second, we need to affirm our sexuality rather than be ashamed of it. Ever since the Fall, shame has characterized human sexuality (compare Genesis 2:25 and 3:10). Shame takes many forms. For many in our culture, shame takes the form of promiscuity and perversity (Philippians 3:19). For others, it takes the form of embarrassment about their bodies. Some Christians experience shame on their wedding nights, even though they are virgins.[3]

Affirmation — even rejoicing — needs to characterize the Christian experience of sexuality, not shame. In the creation narrative, God covered Adam and Eve's shame with clothing (Genesis 3:21), a divine provision for privacy when it comes to how we use our bodies. Behind closed doors, however, "the [marriage] bed [is] undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4, KJV). Christian spouses, then, need to cultivate delight and pleasure in one another's bodies. Paul's rule for Christian married couples regarding sex is this: "Do not deprive each other" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

POTENTIAL

Third, *we* need to cultivate the potential for our sexuality. For married couples, that potential includes sexual intimacy and childbearing (Genesis 1:28; 2:24). For singles, it includes serving the Lord in characteristically male or female ways.

Regarding celibacy, Jesus spoke of "'others [who] renounced marriage *because of the kingdom of heaven*'" (Matthew 19:12, emphasis added). Paul saw a similar advantage for Christians who chose celibacy: "An unmarried man is concerned *about the Lord's affairs* — how he can please the Lord. … An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned *about the Lord's affairs:* Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit" (1 Corinthians 7:32,34; emphasis added).

Both married and single Christians express their sexuality. For married couples, the expression is explicit. Single Christians, however, sublimate their sexuality to serve the Lord with undivided attention.

Through its ministry of teaching and counseling, the church can help single Christians determine how to develop their potential. The church needs to honor those who choose lifelong celibacy because such celibacy is a spiritual gift both *from* the Lord and *for* the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:7). The church needs to inform those who desire to marry how to choose a spouse and foster a godly marriage (Ephesians 5:21–33). And it needs to encourage married couples to cultivate fidelity and joy in their relationships, as well as helping them rear their children "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

LIMITS

Fourth, we need to observe the limits God places on the expressions of our sexuality rather than transgress them. The biblical norm is the lifelong marriage of a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6). God did not create fornication, polygamy, divorce, homosexuality, or any other form of sexual expression. He created marriage. When we observe the divinely given boundaries of human sexuality — or any other divinely given boundary on human behavior — we experience God's blessing. Outside those boundaries, however, we may experience momentary pleasure, but in the long term, we experience God's judgment. (See Psalm 1:1–6; Matthew 7:24–27; Galatians 5:16–26; and Revelation 21:6–8 for contrasting destinies of those who observe and those who transgress the Lord's commands.)

MYSTERY

Fifth, we need to remember that the relationship of husband and wife is an analogy of the relationship of Christ and the Church. Our sexuality, created in God's image, always points us back to the Creator. In Ephesians 5:31,32, Paul writes: " 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church."

How does marriage point us back to our Creator? Notice that the man makes two movements in this passage: *away* from his father and mother and *toward* his wife. Both movements find analogy in the work of Christ. Does not our Lord move *away* from His Father to move *toward* us, His bride? Through the grace of the Incarnation, Jesus lives, dies, and rises again to unite us to God.

Jesus' humble service defines how Christian husbands act toward their wives and is the antithesis of male superiority. The Church's response to Jesus defines how Christian wives should submit themselves toward their husbands, and it is the antithesis of female subordination, because it is a freely chosen response to sacrificial love.

Jesus' relationship to us defines how we should relate to one another in marriage. Our relationship to our spouses draws a living portrait of what God has done for us in Christ. Our spirituality and our sexuality illuminate and reinforce one another.

Conclusion

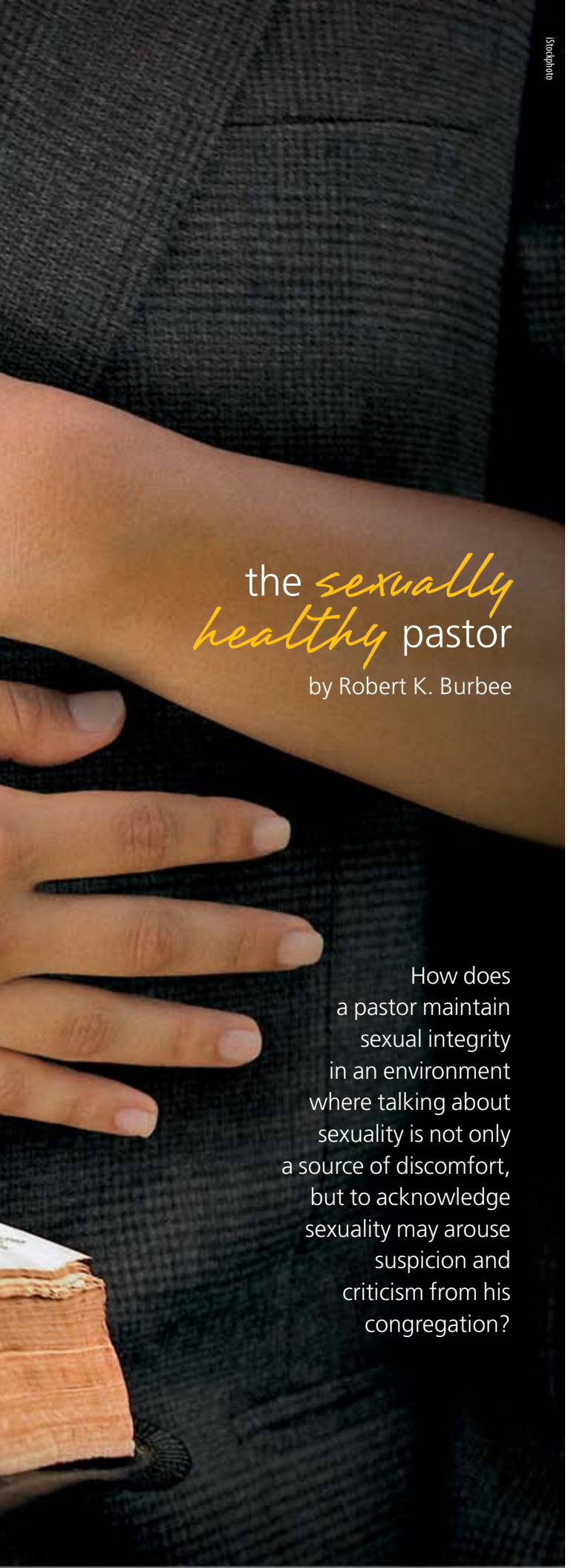
God created us in His image. Our human sexuality finds fulfillment through unity-in-difference with our spouse. But it always points beyond ourselves to the character of the God who made us this way. He designed our sexuality for intimate communication, celebration of sexual pleasure, and creation of new life because He is a God who communicates with, celebrates over, and creates (and recreates) us.

Our culture is both sexually immoral and spiritually lost. Its understanding and practice of human sexuality is darkened and reinforced by its spiritual lostness. As we proclaim the gospel, let us invite people into relationship with God through Christ, but let us also teach, value, and model a better way to experience human sexuality.

GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P., general superintendent of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

NOTES

1. Paul also cited Genesis 2:24 as he developed his theology of sexuality. He used it to explain both how husbands and wives need to love one another (Ephesians 5:22–33) and why they should not engage in sexual immorality or prostitution (1 Corinthians 6:12–20).
2. For the Roman Catholic Church's view on contraception, see ENCYCLICAL LETTER HUMANAE VITAE OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF PAUL VI at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html.
3. See in this issue of *Enrichment*, "Hooking Up vs. Holding Out: Helping Youth Find a Healthy Sexual Balance," page 58.



the *sexually healthy* pastor

by Robert K. Burbee

How does a pastor maintain sexual integrity in an environment where talking about sexuality is not only a source of discomfort, but to acknowledge sexuality may arouse suspicion and criticism from his congregation?

"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25).

In creation, God made Adam in His image and that likeness included a desire for relationship. When God presented Eve to Adam, Adam experienced the fulfillment of a God-created longing.

In the absence of shame, Adam and Eve began the revelry of knowing each other, becoming united, becoming one flesh. For them it must have been ecstasy.

How long did this ecstasy last before their disobedience shattered it? And how did they manage intimacy after it became clouded with doubt, accusation, and a sense of humiliation and failure? Indeed, this is the challenge for post-fallen creatures. This question is poignant whenever we examine human sexuality. The examination and discussion of sexuality among clergy carries an extra sense of mystery because people expect pastors not only to inform them of the truth but also to exemplify that truth.

We can safely assume that sexuality permeates the thoughts, imagination, and preoccupation of a third of the audience in any church, including the pastor. How does a pastor maintain sexual integrity in an environment where talking about sexuality is not only a source of discomfort, but even acknowledging sexuality may arouse suspicion and criticism from the congregation? Even the most superficial consideration of these questions alerts us to the need for improvement in training, mentoring, and supporting pastors. With this awareness let us consider the following:

- What are the components of personal, healthy sexuality?
- What are the indicators of sexual dysfunction?
- What factors lead to sexual compromise among pastors?
- What are steps to restoring healthy sexuality?

What Are the Components of Personal, Healthy Sexuality?

Healthy sexuality is an expression of sexual interest and behavior that affirms God's design. It is a vehicle for experiencing sexual intimacy in the context of an exclusive, committed heterosexual marital union. God designed sexual dynamics and processes to motivate and affirm both the intimate union between a man and woman in marriage and for participation with God in procreation.

Integrity. *"The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out" (Proverbs 10:9).* Integrity is an expression of what people store and nurture in their hearts. Healthy sexuality does not exist apart from a strong sense of personal integrity.

Integrity refers to a sense of personal wholeness, balance, and purity of thought and conduct. A person of integrity has a strong sense of personal responsibility and is willing to acknowledge his or her mistakes.

 (continued from page 39)

A willingness to give oneself time for rest and recreation is part of being emotionally whole. Pastors who carefully observe a personal sabbath and value pursuits that are rewarding, but not necessarily ministry oriented, are investing in their integrity.

Relationships. *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17).* Persons with a strong sense of integrity often express that integrity in the quality of their relationships. The person with strong sexual integrity enjoys and nurtures intimacy in his or her marriage. The marriage relationship for the sexually healthy pastor is an emotionally safe environment that allows spouses to dialogue about their deepest vulnerabilities and longings. In their other friendships, pastors express this quality of integrity in the vulnerability and support they experience and practice.

Boundaries. *"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).* People with sexual integrity understand their vulnerabilities to sexual compromise. They accept responsibility to guard their sexual health and integrity by observing boundaries that protect them and their relationships from trauma and/or deterioration. Such people are committed to explore and celebrate the ever-unfolding mystery of their sexuality within the biblical guidelines of a marriage covenant. Their sense of adventure and discovery is not for their own sexual fulfillment; it also respects their spouse's developing sexuality. They do not impose their selfishness on their spouse but rather supports him or her in mutually safe discovery of sexual health and vitality.

The loss of integrity and the deterioration of personal health are birthed by deception and maintained by denial.

Identity. *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).* Personal identity begins with the acknowledgment: I am God's creation. And as such, sexuality is integral to created identity.

Healthy sexual identity and functioning are expressions of healthy emotional adjustment and identity formation. People with healthy sexuality have a strong sense of maleness or femaleness, but are not encumbered by sexual stereotypes or cultural expectations of males and females. They are confident enough to develop their sexual identity in a manner that affirms the whole of their personhood, not just their gender.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Influence. *"My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2,3).* These words from the apostle Paul express a pastor's heart for those he or she shepherds. We know from Paul's other writings he was not hesitant to address sexual issues with those he felt a responsibility to instruct and encourage.

Sexually healthy pastors will likely express an attitude of celebration regarding others' sexuality. They encourage those under their leadership to embrace the journey of sexual discovery within the biblical guidelines of a committed marital union. They express their influence in their teaching and exhortations regarding sexual topics. This influence reflects a balance of celebration and respect. Such ministry is courageous in confronting sexual sin and corruption, but balanced with sensitivity and compassion for the sinner caught in the trap of sexual compromise.

What Are the Indicators of Sexual Dysfunction?

When either partner in a marriage is distressed or confused sexually, this impacts the other partner. People in general, pastors and their spouses included, are vulnerable to sexual difficulties largely due to three factors: inadequate information, faulty learning, and rigid expectations.

Inadequate information. In a culture inundated with sexual enticements, our temptation and preoccupation with sex remains largely uninformed about even the most basic sexual information. In many cases, we sadly presume to know how sexual interest, arousal, and functioning work by taking our instruction from infomercials, movies, and even pornography. Fortunately, there are a number of resources that can provide basic information about male and female sexuality and provide guidance on establishing meaningful, satisfying sexual intimacy

in marriage. *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide To Enjoying God's Gift of Sexual Intimacy,* by Dr. Douglas Rousenau, published by Thomas Nelson, is a good place to start.

Faulty learning. The same principles of learning that influence other body functions govern the sexual response system in the human body. In particular, our sexual response system is sensitive to what psychologists call *classical conditioning principles*. Childhood trauma, especially sexual abuse, can have a profound impact on one's sexual response system. In the case of classical conditioning, our bodies have learned to respond to certain sexual cues signaling the opportunity for sexual arousal and response. These cues can be highly individualized and sometimes follow stereotypic male and female patterns. Problems are set in motion when we experience sexual arousal and response before we understand how our bodies respond to sexual stimuli.

Our current culture allows, if not encourages, adolescents and even prepubescent children to experiment with adult sexual behavior. Young people can form strong associations at these early formative periods of development. If we do not help them identify and address these associations, these can be a source of confusion and disappointment when they try to establish and maintain healthy sexual intimacy in marriage.

Our sexual response systems do not know the difference between a context of moral compromise and the sexual pleasure and discovery with our marriage partner. These previous experiences contribute to sexual expectations and preferences


iStockphoto

that can feel confusing once people are in a context where they are free to exercise sexual curiosity without guilt or shame.

Because we have lost our innocence, we do not know how to innocently discover and explore intimacy with our mate within marriage. Thus extramarital sexual experience complicates the God-designed process of developing intimacy over time in the context of relationship. Pornography, in particular, disrupts this process because the person viewing pornography is creating sexual associations outside a marital union. These associations become the source of sexual preferences and expectations that exert an almost unconscious control of sexual response in marriage.

With patient repetition of healthy sexual patterns of interest, arousal, and response paired with cessation of unhealthy patterns, we can retrain our sexual response system. Communication between spouses about their patterns of sexual interest, arousal, and response is essential for marriage partners to relearn a sexual intimacy that is affirming to the relationship and honors the exclusivity of their marital covenant. When such communication can occur sensitively and without fear of retribution and humiliation, couples are well on their way to growing satisfying sexual intimacy.

Sexual trauma — in the form of childhood sexual abuse or sexual assault, and/or harassment in adulthood — intensely impacts these association dynamics. Because the experiences are traumatic, the associations formed during the trauma are especially strong and powerful.

When a threat to our safety confronts us, our memory system opens up and retains minute details of stimuli associated with this experience. It is as if we are wired to remember every little detail of the threat to better recognize signals of similar threats in the future, and thus protect ourselves from additional injury. Interestingly, these sensitive memories can even be outside our conscious awareness. We apparently do not need to make a logical connection between the past trauma and some present stimuli for our brain to register an awareness of threat. We may only be aware of being uncomfortable and not recognize this is the result of a smell, sound, sight, or sensation of touch that occurred during a previous trauma experience.

Recovering from the injury of sexual trauma and relearning sexual interest, arousal, and response without disrupting feelings of fear and threat may require professional assistance. A competent Christian counselor or therapist has contributed to the recovery of countless individuals and couples faced with the challenge of addressing sexual trauma in one or both spouses.

Rigid expectations. Life has a way of confronting us with an endless array of circumstances that require us to alter our thinking, attitudes, and behavior. The capacity to make important adjustments in one's beliefs, thinking, emotions, and behavior while retaining a consistent personal identity is a hallmark characteristic of emotional maturity. This is expressly evident in the dance of sexual intimacy. Again, communication between spouses is important to guide adjustments in belief, emotion, and behavior. If a spouse is rigid in his/her expectations of what is *normal* or *pure* sexuality within the boundaries of marriage, he/she inhibit the experience of mutual discovery and growth.

Addressing rigid expectations may feel vulnerable at first, but the risk can yield significant rewards. With some information and a willingness to be curious and explore possibilities, almost any couple can enjoy sexual intimacy. But it does entail being willing to set aside rigid assumptions about what is *normal*.

What Are Factors That Lead to Sexual Compromise Among Pastors?

Paul wrote, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery" (Galatians 5:19). Peter further stated, "Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Paul began delineating the sinful nature with sexual immorality.

Our sexuality is perhaps our most potent capacity to express God's image in us and, at the same time, when corrupted, our most obvious separation from His Spirit. Our sexuality is the means by which we participate in creation through conceiving children and is the context where a person can achieve the most intimate expression of love and affirmation of another. Is it any wonder that something so close to the heart of God is the target of evil and such a deep source of shame when corrupted? Consequently, guarding against sexual compromise by those in ministry is of the utmost importance.

Eric Reed, in an article for Leadershipjournal.net, reports that polls over the years have estimated 12 percent of pastors confess to "inappropriate physical involvement outside of marriage. In one poll, *Leadership* found 38 percent of pastors said Internet pornography was a temptation to them."[1]

Anyone involved in church for a significant period of time has heard stories of sexual infidelity by persons in ministry.

The news grips us at a deep level, often with anxiety, at times with a vague sense of embarrassment, and always with disappointment. In each case everyone seems to ask the same question: How could this happen?

Deception and denial. Betrayal of marital vows and the sacred trust of the ministry are the most blatant indications of something unhealthy going on. The loss of integrity and the deterioration of personal health are birthed by deception and maintained by denial.

The deception and denial begin with unacknowledged vulnerability. Deception consummates the compromise of integrity, and denial hastens the slide to destruction. In virtually any life-controlling behavior, we see these dynamics at work to oppress and imprison a person.

Consider alcohol and drug dependence. Potential addicts possesses a unique taste and preference for the mood alteration provided by a drug. They erroneously believe they can partake of the substance and not be injured. They then further deny the consequences of the usage and the web of secrecy needed to ensure no one challenges their judgment about their indulgence. They pretend to themselves first and then to others that nothing is wrong, setting the stage for another use of the drug because, "I can handle it."

Compromise of sexual integrity is no different. People mistakenly tell themselves they are safe from sexual indiscretion. Interestingly, they often resent the challenging and questioning by their spouse or other loved ones when the signs of compromise begin to show. Others often recognize the grip of deception and denial before the compromised person becomes aware of the slide toward moral failure.

As the intensity of deception and denial grows, people find themselves in a quagmire of excuses, protecting their secret indulgence as it gains an ever more powerful grip on their thought processes, emotions, and behavior. What began as an accidental touch or glance becomes a fantasy they nurse and protect like a private treasure. They visit this often enough that the transition to pursuing an inappropriate relationship or activity is smooth and almost imperceptible as they are caught up in the drama of desire and imagination.

Sadly, it is possible for people to be capable in their professional capacity as ministers and yet be woefully deficient in their personal relationship with God.

Dr. Mark Laaser of Faithful and True Ministries provides some insight on the issue of sexual compromise. Laaser suggested there are at least five characteristics of pastors that contribute to their being vulnerable to sexual compromise:[2]

Isolation. Despite being surrounded by people, pastors can find themselves with few if any relationships in which they can safely disclose their private struggles and questions.

Narcissism. Narcissists believe they are somehow *special*, and normal rules of caution do not apply to them. Their belief in their special status allows them to justify holding secrets and entertaining indiscretions they believe others cannot understand. When this pattern of narcissistic thinking begins to take hold, they can easily underestimate their vulnerability to moral compromise and overestimate their capacity to handle the developing web of deception.

Typically, this way of thinking leads to denial of personal responsibility, and the pastor will blame others for difficulties and distress of which the narcissistic minister is a prime player. This is usually obvious to others, but the network around the narcissistic minister becomes like the audience in the children's story where the emperor is naked but no one has the courage to tell him.

Unresolved childhood trauma. If ministers have not addressed the effects of childhood trauma, sexual or otherwise, the dynamics of that trauma can be a buried danger waiting to erupt in a crisis provoked by stress and dulled self-awareness.

Unresolved resentment. Unresolved resentment in marriage is particularly relevant when assessing vulnerability to sexual compromise. If pastors harbor unresolved resentment toward their spouse, they are especially vulnerable to the kind but inappropriate attention offered by someone other than their spouse.

Unresolved resentment in ministry can have a similar effect. The disappointment and emotional hurt that can occur in ministry may leave pastors resentful of not only parishioners, but also of the call to ministry. Unaddressed fantasies about leaving the ministry can lead ministers toward taking dangerous chances without regard to consequences, because they

Starting a Discussion on Sexuality With Your Church Staff

Discussing sexuality may be a bit uncomfortable for some. With patience and attention to creating an atmosphere of emotional safety, many people are willing to discuss matters of sexuality. The following list of questions might provide some healthy discussion regarding sexuality between a pastor and his staff:

- Do the members of our congregation have a healthy appreciation for sexuality as God designed it?
- If someone asks you a sexual question, how would you address it?
- Share some ways you protect your sexual integrity?
- How do you feel about same-gender friendships where you can be held accountable regarding your sexual integrity?
- What would you like to see that would support sexual integrity among us as a pastoral ministry team?
- What would you like to see in our church that would support sexual integrity, sexual awareness, and sexual fulfillment?

 (continued from page 43)

have not resolved the disappointment, doubt, and resentment from earlier experiences in ministry.

Spiritual immaturity. Clergy who maintain an extreme, authoritarian, rigid, black-and-white organization of their theology can become disoriented when life somehow does not deliver on their expectations for how life, ministry, marriage, and relationships are supposed to function. Most understand personal spiritual health and well-being to be a component of a minister's overall theology and sense of ministerial calling. Sadly, it is possible for people to be capable in their professional capacity as ministers and yet be woefully deficient in their personal relationship with God.

These factors can be endemic to a condition sometimes referred to as *sexual addiction.* In sexual addiction, an individual uses sexual activity as a means of escaping or soothing distressing emotional feelings. Psychologists refer to this condition as an addiction because the dynamics closely mirror addiction as seen in alcoholism. Often individuals suffering sexual addiction have companion life-controlling behaviors like drug addiction, workaholicism, compulsive spending, or compulsive thrill seeking.

Any type of sexual compromise is a signal of distress and dysfunction that in most cases warrants professional assessment. A continuation of active ministry or return to ministry before someone has fully assessed the factors contributing to sexual compromise is probably irresponsible on the part of the minister, and may place a congregation at risk for continued damage from a minister with compromised integrity.

Hope and Recovery

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1).

Clergy can regain their integrity and redeem their lives when they are willing to address the symptoms of sexual compromise. Counseling programs are available to assist ministers and their spouse in addressing the crisis caused by sexual compromise. *(See sidebar "Counseling Programs for Pastors.")*

While counseling is a preferred, perhaps even necessary option for many, every pastor can benefit from regular study and research on matters of sexuality, sexual health, and sexual integrity. Imagine a pastoral staff in which sex education and sexual ethics are standard expectations for continued education. A church staff that is unified in supporting sexual integrity and sexual accountability can add to the sexual safety of an entire congregation, not just the pastors alone. *(See sidebar "Starting a Discussion on Sexuality With Your Church Staff.")*

Conclusion

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Romans 8:5).

Paul offers a strategy for cultivating integrity, setting our minds on the desires of the Spirit. Our capacity to live a holy, righteous life lies with God, not with our own intelligence or strength of will. We need a humble acknowledgment of our dependence on God's transforming power in our lives to know the full blessing of God's plan for our sexual fulfillment. And, we need courage empowered by the Spirit to address the maze of issues surrounding sexuality. With His power and His Spirit we will know greater integrity personally and witness more effective ministry to others who may be confused and hurting in the area of sexuality.


iStockphoto

Counseling Programs for Pastors

Here are ministries that can provide counseling for sexual issues for pastors and their wives.

- Dr. Mark Laaser, Faithful and True Ministries, Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Website: www.faithfulandtrueministries.com
- Robert Paul, National Institute of Marriage, Branson, Missouri. Website: www.nationalmarriage.com
- Dr. Douglas Rosenau, Center for Sexual Wholeness, Atlanta, Georgia. Website: www.sexualwholeness.com
- EMERGE Ministries, Akron, Ohio. Website: www.emerge.org/

ROBERT K. BURBEE, LPC, is a licensed psychologist and a therapist at the National Institute of Marriage, Branson, Missouri, and adjunct professor in graduate studies at Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri. E-mail Burbee with questions or comments at drburbee@nationalmarriage.com.

NOTES

1. Eric Reed. "Restoring Fallen Pastors" in *Leadership* (winter 2006). http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2006/winter/22.21.html. Accessed October 8, 2010.
2. Mark Laaser, (2010) Personal communication.

EJ online For an unabridged version of this article, visit www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org. Look under EJ Online.

the P O R N I F I

Looking more closely at the pornification of our culture will help answer a critical question: Who will be the "salt" and "light" of biblical guidance to a culture gone wild?

The world seemed shocked by the Tiger Woods' scandal. The media feasted on the stories, rumors, and drama that surrounded Tiger's life of undisputed infidelity. But who created Tiger Woods? A dysfunctional childhood to American hero worship and things in between contributed to Tiger being Tiger. But one thing is for sure — Tiger's story is only a symptom of our sex-obsessed, pornified culture.

Pornification Realities

The term *pornification* is not original with me. *New York Times* columnist, author, and speaker, Pamela Paul, coined the term. Her 2005 book, *Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families,* caused a stir. Paul observed, "It is easier to get pornography than to avoid it. We have protected the rights of those who wish to live in a pornified culture while altogether ignoring the interests of those who do not."[1] She raised awareness of this cultural current and the corresponding devastation.

William Todd Schultz blogged on the subject for *Psychology Today*. His article, "The 'Pornification' of Human Consciousness," suggests that the effect of continual exposure to pornography can lead to a wide range of abnormalities. Schultz said: "Porn is … the new universally shared experience. The nation has been 'pornified.' It's everywhere. It's open 24/7. And chances are good, judging from research into Internet habits, that before or after reading this post, a high percentage of you will visit a porn site. … The point is if you did, you are hardly alone."[2]

iStockphoto; Photos.com

C A T I O N

of american culture

By Ed Stetzer

"Not That There's Anything Wrong With That"

The issues of human sexuality are impacting evangelical churches. Churches must recognize and address the changing sexual mores of the world. Sex and sexuality outside of marriage have been around for millennia, but the current is moving to new places.

The line, "Not that there is anything wrong with that," from a 1993 *Seinfeld* episode, is an example of a new era in our culture. The main character, Jerry, and his friend, George, were trying to not be seen as gay but neither did they want to come across as homophobic. They repeated the line throughout the episode in an effort to make the distinction.

American culture expects and demands acceptance of people's diverse sexual decisions. We live under pressure to "be conformed" to the world versus "being transformed" (Romans 12:2).

For the book, *Lost and Found*, we asked unchurched young adults: "If you were considering visiting or joining a church, would knowing that the church did not welcome or affirm homosexual members positively or negatively impact your decision?"

Eighty-three percent of young adults, ages 20–30, responded negatively. Even among the unchurched church dropouts, 52 percent said knowing a church is not open to homosexuals would negatively impact their decision to attend. Alternative expressions of sexuality are not just normal, they are expected and affirmed.

Some porn stars are more than mainstream. They are business people who call the shots on their filming, books, DVDs, and websites. A recent onstage lip-lock between Scarlett Johansson and Sandra Bullock made MTV's "The Best Girl-on-Girl List." (Yes, that's a category.) Pop stars like Lady Gaga (*Poker Face,* 2008) and Katie Perry (*I Kissed a Girl and I Liked It,* 2008) blur the line between porn star and pop star. Their songs address issues like oral sex, bisexuality, and lesbianism.

Well-known secular record producer, Mike Stock, says he believes children are being "sexualized" by popular culture: "The music industry has gone too far. It's not about me being old-fashioned. It's about keeping values that are important in the modern world. These days you can't watch modern stars — like Britney Spears or Lady Gaga — with a 2-year-old. Ninety-nine percent of the charts are R 'n' B, and 99 percent of that is soft pornography. Kids are being forced to grow up too young."[3]

Lawyer and author John W. Whitehead recently observed: "Children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend approximately 30–120 minutes a day watching music videos — 75 percent of which contain sexually suggestive materials; and, with the advent of portable technology, children's television and music are often unmonitored by parents or guardians. Not only does this accelerate adolescent sexual behavior (girls between the ages of 12–14 are two times more likely to engage in sexual activity after being exposed to sexual imagery), but it increases the likelihood of more sexual partners."[4]

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Looking more closely at the *pornification* of our culture will help answer a critical question: What does the world of the people we are trying to reach look like? Most of the

Christian community appears overwhelmed or volitionally disengaged that what existed before in secret is now shouted from the rooftops concerning sex.

Being overwhelmed about how to address the issue — we don't. Choosing to disengage, we give a culture — and our own children — the go-ahead to live by the world's standards. God has given the church all it needs to address sexuality from a biblical perspective. The Scriptures clearly teach God's plan for sex. Yet we stumble awkwardly past the issues. If the church refuses to address the issues, not only do we become irrelevant, we leave the conversation open to others who feel freer to do so.

Who will be the "salt" and "light" of biblical guidance to a culture gone wild? The church must provide a clear and robust biblical ethic of sexuality. Although it may be uncomfortable for Christians and churches to discuss, these are issues on the hearts of young Americans. Addressing marriage, pornography, and homosexuality in biblical ways will enable a church to engage with its community and thrive in many ways. We must resist the temptation to acquiesce to the culture through silence. The church should hold up the "new alternative lifestyle" (men married to women for life in a sexually pure covenant relationship) and live it out.

Just the Facts

Today we are faced with free, 24/7, private access to sexual images not fit to describe. The *Boston Globe* online notes: "Not too long ago, pornography was a furtive profession, its products created and consumed in the shadows. But it has steadily elbowed its way into the limelight, with an impact that can be measured not just by the Internet-fed ubiquity of

pornography itself but by the way aspects of the porn sensibility now inform movies, music videos, fashion, magazines, and celebrity culture."[5]

Of people who use the Internet, 43 percent visit pornographic websites. Some 40 million Americans regularly visit porn sites, with pornographic downloads representing 35 percent of all Internet downloads. Of the 40 million regular visitors, 33 percent are woman, while 70 percent of men ages 18–24 visit porn sites monthly.[6] *Sex* and *porn* are among the top five most frequently searched terms for children under 18. Only 3 percent of adult websites require verification of age before viewing, and some of those merely say, "Are you over 18? Click here if yes."[7]

For years the culture has been forced to find an argument to defend its passion for consuming porn in general and selling porn in particular. Somehow culture has managed to find and win its argument.

Phone porn and "sexting" did not create the *pornification* phenomena, but they do enhance the problem. In a 2009 Harris Survey, 19 percent of teens surveyed have engaged in sexting. Sexting is defined as "sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually suggestive nude photos through text message or e-mail." Boyfriends and girlfriends received 60 percent of these messages that are sent by mostly teens under the age of 18. Just as troubling is the fact 11 percent of these sexting teens sent pornographic messages to strangers.[8]

The use and history of the word *pornography* goes back to the 1850s. The literal meaning of the word comes from the Greek *porne* or "prostitute" and *graphein* or "to write." So the elements of sex, print, and commerce come together to produce a highly addicting and destructive cultural force.

Wendy Erin Foster's thesis at Texas Tech University observes how the *pornification* of America has affected schools, producing what she terms "raunch attitudes." She quotes an interview with Anne, a teen from Head-Royce private high school in Oakland, California, who says about sex: "It's an ego thing. We talk about it like at lunch on the patio; people think it's cool. It's competitive: who can hook up with the most guys and who can have sex … like my friend is having her 18th birthday party and she wants to have strippers there."[9]

For years U.S. culture has debated what is deemed "pornographic," reaching the U.S. Supreme Court on multiple occasions. One case, *Jacobellis vs. Ohio* (1964), led to an often repeated statement by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart. He took the position that a French movie shown in Ohio was not pornographic. He refused to clarify what he considered hardcore pornography and added: "But I know it when I see it and the motion picture involved in this case is not that."[10]

Although accurate statistics on the sale of pornography are difficult to attain, researchers estimate porn is a $100-billion-a-year business worldwide. In the U.S. alone, people will spend $13.6 billion on porn this year. Technology has created a porn revolution. People of all ages have anonymous access to all types of porn, including 24.6 million pornographic websites, 12 percent of the entire Internet total. Around 25 percent of all Internet searches are porn related (68 million each day), and 35 percent of all downloads are pornographic.[11] Each second in the U.S., people spend $3,075 on porn. In that same second, 28,000 Internet viewers are looking at porn. Every 39 minutes an adult sex video is being produced.[12] The adult video industry will have 800 million rentals this year. People in the United States are the fourth largest porn purchasers in the world behind China, South Korea, and Japan.[13]

More than 30 percent of other Internet users have experienced unwanted exposure to pornography through pop-up ads, misdirected links, or e-mails — some of the 2.5 billion pornographic e-mails sent daily. On the extreme end of pornography consumers are those among the 116,000 who search each day for child pornography.[14]

Jesus and Sexual Deviants

When we watch Jesus in the Gospels, we can ask: What did Jesus do?

Jesus actively engaged the people of His culture, even those considered sexually immoral. Some sexual deviants from the Bible were associated with Jesus: a sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50); the woman at the well (John 4:13–26); and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3–11).

Our mission must reflect the same as Jesus' — seeking and

saving the lost. People must know us as those who love people toward God and not those who hate people toward the world.

The purpose of Jesus' life was to release people from the power and penalty of sin. When considering the *pornification* of the American culture, one can easily become angry with those on the front edge of creating this phenomenon. The Hugh Hefners, movie directors, photographers, investors, and actors all deserve a little angst. Right? Yet, are they completely to blame? The issue we then face is, "Who will love them if Christians decide to hate them?" Instead, we should surprise the people with whom we are angry with the love of Jesus.

Often the best the church offers porn addicts is the command to turn off their computer and modify their behavior. Who will love the porn addict in our pew? Who will disciple them into true spiritual victory? Will churches be willing to put in the long, difficult hours that are sometimes necessary to see deliverance?

The struggle is so much deeper than most churches know or admit. We could rid the world of pornography and yet never rid the world of sexual deviance. Pornography will return in some other form. Mankind will figure out another way to act out its spiritual condition. We always do.

Gene McConnell (powertochange.com) tours college campuses communicating the dangers of pornography. McConnell is a recovering porn addict who saw porn for the first time at age 12. The cost of his addiction was great, including his marriage and ministry. In an interview in *Charisma* magazine, he weighed in on inadequate solutions. "I believe pornography exists because we have a need for it. The reason porn exists is that we live empty lives. The issue is intimacy, our greatest need. Take that as *into-me-see* — you see my life and see who I am, and you love me. That's the greatest need, male and female. But it's also the greatest fear — that if you know the real me, if you see my weaknesses, then you would abandon me."[15]

"Take some advice from the church treasurer. If you plan to preach on sex, be sure to take the offering first."

Jesus valued the *lost* over the social needs of the *found*. The truth that Jesus was attractive to socially marginalized unbelievers is often overlooked. People are looking for hope. They found it in the person of Jesus but are not finding it in the people of the church. In Luke, we read, "Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him" (Luke 15:1). Notice they were drawn to Him. They could not have possibly believed Jesus hated them. There was something about Him that was attractive. The attractiveness of Jesus needs to be evident in the life of the church in how we live and in what we teach. In regard to human sexuality, our teaching needs to be more attractive and inspiring than anything the world has seen, heard, or put on a DVD.

Jesus offered hope from sexual and spiritual bondage. He came to free people from the power and presence of sin.

Causes or Symptoms?

We debate about causes versus symptoms on the topic of sexual deviance. Picture the *causes* of a sexually deviant culture as one stream running rapidly through our culture. Causes include dysfunctional families, sexual abuse, and, on the most basic level, the sinful nature of people. Then, picture another stream — the *symptoms* of a sexually deviant culture. Symptoms might be accessibility to pornography, acceptance of sexual deviance as normal, and an increasing divorce rate. As both streams rise and leave their banks, sex floods the culture. The reality is, we become so overwhelmed by sexual deviance we do not know how to respond; neither can we tell symptoms from causes. Without knowing where to start we either take a blind swipe or disengage to irrelevance.

We swim in a cultural flood of confused sexual roles, ambiguous standards, and sexually charged images. This flood is the *pornification* of America.

In 2007, CNN reported that 70 percent of Christians admit to struggling with porn daily, according to a nonscientific poll taken by XXXChurch.com (an antiporn website), while Focus on the Family reports that approximately 20 percent of the calls they receive on their pastoral care line are for help with issues such as pornography and compulsive sexual behavior.[17]

Certainly, the church must speak the truth about biblical sexuality through nationally published magazines, books, and other mediums. But local churches need to do the difficult and messy work of understanding their own communities so they can display and explain the gospel.

So, Where Do We Go?

Pamela Paul explained the danger of being uninformed or naïve about the porn devastation: "An entire generation is

being kept in the dark about pornography's effects because previous generations can't grapple with the new reality. Whether by approaching me (at the risk of peer scorn) after I've spoken at a university or via anonymous e-mails, young people continue to pass along an unpopular message: Growing up on porn is terrible."[17]

For years the culture has been forced to find an argument to defend its passion for consuming porn in general and selling porn in particular. Somehow culture has managed to find and win its argument. Now we must find the new argument. Right now it seems that is not working well for us. The church holds and proclaims the truth of the gospel — and the gospel, and only the gospel, permanently fills the void that porn temporarily occupies.

Be informed and optimistic. Read the numbers and see the devastation to our children, marriages, lives, and culture. But be optimistic about the power of God to give hope and healing.

Imagine thriving churches addressing issues of marriage, pornography, and homosexually. As a church leader, establish your church as a safe place for those who are experiencing the devastation of bad sexual choices and addictions. By understanding and addressing cultural issues like pornography and applying the gospel's transformational power to this area of lives, believers and churches can be relevant.

ED STETZER, Ph.D., president, LifeWay Research and LifeWay's missiologist in residence. He lives in Gallatin, Tennessee. He is the author of several books, including *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* and *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and Churches That Reach Them*.

NOTES

Readers may find some of the content on the websites listed below distasteful. The following sources are provided to substantiate statements made in the article.

1. Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families,* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2006), 253.
2. William Todd Schultz, http:www.psychologytoday.com/print/4041. Accessed September 21, 2010.
3. Ben Todd, "Children At Risk From Pop Charts Porn: Top Producer Mike Stock Blasts His Own Industry," http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1301974/Mike-Stock-Pop-charts-porn-putting-children-risk.html. Accessed September 15, 2010.
4. John W. Whitehead, "Lady Gaga and the Pornification of America," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-whitehead/lady-gaga-and-the-pornifi_b_705306.html. Accessed September 21, 2010.
5. Don Aucoin, "The Pornification of America," http://www.boston.com/yourlife/articles/2006/01/24/the_pornification_of_america/, (accessed September 21, 2010).
6. "The Stats on Internet Pornography," http://gizmodo.com/5552899/finally-some-actual-stats-on-internet-porn. Accessed September 21, 2010.
7. "The Numbers Behind Pornography," http://www.onlineeducation.net/porn. Accessed September 21, 2010. The original sources behind these numbers are found at the bottom of this webpage.
8. HarrisInteractive, Trends & Tudes, "Cox's New Survey on Cyber-safety Finds Many Teens Going Online Wirelessly Without Limits or Controls," http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vault/HI_TrendsTudes_2009_v08_i03.pdf. Accessed September 21, 2010.
9. A. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, quoted in Wendy Erin Foster, *Pornification of America: The Bacherorette Party as Symptom of Raunch Culture,* 154. http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ME0HxaL-jblJ:etd.lib.ttu.edu/theses/available/etd-03272007-150212/unrestricted/Foster_Wendy_Thesis.pdf+pornification+new+yorker&cd=23&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a. Accessed September 15, 2010.
10. *Jacobellis v. Ohio,* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobellis_v._Ohio. Accessed September 21, 2010.
11. "The Stats on Internet Pornography," http://gizmodo.com/5552899/finally-some-actual-stats-on-internet-porn. Accessed September 21, 2010.
12. "Porn: The Business of Pleasure." Melissa Lee. A *CNBC* Original Season 1 Episode 15.15 July 2008
13. "The Numbers Behind Pornography," http://www.onlineeducation.net/porn. Accessed September 21, 2010.
14. "The Stats on Internet Pornography," http://gizmodo.com/5552899/finally-some-actual-stats-on-internet-porn. Accessed September 21, 2010.
15. Andy Butcher, "How One Man Unleashed the Porn Plague," http://www.charismamag.com/index.php/features2/424-faith-and-our-culture/8168-how-one-man-unleashed-the-porn-plague. Accessed September 21, 2010.
16. "Statistics and information on pornography in the USA," http://www.blazinggrace.org/cms/bg/pornstats. Accessed September 21, 2010.
17. Pamela Paul, "The Cost of Growing Up on Porn," http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/05/AR2010030501552.html. Accessed September 21, 2010.

helping families deal with today's sexual issues

By Richard D. Dobbins

If we are to remain a relevant church, we must overcome our shyness, break our silence, and confront the sexually threatening challenges to our children and families.

iStockphoto

Our society is rushing toward a cliff of sexual destruction. The Internet and television are aggressively invading our homes and exponentially increasing the sexual toxicity of our society. Many people in America no longer see sexual experience as something that should be exclusively contained in marriage. Society is ripping out everything that is sacred and holy about this precious gift.

What are we doing to offset these influences and better prepare our children to lead healthy sexual lives in a morally decaying nation? What message is our silence sending to our parishioners?

In August 2006, the Southern Baptist Convention Council on Family Life reported that 88 percent of children from evangelical homes are leaving the church shortly after they graduate from high school. These are the sexually urgent years of life. Could it be that our silence about sexuality encourages our young people to question the relevancy of their faith to the practical needs of their daily lives?

This challenge is going to grow even more menacing. Why? The age of puberty is becoming lower. People are delaying marriage longer. This requires our children and young people to manage their strongest sexual urges for 15 to 20 years before they get married. They often do this with little help from their parents or their church.

If we are to remain a relevant church, we must overcome our shyness, break our silence, and confront these sexually threatening challenges to our nation. Wherever possible, we need to spare our young from the personal calamities that stem from uninformed and unwise sexual decisions. This mission calls for a protective *fence* built from healthy biblical information about sex communicated to our children by their parents and affirmed by their church.

Unfortunately, for many, this kind of preventive help is too late. They are already living with the tragic consequences of unwise and reckless sexual decisions. They need a spiritual *ambulance* to get them to churches where they can find the compassionate healing and restoration they need.

Biblical Answers to Sexual Questions

The secular nature of society makes it unlikely that many ever consider why God made us body persons and sexual persons. We have a responsibility to help those under our ministry understand the answers to their questions.

When God created Adam and Eve, He chose to make them body persons and sexual persons. In the process He designed the neurochemical pleasure loop in the brain.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

God neurochemically wired our brain to automatically create an attachment, or bond, between our bodies and our sources of pleasure. This is why it is difficult to do anything that is extremely pleasurable only once. So, we need to be careful

 (continued from page 53)

about what we do to give us pleasure because it will draw us back to it again and again. The greater the pleasure we experience, the stronger the bond to its source will be.

God designed the spiritual ecstasy and pleasure of His presence to provide us with the most intense pleasure that is possible for the human mind/brain to experience. He wants us to be more strongly bonded to Him than we are to any other person or thing in life (Psalm 16:11; Nehemiah 8:10; Romans 14:17).

Experiencing the ultimate pleasure of His presence gives us a benchmark for comparing this enduring pleasure with the transient pleasures of this world (Hebrews 11:25). Until we have experienced the pleasure of His presence, we are at the mercy of Satan's counterfeits.

God designed the intense pleasure of sexual orgasm to form a bond between a husband and wife strong enough to bind them together for life (Genesis 2:21–23). By doing this, God meant for sexual orgasm to serve three sacred functions in marriage:

1. The uniting function. God intended this to build a lifelong bond between two people that makes them as one.

2. The reproductive function. Sexual intercourse, through the miracle of reproduction, can make two people three. God planned for the human race to be bonded to Him by the pleasure of His presence, and for married couples to be bonded with each other through the pleasure of sexual orgasm, so they can multiply the human race for the purpose of restoring divine dominion over a fallen planet.

3. The rejuvenating function. In His kindness, God made Adam and Eve naked and unashamed. He provided sexual pleasure to strengthen the bond between a man and wife to support them throughout life (Genesis 2:23–25).

Society has turned God's sacred gift to married couples into a form of *adult* entertainment that people buy and sell like any other form of commercial recreation. As a result, it is common for both men and women to have had several sexual partners before marriage. Consequently, this weakens the bonds of marriage and family.

More and more people are finding themselves in bondage to whatever they have allowed to sexually excite them. The lack of spiritual and emotional intimacy between spouses fails to bring lasting satisfaction to their sexual experiences.

The neurochemistry of the brain accommodates previous levels of excitement, so it now requires more and more of the stimulus a person has chosen to reach the same level of sexual pleasure. People are in bondage to voracious sexual appetites and perverse expressions of sexuality. Unless God breaks this bondage and heals them, they are incapable of being sexually true to anyone.

Paul warns us about this in 1 Corinthians 6:13–18. Sexual sins are sins against the body. They are not the most wicked sins a person can commit, but they are the most life-complicating because they tamper with the sexual adhesive that holds marriages and society together.

Sex Education Must Begin Early in Life

If we are to spare our children these calamities, we must begin our conversations about sex with them much earlier in life. I was reminded of this recently when shortly after midnight I was awakened by a phone call from a frantic mother crying hysterically: "Oh, Dr. Dobbins help me, please help me! I'm sorry, I know it's late where you are, but I desperately need help now. I simply do not know how to deal with what I just found.

We must awaken parents to the tragic future they and their children will face if the home is not the children's primary source of healthy information about sex.

Our sexual dilemma

In our modern society, sexual pleasure has replaced the pleasure of God's presence. Many people, particularly men, no longer desire or seek the pleasure of His presence. More and more they seek intense sexual orgasms. Pornographers pander to this appetite.

"A few minutes ago I walked into my children's play room and found my 5-year-old son trying to engage his 3-year-old sister in some highly inappropriate sexual activity. I was so appalled by what I saw that I ran from the room and tried to pretend I hadn't seen it."

As shocking as it was for her to find her children in this

kind of activity, I told her it could be a real blessing if it forced her to realize how early in our sexually sick world children become exposed to explicit pornography. I pointed out to her that the nature of the activity her children were trying to imitate indicated they had learned about pornographic sex from someone.

I asked her if she had begun talking to her children about sex. She replied, "They are only 3 and 5 years old. Don't you think that is a little early to start talking to them about such things?"

I replied, "Of course not. I believe parents need to begin talking to their children about sex when the children begin to talk."

I asked her how much of a head start she wanted to allow these lustful ideas growing in her children's minds before she began providing them with the healthy biblical ideas about sex she wanted them to carry through life. Her silence made it obvious she had never given this a thought.

This is this kind of "head in the sand, look the other way" approach that allows the world to steal the sexual innocence of our children from under our noses. Unfortunately, millions of American parents are still naïve enough to believe that even in a society as sexually toxic as ours, their preschool children can retain their sexual innocence.

As you can see from this story, children begin making sexual decisions very early in life. They are going to base those decisions on the information someone has given them at the time. As soon as children can talk, parents need to begin the process of teaching their children about healthy sexuality.

Jesus put the emphasis for living a healthy sexual life on our fantasies (Matthew 5:28). He did not say it was sinful for a man or woman to admire the beauty or handsomeness of another person. The difference between looking at someone and lusting after someone is in the fantasies occupying your mind at the time. Lusting involves thinking about what it would be like to have sex with that person.


iStockphoto

Children need to link sexual fantasies to the dream of growing up and getting married. Parents need to teach adolescents to train their sexual fantasies to be true to the person they will eventually marry. Married people need to confine their sexual fantasies to each other. Healthy sexual fantasies are always linked to the idea of marriage.

We must awaken parents to the tragic future they and their children will face if the home is not the children's primary source of healthy information about sex. If parents do not become proactive sex educators of their children, their children will get their information about sex from their peers, the public schools, and pornographers. Then, the family and the church will suffer the grief and pain that will inevitably follow the unwise sexual decisions based on information from these sources.

How We Got From Where We Were to Where We Are

Until the middle of the 20th century, most children could enjoy living a relatively innocent sexual life until puberty. So parents felt it was safe to delay any communication about sex until then. Still, parents relied mostly on public school sex education programs to relieve them of the awkwardness of having this kind of talk with their child.

At that time, the public school's sex education program reflected the framework of Judeo-Christian values. Schools encouraged young people to delay intercourse until after marriage. They taught young people the danger of sexually transmitted diseases. They frowned on teenage pregnancies and these pregnancies were relatively rare.

This began to change, however, in the last half of the 20th century. In 1963, through the passionate zeal of one committed atheist, the United States Supreme Court took the Bible out of public schools in America. By this action they legally silenced the voice of Scripture in defining sexual mores and values so vital to shaping the character of America's children and youth. This removed anything sacred or biblical from public school sex education programs. These sex education programs simply gave our children the facts about pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Today, we call this *sex education*. To make sure no religious references bias the sex education of our young, public schools are legally required to present sex education programs from a carefully monitored *politically correct* agenda.

These programs normalize homosexual lifestyles, take a permissive attitude toward intercourse outside of marriage, and destigmatize single parenthood. When it comes to teaching about abortion, secular sex education programs are more

likely to favor pro-choice over pro-life. Although these programs have recently slightly reduced the number of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases continue to ravage our young at near epidemic levels.

As young people converse with their peers and interact with our sexually charged media, they are being pumped full of permissive studies and statistics about sex. This is just what they need to fire up their fantasies and energize their sexual urges at a time when poor sexual decisions can complicate or threaten the rest of their lives. This is like giving soldiers detailed information about arms and munitions without giving them any rules for engagement except "Let's hope nobody gets hurt."

Meanwhile, Facebook, texting, and Twittering are helping young people keep each other up on the latest jargon designed by this *hanging out* and *hooking up* generation and making sure parents and families are left in the dark about what is really going on in the carefully guarded sexual side of their lives. As a result, when most parents realize the sexual conversations and behavior of their children, they, like the young mother referred to earlier, simply cannot believe it.

By our silence, the family and the church have surrendered serious conversations about these vital areas of life to sources outside the church and family. Secular and satanic forces are seizing the opportunity to capture the sexuality of our children and youth. As a result, today's children and youth have more information about sex than any previous generation, but they lack a well-defined Christian value system and character structure necessary to guide them in making wise sexual decisions. If the church and family are not providing them with healthy biblical teaching about sex, we should not be surprised when their future is compromised by unwise sexual choices.

We don't emphasize sex in this church."

The Church Must Address These Sexual Issues

If we are going to prepare our children and youth to stay sexually healthy in a world that is becoming more sexually sick every day, we need to mobilize the spiritual and creative resources of the church to provide them with practical ways of applying biblical discipline to the expression of their sexuality. We need to articulate for them a healthy theology of the body and sexuality. The church is the only institution in society that can do this. Admittedly, the challenge is formidable, but the church can do this if all departments and ministries mobilize for the task.

Facing the issues

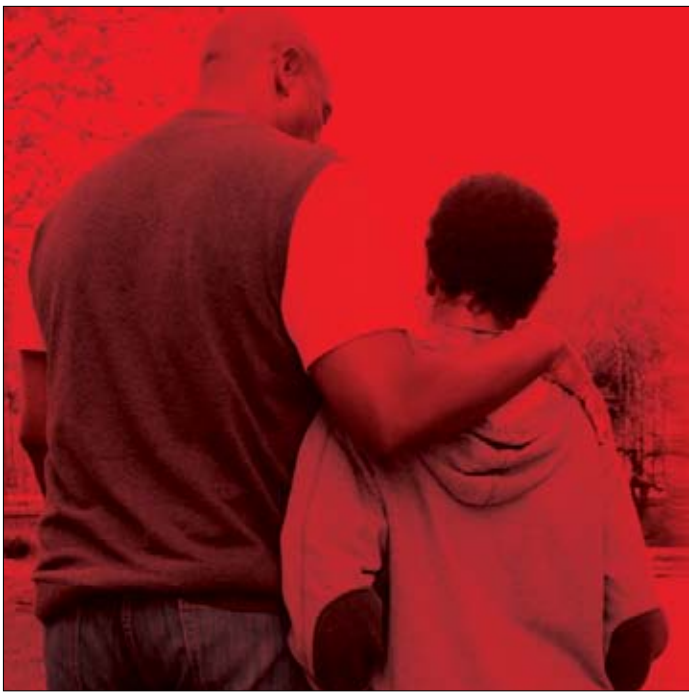
One way of addressing these needs is by having the church board create a life committee and charging it with this responsibility. The life committee will free the pastor from the inevitable criticism of a few overly sensitive people. Also, the board's sponsorship will provide some congregational ownership. This is not to be the pastor's committee; it is the church's committee.

Members can include the directors or ministers of Christian education, men's ministries, women's ministries, youth ministries, children's ministries, a representative from the board, and the pastor. The pastor needs to chair the life committee. Quarterly meetings should be scheduled to plan the programs for that quarter, add issues to address later, and reprioritize the program for the following quarter. In considering creating a life committee, discuss the issues this committee needs to address. *(See sidebar "Suggested Topics to Address.")*

One of the first tasks of the life committee is to create an agenda of issues, establishing the priority in which they need to be addressed, and designing the platform best suited to communicate each topic. For example, the pastor may want to preach a month-long series of messages on specific life issues. A breakfast or lunch may be the best platform for addressing some topics. The life committee can plan men's only and women's only meetings. Parent-teen programs are also helpful. The life committee might want to effectively use panels on various topics. An "Ask the Expert" service once or twice a year will add variety to the committee's presentations.

When using a panel or an expert, the life committee can select questions for the panel or expert to address and also solicit questions from the congregation. The congregation can write their questions on index cards. The church can designate a way to collect these cards confidentially.

The pastor, or someone he or she delegates, can select the questions they feel are most



iStockphoto

Suggested Topics To Address[1]

- Sex ... Sacred or Secular?
- What Does the Bible Have To Say About Sex?
- When and How To Start Talking About Sex
- Protecting Children From Sexual Abuse
- Helping Your Child Learn When Abuse Has Happened
- Pornography ... How Big a Threat for Children?
- Avoiding Traps With the Opposite Sex
- Masturbation and Fantasy
- Alcohol, Drugs, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Single Pregnancy
- Adultery
- Abortion
- Sex and the Single Person
- Homosexuality

— RICHARD D. DOBBINS, Ph.D.

NOTE

1. Richard D Dobbins, *Teaching Your Children the Truth About Sex* (Lake Mary, Florida: Siloam, 2006).

important and most frequently asked. This allows the pastor to exercise discretion in choosing the subject matter that will be presented.

The preaching and Christian education ministries of the local church need to focus on sexual issues at least once a month. Once the life committee has identified the topics to address, they can do the research to gather relevant statistics and information. They can use this information to promote the event through the media resources of the church. By discreetly confronting the congregation with these life issues facing their community, people are likely to become more open and comfortable in discussing them.

Each department director can identify topics that relate to his or her group. Once the congregation is aware that the life committee is functioning, the committee needs to encourage the congregation to suggest issues they would like to have discussed. Again, a church can do this by providing index cards and a drop box in designated places for people to fill out confidentially.

Eventually, the life committee can create a needs-assessment checklist. They can do this by simply identifying in a discreet way the sexual needs represented in the congregation.

The committee can circulate the needs-assessment list among the congregation at least twice a year. As the committee collects information from the congregation, they can edit the needs list to reflect any new information. Encouraging each person to check the areas from the list that indicate needs impacting his or her life at the moment will enable the pastor and committee to stay focused on those issues.

Some of these needs will be preventive (fence issues). Others will involve healing and recovery (ambulance issues). For example, training parents to be the primary sex educators of their children needs to be a major preventive project. The church can provide special classes, curricula, or programs for the parents of preschool children, elementary school children, junior high children, senior high children, and college students. This kind of developmental approach makes it unnecessary for parents to be involved in classes or programs that are not related to the needs of their children. A number of excellent sex education curricula and books are available from Christianbook.com and Gospelpublishing.com.

Conclusion

For more than 40 years I have watched the enemy use the taboos attached to sexuality to effectively muzzle the church. As a church, we have been far too squeamish for far too long when it comes to teaching our children about sex. Isn't it time we realize, for our sake and for our children's sake, we need to get over this? The need is obvious. The time to act is now.

RICHARD D. DOBBINS, Ph.D., founder of EMERGE, is currently directing the Richard D. Dobbins Institute of Ministry in Naples, Florida, which he founded in 2007. Visit his website: www.drdobbins.com.

hooking up vs. holding out:

helping youth find a healthy sexual balance

Convincing young people to save sex until marriage is only half the battle. We must also help them prepare for a healthy sex life within marriage.

By Shannon Ethridge

I will never forget the day one of my childhood friends received a swing set for her birthday. Why? Because the scar on my forehead will not let me forget.

The contraption had typical swings, a slide, and a U-shaped bar for twirling around. But it also had something I had never seen on a swing set. The shape of a cage, it had benches facing each other, allowing two people to pendulum swing at the same time. Two attendees climbed onto the benches, and I pushed them, hoping I could have the next turn. As I pushed, the girls squealed, "Higher." So I pushed the way I pushed someone on a typical one-person swing — putting my hands on their back and plowing forward until I ran under the swing to the other side. I pushed high in the air.

I then realized the weight of the second person prevented me from pushing the swing high enough to have clearance, but my body movements were already committed. I was caught in the backlash of the pendulum swing when the foot rest caught my forehead and dragged me down to the ground, flat on my back.[1]

Many young people in churches find themselves in a similar dynamic. They assume they are strong enough to fight against their own flesh, so they push the envelope — watching whatever movies they want ... listening to whatever music they want ... dressing as provocatively as they want ... spending as much time alone with the opposite sex as they want. Only then do many discover that their sexual resolve is not nearly as strong as they originally thought. Rather than saving sex for that special someone, they begin letting life (and all of the sexual temptations that come with it) drag them down. They start hooking up instead of holding out. *Why bother resisting once you have lost your virginity?* they reason. I know this mindset all too well.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

When the Pendulum Swings to the Left

If anyone had asked me in sixth grade if I wanted to remain a virgin until marriage, I would have said, "Of course I do."

In the seventh grade, I would have said, "I think so."

By eighth grade, I would have replied, "Maybe."

As a freshman, my response would have been, "I don't see how that is possible." Indeed, my innocence became just a memory that first year of high school. I was date-raped by a guy I was not even officially dating — an 18-year-old boy with whom I had been flirting for attention. I never told anyone for fear they would blame me, or at the very least label me with one of those names that echo in a girl's ears. You know ... *slut, whore, tramp*. Because I kept this secret, I had no one to help me heal from this traumatic experience.

A few months later my parents allowed me to date (too prematurely, but they only discovered this in hindsight). Because I believed someone had already stolen my virginity, I had no reason to withhold my body from most of the men I dated. Sex became routine in my relationships — the price I felt I must pay for the attention and affection I craved.

I appeared to most in my world as the Christian girl who had it all together. I attended Sunday School and church regularly. I was the president of my youth group. I would attend Christian concerts and yell, "Praise God! Praise God!" But I would often have sex with my date in the backseat of the car on the way home, oblivious to the hypocritical life I was living. At 19, after 4 years of reckless dating, I was shocked to realize how my sexual scorecard had grown. I lost count during those years of looking for love. *(See sidebar, "Forbidden Fruit vs. Not-So-Guilty Pleasures.")*

God got my attention and drew me back to a sexually moral lifestyle in my early 20s. I was enrolled in mortuary college and working at a funeral home in Dallas, Texas. I expected to be embalming people who were in their twilight years and had died of natural causes. But I was shocked at how often I was embalming people in their 20s and 30s, who died of AIDS or committed suicide once they discovered their HIV positive status. I was not HIV positive after 4 years of sleeping around, but truly grateful for the wake-up call. I met a 26-year-old virgin, who was willing to look beyond my past, and married him 1 year later. It took several years to sort out my sexual baggage and find forgiveness, but I am thankful to say we just celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary, along with 15 years of ministry to young people about healthy sexuality.

 (continued from page 59)

A Christ-reflecting marriage leaves no room for feelings of guilt and shame over our identity as sexual human beings, created in the image of God, to fully experience the pleasure of intimate communion with one another.

Many friends who walked similar paths in the 1980s were not so lucky. At my 20-year reunion, I was saddened to see how many marriages had crumbled since college, many due to sexual incompatibility, extramarital affairs, pornography addictions, etc.

I think back to what our spiritual leaders (pastors, youth directors, parents) could have done differently to guide us through those tumultuous teenage years. Sadly, I never remember a single Sunday School lesson, youth group event, or sermon focused on sexual purity. An unspoken "Don't ask, don't tell" rule loomed large: Don't embarrass us by asking questions about sex, and we won't embarrass you by trying to bring it up. Maybe adults thought that silence about such a taboo topic would keep us innocent, but there is a difference between *innocence* and *ignorance*. Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge."

Although I believe wholeheartedly in the inerrancy of Scripture, I must say I am often tempted to interject a parenthetical phrase into Hosea 4:6. Its meaning would be clearer if we said, "It's a lack of [the right kind of] knowledge that causes people to perish." I will explain by shifting our focus to the opposite extreme — examining the other end of our pendulum swing analogy.

When the Pendulum Swings to the Right

Terra was raised in a home and attended church where sex *was* talked about — *often*. Leaders often quoted Scriptures about sexual immorality and she memorized these verses. Statistics regarding sexually transmitted diseases and premarital pregnancy rates were discussed at the dinner table. Any sexual insinuation or innuendo on television resulted in the remote control getting pressed in record time. Parents purchased purity rings for every child's 13th birthday. Terra wore hers proudly for 9 years, until she married at the age of 22. As she shopped for wedding gowns for her special day, nothing but a bright white dress would do to symbolize her pristine purity. It seemed the recipe for the perfect marriage — two virgins walking the aisle, dragging absolutely no sexual baggage behind them whatsoever.

Although the wedding day was a success, the wedding night was deemed a disaster. Terra confessed, "Before I came out of the hotel bathroom, I was crying over the thought of relinquishing my role as a virgin. It had become such a source of my identity, I wasn't sure who I would be if I was no longer a virgin."

Terra's husband, Trent, was patient. No pressure. They had the rest of their lives, right? He finally got to make love to his wife on the fourth night of their honeymoon, but Terra found it painful and "slightly disgusting," in her opinion. In the coming months, she tried to open herself up to the possibility that married sex was a blessing, but admitted that it felt more like a burden, stealing the wind completely from Trent's sexual sails. After less than 2 years of marriage, Trent decided to jump ship. "I don't want to spend the rest of my life trying to twist my wife's arm to let me have sex with her," he insisted.

Perhaps you think Terra's situation is an extreme case. Think again. I am hearing this

"You're an engaging storyteller, but you lack authenticity."

iStockphoto

sentiment several times each month from life-coaching clients or through e-mails such as Lori's, who said: "I have been married for 9 l-o-n-g months. Growing up, pastors preached sexual abstinence constantly. Not only was I taught that sex before marriage was bad; I was never taught that sex within marriage was good. So I have pretty much always thought of sex as a terrible thing that should never be done, least of all enjoyed, and that the only reason you should ever need to have sex is to get pregnant.

"So, as you can probably gather, I hate sex. I've never enjoyed it and never want to have it. Perhaps it is something subconscious because I cannot seem to get rid of all of these negative thoughts about sex implanted in the back of my mind.

"I do not know what to do. It is destroying my marriage. I have tried to enjoy sex for his sake, but the whole time I cannot wait for it to be over so I can be left alone. I do not even enjoy kissing or cuddling with my husband anymore, because I always think he will try to push me to go further, and I do not want to. I do not even like sleeping in the same bed with him for fear that he will try to initiate sex.

"I am at the end of my rope. I feel like I do not even want to be married. I want to be alone. I want to have my space, where no one expects or wants sex from me, and where I can sleep by myself."

Yet another couple divorced after only 7 months of marriage for this very reason. She simply could not relax and enjoy something that she had been told over and over was "dirty ... wrong ... despicable," and he was not willing to spend a lifetime just holding her hand.

Perhaps you think this dynamic is unique to women. Think again. Megan explained, "I always thought men wanted sex any time they could get it, but *not* my husband. Brad says he is not that interested, and sees no point in wasting our time when we could be doing other, more productive things. How

iStockphoto

Forbidden Fruit vs. Not-So-Guilty Pleasures

When teaching young people about boundaries in dating or courtship relationships, it's easy to focus on all the things they *shouldn't* do. *No* touching below the neck. *No* getting horizontal. *No* … *No* … *No*. There's certainly a place for such warnings in youth ministry, but what young people really want to know is, "What *can* we do?"

Why not focus on the great things they *can* enjoy without guilt or shame? I have asked guys and girls to make lists of ways they can fuel a romantic relationship without starting any sexual fires. Their lists include:

Girls:

- Affirm not just my physical beauty, but also the character traits you admire in me.
- Take me to church and youth activities so we can grow spiritually both as a couple and as individuals.
- Hold my hand, or give me the kind of hug that makes me feel safe, not seduced.

Guys:

- Tell me what you respect about me.
- Help me with little things like homework or shopping for my sister's birthday present.
- Do nice things that make me feel special, like baking me cookies or helping me wash my car.

Our sex-saturated society teaches young people that unless someone is trying to push your envelope or get your clothes off, he must not be very into you. By teaching teens the difference between loving activities and lustful activities, we can equip them to enjoy the healthiest romantic relationships possible.

12 Questions To Explore in Premarital Counseling

As spiritual leaders, we must boldly take premarital counseling sessions into areas that may cause some discomfort, but the discomfort of an awkward premarital conversation is much preferred over the discomfort of a future divorce. Here is a list of questions to consider asking in premarital counseling situations:

1. Have you discussed your sexual histories with each other?
2. If so, what did you learn about each other? Is there anything that concerns you?
3. If both are virgins, what kind of issues may present themselves after your wedding day?
4. Do you have questions or concerns about healthy sexual expression within marriage?
5. Do you have any guilt, fear, or inhibition about fully engaging in a vibrant sexual relationship with one another once married?
6. How often do you feel it is healthy for a husband or wife to want to engage in sex?
7. How often do you suspect you may desire to be sexually intimate?
8. If one of you is a virgin and the other is not, what issues might you need to be aware of entering into marriage?
9. Do you believe God has forgiven you fully for your sexual misdeeds? And do you believe God has forgiven your fiancé for the same?
10. Do you believe you have the complete forgiveness of your fiancé? How do you know?
11. Have you forgiven yourself for any premarital mistakes?
12. Are you committed to communicating honestly with your spouse regarding any and all sexual issues that arise in the future, recognizing that genuine sexual intimacy requires deep levels of trust and open communication?

is this supposed to make me feel? And what am I supposed to do with my sexual needs? Just because he is not interested does not mean I can turn myself completely off."

As an abstinence educator and author of several books, including *Every Young Woman's Battle,* I am all about equipping junior high, high school, college age, and single adults to embrace a lifestyle of sexual integrity. However, something has gone awry with the whole "sexual purity … true love waits … purity ring thing" when the pendulum swings *so far* to the right that there is no balance in a married couple's sex life.

Sadly, I often discover a significant common thread running through my relationship coaching clients who wind up on either side of this pendulum swing — both those who hooked up and those who held out prior to marriage. The common thread? They received little-to-no premarital counseling. "We don't need it; we're fine," most couples reason. Brains scrambled, hearts ablaze, most engaged couples are absolutely intoxicated by the high of romantic love. And they have no idea what kind of hangover awaits once that high wears off. *(See sidebar "Questions To Explore in Premarital Counseling.")*

Convincing young people to save sex until marriage is only half the battle. We must also help them prepare for a healthy sex life within marriage, just as God intends. How? By not being afraid to talk about sex as a pure and holy gift from God to be celebrated and savored in the marriage bed. (No, such talk will not set their loins ablaze with lust, but rather provide encouragement that marital sex is so good that it's worth the wait.)

On the other end of the purity spectrum, it is — according to which study you read — sadly estimated that 80–95 percent of young people eventually walk down the aisle on their wedding day as nonvirgins.[2] Therefore, we cannot overlook the need to minister to the sexually broken prior to marriage either, making sure they have experienced deep healing and genuine transformation rather than expecting the wedding band to cure them of all their sexual issues. *(See sidebar "Drawing Boundary Lines.")*

Striking a Healthy Balance

The purpose of marriage is to reflect to the world Christ's unwavering commitment to His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22–33). Therefore we want to encourage both men and women to reflect that level of commitment to marriage, and to the intimate relationship that comes along with it.

We do not want to adhere to the traditional silence within the church that has shrouded all things sexual, fostering ignorance through religious taboos and naively labeling it as *innocence*. That is too often a recipe for sexual liberalism, as young people are left to construct a sexual code of conduct that will most likely not prove to live up to God's standard of sexual purity.

Nor do we want to promote sexual legalism by elevating the concept of sexual purity to the point that "no longer being a virgin" distorts a married person's self-image and robs him or her of his or her sexual and spiritual confidence. A Christ-reflecting marriage leaves no room for feelings of guilt and shame over our identity as sexual human beings, created in the image of God, to fully experience the pleasure of intimate communion with one another.

Ecclesiastes 7:18 advises, "The man who fears God will avoid all extremes." So let us avoid a sexual pendulum swing that sways too far to the left or to the right. Let us teach young people to strike a healthy balance — by embracing a lifestyle of sexual integrity prior to marriage, as well as a lifestyle of healthy sexual intimacy within marriage.

SHANNON ETHRIDGE, M.A., Tyler, Texas, is author of *Every Woman's Battle, Every Young Woman's Battle, Every Woman's Marriage, and The Sexually Confident Wife.*

NOTES

1. This illustration originally appeared in my book *Every Woman's Marriage*, WaterBrook Press, 2006.
2. Among those reviewed:
   - http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2006-12-19-premarital-sex_x.htm. Accessed 10/5/2010.
   - http://www.beforemarriage.org/premarital-sex.php. Accessed 10/5/2010.
   - http://abundantliving-tracy.blogspot.com/2010/01/few-days-ago-i-read-excellent-post-and.html. Accessed 10/5/2010.

Questions for Self-reflection or Group Discussion:

1. As a youth leader, do I balance my discussions with teenagers to include not just all the *bad* things about premarital sex, but also some of the *great* things about sex within marriage? How might I avoid both extremes (sexual legalism and liberalism) and create a balanced, healthy understanding of God's design for our sexuality?
2. As a pastor performing premarital counseling, do I invest enough time preparing both the husband-to-be and the wife-to-be to eventually embrace, celebrate, and enjoy an active sex life in marriage without guilt, shame, or inhibition? Or do I feel I must hold back in this area for fear of awakening their premarital sexual desires?

iStockphoto

Drawing Boundary Lines

A couple must be honest with one another about their sexual history (particularly a history that involves sexual abuse, addictions, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancies, and/or abortions). However, couples need to draw certain boundary lines so they do not create new trauma during these conversations. For example, certain details such as (1) the identity of previous sexual partners, (2) specific sexual acts previously engaged in, and (3) specific places where those acts took place do not serve any purpose other than as painful reminders of a spouse's sexual misconduct. Rather than focusing on the *who, what, where, when,* and *how* of a person's sexual history, focus on the lessons learned during those seasons, what the healing process has looked like since, and how the spouse-to-be can be of support in the continued growth and maturing process.

You cannot have genuine sexual intimacy without genuine sexual integrity. A sexually healthy couple is comprised of two sexually healthy individuals, so encourage both to be honest about any sexual and emotional baggage that may surface during their lifetime together. By cultivating certain fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22,23 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), couples can forge a rich, vibrant marital relationship in the future, regardless of what is in their past.

sex and the single christian: moving from don't to do

By Rick Stedman

Single adults need more than negativism — they need to know the positive side of single sexuality and abstinence, the positive things God wants them to work on and do during this stage of life.

Let me start with a game like the TV game show *Jeopardy!* I list the answers and you supply the questions. The category is Singles and Sex.

- He wrote, "The more women with whom a man has intercourse, the greater will be the benefit he derives from the act."
- He wrote, "If in one night [a man] can have intercourse with more than 10 women, it is best."

I will give you a clue — the answer is the same for both questions. Some singles have guessed: "Who is Hugh Hefner?" "Who is Tiger Woods?" and "Who is Wilt Chamberlain?"

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Sorry, all are wrong. The right response is: "Who was Lao-tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher and author of the *Tao*?"

Those two quotes are from *Tao-Te-Ching* — the bible of Taoism — the predominant religion of

iStockphoto

 (continued from page 65)

Today's contemporary culture sees an active sex life as the norm and considers celibacy abnormal.

modern China and Taiwan. Although these statements sound contemporary, they are more than 2,300 years old.

Lao-tzu considered sex an important part of the healthy life; he considered anyone who avoided sex as unhealthy. The ancient Hebrews held a similar attitude. The *Mishnah* recommended the frequency of sex for a healthy marriage: "Twice a week for laborers, once a week for donkey drivers, and every day for the unemployed." (Maybe this helped them deal with recessions better than we do.) Clearly, they believed an active sex life was the healthy way to live, and abstinence was considered unhealthy and unnatural. This almost forced singles in ancient Israel to marry. Some rabbis taught that to be over 25 years of age and still single was a sin against God.

How modern this sounds. Today's contemporary culture sees an active sex life as the norm and considers celibacy abnormal. This puts tremendous pressure on singles to either get married, cohabitate, or be sexually active. Many singles are embarrassed to admit they are virgins.

Movies, talk shows, magazines, and books all portray sex as normal and virginity as weird for singles. A few years ago a friend wrote Oprah Winfrey to counter Oprah's implication that all singles were sexually active. Oprah thought my friend was so unique she invited her to be a guest on her show. Oprah could not believe virginity was anything to be proud of, or there was a positive side to celibacy.

To make matters even more confusing, many church leaders are telling single adults that sex before marriage is okay. The results of a questionnaire distributed in 1989 to national leaders of several denominations showed that only 40 percent of denominational leaders believed it was wrong for a man and woman to have sexual relations before marriage. This shows there is wide diversity among church leaders as to whether sexual activity before marriage is wrong or not. No wonder many Christian single adults feel frustrated and confused about sexual issues.[1]

As a result, both in the secular world and in Christian circles, people view single sexuality from an almost completely negative perspective. The world tells singles that abstinence is bad; and, the church tells singles the reasons why sex before marriage is wrong, how it is harmful, and how God has said no.

The Bible clearly teaches that sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong (Exodus 20:14; Romans 1:21–27; Ephesians 5:3). But single adults need more than negativism — they need to know the positive side of single sexuality and abstinence, the positive things God wants them to work on and do during this stage of life. We need to change the way we look at sexuality — we need a complete paradigm shift to a positive view of single sexuality.[2]

Singles Need To Hear More Than *Don't*

In working with single adults, I find they need to hear more than just the negative side. They want to hear why God gives certain guidelines and why sexual activity outside of marriage is harmful. They long to hear what they could concentrate on in a *positive* way.

In fact, everyone needs to know there is a positive side to each of God's instructions. God is not only all-wise and all-powerful; He is also loving. And, like a loving parent, He instructs His children in ways designed to benefit us.

God does not give rules without reasons. For instance, the dietary laws He gave the Israelites in the Old Testament were for their benefit. Nutritionists today are seeing the value and reasonableness in those instructions (see Leviticus 11, for example). Another example is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). These are not arbitrary rules; they are still sociologically valuable today as positive functional guidelines for relationships.

As parents, we also have reasons behind our rules. When my daughter was young, I would say, "Honey, don't touch the stove." This was not because the stove was holy to me or because I was the only one privileged to touch the stove. I did not want her to get burned. In the same way, God gives instructions about sexuality, and His instructions are not arbitrary. He has positive reasons for them that singles can learn and appreciate.

The Problem With Don'ts

Unfortunately, if singles are only told don't when it comes to their sexuality, lots of problems can ensue.

For instance, many Christian singles decide sexuality is an area of God's instructions they can choose not to obey. One lovely, compassionate Christian woman who had everything going for her kept thinking she would marry in a few years. But when she turned 25 and it was just not happening, she

decided she did not want to miss out sexually any longer — even though she had been raised in a conservative Christian home, had attended church every week, had a deep and sincere love for God, and had been on the mission field for a time. She consciously decided to become sexually active. She first became involved with a man in her office, followed by a couple of married men who treated her poorly. After a few years she decided the swinging single life was not what it was cracked up to be. She learned that the real result of being *sexually free* was a cheapening of her sense of personal value.

Many singles feel cheap as a result of their negative view of single sexuality. Many who have gone this route (even non-Christians) conclude that sexual freedom is damaging to the soul. Carolyn See, in her article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine entitled "The New Chastity," graphically describes how sexual promiscuity affected her: "What does all this mean in a discussion of the new chastity? What it means, I think, is that despite the Pill, legalized abortion, and economic freedom, our own bodies are trying to tell us something: They don't necessarily want to be tossed around like lost luggage on a round-the-world plane trip. That's why, maybe, after a long night of good times … with a Nick Nolte look-alike, when you get up and weigh yourself and find you've even lost two pounds from the exertion, and he left at 5 in the morning, but he did say he'd call, and you even work in the same office with him, so. … But you go out for coffee in the kitchen, and something, someplace in your body feels like if it could cry, it would cry. It's not your … 'heart.' It's in the vicinity of your lungs, your solar plexus, where some … religions suggest your soul resides. In other words, recreational sex is not soul food. Yet, however difficult the choice, after close to two decades of sexual permissiveness (what a tiresome phrase; one gets 'permission' to go to the cloakroom in grade school, not to go to bed with darling men!), more and more young women are opting for the new chastity. … 'What's all this stuff about the new chastity?' asks a beautiful showgirl who was once married to a famous tap dancer. 'I'm still working on the old kind! Save yourself for a man you love or at least one who makes your heart flutter. Otherwise it's meatloaf, under brand-X catsup.' "[3]

She has described what many singles feel as the result of indiscriminate sex: overused and run-down like a worn-out suitcase, battered and torn from too many miles logged. They feel cheap and depreciated because sexual experiences do not reinforce a person's ultimate value.

A negative view of single sexuality may also lead to problems such as obsessive and problematic behaviors. One such problem many singles face is masturbation. During seminars on single sexuality, by far the most common question asked by singles when organizers allow them to ask anonymously is, "Is masturbation okay?" Kinsey reported that 97 percent of males and 83 percent of females masturbate. Of senior citizens over 80 years of age, 72 percent of males and 40 percent of females masturbate. These numbers represent the percentages of all adults who masturbate, so it would follow that the percentages of single adults would be significantly higher. In a study done among Christian adults, 92 percent admitted to having masturbated at some point in their lives, 88 percent had masturbated in the last year, 75 percent within the last month, and 52 percent within the last week.[4]

Although the practice is widespread, masturbation is such a forbidden topic in the church that it takes a major act of courage to bring it up, even in private counseling sessions. Very few books on Christian sexuality deal with masturbation — even though the perspective is very diverse as to what God's will is on the issue. Opinion ranges from, "It is always a sin and contrary to the will of God" to "It is a necessary part of the single experience and a gift from God." This confuses singles, and they do not know who to listen to or trust on this topic. I think getting a positive perspective on sexuality will help with this dilemma as well.

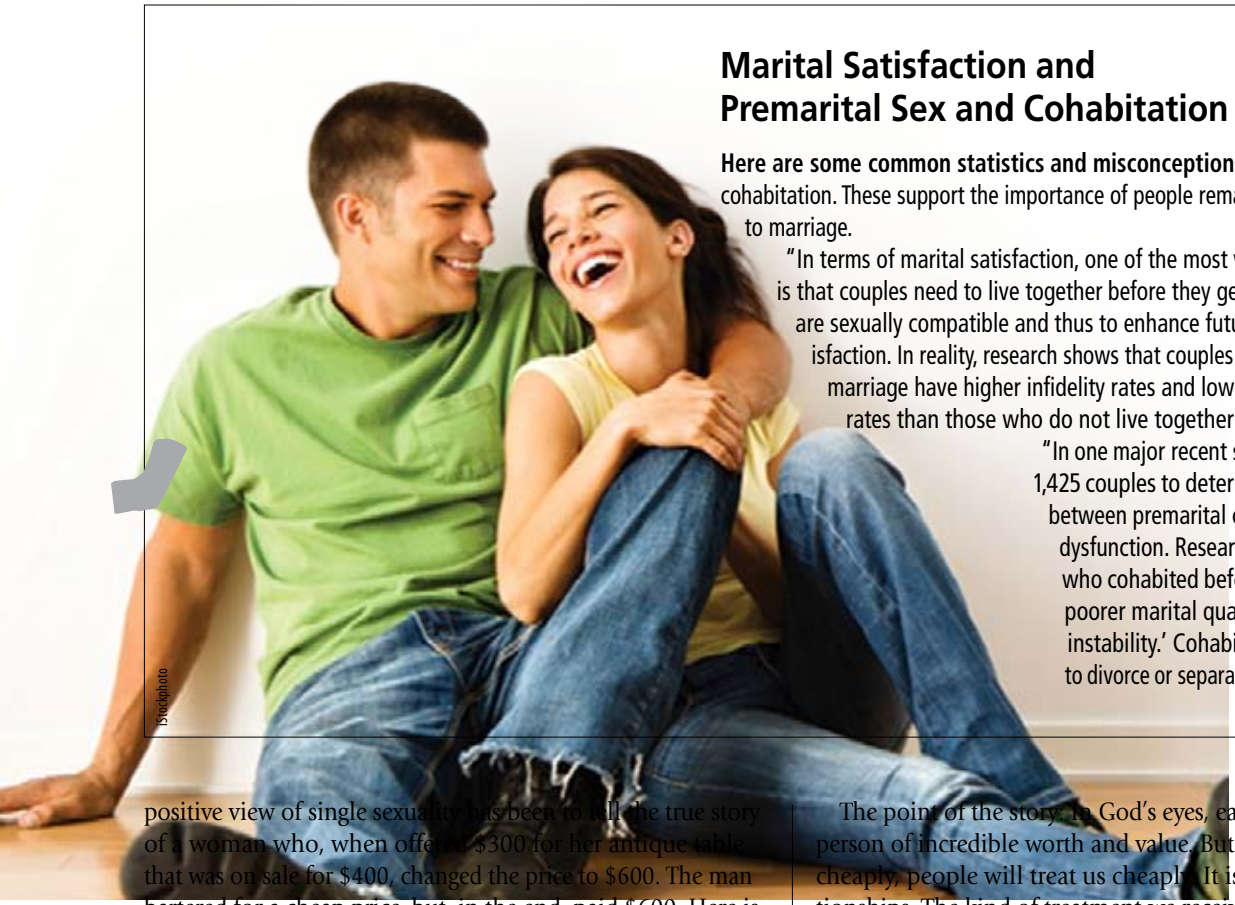
Single celibacy is becoming more and more of an issue for older adults who find themselves alone due to divorce or bereavement. What are 50-ish or 60-ish persons to do when they hate being alone but also, for a variety of reasons, do not want to get remarried? (Sometimes remarriage will cause them to lose their deceased spouse's retirement benefits.) Cohabitation among senior adults is sharply on the rise, and the don't approach does not seem to be working.

Finally, singles that lack a positive rationale for celibacy can also get caught up in the more serious and dangerous world of pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, and molestation. If someone descends into this level of behavior, there is no easy way out. A positive view of single sexuality, however, will help a person — even in these extreme situations — take appropriate steps toward recovery.

The Positive Side of Single Sexuality

The most helpful tool for me in teaching single adults about a

 (continued from page 67)



Marital Satisfaction and Premarital Sex and Cohabitation

Here are some common statistics and misconceptions about premarital sex and cohabitation. These support the importance of people remaining sexually pure prior to marriage.

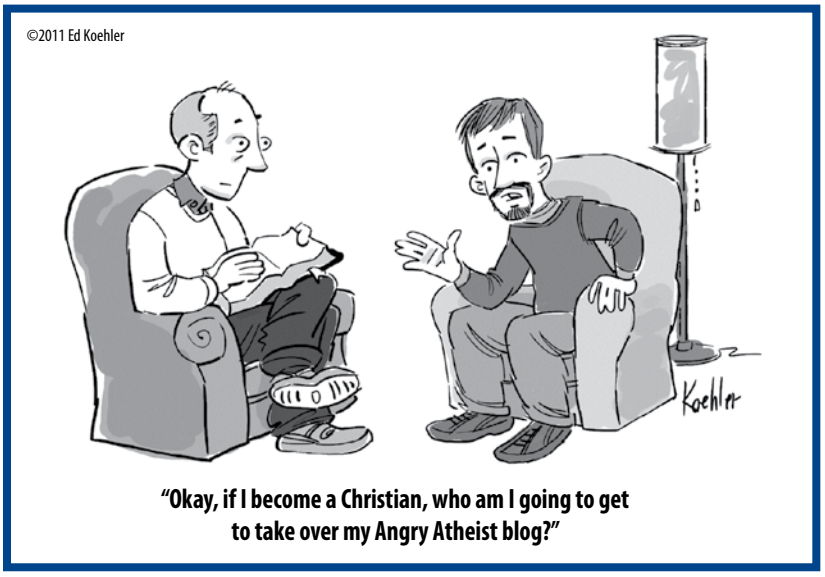
"In terms of marital satisfaction, one of the most widespread modern myths is that couples need to live together before they get married to see if they are sexually compatible and thus to enhance future marital health and satisfaction. In reality, research shows that couples who live together before marriage have higher infidelity rates and lower marital satisfaction rates than those who do not live together before marriage.

"In one major recent study, researchers studied 1,425 couples to determine the relationship between premarital cohabitation and marital dysfunction. Researchers found that couples who cohabited before marriage 'reported poorer marital quality and greater marital instability.' Cohabiters are also more likely to divorce or separate if they do get married.

positive view of single sexuality has been to tell the true story of a woman who, when offered $300 for her antique table that was on sale for $400, changed the price to $600. The man bartered for a cheap price, but, in the end, paid $600. Here is the clincher: When he got the table home, how did he treat it? Like a $300 or $600 table? He treated it like a $600 table because he paid that much. But if he had only paid $300, he would have treated it poorly.[5]

The point of the story: In God's eyes, each individual is a person of incredible worth and value. But if we sell ourselves cheaply, people will treat us cheaply. It is the same in relationships. The kind of treatment we receive is directly related to how cheaply we sell ourselves. So we are the ones who select the type of treatment we receive from others.

This has tremendous implications in the sexual arena for singles. If others are to treat singles as being valuable sexually, singles will first need to believe they are valuable — valuable enough to hold out for someone who will treat them the way they deserve to be treated. Then, whether or not they ever marry, they will have a sense of personal and physical self-worth that no one can deny.



"Okay, if I become a Christian, who am I going to get to take over my Angry Atheist blog?"

The Biblical Basis for a Positive Single Sexuality

The biblical basis for this positive concept is found in the Hebrew words for "virgin" — *almah* and *bethulah*. The respective root meanings are "to hide" and "to separate." God instructed the Hebrews to hide and separate young women as a way of protecting and enhancing their worth — as a public declaration of their great value.

Sexuality is related to personal value. This

"A study of over 4,000 Swedish women reported that women who cohabit before marriage have an 80 percent higher marital failure rate than women who did not cohabit with their future spouse. In short, living together and having sex before marriage does not prepare one for marriage, but decreases the likelihood of a future healthy marriage."[1]

"Couples with no intention of marrying who decide to cohabit are forming unstable living arrangements that can have negative effects on their emotional, financial, and sometimes physical well-being, according to University of Chicago researcher Linda Waite, professor in sociology. … She found that men and women who cohabit are more likely than married people to experience partner abuse and infidelity and less likely to receive assistance from family members than married couples. … Waite also found the parenting role of a cohabiting partner toward children of the other person is vaguely defined, making cohabitation an unstable living arrangement for children. 'The nonparent partner — the man in the substantial majority of cases — has no explicit legal, financial, supervisory, or custodial rights or responsibilities regarding the children of his partner,' wrote Waite. … 'This ambiguity and lack of enforceable claims by either cohabiting partner or child makes investment in the relationship dangerous for both parties and makes "Mom's boyfriend" a weak and shifting base from which to discipline and guide children,' she continued. Despite its disadvantages, people increasingly are choosing cohabitation over marriage. The latest Census Bureau figures show that 4 million couples live together outside of marriage, eight times as many as in 1970.' "[2]

"More women cohabit than men, but men are more likely to cohabit serially."[3]

"If a couple abstains from sex before marriage, they are 29 to 47 percent more likely to enjoy sex afterward than those who cohabit. Sexual satisfaction rises considerably more after marriage."[4]

NOTES

1. Steven Tracy, Ph.D., "Sex as a Gift From God: The Case for Premarital Sexual Abstinence." Phoenix Seminary. http://www.preciousheart.net/ti/ISCF/12_%20Sex%20-%20Gift%20of%20God%20-%20Steven%20Tracy.pdf. Accessed 10/5/2010.
2. William Harms, "Research Looks at Cohabitation's Negative Effects," in *The University of Chicago Chronicle*, Vol. 19, No. 11, March 2, 2000.
3. "Should We Live Together?" Daniel Popenoe nd Barbara DaFoe Whitehead, The Natural Marriage Project. http://www.smartmarriages.com/cohabit.html. Accessed September 30, 2010.
4. "Cohabitation vs. Marriage: 26 Research Findings," http://www.physiciansforlife.org/content/view/242/27/. Accessed September 30, 2010.

is the revolutionary thought we must place in singles' minds to help them understand the purpose behind the practice of temporary celibacy — separating oneself from sexual activity to establish and enhance personal worth. This is the core of the positive approach to single sexuality.[6]

God created sexuality as a way for us to learn how to value ourselves, and, as a way of expressing that value to others. Value becomes the dominant and determining perspective concerning sexuality. The way in which I allow others to treat me sexually, and the way in which I treat others sexually, either asserts and protects my value as a person or has the opposite effect and diminishes my value. Thus, temporary celibacy is a positive way of asserting and enhancing personal value. Conversely, promiscuity cheapens and diminishes my sense of personal and physical worth.

This is not simply another way of saying, "Wait until you are married." The idea of temporary celibacy is like having a savings account. Consider the case of a single woman who saves money to buy a house. She may need to give up driving a fancy car or having expensive clothes to save $100 a week for a down payment. At the end of 5 years, whether she bought a house or not, she would have a sizable savings. She would feel a sense of security, stability, and worth due to her savings account. She has built a foundation for her future. Similarly, a person's sexual behavior should be that which most promotes and protects a sense of value — which for a single adult is temporary abstinence. Singles save themselves sexually to contribute to a sense of self-worth. Whether they marry or not, they end up with a sense of value.

When talking with engaged couples, I have found this positive approach to be helpful. Rather than trying to convince couples they must obey, what some view as an illogical rule from the Bible, I teach them God's reason for creating the idea of temporary abstinence. I stress the idea that being patient and remaining pure until their wedding day will make a statement of mutual worthiness, and it will also set the stage for a much more meaningful sexual relationship in marriage — with no guilt and shame to cast a shadow on the relationship.

Engaged couples are often excited when they understand this concept and really want to save themselves for each other. They do not see it as denial, but as a deposit into the other person's self-worth account. They are saying, "I not only love you, but I will prove how much I love and value you by not treating you cheaply and by separating myself sexually from you until the wedding."

When talking with senior adults, they clearly understand economics and will not let others negatively affect their finances. For instance, they would not dream of letting someone treat their home or car cheaply. But should they allow someone to treat their own bodies and souls cheaply? Of course not. And if they do, what kind of future treatment will they most likely get? Cheap, of course.

Or consider another example: One single man who was obsessed with masturbating discovered through a discussion

 (continued from page 69)

Temporary celibacy is a positive way of asserting and enhancing personal value.

iStockphoto

of his sexual autobiography that he had been molested as a young boy by an uncle. As he understood the positive aspects of his sexuality, he came to see for himself the connection between the past devaluing experience and the current obsession with masturbation. In a way he was punishing himself because he felt worthless. He was also using masturbation as a type of compensation because he felt he would never be worthy enough for a sexual relationship. Through this discovery, he was able to experience forgiveness, gain control, and release the feelings of guilt. We talked about how he could begin to assert his value as a person. He drew the conclusion that masturbation was not helping him do that but instead was causing him to make unhealthy "withdrawals" from his moral bank account. As a result, he was finally able to conquer his masturbation problem, and he began, through positive abstinence, to build up his moral bank account.

Fortunately, life is not a game show like *Jeopardy!* God is not a cosmic judge who only hits the no button for singles and sexuality. When singles begin to learn to value themselves as God values them, they can learn there are ways to both obey God and live the abundant life. One woman — 62 years old — broke up with both of her boyfriends who had been pressuring her sexually. She said, "I told them: 'I am a million-dollar table, and you are not scratching my surface any more.' And you know what? I feel happier and healthier without them in my life. I want a man to value me like God does, and I'm not settling for less any more."

Questions for Self-reflection or Group Discussion

1. Brainstorm all the don'ts you have heard about single sexuality. (Such as "Don't wear tight fitting sweaters."; "Don't go on unchaperoned dates."; "Don't think about sex."). What are the positive and negative results of these don'ts? How can church leaders adapt or change their teaching emphasis to a do approach?
2. Are you a spender or a saver financially? Singles who are savers end up with solid net worth, regardless of whether they ever marry. How does this analogy relate to single sexuality and abstinence?
3. The Bible says that God forgives our sins and makes us "white as snow" (Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18), but many Christian singles feel soiled or cheap due to past sexual mistakes. Why? What do the following verses say about God's view of us, in light of our sexual past: Psalm 51:1–19; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:12–14; 1 John 1:8,9?
4. Do you think it is okay for older singles to cohabit to keep their Social Security benefits or retirement income from their deceased spouse? Why or why not? What Scriptures support your position? How can church leaders effectively minister to older singles in this area?

RICK STEDMAN, D.Min., senior pastor, Adventure Christian Church, Roseville, California. He is the author of *Pure Joy!: The Positive Side of Single Sexuality and Your Single Treasure: Good News About Singles and Sexuality.* This article is adapted from "Sexual Struggles" that appeared in *Counseling Single Adults*, D. Fagerstrom, ed.; Baker Books, 1996, 243–59. Used with permission.

NOTES

1. "Sexual Struggles" by Rick Stedman in *Counseling Single Adults,* Doug Fagerstrom, ed., Baker, 1996, 244.
2. By using the phrase "Single Sexuality," I am stressing that singles, though unmarried, still remain sexual beings and must discover and obey God's will in that aspect of their lives. The phrase does not refer to one's sexual orientation, gender, or drive.
3. Carolyn See, "The New Chastity," *Cosmopolitan* (November, 1985), 382–83.
4. Harold Ivan Smith, quoted in Stedman, "Sexual Struggles," 250.
5. For the whole story, see Rick Stedman, *Your Single Treasure*, (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 27–31.
6. Ibid., 55–58.

restoring the damaged soul:
church-based ministry to the sexually broken

A damaged soul threatens the spiritual and relational integrity of many Christians. Here are nine keys to facilitate the healing process for people struggling to free themselves from sexual brokenness.

By Andy Comiskey

Jim and Karen could barely look at you. Dumbfounded, you struggle to hold their gaze as well. Are these the same young adults you married 10 years earlier? You knew Jim had a struggle with Internet porn. Yet, as their story unfolds, these beleaguered partners reveal a marriage in crisis.

Apparently the sexual part of their marriage was never strong. A victim of childhood sexual abuse, Karen tolerated marital sex but resisted Jim more than not after their two kids were born. While Jim sought guilty pleasure in porn, Karen reconnected on Facebook with a college roommate. This friend, a lapsed Christian, was now a self-affirmed lesbian. She first provided solace to the struggling mom, then she initiated a sensual bond that met some deep needs in Karen.

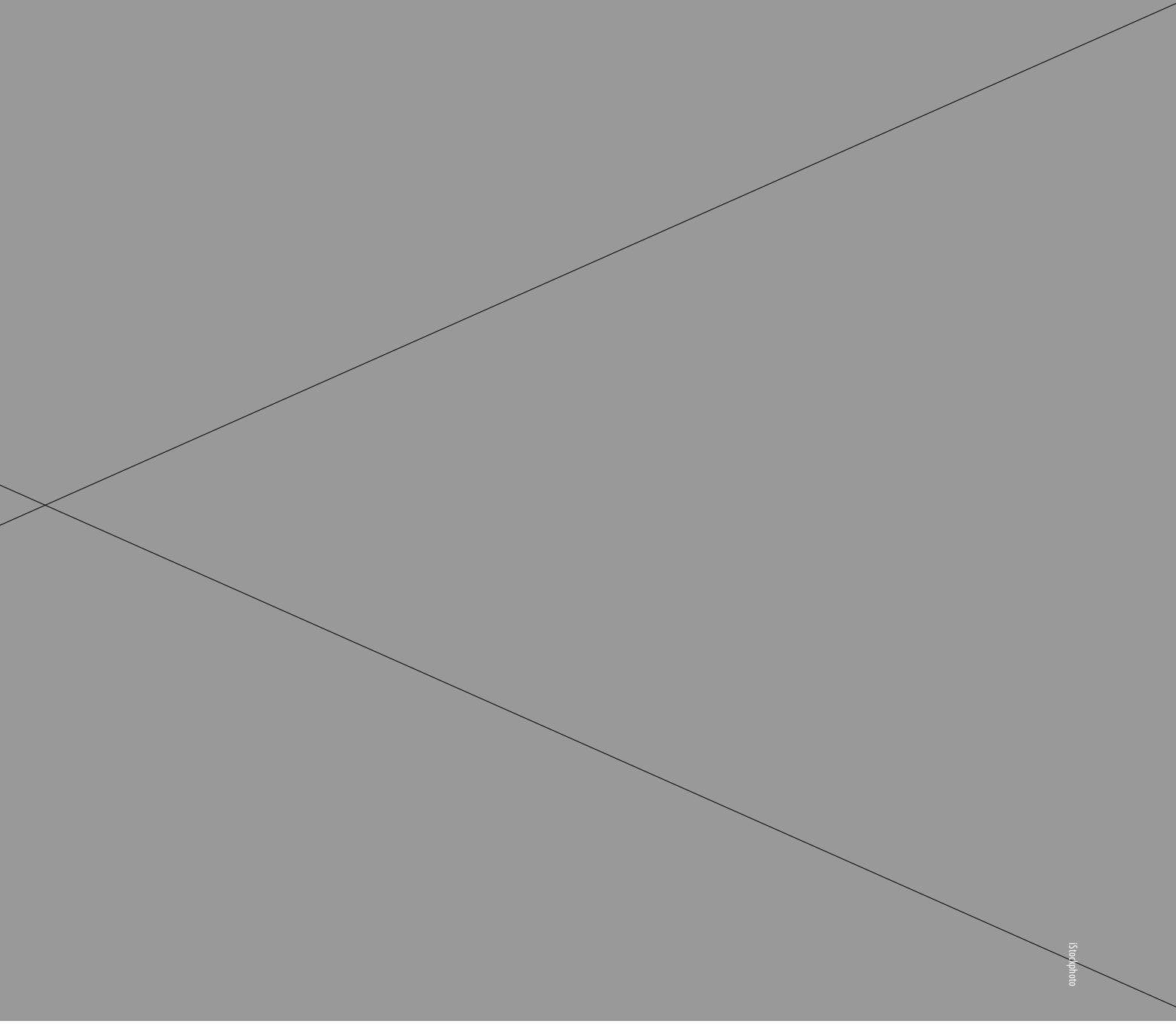
Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Karen had just told Jim about the special *friendship* and the possibility of divorce. Jim was floored. He asked her if she would seek help with him. In conflict due to her faith, Karen agreed. The two await your pastoral response. What will be your counsel that will help heal their sexual brokenness?

How Whole Is Your Gospel?
What's at stake in sexual brokenness

Though perhaps an extreme example, this marriage in crisis reveals cords of sexual entanglement that threaten the spiritual and relational integrity of many Christians. You might say that the integrity of the gospel of Christ is at stake.

How the church handles sexual brokenness is a window to the fullness of the gospel: the challenge of surrender (Christ crucified), the hope of new life (Christ resurrected), the call to holiness, and the pursuit of healing. Paul knew this tension when addressing the Corinthians. Paul knew the whole gospel could be lost at Corinth because the Spirit-filled sophisticates in the church did not take seriously, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord" (1 Corinthians 6:13).



Today's idolatry

Welcome to today's Corinth. Internet porn is the drug of choice for most men and some women. Never before in history have so many sex idols been available in so many homes with so few controls at absolutely no cost. Male and female homosexuality is on the increase. "The only problem with being gay, Pastor," a young man said to me recently, "is the one you have with it."

Beneath the surface of today's sexual idolater lies a profound instability of soul rooted in any number of wounds and distorted self-perceptions. This crisis in identity is sourced in destabilized families of origin, coupled later on with the unreal communities we forge in social networking. Countless hours of virtual screen time tempt people to create their own reality — to become their own "American idol."

Idol is right. Broken, empty, eager to worship or be worshiped, we are mired in a profound idolatry of self. Not knowing who we are, we put on any number of faces to secure love, usually sexual in nature. Our very need for love gets frustrated in the games we play. The result? People have a near inability to make and keep promises of love.

We are sexually fired up and yet unable to forge relationships that can sustain meaningful sexual expression. In short, many members of your church are sexually broken. Their sexual brokenness consists of two components.

Broken boundaries, fractured identities

Sexual brokenness usually consists of two distinct, yet related parts — broken sexual boundaries and a fractured personal identity. First, broken boundaries.

On the positive side, as Christians, we are pretty clear that sex is really powerful and essentially creative. The purpose of sex is to bond two people for life who may very well create a family.

The mutual commitment of two heterosexual adults provides

 (continued from page 73)

a boundary that protects and guides sexual expression. Optimally, it dignifies both parties and confirms, rather than confuses, the humanity of both the man and woman. On the other hand, many grow up with few, if any, boundaries to guard their bodies and imaginations from sexual activity.

— damaged humanity — a place to go and to raise us to love like He does. He is the true image of God in His humanity (Colossians 1:15,16). His blood removes sin and shame; His Spirit raises us to resume the journey to loving others well. Jesus alone has power to transform sexual brokenness into an

Beneath the surface of today's sexual idolater lies a profound instability of soul rooted in any number of wounds and distorted self-perceptions.

Karen was subject to the humiliations of a perverse uncle. Jim experimented sexually with other kids early on, then he went on to his father's porn stash — a habit that escalated years later on the Internet. He also had many partners before his conversion and marriage to Karen. Both entered into marriage ill-equipped to see the other with new eyes.

Jim and Karen's lives line up with Nehemiah's vision of the wall surrounding Jerusalem when he said the city's boundaries are burning with fire and left in disgrace (Nehemiah 2:17). In truth, Jim and Karen are nearly unable to yield their bodies to one another out of a genuine expression of love and authentic self-giving. Karen's sexuality is locked up in the shameful perversion of another; Jim cannot shake the shame of his lustful, porn-fed imagination. Their broken boundaries subject them to distorted views of self and others.

The second component of sexual brokenness is a damaged personal identity. Karen hated male sexuality and hated herself for not acting more decisively against her uncle's defilement. The enemy of her soul constantly accused her of being dirty and seductive, and she was oppressed by fear.

Jim had never really loved a woman as a whole person. Prior to Karen, he sexualized all of his relationships. The enemy had shrouded his vision of reality with a pornographic fog. This further distanced him from loving his wife for who she was — a person worthy of value — and limited his capacity to grasp the deeper issues underlying both his and Karen's sexual brokenness.

Jesus Redeems Sexual Brokenness

Scripture describes us as bearers of God's image: humanity as male and female (Genesis 1:26,27). This means we represent God in our sexual and relational lives. Sin distorts both of these aspects of our lives. This is why Jesus came: to grant us opportunity for deeper discipleship. The hope for Jesus' presence to heal sexual brokenness requires three things.

Jesus redeems the broken through His body — the Church

First, healing sexual brokenness requires ministry leaders to understand how God uses the church to restore sexually broken people. God's presence is mediated through people who stand with the sexually broken in the hard process of disclosure.

This dynamic fulfills Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:22–26, when he speaks of the different parts of the body. He refers to the weaker, less honorable parts (a good description of the sexually broken), then implores members of the church to give greater honor to them through sharing life together in the Body. Pastors may well be the first ones to convey the hope of Christ revealed through the church. Their calm, hopeful response manifests the honor God gives the dishonorable.

Confidentiality

Second, confidentiality is crucial to the healing process. Most Christians are intrigued by sexual brokenness and delight in disclosing another's failure to someone who has no business knowing it. The Karen and Jims in your church need the boundary of your word. This is no one else's business. You begin to restore their boundaries by keeping their secrets safe.

Willingness

Third, each party must have a willingness to change. It is important to discern the readiness of the broken to resume the journey to freedom. This discernment of genuine repentance can take time. Some know how to play the confession game, but their hearts are far from repentant. Others are dull and deceived at first, then when gracefully encouraged begin the slow turn.

Ultimately, sexually broken people must decide whether to clear or block their own path to sexual wholeness. For example, Karen's refusal to set boundaries with her friend, or Jim's unwillingness to realize he had a limited vision of who Karen was and what she needed, could have derailed the process.

Staying tender and broken before God, with proper encouragement from the body of Christ, is key to the long-term approach needed to get free and stay free from sexual brokenness.

Clear standard and track for redemption

It is important as church leaders to have two documents in place: a clear standard for the sexual conduct of your core team and a plan of action in case of failure. When these two procedures are in place, and you steward them consistently and compassionately, you can face the charge with integrity that you acted arbitrarily and harshly.

You also can say plainly to the fallen: "This is the course of action we use at this church; walk this way." This gives people clear guidelines and choice concerning whether or not they want to cooperate with you and the church in their sexual brokenness.

Willingness involves two sides: a sustained, humble attitude on the part of the broken, and you and your church having a helpful, long-term plan for them. Beware of the consumerism that insists sexual wholeness can and must be achieved quickly.

The Healing Process

Learning to love well

I believe in the power of the Spirit to act quickly as He wills to release one from certain strongholds. I also believe that unless we welcome and understand such Kingdom activity as one giant step on our life long journey toward maturing in love we will be sorely disappointed. Being prone to proclaiming an "it is finished" approach to a person's brokenness serves no one well.

The truth is: Sexual brokenness is shameful, painful, and runs deep. We are all uncomfortable with sexual brokenness. Both struggler and church want it to be fast. So we may be tempted to " 'dress the wounds of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace' " (Jeremiah 6:14). We minimize the depth of the struggle or exaggerate its resolve because we all just want to move on.

Jesus takes the long view. He wants us to become reliable in love, not merely seeking our own good, but the good of others (1 Corinthians 10:24).

A team approach

The goal of healing sexual brokenness requires more than what one Christian leader can give. It will serve everyone well to consider another course of action other than what you can provide for the sexually broken. Solid Christian counselors are invaluable, as are weekend conferences, and a variety of resources geared toward inner healing.

I recommend two discipleship/healing resources I've developed for the sexually broken for use in the local church: CrossCurrent, an introductory 8-week course; and, the main meal — Living Waters, a 25-week course. (For more information on Living Waters, e-mail: info@desertstream.org.) These courses are designed to be led by laity — wounded healers in their own right — who meet certain leadership requirements and are trained to lead once a week, for your church and community — under your auspices.

These resources provide concise teaching that gives a grid for understanding and addressing various strands of sexual brokenness, while providing a Cross-centered, Spirit-filled support system along the way.

The importance of well-run groups

When I was a young man coming out of homosexuality, my pastor urged me to gather with other strugglers in the hopes they too might find the healing they needed to become life-giving members of the community.

By following my pastor's advice, my wife, Annette, and I continue to grow in truth and grace. His suggestion led us to develop leaders as we taught on topics that seemed relevant to the broken. As God healed people trapped in same-sex relationships, we decided to also include heterosexual idolaters from our church that needed help.

A more diverse group presents a greater challenge, but ultimately a more diverse groups is much healthier. It seemed counterproductive and unbiblical to gather solely on the grounds of same-sex attraction when all humanity finds itself somewhere on the continuum of sexual brokenness.

As well, we included both men and women in the group, as this was healthy too. Our group meetings would include times of worship, teaching and testimony, and ministry time. Following this, same-sex groups were formed for deeper prayer

 (continued from page 75)

and accountability in specific areas. The Living Waters group emerged out of this initial phase of our growth.

Through the Living Waters Group Annette continued to receive healing for her childhood sexual abuse, and together we grew as more mature expressions of God's image. All of this occurred as we offered ourselves in service to the local body of Christ.

Sexual brokenness impacts our daily lives: how we worship and how we love. Its resolve in individual lives is an expression of the power of the body of Christ to bring about healing. Discipleship groups — run by trustworthy laypeople — are a safe and solid way of serving the needs of the broken without the pastor needing to do all the work.

Keys to healing

Following are nine keys to facilitating the healing process. I use Jim and Karen as examples of two individuals who might benefit from this process.

God seeks to meet our needs

The first key to discuss with the sexually broken is the truth that God wants to meet our needs for love and security. We all have these needs. When our need for love and security is not met, we are more likely to go looking for them in all the wrong places. Our sexuality is often a powerful barometer of how secure the love is around us. What we know about Jesus: He came to give us what we need — a double portion of love in the place of our sin (Isaiah 40:1). God gives us what we need, not what we deserve.

Praying over this with Karen and Jim was a revelation. God took a long view of their lives and wanted to satisfy them with good things. This takes the edge off fear and dread. It brought hope to what seemed unmanageable. The Father gives us bread for our sexual hunger, not snakes and stones (Matthew 7:9–11).

"That was a good sermon, Pastor, but I'd have settled for a sound bite."

Upholding the hope of the Cross

Another key to help sexual brokenness involves the power of hope rooted in the Cross. I urged Jim and Karen to realize that in light of all the pain in their lives Christ endured the ultimate suffering — the suffering at Calvary. The Cross invites us in our suffering to enter into relationship with the Father and Son. Divine relationship restores human relationships. The Cross invites us into that communion constantly.

Trust

Most sexually broken people doubt whether others who are aware of their brokenness can and will be genuine agents of healing for them. Consistently gathering with trustworthy saints is vital to the healing process — growing in love and trust with people who stand with you. The sexually broken need to surround themselves with individuals who have been around the block and who have made good but difficult choices in light of God's love.

Sexuality is all about relationship. So sexual problems require relational solutions. The sexually broken lay down their defenses when they see others doing so in a way that brings life, not greater fear or shame.

Identifying and overcoming shame

Shame is huge — perhaps the greatest barrier to receiving God's love through the body of Christ. Karen felt shame for her same-sex attraction; Jim for his porn addiction and feelings of inadequacy. To discover others who faced these struggles in the light of mercy and truth made a difference for both of them. It allowed the One who endured the final shaming at Calvary to break through their shame.

They learned to tell themselves this: *God's love makes a way for me in my weakness. I won't let shame disqualify me from that love.*

Confession of sin, and repentance

Confession and repentance is another important key in the healing process. Both Jim and Karen needed to give an in-depth confession of the real and specific sins they had committed. Neither was exempt from this. Each had sought to meet his or her needs the wrong way. Also, each had wronged the other in judgmental attitudes, as well as in blaming the other for sins he or she did not commit, e.g. Karen transferred her childhood abuse onto Jim.

In-depth healing requires an in-depth confession, one to

another. There is nothing quite like naming specific sins before a trusted Christian and then hear: "You are forgiven." Shame and guilt flee, and grace rests on areas of weakness, giving new strength and a new perspective on how to choose differently.

That capacity to choose is the fruit of confession. Repentance requires decisive action. If confession is not in the service of repentance, it can remain in the service of sin, fooling one into believing that merely naming the sin is enough. We name it in order to refuse it.

The power to refuse familiar robbers

The sexually broken need to renounce certain strongholds of sin tied to the idolatry at hand. They need to identify deep patterns of lust, seduction, or hatred, especially those rooted in longstanding addictions and/or family patterns. This process empowered Jim and Karen to take authority over their family patterns. With the help of others, they needed to name and refuse their own idols of action and attitude.

A big problem with deliverance tied to sexual problems is this: If someone else casts the robbers out of our temple, it leaves us defenseless when the enemy gathers his friends and returns home.

Feeling pain, not lust, and forgiving

Another key to overcoming inordinate sexual desire is identifying the wounds underlying it, and then feeling the appropriate emotion. The power of the Cross is available to bear our wounds. Both Karen and Jim had huge early gaps in their lives: Karen, with her abuse, but also a troubled family life (a divorce early on that left her mother depressed and unstable); Jim, with a sexually addicted father who neglected his son's masculine development almost entirely. Discovering how Jesus frees us to abide with Him in our suffering was a revelation for Karen and Jim. It gave them a place to go with much of the raw energy empowering their sexual actions.

They also grew in their capacity to forgive those who wounded them. As they forgave others from the heart (Matthew 18:35), their hearts began to heal. That applied to past offenders and to the ones very near to them in the marriage.

Confirmation of Gender: Seeing the Other With New Eyes

God prepared Jim and Karen to receive fresh confirmation as image-bearers. They needed to be reminded of the beauty of her womanhood and the strength of his manhood, and also of the many ways the enemy had beaten down the original good of that design in their own lives. We can profoundly impart "gender blessing" in the power of God's confirming Spirit. That is crucial to the raising up of true men and women of God in our midst.

We agreed together that Jesus' sacrifice "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians.2:14) that otherwise brought about the division between them. With renewed eyes,

More Keys To Healing the Sexually Broken

1. God gives the broken what they need, not what they deserve. Our churches should reflect this.
2. God gives hope through the Cross. He suffered to give the broken a place to go in any affliction.
3. Establishing trust. The broken need to establish roots in a caring, confidential community.
4. Identifying shame. Love alone overcomes this greatest barrier to bringing sexual damage into the light.
5. Confession of sin. In-depth healing requires in-depth confession and repentance.
6. Toppling personal idols. Instead of other Christians casting them out, the broken must be empowered to refuse their own demons.
7. Feeling pain and forgiving. Both take the edge off lust and perversion.
8. Blessing gender. Confirming the worth of one's own gender liberates the blessing of the other gender.
9. Lifetime plan. Healing of sexual brokenness means learning to love others well for life.

— ANDY COMISKEY

 (continued from page 77)

Jim began to see how he had reduced Karen to the sum of her capacity to please him sexually. He vowed to grow in his capacity to love her as a whole, not a sexual part.

Karen had to face the hard truth that she could not handle her *special* friendship. Though she needed consolation, she had to find it with safe friends and ultimately through growing in friendship with Jim. She also vowed to keep working on her pain, to not make it Jim's pain, and to try not to judge him for his distinctly masculine sexuality. She was committed to learning how to accept its difference without fear.

Through surrender to Christ, Karen and Jim became progressively good gifts to each other. They reflected this freedom as they offered themselves to each other in their sexual life as well.

A Lifetime Plan

Jim and Karen still have a long way to go. Jim needs ongoing same-sex accountability to help him steer clear of Internet porn; Karen needs help in keeping the boundary she set with her friend. She is also getting counseling for further healing of her sexual abuse. Each is taking seriously the weaknesses they brought into the marriage. They are renewing their efforts to make the relationship a priority. God is restoring the integrity of their faith and marriage.

Jim and Karen are taking small steps on a lifelong path to loving others better. This is what freedom from sexual brokenness is about: We follow Jesus and seek to love others rightly, from the heart. Walking alongside trustworthy Christians is key. As ministers, our part is to cultivate healing communities where the sexually broken receive Jesus' help, full of grace and truth.

ANDY COMISKEY, founder, Desert Stream Ministries, Kansas City, Missouri

Questions for Self-reflection or Group Discussion:

1. Are we all sexually broken? Consider how you rate certain sexual issues as more broken than others.
2. Why is confidentiality key in helping the sexually broken? Consider your own hesitation to disclose your sexual vulnerabilities to another.
3. Why does Jesus have unique authority to reclaim the broken image in humanity? What aspects of your gender or sexual identity has He reclaimed? How?
4. What is the goal of sexual wholeness? Why is its attainment a process? Explain the flaws in certain *deliverance* approaches to sexual healing.
5. What is the bigger problem: a sexual problem itself, or the shame that shrouds it and silences the struggler? How can we create a holy and yet open environment for congregants to deal with these issues?
6. Would you entrust certain laypersons to serve the church by serving the sexually broken? What are the risks? The rewards?
7. Consider the power of the Cross in healing the sexually broken. Does the Cross represent hope to you in your brokenness? Does the Cross invite you in your affliction to come to God, or does it distance you? Why?
8. Do you believe Jim and Karen could find hope and help in your church? What resources would you have for them?

— ANDY COMISKEY

pornography addiction in the brain:

its destructive nature and how to overcome it

By William M. Struthers

How can you help church members who are controlled by pornography? Insight into the addictive nature of pornography is an important first step.

While the church in recent years has focused on matters related to homosexuality, the proliferation of pornography use in our congregations has slipped in almost undetected.

Some estimate that at least half of the men in church have intentionally visited pornographic websites within the past year. The relationship these men have with pornography directly affects the relationships they have with those in your communities. Perhaps you have seen a man who seems to have it all — a loving wife and children, a good job — throw it all away because he cannot keep himself from downloading Internet porn. Or maybe you have counseled a young man who has become so isolated from his family and friends he no longer feels God is able to forgive him of the things he has seen and done while surfing online for porn. It is easy to find stories of high school girls sending lewd pictures of themselves to their boyfriends who then distribute them to their classmates.

Sex has become a recreational commodity. People sometimes only value others for their ability to stimulate and satisfy their sexual appetites. Pornography contributes to and promotes this lie and eliminates the sacredness of the sexual relationship.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

As you minister to the people in your church, what should you be aware of concerning how pornography controls a person? The following information offers insight into the addictive nature of pornography and how to help church members controlled by this addiction.

The Destructive Nature of Porn

For Christians, sexuality has both a sacred and a moral dimension (Genesis 2:22–25). If something is sacred, we set it aside to use or devote to an exclusive purpose. God sanctioned sexual intimacy to be only between a husband and wife, and they need to keep this sexual intimacy pure (Hebrews 13:4). We image God's exclusive love for His people in the faithfulness of keeping this aspect of our bodies for one another (1 Corinthians 6:18–20; Ephesians 5:25–28). Understood this way, intentionally viewing pornography becomes an invasion of this sacred space.

There are clear, destructive consequences from regularly viewing porn (and sexually acting out on it). On a social level, pornography portrays human beings as objects of consumption rather than persons made in the image of God. People pay women and men to offer their bodies for entertainment and the stimulation of anyone willing to watch. The clear message is that women are nothing more than dehumanized pieces of meat. This carries over into the mental habits as well. The regular consumer of porn begins to objectify the women in

iStockphoto

(continued from page 80)

his life, seeing them through a pornographic lens. As you can imagine, this can have devastating consequences in a man's marriage, family, and workplace.

Additionally, there are a number of indicators that associate exposure to pornography with antisocial behavior and attitudes. Men tend to be more aggressive toward women and less sensitive to the pain and suffering of rape and violence against them. Pornography also decreases a man's view of his own body and results in decreased sexual satisfaction. Pornography can lead to a major source of conflict in marriages and to social isolation.

Pornography intrudes into the sacred space intended for a husband and wife and pollutes the mind, creating expectations for sexual intimacy that are inherently selfish. While offering the promise of connectedness, in reality pornography isolates.

Porn Addiction and Compulsion

What is it about pornography that makes it potentially addictive? Doctors often describe addictions as a medical disease of the brain's reward and motivation circuitry. Addictive drugs hijack this circuitry that is normally for things that give us pleasure (like food and water). Methamphetamines, cocaine, and heroin act directly on this neurochemical system and disrupt it in such a way that normal pleasures (i.e., eating, drinking) lose their appeal; the only thing that matters is consuming the drug.

Addictions have three main components: 1) a craving/preoccupation for the substance, 2) an inability to stop, and 3) progressive use of the substance in spite of negative consequences. Addiction commonly involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment, addiction's progressive nature can destroy someone socially, financially, physically, and spiritually.

For some men, their relationship with pornography is addictive (it has all three aspects of an addiction), but many men are more likely to report compulsive viewing of porn. They have adopted viewing and acting out to pornography as a way of dealing with stress, venting their frustration or feelings of helplessness, or salving their feelings of depression and insecurity. They may or may not know why they want to view pornography, but they know they must have it. Men often connect their compulsion to view pornography with a ritualistic pattern of sexually acting out. By acting out they experience the pleasure of release, and they are able to control this *hit of pleasure*. So where does this *hit* come from?

Porn on the Brain

Because of the way God neurologically wired men, they are sensitized to visual, sexually relevant cues (i.e., the naked female form, solicitous facial expressions).[1] These cues trigger neurological, chemical, and hormonal events that are the source of the sexual arousal *hit*.

Most men are familiar with the rush of sexual arousal and the energy that comes with it. How we deal with this energy and how we have learned to respond to it form the psychological, emotional, and behavioral habits we develop. This continual sequence of arousal and response forms a neurological circuit. This pathway, then, becomes the preferred route — a mental journey — each time a man repeats this sequence.

Regularly viewing pornography leads to men seeing women as sexual objects. As men regularly activate this mental pathway, it triggers sexual arousal. As sexual arousal increases, a habit of dealing with it emerges. The user pairs pornography with the internal, mental life of fantasy and lustful thoughts to produce a neurochemical cauldron of sexual tension.


iStockphoto

Several brain regions seem to be critically involved when men sexually act out. Scientists call one region the ventral tegmental area (VTA). Looking at pornography causes an increase in the activity of the VTA. The VTA produces the neurochemical dopamine that is in virtually all drugs of addiction. The VTA, along with a handful of other brain regions, appear to be the sites responsible for the psychological experiences of craving and euphoria that underlie the sexual experience. As a result of acting out, the body releases the brain's natural reinforcers (dopamine, endorphins, norepinephrine, and oxytocin) and the person forms a memory of the event. This memory serves to bind him to the object he connects to the experience.

In a handful of studies that have examined the effects of viewing pornographic (sexually explicit) material and the effects of sexual arousal and response, researchers have observed several findings. They call one finding *mirror neurons*. These neurons make up a circuit located in the frontal and parietal lobes (the region near the top of the head). These neurons are involved with the process of how to mimic a behavior. They contain a motor system that correlates to the planning out of a behavior. Consider this example: If you see someone grab a hammer and pound a nail, you activate the same part of your brain you would use to pound a hammer. Other brain regions may hold that behavior in check, but you now have primed a neural circuit to hammer a nail. Scientists originally called these neurons *monkey see, monkey do* neurons (they were

first discovered in monkeys), and constitute the way we neurologically learn by observing others.

Whenever we see a behavior, there is a silent echo; a neurological mirror of ourselves doing that behavior resides in the brain. This is wonderful because we can learn by watching others; but, it can also have negative effects, especially with respect to pornography.

These mirror neurons are involved when persons view pornography because they vicariously experience and learn from what they view. As men watch the sexually charged scene onscreen, they *mirror* this — which triggers their own sexual arousal and they learn how to respond. This mirror neuron system triggers the arousal that leads to sexual tension and a need for an outlet. The unfortunate reality is that when he acts out (often by masturbating), this leads to hormonal and neurological consequences that God designed to bind him to the object on which he is focusing. In God's plan this would be his wife, but for many men it is an image on a screen. Pornography enslaves the viewer to an image instead of bonding him to his wife.

Some estimate that at least half of the men in church have intentionally visited pornographic websites within the past year.

Sexual intimacy is a complex neurochemical and hormonal event. It is one of the most powerful God-given pathways by which men form attachments. In viewing and acting out to pornography, men form attachments to the images and not real people. By viewing hundreds of images and then acting out, or even using the images to get him sufficiently aroused to be with his wife, we must ask, "To whom or what are you bound?"

In God's plan, a husband who is faithful to his wife is deeply, emotionally bound to her. This mirrors God's exclusive love for His people and the mystery of marriage between Christ and the Church. A celibate single man is not bound in this way and, as such, is freed to image God's inclusive love and minister to others. Here we see the necessity for both faithful married men and faithful single men to be part of the church.

How To Overcome

When I think about the process of recovery from pornography addiction and sexual sin, the principles of spiritual formation come to mind. My neuroscience training gives me a particular perspective on this. I believe spiritual formation is the best context to understand our social, psychological, neurological, and spiritual development. As we understand how God made us, and how He works through us, we can better support each other in God's spirit of compassion and forgiveness.

We need compassion and forgiveness in abundance at the beginning of the recovery process and as God redeems lives. People rarely change neurological habits of depravity overnight because they did not form them overnight. God often uses our embodied nature to reveal himself, and we need to help each other envision the unique way He is sanctifying us as we become conformed to the image of Christ. The spiritual formation process utilizes confession, enlightenment, intentional action, and vision to bring us all to this goal.[2]

Confession

The first step someone takes to be freed from pornography or sexual sin is to confess. Confession moves one to a right understanding of his or her brokenness. As the first step toward reestablishing communion with God, we begin the process of moving out of the isolating effects of sin. It is only with a truly repentant heart (which bears the fruit of behavioral change) that a man begins the journey toward redemption and recovery. Conditional confession is not an option. Neither is confession that is done silently or unobserved by others. Because of pornography's isolating nature, it is necessary that confession be done with a confidant.

Choosing whom to disclose problems relating to pornography is a delicate process. Often pastors will be a logical choice for confession. Pastors need to be sure their response is mature, supportive, discreet, and compassionate while not minimizing the severity of the consequences (especially with affected spouses or family members). While some men will confess to a relative, friend, or mentor, it is important to remember the need for another person to hear of the sin and speak the forgiveness of Christ into it. After confession, men can then move to the next stage of enlightenment.

(continued from page 83)

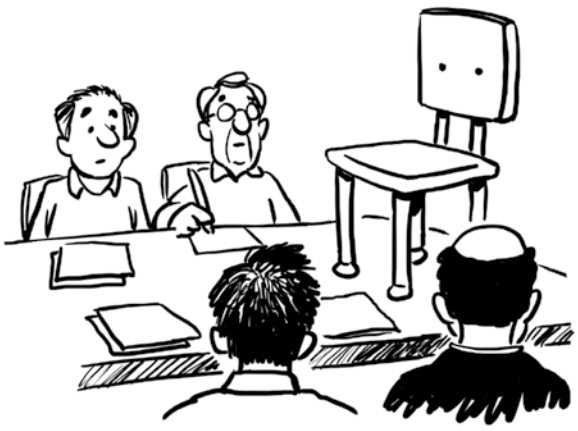
Enlightenment

Through enlightenment we discover the draw of pornography. Pornography and the craving for sexual intimacy are rarely the root causes of the problems. As you dig deeper into the reasons someone looks at porn, you will find that it is a symptom of a much deeper, human problem. Enlightenment is an educational process whereby we identify the environmental, emotional, and psychological needs and triggers underlying the sin pattern. This is best done with a pastor, mentor, or counselor — someone who can provide an objective viewpoint and give godly counsel. These people can see the patterns where the man knee-deep in the sin cycle cannot. Here men can identify — take captive — and defuse the sexual triggers responsible for the compulsion or addiction.

Short-circuiting these neurological habits and rituals breaks men out of their compulsive patterns. Because they better understand their behavior patterns, they can avoid situations or thoughts they know lead down the deadly path of sin.

Once a man understands his own weaknesses, he is able to organize his world and the support of his family and church to minimize the likelihood of falling into sin. This rehabilitative process is one that is also neurologically stored and becomes a positive habit — more likely to increase with time and repetition.

We can use the processes and triggers that were part of our downfall as the processes that redeem and alter our very human nature.



In trying to find the right person to chair the Pastoral Search Committee, the elders discovered the best candidate was the chair itself.

Intentional action

After a man realizes the nature of his sin (confession) and reflects on why he made his mistakes (enlightenment), there are a number of steps he must take so he will not make them again. There are three factors that are strong predictors of recovery from addictions and are important in the process of spiritual formation. The first is to develop a sense of personal responsibility and investment in the process of recovery. The things we set our mind on have a significant impact on the trajectory of our sanctification. As we set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:2), we are doing so intentionally. We are not passive in the process, but active participants in what God is doing in us.

The sense of ownership we have over our spiritual formation is a critical predictor of the recovery outcome. If we do not invest in our spiritual recovery process, it will happen according to the dictates of the world. But redemption cannot occur in isolation. We must enlist the help of others. This brings us to the second factor: support of the church.

As the church invests in providing the spiritual, social, and physical support necessary to bring individuals through the difficult times of trials, the prospect for recovery (and eventual full participation in the life of the church and ministry to others) dramatically increases. This is most present in the presence of a spiritual mentor and in what I will call Life Together Accountability Groups.

A mentor has dealt with similar challenges and knows the redemption found in God. The relationship between the mentor and the person recovering is genuine and not isolated merely to the issue of sin. As the relationship with the mentor

deepens, he acts as a voice of warning when temptation is on the horizon and encourages him with Scripture, practical advice, and in prayer. In some cases, a person may need to seek professional help due to the severity of the problem. A Christian counselor is skilled in getting underneath the surface of these problems and detecting deeper issues that may have gone undetected, even by some of the best mentors.

Groups that focus solely on abstinence from pornography have limited power to promote real change. Accountability has to be more than issue specific; it must be life encompassing. Accountability groups based exclusively on shame generated by sin are doomed to slowly isolate men; that is what shame and deception do. Life Together involves relationships that extend beyond any one issue and are holistic. They involve family, ministry, profession, and every other aspect of a man's life. In short, they require real relationships with other men. In this place of real relationships, men experience the need for intimacy (albeit in a different way), and the true bonds of masculine affection and fellowship are life giving, not demeaning, competitive, or dominating.

The third factor is strengthening incompatible habits and disciplines. Just as we should not think of Christianity as a list of "thou shalt nots" (we should think of it as "do unto each other"), the spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, meditation, study, worship, and others are incompatible with the behaviors associated with pornography consumption and sexual sin. As a person strengthens these disciplines, they become neurological habits that become the preferred path of thought and life. As we practice the spiritual disciplines in community, we will become more conformed to the image of Christ. Instead of wiring depravity into our pathways by addictive sin patterns, the spiritual disciplines anchor conformity to Christ's image in our brain's wiring.

Vision

How does a man recover? Is it possible he can rewire himself? We can use the processes and triggers that were part of our downfall as the processes that redeem and alter our very human nature. Accepting the wisdom found in Scripture will guide us and frame our relationships. It is in the ministry of the love of the body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit that our brothers and sisters become the incarnation of mercy, forgiveness, and love in the care and compassion we receive from them. It is that incarnate, embodied love that we need not be afraid of claiming because that is what God made us for (1 Corinthians 15:49).

God designed each of us to be sanctified in the image of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:10). All of our struggles and victories become an integral part of our journey — they are archived in our brain and our memories. God claims and transforms each person's unique path to be a part of his witness and testimony to God's love, power, and mercy.

Conclusion

Imagine that we can use our sexuality to propel us toward sanctification, and not hinder us. By understanding our purpose as rooted in becoming conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), we manifest God's exclusive and inclusive love. We are better able to go beyond the lie of pornography — that people are for our sexual consumption — and we become able to appreciate women as sisters in Christ. We move beyond objectification to real relationship and honoring their dignity. This is how I envision sanctification — it is an addiction to holiness. It is a compulsive fixation on the person of Jesus Christ who plays out in habits of compassion, virtue, and love. This is a vision and hope that any man who longs to be holy can cling to.

WILLIAM M. STRUTHERS, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. He is the author of *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain.*

NOTES

1. William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
2. Randy Reese, Keith Anderson, *Spiritual Mentoring.* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

Questions for Self-reflection or Group Discussion:

1. How might mirror neurons be involved in developing godly habits?
2. What is your personal vision for holiness?
3. What are some examples of how sexuality could be harnessed in the life of a single person?
4. What would a Life Together Accountability Group for men look like in your church?

love thy *homosexual* neighbor

We are likely to encounter three general types of homosexual people: Those who are *unconverted;* those who claim to be both *gay and Christian;* and those who are *repentant*. Loving each group requires a different and specific response.

By Joe Dallas

"Who is my homosexual neighbor?" one might ask. "And how should I love him?" Let me answer by taking some liberties with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

A homosexual man sat by the side of the road wondering what, if anything, he should do about his tendencies and behavior. A priest approached him. When the man explained his situation, the priest said, "It's a sin. Repent."

"Okay," said the homosexual, "but *why* is it a sin? What do I do when I am tempted? If I do repent, will I be attracted to women and have a normal life?"

"Haven't a clue," the priest replied. "They never talked about this in seminary, and I have never dealt with someone like you. But you need to repent, so let me know when you are ready."

And off he went.

Within minutes, another pastor noticed the man, heard his story, and said, "I never talk about right or wrong. I would rather preach love. God loves you; you are wonderful; everything is going to be fine."

"Yes," the man said, "but is this a sin or not? If God loves me, does that mean He approves of anything I do? And what do you make of the Bible verses that condemn homosexuality?"

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

"Dunno," the cleric shrugged, "everyone has to decide that on his own. But visit our church sometime. You will be loved no matter what."

Later, an evangelist walking by was more direct. "God hates what you do," he thundered, "and it is a dangerous sin that is ruining this country."

"Ruining it more than adultery, pornography, or unmarried people shacking up?" the homosexual retorted. "Aren't heterosexual sins serious, too?"

"Yes, but at least they are *normal*," the evangelist huffed before stomping away.

And so the man's frustration grew. One minister had told him what to do without offering any guidance as to *how*. The second had oozed compassion, while offering no standards or direction. The third was long on standards but short on grace. Just as he was ready to give up, he noticed a fourth minister approaching, and decided to give it one more try.

"There is truth in what all those fellows told you," the pastor said after hearing the man out. "God definitely loves you, but you have sinned like we all have, and your homosexuality is just one of many ways you fall short. That is the bad news. But the good news is, there is a remedy. Let me explain."

So goes a simple story of grace and truth artfully applied. The commission to "go and do likewise" is obvious, but not easily fulfilled, especially today. As the nation's drift from Judeo-Christian values accelerates, issues on which the church and culture agreed on in the past are now sources of tension. And nowhere is that


Photos.com

tension more evident than in current debates over homosexuality.

Since the advent of the Gay Rights Movement in the late 1960s, the secular institutions that heavily influence public opinion — psychiatry, the media, the entertainment and education industries — have all shifted to solidly pro-homosexual positions. A growing percentage of the culture has followed suit, causing both the culture and its primary institutions to pressure the church into shifting with them. Faced with the choice to abandon biblical authority, the church largely (and properly) refuses, and here is the rub. Modern believers know God has called them to love their gay neighbors, yet these believers hold a viewpoint — homosexuality falls short of God's will — that many gays find hateful. That alone can be perplexing. Add into the mix the fact some of our homosexual neighbors are non-Christians, some are professing believers, and some are repentant believers who see their homosexuality as something to overcome, and the challenge to love seems overwhelming. What to do?

Looking at my own involvement in homosexuality from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, and considering the hundreds of Christian men and women I have counseled who struggle with this sin, I have come to believe we must express love according to need. With that in mind, we are likely to encounter three general types of homosexual people: Those who are *unconverted*; those who claim to be both *gay and Christian*; and those who are *repentant*. Loving each group requires a different and specific response.

Love Thy *Unconverted* Homosexual Neighbor

Loving the unsaved demands, among other things, a clear presentation of the gospel, acts of kindness, service, respect, and reasonable dialogue about faith as it applies to them. Since many gays and lesbians either hold to other religions, or are agnostic or atheist, these principles come into play when loving our unconverted homosexual neighbor.

Jesus modeled the gospel priority when He interacted with a Samaritan woman who was cohabiting outside of marriage. It is noteworthy that Christ acknowledged the sexual sin in her life without emphasizing it, with good reason — she was unsaved. He wanted her to live. Her sexual sin was symptomatic of, but secondary to, her spiritual state. Even if we could talk nonbelievers out of their sexual sins, that alone would hardly usher them into heaven. The gospel, not homosexuality, needs to be the key point we return to when interacting with homosexuals.

The Good Samaritan modeled acts of kindness, service, and respect when he offered practical help without questioning the whys and wherefores of his neighbor's lifestyle. The modern believer who asks his gay coworker to have lunch, then listens respectfully as he opens up about his life, continues the tradition. Likewise, the Christian woman who visits a young

man with AIDS is planting a harvestable seed, as is the youth minister who teaches his or her teenagers how to defend a gay teen who is being bullied on campus.

Reasonable dialogue about sexuality and faith is also critical, yet difficult, because there is a growing belief that the traditional biblical position on homosexuality is hateful and dangerous. Consider, for example, one of Judge Vaughn R. Walker's findings when he ruled on Proposition 8, California's 2008 marriage-defining ballot measure: "Religious beliefs that gay and lesbian relationships are sinful or inferior to heterosexual relationships harm gays and lesbians."[1]

Echoing the judge's sentiments, actress/comedienne Wanda Sykes, when referring to a recent rash of suicides among gay teenagers, remarked on *Larry King Live*: "The churches that preach that homosexuality is wrong — you pretty much are giving kids permission to disrespect and cause harm to the gay and lesbian community."[2]

Fellow comedienne Kathy Griffin likewise affirms: "It's almost sanctioned to bully gay people and treat them as second-class citizens — I think a lot of the so-called religious leaders play into it."[3]

When figures as influential as a federal district court judge and nationally recognized celebrities make such accusations, then those believing homosexuality is a sin are clearly on the defense. This makes a rational explanation for our views a must when dialoguing with non-Christian homosexuals. For this reason, a few points on the biblical approach to human sexuality are in order, as they help explain our position.

We are created beings (Genesis 2:7; Revelation 4:11). If we were not created, we might judge the rightness or wrongness of our behavior by its rightness or wrongness in our own eyes. But if we, as created beings, will ultimately answer to our Maker, then it matters less what seems right and natural to *us*, and more what is deemed right and natural to *Him*. Christian apologist and radio host Gregory Koukle states: "But if God is there (which is what the Christian says), it doesn't matter what is preferred. It only matters what is true."[4]

Our Creator has specific intentions for our existence and behavior, which He spells out in Scripture. We see this in the Mosaic Law, Psalms, Proverbs, Prophetic Books, Gospels, and Epistles. These all brim with instructions, prohibitions, and warnings, testifying to a God who is not passive or unconcerned about His creation. God fashioned us with specific purposes in mind; purposes we call *created intent*.

Created intent extends to our relationships in general and to our sexual relationships in particular. We need to note that not only did our Maker create us as *human* beings, but as *sexual* beings as well. He authored our gender distinctives, then He looked on all He created (human sexuality included) and said, "This is very good" (Genesis 1:26–31). Far from being prudish or antisexual, God is the original celebrator of sex. Understanding this is important when approaching the next point.

The Creator (and *thereby* the Church) regards any sexual behaviors falling short of *created intent* as wrong. We believe God condemns sexual sin because He views sex as being so exquisite and meaningful. While we regard all sin as serious, sexual sin carries a severity in both its nature and its consequences.


iStockphoto

Both Testaments *prohibit* homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10) and regard it as one of many sexual behaviors falling short of created intent along with adultery, fornication, prostitution, and incest. We hold our position not out of animus towards homosexuals, but out of conviction that God created us with specific intentions. If a sexual behavior falls short of those intentions, then it cannot help but matter, both to God and to us.

Love Thy *Religious* Homosexual Neighbor

Renowned Christian musicians Ray Boltz and Jennifer Knapp, former Fuller Theological Seminary professor Mel White, country singer Chely Wright, and pop star Clay Aiken are just a few of the thousands who identify themselves as being openly gay *and* committed Christians. They are representative of numerous women and men who are coming into our churches.

The challenge to speak truth in love shows itself plainly here because, the more crucial the topic, the clearer the mandate for defending truth. Here the arguments over sexual behavior are much like modern debates over an exclusive versus inclusive concept of God. "I am not religious; I am spiritual," many affirm today. They claim there are multiple paths to God, and many ways to conceptualize Him/Her/It. On this point, Christians can hardly agree. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Believers face the challenge of promoting a specific definition of God and salvation in a time when subjectivity regarding both is in vogue. It is neither loving nor kind to do any less.

When someone argues, "God made me gay," we can hardly agree. With precision Scripture defines normal sexuality. Social

tensions notwithstanding, this is a topic on which we can ill afford being coy. The ramifications for childrearing and cultural stability are many; the stakes are enormous. A mutually agreed-on concept of family determines our approach to same-sex marriage, polygamy, couples living together apart from wedlock, transexualism, adoption, custody of children, and divorce.

While we regard all sin as serious, sexual sin carries a severity in both its nature and its consequences.

The fact Scripture offers a concise definition of normal sexual behavior is self-evident. But is that definition critical as a doctrinal/moral issue within the church? Evidently it is.

Paul was alarmed when he learned of a Corinthian Christian's openly incestuous relationship with his stepmother. He was also outraged over the church's casual attitude. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul rebukes his readers for allowing a form of fornication "that does not occur even among pagans" (verse 1). He rebukes them for their smug self-satisfaction over their tolerance (verse 2) and their seeming ignorance of a basic reason for Christian purity — our bodies do not belong to us — rather, they are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). When ordering the church to excommunicate the unrepentant fornicator, Paul makes two general appeals: Don't you *know*? And if you know, why don't you *do*?

According to a 2003 George Barna poll, 49 percent of respondents who identify as "born again" consider living together apart from marriage acceptable; 33 percent condone abortion; 35 percent are okay about sex before marriage; and 28 percent see no problem with pornography. In response, Barna notes: "Even most people associated with the Christian faith do not seem to have embraced biblical moral standards. Things are likely to get worse before they get better — and they are not likely to get better unless strong and appealing moral leadership emerges to challenge and redirect people's thoughts and behavior. At the moment, such leadership is absent."[5]

In the absence of such leadership, confusion thrives over right versus wrong and a casual attitude toward wrong itself. We need clarity. If the question, "How then shall we live?" gets no clear response from the pulpit, we should not be surprised when everyone does what's "right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, KJV).

Paul no doubt considered this when he told Corinth's believers to distance themselves from Christians who engage in fornication (1 Corinthians 5:11) and when he told the Ephesians to live in such a way that sexual immorality would never be named among them (Ephesians 5:3). Paul made it clear that a biblically based sexual ethic is critical.

This stance can be controversial and certain to clash with gays and lesbians claiming a Christian base. We can and should welcome anyone wanting to attend our churches, but those wanting to become members need to know that membership requires submission to scriptural standards of life and conduct. Plainly put, we need to raise three simple points — loudly and regularly — from the pulpit:

"This is what constitutes the Creator's intention for human sexuality."

"These are behaviors falling short of God's intentions."

"This why the subject matters."

Love Thy *Repentant* Homosexual Neighbor

Many churches take a clear stand against homosexuality, while showing indifference to, or ignorance of, believers in their own ranks who struggle with homosexuality. When a pastor mentions homosexuality from the pulpit, he usually frames it as a problem "out there in society." When pastors denounce homosexuality, a few add, "Perhaps someone here is wrestling with this sin, as well. Resist it — God will be with you as you do. And so will we."

As one who has known countless women and men who have renounced homosexual practices and who resist, sometimes daily, temptations to return to these practices, I can attest to the world of difference one remark like that from a pastor can make.

We find this neglect of a significant problem among believers in Christian outreach or support programs, as well. Many churches have ministries for people dealing with chemical dependency, alcoholism, marital problems, postabortion trauma, emotional dependency, and eating disorders. Why are similar ministries to repentant homosexuals so scarce?

One possible reason is ignorance. Conservative Christians

may not believe such a problem could be plaguing one of their own. "I have never run across that in my church," a minister assured me when I tried to acquaint him with my ministry to repentant homosexuals. Ethics and common sense kept me from informing him that his own choir director came to me twice a week for counseling.

asking them to hire any. But this same church had, weeks earlier, started a support group for people who were codependent. Moreover, a group for the chemically addicted had been meeting there for years. As well, one of this man's former associate ministers had fallen into homosexuality and died of AIDS.

Among churches that offer special care for a myriad of other problems, it seems odd that they offer so little to the repentant homosexual.

Reluctance to tackle the messy issues homosexuality raises might be another reason, although there is a certain inconsistency in this. A friend once suggested to a pastor that his church might develop a support group for men wanting to overcome homosexuality. "That's unnecessary," the minister retorted. "We believe in the power of the Word of God to transform lives. We teach people the Bible and send them home. We are not professional counselors."

No, they are not professional counselors. And no one was

"It's tough being clear minded, disciplined, and staying the course of faith. But popcorn night at church sure helps."

So why the double standard? Why are they not just teaching the codependent, drug addicted, and the alcoholics "the Bible and sending them home"? Why the willingness, in this church and so many others, to let pastors or group leaders address complex problems like addiction and dependency, while relegating the homosexual issue to professional counselors?

Many churches have no support groups of any sort, and who is to say they should? But among the thousands of churches that do offer special care for a myriad of other problems, it seems odd that they offer so little to the repentant homosexual.

The repentant homosexual finds himself between two voices: the liberal and the conservative Christian, both of whom are repeating part — but only part — of Christ's words to another sexual sinner, the adulterous woman: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11, NKJV[7]).

"Neither do I condemn you," the liberal theologian comforts today's homosexual. "Go and sin."

"I *do* condemn you," the conservative Christian too often seems to retort, "so go and sin no more." He then leaves the sinner alone to figure out how.

Or else he just says, "Go."

We can do better. We can aggressively partner with repentant homosexuals by establishing in-house ministries designed to walk them through their sanctification process. We can learn from existing organizations, like Exodus International, who have ministered to repentant homosexuals for decades. And we can make it safe in our churches for those who want to abandon this behavior to speak up, avail themselves of our pastoral care, and join the ranks of all other believers who know what it is like to love God yet struggle with any number of ongoing temptations.

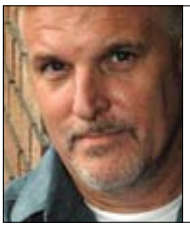
Conclusion

Loving our homosexual neighbor will be daunting in many ways, and require of us nothing less than Christ's mandate to both preach the gospel *and* make disciples. Yet ironically, in these gay-friendly times, the opportunities are greater than ever, as numbers of homosexuals continue to question whether their behavior and passions are really in line with what they were intended to be.


iStockphoto

In this sense, today's church is not unlike the Early Church, which existed in times of unbridled licentiousness, yet, according to Episcopal Bishop William Frey, continued to draw the most unlikely members: "One of the most attractive features of the early Christian communities … was their radical sexual ethic and their deep commitment to family values. These things … drew many people to them who were disillusioned by the promiscuous excesses of what proved to be a declining culture. Wouldn't it be wonderful for our church to find such countercultural courage today?"[6]

Wonderful, yes. And, more important, entirely possible.



JOE DALLAS is an author, speaker, program director of Genesis Counseling, a pastoral counseling ministry in Tustin, California, and a member of Newport Mesa Church (Assemblies of God), Costa Mesa, California. He, along with Nancy Heche, authored *The Complete Christian Guide To Understanding Homosexuality.*

Questions for Self-reflection or Group Discussion:

1. If a gay couple starts attending our church, what concerns might other members of the congregation have? How will we address those concerns?
2. How will we answer those who say, "I was born this way, so how can it be wrong?"
3. Should our church or ministry leaders take a stand on political issues (such as same-sex marriage, "Don't ask; don't tell") that are often associated with homosexuality? Why or why not?
4. If a man comes into our church and says, "I've just repented of homosexuality, so what should I do now?" what sort of ministry would he need? Are we prepared to give it? Why or why not?
5. When religious homosexuals say they are gay and Christian, is it possible they are saved even as they continue in this sin? Why or why not?

NOTES

1. Prop 8 Decision "Finding of Fact: Religious Teaching on Homosexuality Harms Gays & Lesbians" Thursday, August 5, 2010, 3:41 p.m. http://www.standfirminfaith.com/?/sf/page/26446. Accessed October 27, 2010.
2. Wanda Sykes, quoted from *Larry King Live* Broadcast October 17, 2010. http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1010/17/lkl.01.html. Accessed October 27, 2010.
3. Ibid.
4. Transcript from 1994 broadcast on *Stand To Reason* titled "Preference or Truth?" http://www.str.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5503. Accessed October 27, 2010.
5. http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/129-morality-continues-to-decay. Accessed October 27, 2010.
6. "What Does God Really Think About Sex?" by Richard Ostling, *Time Magazine,* June 24, 1991. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,973264,00.html. Accessed October 27, 2010.
7. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

iStockphoto

understanding and responding to a *pro-homosexual* interpretation of Scripture

Pro-homosexual interpreters frequently make four claims with respect to Scripture. Their misinterpretations require a scholarly response.

By Robert A.J. Gagnon

 (continued from page 93)

Writing a short article on how pro-homosexual readings of Scripture misinterpret the biblical text is no longer easy. The reason is not so much that pro-homosexual interpretations have varied over the past decade as the fact evidence against such interpretations has become extensive. In this article I present four claims pro-homosexual interpreters frequently make with respect to Scripture. I then briefly sketch the main contours of a response to such claims. Space limitations do not permit in-depth treatment of these four claims, analysis of pro-homosexual readings of Old Testament texts, or much interaction with specific pro-homosexual writings. For such, I refer readers to my book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, and to my website, www.robgagnon.net, where I keep an updated bibliography.[1]

Jesus believed a male-female requirement for sexual relations was foundational, a core value of Scripture's sexual ethics on which to base other sexual standards, including the "twoness" of a sexual union.

1. Jesus

Pro-homosexual Claim: Jesus had no interest in maintaining a male-female requirement for sexual relations.

What the evidence shows: Jesus believed a male-female requirement for sexual relations was foundational, a core value of Scripture's sexual ethics on which to base other sexual standards, including the "twoness" of a sexual union.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Jesus predicated marital "twoness" — restricting the number of persons in a sexual union to two, whether concurrently (no polygamy) or serially (no cycle of divorce and remarriage) — on the fact "at the beginning of creation God made them male and female [see Genesis 1:27]. For this reason a man … will be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh [see Genesis 2:24]"[2] (Matthew 19:4,5; see the context in verses 3–9; Mark 10:6–8). The fact God had designed two (and only two) primary sexes for complementary sexual pairing was Jesus' basis for rigorous monogamy. The union of the two sexual halves created an integrated, self-contained sexual whole, making a third partner neither necessary nor desirable.

We know this was Jesus' reasoning because the only other first-century Jews who shared Jesus' opposition to more than two persons in a sexual bond were the Qumran Essenes, who likewise rejected "taking two wives in their lives" because "the foundation of creation is 'male and female he created them' [Genesis 1:27]" and because "those who entered [Noah's] ark went in two-by-two into the ark [Genesis 7:9]" (*Damascus Covenant* 4.20–5.1).

The appeal to the "two-by-two" statement in the story of Noah's ark is significant because, apart from the repetition of Genesis 1:27 in Genesis 5:2, the ark narrative is the only other place in the Old Testament where the precise Hebrew phrase *zākār ûnĕqēvâ* ("male and female") appears. There it is strongly linked with the emphasis on a natural pair. For Jesus, as for the Qumran Essenes, the "twoness" of the sexes was the foundation for the "twoness" of the sexual bond.

We can cite many other arguments as evidence of Jesus' rejection of homosexual practice, including the fact the Old Testament Jesus accepted as Scripture strongly opposed homosexual practice; that Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist for criticizing him for violating Levitical sex laws (the incest prohibitions, even in adult-consensual relationships, Leviticus 18:16; 20:21); that the entirety of early Judaism out of which Jesus emerged believed homosexual practice to be a gross violation of foundational sexual ethics;[3] and that the Early Church that knew Jesus best was united in its belief that a male-female prerequisite for sexual unions was essential (Romans 1:21–32; Ephesians 5:22–33).

The supposition of Jesus' support of, or even being neutral toward, committed homosexual unions is without historical

analogue in Jesus' immediate cultural environment. This is revisionist history at its worst.

Moreover, whereas we have no extant saying of Jesus that loosened the Law's demand for sexual purity, we do have sayings where Jesus closed remaining loopholes in the Law's sexual commands *by further intensifying* God's demand (adultery of the heart; divorce and remarriage) and warning people that sexual impurity could get one thrown into hell (Matthew 5:27–32). Jesus argued that it is not so much eating food proscribed in Old Testament law that defiles the body but the gratification of impulses to do what God forbids (Mark 7:14–23). For Jesus, these include *porneiai* (sexually immoral acts), *moicheiai* (adulterous acts), and *aselgeia* (licentiousness, lack of self-restraint especially as regards sexual matters; verses 21,22).

In early Judaism *porneia* and *aselgeia* always included, at or near the top of the list, an absolute prohibition of homosexual practice, even for Gentiles (the "Noahide laws"). The trend of Jesus' teaching on sexual ethics is not toward greater license but toward fewer loopholes.

A related pro-homosexual claim about Jesus states that Jesus' outreach to sexual sinners like the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11) and His positive statement about "born eunuchs" (Matthew 19:12) provide grounds for supporting homosexual unions. They do nothing of the sort. Jesus aimed at achieving people's repentance so they might inherit the kingdom of God He proclaimed.

Jesus warned the woman caught in adultery: "Go and from now on no longer be sinning" (John 8:11). Jesus made a similar statement in John 5:14, where He followed it with "lest something worse happen to you." That something worse is loss of eternal life through an unrepentant life (cf. John 5:24–29). Whereas the Pharisees did not care if sexual sinners and tax collectors (persons who exploited the poor for material gain) went to hell, Jesus cared enough to make them a focus of His ministry to call them back to God's kingdom.

Mark gives as an apt summary of Jesus' message: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15, NIV). When the church calls to repentance those who engage in homosexual acts and does so lovingly, with a desire to reclaim lives for the kingdom of God, it carries out the work of its Lord.

Jesus' saying about eunuchs presupposed that eunuchs were not having sexual intercourse at all, let alone having forbidden sexual intercourse. Jesus compared "eunuchs who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God" (= Christians who opt out of marriage and thus sexual relations to have more time and freedom to proclaim the gospel) with "eunuchs who have been born so from the womb" (= those who are such from birth, due to corporal malformation)[4] and "eunuchs who were made eunuchs by people" (= men forcibly castrated).[5] The analogy only works on the assumption that eunuchs do not have sexual relations (presumed, for example, in Sirach 20:4; 30:20).

The whole context for the eunuch saying in Matthew 19:10–12 is Jesus' argument that the "twoness" of the sexes in complementary pairing, "male and female," is the basis for rejecting sexual relationships involving more than two persons. He can hardly be dismissing the importance of a male-female requirement for sexual relations immediately after establishing the foundational character of such a requirement.

2. Romans 1:24–27 and the Erroneous "Exploitation Argument"

Pro-homosexual Claim: The Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24–27 only applies to exploitative and hedonistic forms of homosexual practice such as sex with slaves, prostitutes, and adolescents.

What the evidence shows: The evidence culled from the literary and historical context of Romans 1:24–27 confirms that the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice — like its prohibition of adult incestuous unions — is absolute. Paul is rejecting all forms of homosexual practice regardless of consent and commitment. Five lines of evidence make this point clear.

First, Paul in Romans 1:24–27 rejects homosexual practice because it is a violation of God's creation of "male and female" as a sexual pair in Genesis. In Romans 1:23–27 Paul intentionally echoed Genesis 1:26,27, making eight points of correspondence — in the same tripartite structure — between the two sets of texts: humans/image/likeness, birds/cattle/reptiles, male/female. Paul was rejecting homosexual practice in the first instance because it violated the male-female prerequisite for sexual relations ordained by the Creator at creation, not because of how well or badly it was done in his cultural milieu.

Second, the nature argument Paul uses in Romans 1:18–27 is not conducive to a distinction between exploitative and

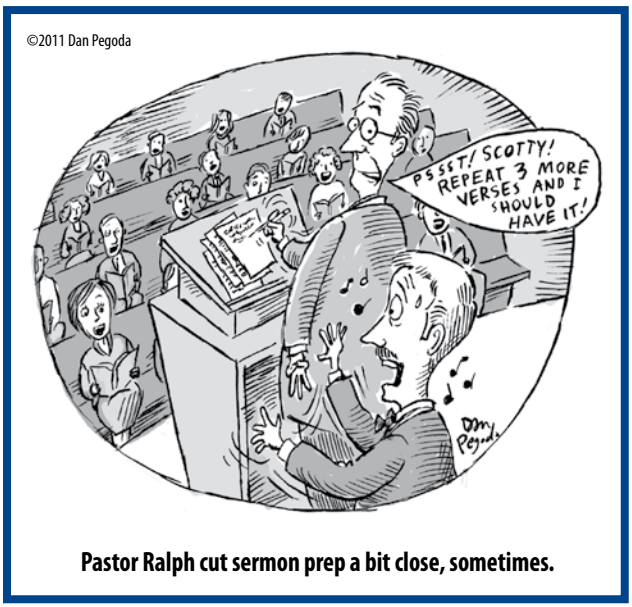
 (continued from page 95)

nonexploitative forms of homosexual practice. Paul contends that female and male homosexual practice is "contrary to nature" because it violated obvious clues given in the material structures of creation that male and female, not two males or two females, are each other's sexual "counterpart" or "complement" (to use the language of Genesis 2:18,20) in terms of anatomy, physiology, and psychology. What Paul says regarding the vertical vice of idolatry (Romans 1:19–23) is equally true of the horizontal vice of same-sex intercourse: Male-female complementarity is "clearly seen, being mentally apprehended *by means of the things made*" (1:19,20).

Some have argued that the ancients had no comprehension of a complementarity argument. Yet as classicist Thomas K. Hubbard notes in his magisterial sourcebook of texts pertaining to *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*: "Basic to the heterosexual position [among Greek and Roman moralists in the first few centuries A.D.] is the characteristic Stoic appeal to the providence of Nature, which has matched and fitted the sexes to each other."[6]

Third, Paul in Romans 1:27 specifically indicts male homosexual relations that involve mutual, reciprocal affections. Paul states, "males, having left behind the natural use of the female, were inflamed with their yearning *for one another.*" This precludes any supposition that Paul is thinking only of coercive relationships.

Fourth, Paul's indictment of lesbianism in Romans 1:26 further confirms that his indictment of homosexual practice is absolute, since female homosexuality in antiquity was not primarily known or criticized for its exploitative practices of sex with slaves, prostitutes, or children. There can be little doubt Paul is indicting female homosexuality, as evidenced by: (1) the parallelism of the language of 1:26 ("females exchanged the natural use") and 1:27 ("*likewise also* the males leaving behind the natural use *of the female*"); (2) the fact in antiquity lesbian intercourse was the form of female intercourse most commonly labeled "contrary to nature" and paired with male homosexual practice; (3) the fact of nearly universal male opposition to lesbianism in antiquity, even by men engaged in homosexual practice; and (4) the fact lesbian intercourse was the dominant interpretation of Romans 1:26 in the patristic period.



Pastor Ralph cut sermon prep a bit close, sometimes.

Fifth, contrary to false claims that people in the Greco-Roman world had no concept of committed homosexual unions, there is plenty of evidence for the conception and existence of loving homosexual relationships, including semiofficial "marriages" between men and between women. Moreover, we know of some Greco-Roman moralists who acknowledged the existence of loving homosexual relationships while rejecting even these as unnatural.

In Plato's *Symposium* (ca. 380 B.C.) the comic Aristophanes is said to remark about male-male relationships: "they [i.e. the two men] continue with one another throughout life … desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity … and to become one person from two" (192E). His remarks play off of the positive view of same-sex eroticism expressed by Phaedrus and Pausanias at the banquet.

Neither Phaedrus (the "beloved" of Eryximachus, also at the banquet) nor Pausanias — who was a lover of the tragic poet and host Agathon (a relationship that began when Agathon, now 31, was 18 years old) — advocate for same-sex hedonism. On the contrary, they stress an attraction for the soul or mind more than the body and the relationship's inducement to moral excellence. Pausanias, in particular, emphasizes that "love is neither right nor wrong in itself" but only right when it is "done rightly" and "for the right reasons"; that lovers who love rightly "are prepared to love in the expectation that they will be with them all their life and will share their lives in common … as if having been fused into a single entity with" the soul of the beloved (181D, 183E). It is thus evident that Aristophanes reflects Pausanias' view of himself when the former states

that men who love males "are not inclined by nature (*phusei*) toward marriage and the procreation of children, yet are compelled to do so by the law or custom (*nomos*)" with the result that two joined males "live their lives out with one another unmarried" (192A-B).

In Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love* (late first-early second-century A.D.) Protogenes argues that man-male love is superior, not because it is more hedonistic but because, instead of having "as a net result the reaping of the fruits of pleasure (*hēdonēn*)," it "comes through friendship to the end and goal of virtue" (750D; 4). Daphnaeus, defending the superiority of male-female love, concedes that homosexual relationships are not necessarily exploitative, for "sexual intercourse that is contrary to nature with males does not do away with, nor damage, a lover's kindness [or: amorous goodwill]" (751C; 5). Yet, he declares, even when "the (intercourse) that comes about from (the joining of) males" is done "willingly," it remains "shameful" (*aschēmōn*) since males are, "with softness (*malakia*) and effeminacy (*thēlutēs*), surrendering themselves, according to Plato, 'to be mounted in the custom of four-footed animals' and to be sowed as if to produce children (*paidosporeisthai*), contrary to nature" (*para phusin*; 751D-E; 5).

In Rome by the epigrammatist Martial (ca. 40–104 A.D.; 1.24; 12.42) and the satirist Juvenal (early second-century A.D.; *Satire* 2) refer jeeringly to effeminate men who willingly commit themselves as "brides" to another man. For example, Gracchus, "a man renowned for his family background and his wealth," became the "bride" to a common cornet-player and signed semi-official documents (*Satire* 2.119,125,129). Lucian of Samosata (mid-second-century A.D.) tells of two rich women who regard themselves as married, the masculine Megilla of Lesbos and her "wife" Demonassa the Corinthian (*Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5). The astrologer Ptolemy of Alexandria (second-century A.D.) writes of manly women born under a certain constellation who are "lustful for sexual relations contrary to nature" and take the active sexual role with women whom they sometimes call their "lawful wives" (*Tetrabiblos* 3.14; §171-72). Clement of Alexandria mentions in disgust "women … contrary to nature … marrying women" (*Paidagōgos* 3.3.21.3). Obviously marriage implies commitment; yet commitment does not change the unnatural and sinful character of the relationship.

Some Greek and Roman moralists condemned *all* homosexual acts on the grounds of a nature argument. "Literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman citizens to severe moral condemnation of *all* homosexual acts."[7] If even some sectors of the "pagan" world were beginning to develop absolute opposition to all forms of homosexual practice, what is the likelihood that Paul would have made exceptions for committed homosexual unions?

Paul operated out of Jewish Scriptures and a Jewish milieu that were unequivocally opposed to homosexual practice, even of a committed sort.

Paul operated out of Jewish Scriptures and a Jewish milieu that were unequivocally opposed to homosexual practice, even of a committed sort. For example, first-century Jewish historian Josephus stated the obvious to his Roman readers: "The law [of Moses] recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman. … But it abhors the intercourse of males with males" (*Against Apion* 2.199). Several rabbinic texts forbid marriage of a man to a man;[8] one referring to Egyptian practices even forbids marriage of a woman to a woman (*Sifra* on Leviticus 18:3).

It is hardly surprising, then, that even Louis Crompton, a homosexual scholar, acknowledges this point in his massive work, *Homosexuality and Civilization:* "However well-intentioned," the interpretation that "Paul's words were not directed at 'bona fide' homosexuals in committed relationships … seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian."[9]

Also worth noting is the falsity of claims that the ancient world knew nothing akin to our understanding of a homosexual orientation or of congenital influences on at least some homosexual development. As classicist Thomas K. Hubbard notes: "Homosexuality in this era [i.e., of the early Imperial Age of

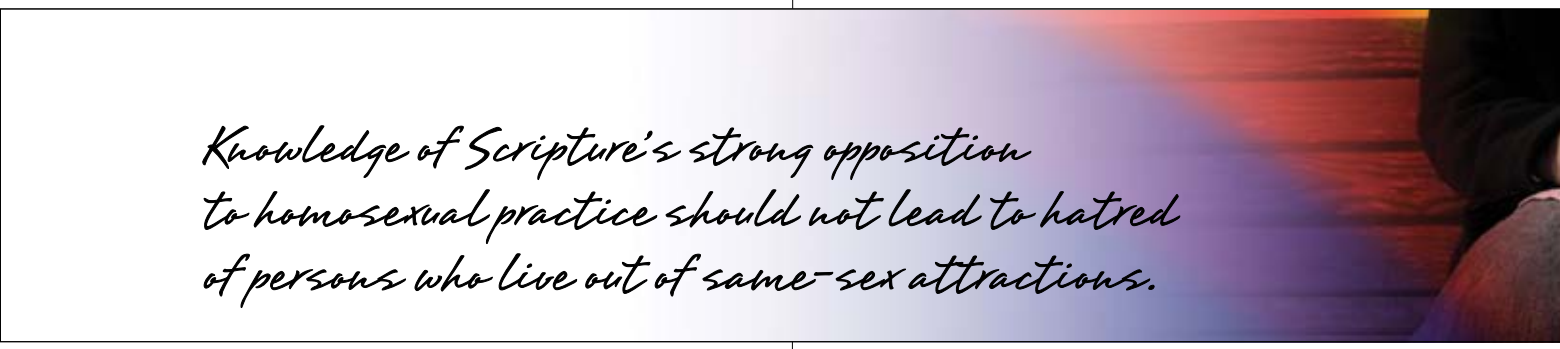
 (continued from page 97)

Rome] may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation."[10]

Bernadette Brooten, a lesbian New Testament scholar who has written the most important book about lesbianism in antiquity, also acknowledges this point. She states that, "Paul could have believed" that some persons attracted to members of the same sex "were born that way and yet still condemn them as unnatural and shameful. … I see Paul as condemning *all* forms of homoeroticism as the unnatural acts of people who had turned away from God."[11]

is merely the symptom of the root problem: too much embodied identity, here as regards gender or sex, between persons of the same sex. If anything, the identity is more keenly felt in same-sex intercourse than incest since sex or gender is a more integral component of sexuality than blood relatedness.

As regards polygamy or polyamory, we have already noted that Jesus predicated His rejection of such behavior on God's creation of *two* sexes for complementary sexual pairing. So a two-sex prerequisite for sexual relations and a limitation of the number of persons in a sexual union to two are related as foundation and superstructure (the latter being built on the former).



Knowledge of Scripture's strong opposition to homosexual practice should not lead to hatred of persons who live out of same-sex attractions.

3. Analogies

Pro-homosexual Claim: The closest analogies to the Bible's opposition to homosexual practice is the Bible's support for both slavery and the oppression of women and its opposition to divorce, all positions we now reject.

What the evidence shows: The alleged analogies cited above are far more remote than the analogies of the Bible's opposition to incest and the New Testament's opposition to polygamy — behaviors that would disqualify any candidate from ordained office, even when the relationships are adult, consensual, committed, and exhibit no scientifically measurable harm.

Scripture's opposition to *incest* and (in the New Testament) *polygamy* or *polyamory* (sexual love for multiple persons concurrently) is related in key ways to its opposition to homosexual practice. Homosexual practice, incest, and polyamory are all sexual behaviors proscribed absolutely in one or both Testaments, despite the fact people can conduct all three as caring and committed adult sexual relationships.

Incest is ultimately prohibited on the grounds that it is sexual intercourse between persons who, in terms of embodied existence, are too alike on a kinship level (compare Leviticus 18:6: "No one shall approach any *flesh of one's flesh to* uncover nakedness"). The higher risks of procreative difficulties that attend fertile incestuous unions are merely the symptom of the root problem: too much identity between close blood relations. Similarly, the inability of persons of the same sex to procreate

These links indicate that the Bible's prohibition of incest and the New Testament's prohibition of multiple-partner sexual unions even for males (the Old Testament never allowed polyandry, i.e. multiple husbands for women) are very close analogies to the Bible's strong prohibition of homosexual practice.

Slavery

Slavery is a bad analogy to the Bible's opposition to homosexual practice because, first, the Bible shows no vested interest in preserving slavery but rather at a number of points has a critical edge against slavery: having mandatory release dates (Exodus 21:26,27; Leviticus 25:35–43); maintaining the right of kin to buy loved ones out of slavery at any time (Leviticus 25:47–53); insisting that fellow Israelites not be treated as slaves (Leviticus 25:42–46). Relative to the slave cultures of the ancient Near East and Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin, the countercultural thrust of the Scriptures is against slavery. However, as regards a male-female requirement for sexual relations, the Bible's critical edge and countercultural thrust is decidedly opposed to all homosexual practice.

Second, same-sex attractions are very different from race or ethnicity. (a) While race or ethnicity is 100 percent inheritable, a homosexual orientation is not. There are congenital risk factors for some homosexual development but that is different from congenital determinism.

The causes of homosexuality are probably multifactorial,

taking in also macro and microcultural influences (society, family, peer socialization), incremental choices, and personal psychology. (b) While race or ethnicity is immutable, homosexual desire is open to some change over time, at least in terms of degree of intensity and exclusivity. (c) While race and ethnicity is primarily a nonbehavioral condition and so benign, homosexual attraction is behaviorally oriented and, since it is a desire for structurally incongruous sexual activity, is not benign.

Third, the parallel with slavery lies with support for homosexual unions, not opposition to such, since those insisting that homosexual desires be affirmed are promoting enslavement to impulses to do what God in Scripture expressly forbids.

Women's roles

The Bible's stance toward *women's roles* is a bad analogy for similar reasons. First, proposing an analogy between being a woman and having homoerotic impulses confuses categories. Being a woman, unlike a homosexual impulse, is a condition that is 100 percent congenital (i.e., determined by chromosomes), immutable, and not a direct desire for behavior that Scripture expressly forbids.

Second, there are plenty of positive views of women in Scripture (e.g., the roles played by Judge Deborah (Judges 4,5 and Ruth in the Old Testament; Jesus' commendation of female discipleship (Luke 7:36–50), and Paul's salute to women coworkers in the New Testament, Romans 16:1,3,6,12). But Scripture gives only strongly negative assessments of homosexual practice. As with the issue of slavery, the counter-cultural thrust of Scripture leans in the direction both of supporting egalitarian roles for women and of opposing homosexual practice. The view of women found in Scripture is more positive, but the view of homosexual practice more negative, than what prevails elsewhere in the ancient Near East and Greco-Roman Mediterranean basin.

Divorce and remarriage after divorce

Divorce and remarriage after divorce also have serious problems as analogues to the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice. First, Scripture does not view divorce and remarriage as bad as homosexual practice. Jesus predicated His opposition to divorce and remarriage on the foundation that God created us as "male and female," a self-contained sexual pair.

Logically it is not possible to justify license in a greater matter by limited license in a lesser matter. For example, it would be illegitimate to argue that greater tolerance toward divorce and remarriage should lead to greater tolerance toward adult-committed incest or "plural" marriages, for the latter two offenses are regarded as more severe. Moreover, there is no virtue to being more consistently disobedient to the will of Christ.

Second, the Bible shows a limited canonical diversity toward divorce (permitted for men in the Old Testament; in the New Testament allowed in cases of sexual immorality or marriage to an unbeliever who insists on leaving), but no diversity on the matter of homosexual practice.

There are also ameliorating factors in the case of some divorce situations that do not apply in the case of a consensual homosexual union. For example, a spouse can be divorced against her or his will or be subject to regular and serious abuse, which creates perpetrator versus victim distinctions irrelevant to a voluntary entrance into a homosexual union.

Third, and most important, the Church's stance toward divorce/remarriage on the one hand and homosexual practice on the other are alike in this respect: *The Church works to end the cycle.* The Church would not ordain any candidate for office who expressed the view: "I've been divorced and remarried a number of times and would like to continue the cycle with the fewest negative side effects." Such a person could not be ordained because that person has an unreformed mind. Why, then, should the Church ordain someone who not only engaged in homosexual practice in the past but also intends to continue in such behavior in a serial, unrepentant way?

Inclusion of Gentiles

Pro-homosexual interpreters often cite the story in Acts 10,11, and 15 about the Church's inclusion of Spirit-filled Gentiles without requiring circumcision and observance of dietary law. They see this as analogous to the Church today disregarding scriptural prohibitions of homosexual practice because persons who engage in such behavior can, in other respects, show evidence of the Spirit in their lives. This too is a bad analogy, for at least five reasons.

First, a male-female prerequisite for sexual relations is grounded in creation whereas a circumcision requirement and dietary commands are not so grounded.

Second, whereas circumcision was a Jewish ritual prescription enjoined only on those Gentiles who became proselytes to Judaism, affecting the body only superficially, the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice was regarded as a universal moral proscription enjoined on all Gentiles because sexual immorality affects the body holistically. Both Jesus (Mark 7:14–23) and Paul (1 Corinthians 6:12–20) forbade comparisons between food laws and prohibitions of sexual immorality, and yet proponents of homosexual unions continue to make such comparisons.

Third, while Gentile inclusion in the first century was about

 (continued from page 99)

both welcoming Gentile believers and rejecting Gentile sexual immorality, today's efforts at normalizing homosexual practice are about accepting not just persons but their immoral behaviors.

Fourth, while Scripture only incidentally links Gentiles to sin (i.e., it recognizes the category of righteous or God-fearing Gentiles), Scripture intrinsically links homosexual practice to sin.

Fifth, whereas Gentile inclusion has significant Old Testament precedent (e.g., the stories of Rahab, Ruth, the widow at Zarephath, Naaman, and Jonah) and uniform New Testament support, Scripture totally rejects homosexual practice. It is absurd to argue for affirmation of homosexual unions as the Spirit's new work inasmuch as it puts the Spirit at odds with Scripture's core values in sexual ethics.

A principle of good analogical reasoning is: The closest, and thus best, analogies are those that share the most substantive points of correspondence with the thing being compared. Honest analogical reasoning does not prefer distant analogies to close analogies. Consequently, it is inappropriate to stress the alleged analogies of slavery, women's roles, divorce, and first-century Gentile inclusion while ignoring both the enormous differences with the Bible's stance on homosexual practice and the more substantive parallels to the Bible's position on incest and polyamory.

4. Significance

Pro-homosexual Claim: The Bible is not particularly interested in homosexual practice as evidenced by the fact it is only mentioned on a few occasions.

What the evidence shows: The contextual evidence indicates that ancient Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity viewed homosexual practice of every sort abhorrent to God, an extreme sexual offense comparable only to the worst forms of adult incest (say, a man and his mother) and superseded among "consensual" sexual offenses only by bestiality.

"Sorry, Reverend, your insurance doesn't cover this because it's job related."

A male-female prerequisite is powerfully evident throughout the pages of Scripture. *Every biblical narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and poetry that has anything to do with sexual relations presupposes such a prerequisite.* Even the male-dominated society of ancient Israel imaged itself as Yahweh's wife so as to avoid any connotation of a marriage between members of the same sex (an image replicated in the New Testament regarding Christ and His Bride, the Church).

There are plenty of laws in the Old Testament delimiting acceptable and unacceptable sexual relationships between a man and a woman but none regulating intercourse between two persons of the same sex. The obvious reason for this is that the Bible does not deem homosexual relationships acceptable.

Those who contend that the Bible condemns homosexual practice only in a handful of passages (Sodom, the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26,27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10) usually neglect *a number of other relevant texts:* the Genesis creation narratives (Genesis 1,2); the Noah and Ham story (Genesis 6:20–27); the narrative of the Levite at Gibeah (Judges 19); the texts from Deuteronomy (23:18) and the Deuteronomistic History dealing with cultic figures known to play the female role in sex with men (the *qedeshim*); the interpretation of the Sodom story in Ezekiel 16:46–58, Jude, and 2 Peter; and Jesus' discussion of marriage in Mark 10 and Matthew 19.

More important, they overlook *the problem with equating frequency of explicit mention with importance.* Bestiality is mentioned even less in the Bible than homosexual practice and incest gets only comparable treatment, yet who would argue that Jews and Christians in antiquity would have regarded sex with an animal or sex with one's mother as inconsequential offenses? Infrequency of mention is often an indicator that the matter in question is a violation of an irreducible minimum in sexual ethics rather than insignificant.

Scripture's male-female prerequisite for sexual relations and its attendant rejection of homosexual behavior is *pervasive* throughout both Testaments (i.e., it is everywhere presumed in sexual discussions even when not explicitly mentioned); *absolute* (i.e., no exceptions are given); *strongly proscribed* (i.e., every scriptural mention indicates that it is a foundational violation of sexual ethics); and *countercultural* (i.e., we know of no other culture in the ancient Near East or Greco-Roman world more consistently and strongly opposed to homosexual practice).

Scripture's male-female prerequisite is also *grounded in the*

creation texts in Genesis 1:27 and 2:21–24. In the latter, the Bible portrays woman as man's missing element or other half, hence the repeated mention of woman being "taken from" the human and being the human's "complement" or "counterpart," a being both "corresponding to" him as a human and "opposite to" him as a distinct sex. Man and woman may become one flesh because out of one flesh man and woman emerged — a beautiful illustration of the transcendent reality that man and woman are each other's sexual counterpart. As noted above, Jesus treats the two-sexes requirement for sexual relations as foundational for His monogamy principle.

Paul cites homosexual practice as a particularly egregious instance of "sexual impurity," "indecency," and a "dishonoring" of the integrity of maleness and femaleness. Homosexual practice is an egregious suppression of the obvious facts of God's design evident in the material structures of creation comparable on the horizontal plane to idolatry on the vertical plane.

If all this does not qualify the Bible's male-female requirement for sexual relations as a *core value* in Scripture's sexual ethics, there is no such thing as a core value in any religious or philosophical tradition.

Conclusion

Hopefully this article will encourage readers to examine in depth the wealth of information that demonstrates why Christians should resist efforts to normalize homosexual practice in both church and society. Of course, knowledge of Scripture's strong opposition to homosexual practice should not lead to hatred of persons who live out of same-sex attractions. On the contrary, such persons are in greater need of loving outreach so they might be reclaimed for God's kingdom. For self-professed Christians who "backslide" into homosexual practice but repent each time they do so, forgiveness is readily available (Luke 17:3,4). For those who persist in such behavior in a self-affirming manner, church discipline may be necessary (cf. Paul's response to the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5). As with any experience of difficulty or deprivation, we can view persistent same-sex attractions as opportunities for God's grace and power to operate in the midst of weakness and for Christ's life to be manifested in the midst of dying to self (John 3:30; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 1:9; 4:7–10; 12:8–10; Galatians 2:19,20; 4:19).

ROBERT A.J. GAGNON, Ph.D., associate professor of New Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

NOTES

1. For a list of my books and articles on homosexual practice, visit: http://www.robgagnon.net.
2. All translations of ancient texts in this article, including biblical texts, are the author's own.
3. There are no extant texts within centuries of the life of Jesus indicating any openness to homosexual relationships of any sort, in contrast to the existence of such texts among "pagans."
4. Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 561.
5. The references to eunuchs in Isaiah 56:3–5 (cf. 39:7) and Acts 8:27–39 refer to persons who were physically castrated against their will, not to persons who willingly removed their marks of masculinity, much less actively engaged in sexual relations forbidden by Scripture.
6. Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 444.
7. Hubbard, 383 (emphasis added).
8. Cf. Sifra on Leviticus 18:3, Genesis Rabbah 26.6; Leviticus Rabbah 23.9; b. Hullin 92b.
9. Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.
10. Hubbard, 386.
11. *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 244.

iStockphoto

what do you do when … ?

answers to ministers' "sex questions"

Pastors face specific challenges as they minister to people with sexual sin. This article explores "contemporary sex" issues along with biblical principles that illuminate how pastors need to think, feel, and act regarding all people whose lives have been complicated by sexual sin.

by George Paul Wood

Pastors[1] face many challenges. One of them is how to minister *to* and *with* people where sexual sin — whether their own or others' — has complicated their lives. In preparation for this article, the editors of *Enrichment* solicited questions from Assemblies of God pastors about specific challenges they face in their churches related to sexuality. Other articles in this issue address their biblical and theological questions.[2] Richard R. Hammar addresses their legal questions. (See online sidebar, "Legal Answers for Sexual Issues in the Church" with this

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

article at http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org. Click on Current Issue link.)

This article addresses the practical questions pastors asked by outlining five biblical principles that illuminate how we need to think, feel, and act in specific circumstances.[3] Their questions reflect the changing sexual practices and attitudes of Americans, which include Americans who self-identify as "Christians." A recent study by the National Marriage Project illustrates the extent of the changes in both practice and attitude.

Pastors need to follow the Golden Rule for ministry: Minister to others who have sinned in the same way you would have them minister to you if you have sinned.

The Changing Sexual Practices of America

"In middle America," the National Marriage Project reports, "marriage is in trouble."[4] As proof, the report cites declining rates of marriage and growing rates of divorce, cohabitation, and nonmarital childbearing. In 1960, 69.3 percent of all American males age 15 and older were married, and 65.9 percent of all American females. In 2009, the corresponding percentages were 53.7 and 50.6 (63). In 1960, 1.8 percent of all American males aged 15 and older were divorced, and 2.6 percent of all females. In 2009, the corresponding percentages were 8.5 and 10.8. A couple marrying today has a 40- to 50-percent lifetime chance of separation or divorce (70; 71).

The number of couples who cohabit increased fifteenfold, from 439,000 in 1960 to 6,661,000 in 2009 (75). "More than 60 percent of first marriages are now preceded by living together, compared to virtually none 50 years ago" (76).[5] In 1960, 9 percent of children under age 18 lived with a single parent, while 88 percent lived with two married parents. The corresponding percentages for 2009 were 25 and 66.7 (89,90). In 1960, unmarried women accounted for 5.3 percent of all live births; in 2009, they accounted for 40.6 percent (91).

Attitudes about sexual practices are also changing. Drawing on studies of high school seniors, the National Marriage Project reports that in 1976, 38.9 percent of girls and 37.9 percent of boys felt that people will have "fuller and happier lives if they choose legal marriage" rather than singlehood or cohabitation. In 2009, the corresponding percentages were 39.6 for boys and 29.8 for girls (101). In 1976, 33.3 percent of girls and 41.2 percent of boys felt that nonmarital childbearing is either "a worthwhile lifestyle" or "not affecting anyone else." In 2009, the corresponding percentages were 55.8 and 55.9 (102). Finally, in 1979, 32.3 percent of girls and 44.9 percent of boys agreed that couples should cohabit before marriage to "find out whether they really get along." In 2009, the corresponding percentages were 66.3 and 68.9 (103).

Gallup has found that Americans' moral evaluation of homosexual behavior has reversed itself in the past decade. In 2001, 53 percent of Americans felt that gay and lesbian relationships were "morally wrong" and 40 percent felt they were "morally acceptable." In 2010, the corresponding percentages were 43 and 52. "Americans' support for the moral acceptability of gay and lesbian relations crossed the symbolic 50 percent threshold in 2010," Gallup concluded. "At the same time, the percentage calling these relations 'morally wrong' dropped to 43 percent, the lowest in Gallup's decade-long trend."[6]

Religious affiliation affects both sexual practice and attitudes about sexual practice. For example, according to the National Marriage Project, religious affiliation reduces the chance a couple will divorce in their first 10 years of marriage by 14 percent (73). According to sociologist Bradley R.E. Wright, "The differences between Christian actions and those of the [religiously] unaffiliated are not insubstantial. And what's more, the more committed Christians are to their faith, as measured by attending services, the more likely they are to 'practice what they preach.' "[7] Still, there is considerable room for improvement in Christian behavior. After all, if 50 percent (one-half) of first marriages in America end within 10 years, a 14 percent reduction in the divorce rate means that 36 percent (one-third) of religiously affiliated people divorce within 10 years of their first marriage. One-third is better than one-half, but it's still far short of God's design.

The relevance of these statistics to pastoral ministry is clear: Increasingly, pastors minister *to* people (in their congregations and communities) and *with* people (on their pastoral staffs and ministry teams) where sexual sin — whether their own or others' — has complicated their lives.

How should we minister in these circumstances?

Biblical Principles

The following five biblical principles illuminate how pastors need to think, feel, and act regarding all people.

First, **the guiding principle** of ministry — and of life — is love. God is love (1 John 4:8). The gospel is the story of His love for us in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:6–8). The fruit of His Spirit dwelling within us is love (Galatians 5:22,23). The Great Commandment requires us, in response to God's love, to love Him with our entire being and our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:34–40). This commandment summarizes the moral teaching of Scripture (Matthew 22:40). And it extends to "enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "sinners" (Galatians 6:1,2), not just those who love us (Matthew 5:43–48).


iStockphoto

Second, **the priority of the gospel:** Both John and Paul emphasized the priority of God's loving action to our loving reaction. "This is love," John wrote, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Paul wrote: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). God's love is prior to ours in time: He loved us before we loved Him. God's love is also prior to ours in importance: Without His grace, our good works are fruitless and our boasting vain.

Too often pastors reverse the priority of the gospel. Explicitly and implicitly, verbally and nonverbally, pastors teach people that they must reform their lives before God can do anything with them. This message is legalistic (putting law before grace) and moralistic (putting human effort before divine empowerment). But rules are powerless to change people's lives. Only God can do that. "For what the law was powerless to do … God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man. … in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" (Romans 8:3,4). This righteousness is both forensic and real. In other words, God declares us righteous on the basis of Christ's atoning work and increasingly makes us righteous through life in the Spirit (8:4,9).

Third, **the process of godliness:** In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), Christ charged His followers to "make disciples." Pastors often take this commission as their marching orders for evangelism, but it involves much more. For Christ, disciple making meant "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Too often pastors assume that people in their churches know both what Christ commanded and how to keep His commands. Pastors also assume that greater obedience to Christ's commands comes quickly and easily. Pastors need to make neither assumption. Rather, they need to assume that people in their congregations do not know either what Christ commanded or how to keep His commands. And pastors need to assume that increasing obedience is an ongoing process in every believer, with both forward progress and frustrating setbacks being part of that process. Ministry to people does not stop with altar calls and new member classes. Disciple making is a lifelong ministry of patient teaching.

Fourth, **the practice of integration:** Though the Great Commission speaks of obedience to Christ's commands, discipleship involves more than religious observance and rule keeping. Christ critiqued the Pharisees and teachers of the law for their *religiosity*, saying, "You have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness" (23:23). And He critiqued the Pharisees for their *externalism*, saying, "On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:28). True discipleship is both Godward and humanward, both outward and inward.

The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34–40) integrates these dimensions into a seamless whole. First, it integrates love of God, neighbor, and self. True love is spiritual, social, and self-directed. We cannot love God without also loving our neighbors (1 John 4:20,21). And we must love our neighbors in the same way we love ourselves (Ephesians 5:28,29). Second, the Great Commandment integrates the components of the self. Christ calls us to love God with "all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind" (Matthew 22:37). Mark 12:30 includes the phrase "with all [our] strength." In other words, love is a matter of *head* (belief), *heart* (emotion and will), and *hands* (behavior and relationship).

Discipleship, then, means a head that knows, a heart that desires, and hands that do God's will in every area of life.

Fifth, **the gentle presence:** In their disciple making, pastors need to reflect the gentleness of Jesus Christ. He said, " 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your

souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light'" (Matthew 11:28–30). This beautifully describes the necessity, ends, and means of discipleship.

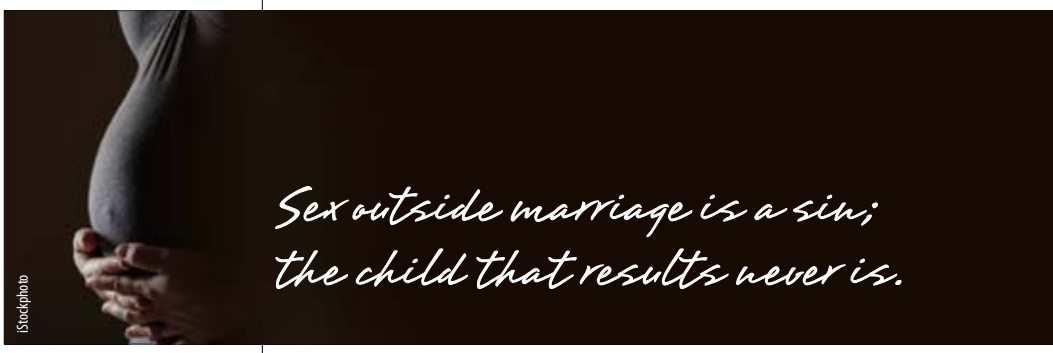
Discipleship to Christ is necessary because life without Him is wearying and burdensome. The end of discipleship to Christ is "rest." But the means He uses to disciple us are "gentle and humble."

Paul echoes the language and themes of Jesus' words in Galatians 6:1,2. "Brothers [and sisters]," he wrote, "if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Both passages emphasize *gentleness* and *presence*. Christ is "gentle and humble," so His followers need to disciple one another "gently." Christ invites His followers into His presence, "Come to me."

We disciple one another by yoking ourselves to one another — "Carry each other's burdens." Too often, pastors attempt to disciple people by preaching strong words from the pulpit. That is not the way of Jesus Christ. He got up close and personal, but ever so gently.

Paul words — "Watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" — provide a salutary reminder that pastors are sinners, too. Pastors minister *as* sinners, not just *to* and *with* them. Knowing this, pastors need to follow the Golden Rule for ministry: Minister to others who have sinned in the same way you would have them minister to you if you have sinned (cf. Matthew 7:12).



iStockphoto

Application to Specific Questions

How do these biblical principles illuminate the specific challenges pastors face as they minister *to* and *with* people when sexual sin — whether their own or others' — has complicated their lives?

The questions Assemblies of God pastors submitted to the editors of *Enrichment* fell into three broad categories: attendance, ceremonies, and participation.

Attendance

Attendance describes a person's low level of involvement with the church and its ministries. To use an economic analogy, attendees are *consumers* of spiritual goods, not *producers*. They derive benefit from Sunday worship services and other programs, but they do not add value to the church by further participation through membership or ministry. *Enrichment* received four questions dealing with attendance issues:

1. **How do you deal with an openly promiscuous teen that still attends youth services?**
2. **What do you do with a couple who divorces, both still attend the church, and one spouse remarries and attends the same church with the new spouse?**
3. **Which bathroom should a transgendered person who attends your church use?**
4. **Should I allow the adopted child of a lesbian couple to enroll in our church daycare or school?**

We need to reframe these questions. Each assigns people an adjective: *promiscuous, divorced, remarried, transgendered,* or *lesbian*. Underlying each adjective is an evaluation: *sinful*.[8] We can reframe the question by substituting the evaluation for the adjective: *What do we do with a sinful person who attends our church?*

Should we not rejoice? Christ loved "sinners" (Romans 5:8). He was their "friend" (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). He entered the world to "save" them (1 Timothy 1:15). And we are His "ambassadors," commissioned with "the ministry of reconciliation," proclaiming "the message of reconciliation" to sinners (2 Corinthians 5:18–21). Should we not rejoice when people whose lives have been complicated by sexual sin attend our church or its ministries? Does not their attendance offer us opportunities to love them, to share the gospel with them, and to disciple them?

And should we not love them? If promiscuous teens, divorced and remarried couples, transgendered people, and homosexuals do not know we love them, they will not listen to us. They do not care how much we know until they know how much we care.

Do not misunderstand me. God's standard for sexual behavior is clear: fidelity within marriage and chastity outside of marriage.[9] The question is, once a person or a couple has violated that standard, how do we minister to them? We cannot even begin to do so unless we love them as Christ does.

With the right attitude, we can move on to the other four biblical principles. Regarding questions 1 and 2: Have we shared the gospel with the promiscuous teen and divorced-remarried

couple? Have we taught them both *what* Christ commands regarding sexual behavior and *how* to obey Him? Have we addressed the false beliefs, emotional needs, and behavioral patterns that drive their promiscuity and relational brokenness? And have we done so in a gentle way that encourages them to trust their sexuality to Christ?

Christ's ministry of forgiveness and healing to the "sinful woman" who anointed His feet (Luke 7:36–50), the divorced-remarried-cohabiting Samaritan woman (John 4:1–26), and the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11) model how we need to minister to people when sexual sin has complicated their lives. Jesus defended them against their accusers, named and forgave their sins, and blessed them to live a new life.

In my experience, when approached this way, most people — whatever their sin — respond positively. They feel lost, broken, and ashamed about the state of their lives. They want a pathway to forgiveness and practical guidance so they do not repeat their bad choices. A few people respond negatively regardless of how we approach them. These people tend to self-select out of the church and its ministries.

Regarding question 3: There are larger spiritual, moral, and psychological issues for us to deal with than a transgendered person's bathroom preference. Transgendered people should use the bathroom of whichever gender they present, unless their use of it causes serious problems for others. Their attendance at events such as men's or women's retreats generates a different level of challenges.[10] In such cases, keep in mind that transgender is an "umbrella term covering a number of sexual and gender variations," including "cross-dressers (or transvestites)" and "transsexuals," i.e., people who have undergone sex-reassignment surgery and are undergoing hormone-replacement therapy.[11] While it would be inappropriate for a cross-dressing man to attend a women's retreat, it might not be inappropriate for a transsexual woman. Leaders need to address two questions: Will participation in this retreat help move her toward greater holiness, or will her participation be disruptive to the discipleship of other members of the group?

Regarding question 4: Christ welcomed and blessed children unconditionally (Mark 10:13–16). Should we not do the same? Or do we hinder children coming within Christ's sphere of influence because their parents are involved in a sinful relationship?

Ceremonies

Pastors lead their congregations in a number of religious ceremonies, including water baptism, Communion, weddings, child dedications, and funerals. *Enrichment* received the following questions about rites:

5. **Should the pastor dedicate an infant born out of wedlock when the mother is attending the church and does not plan on marrying the father of the child? What if the couple is heterosexual or homosexual and cohabiting and desire to have their child dedicated?**
6. **In the case of in vitro fertilization of a single woman, should the church dedicate the child?**
7. **If a person has a sex change and desires to marry, should the church marry this couple?**
8. **Should a pastor agree to do a funeral for a homosexual relative of church members?**

As pointed out earlier, in 1960, 5.3 percent of all live births were to unmarried women. In 2009, the rate was 40.6 percent. Increasingly, pastors will minister to both women and men who have brought forth children out of wedlock, as well as to their children. What should we do?

On the one hand, Christ welcomed and blessed children unconditionally, saying: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). On the other hand, child dedication presumes that parents intend to raise their children in the "training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). These two issues may come into conflict for pastors when sexually immoral parents ask their pastors to bless their children.

Regarding question 5, pastors need to keep the following things in mind. First, pastors need to always welcome and bless children as Jesus Christ did, regardless of the sins of their parents. Sex outside marriage is a sin; the child that results never is. Perhaps pastors need to develop a rite of child blessing alongside a rite of child dedication. The latter would take the parents' intentions into account; the former would not.


iStockphoto

Second, child bearing and child rearing out of wedlock are not always sins. For example, a woman whose child is the product of rape is morally blameless. Rather than judging her, we need to honor her for bringing her child into the world under such difficult circumstances. A single person, whether female or male, who adopts a child does not sin. Should we not dedicate children who are born or reared under these circumstances?

Third, we need to take repentance into account. We need to include people in the rites of the church who repent of their

sins. In the case of question 5, repentance means either marrying the child's other parent or ceasing to cohabit and engage in sexual intercourse. Since, from a biblical point of view, marriage is not an option for a homosexual couple, repentance involves noncohabitation and chastity. Should we not dedicate the children of parents who have repented in these ways?

Question 6 is difficult because the ethics of in vitro fertilization and embryo implantation are inherently complicated.[12] The single status of the woman in this scenario complicates things further. On the one hand, she does not commit fornication. On the other hand, the manner whereby the sperm necessary for IVF is obtained raises red flags. We need to address the beliefs, emotional needs, and behavioral patterns that are driving her to seek to be a parent in this way. If she rejects your counsel, obviously, you need to welcome and bless the child that results.

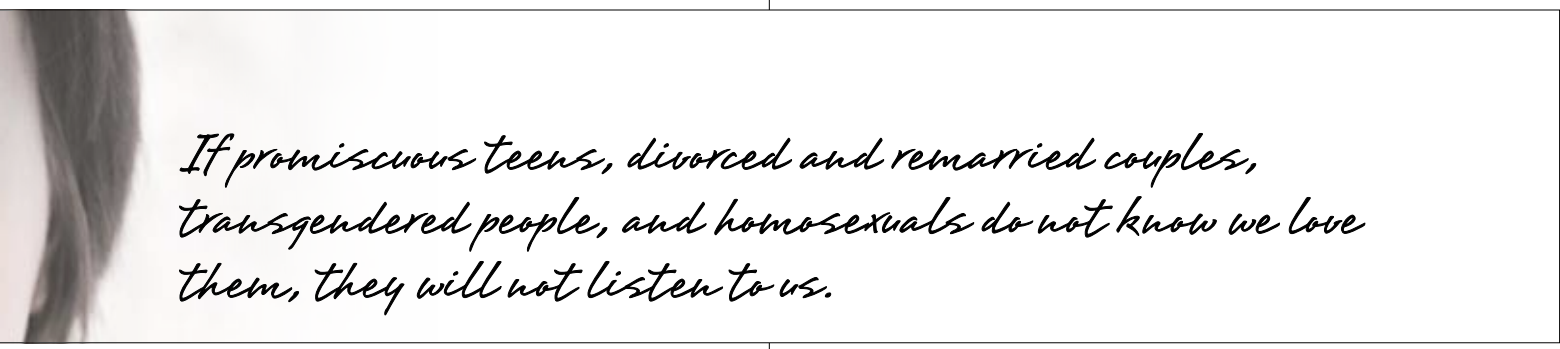
Given the debate surrounding IVF, the issue of whether a pastor can dedicate the child in the customary manner is a question each pastor must answer individually. The crucial question one must answer is whether some form of repentance is called for, and why.

Question 7 presents unique challenges to contemporary pastors. As noted above, *transgender* is an umbrella term covering everything from cross-dressing to transsexuality. This question deals specifically with transsexuals, i.e., people who have undergone sex-reassignment surgery and hormone-replacement therapy. The Bible does not explicitly address transsexuality since the necessary surgery and therapy were medically impossible in the era when the Bible was written. The Bible does say, however, that God created humanity as male and female (Genesis 1:27; 5:2; Matthew 19:4). It prohibits cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5) and promotes gender-distinct appearance (1 Corinthians 11:2–16). Furthermore, the Bible also prohibits homosexual behavior (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27) and blesses heterosexual marriage (Genesis 1:28,29).

What the Bible says about cross-dressing and homosexuality seem most relevant to transsexuality. The appearance of men and women should be distinct. And gender is more than genitalia. A man does not cease being male or a woman cease being female because they have undergone sex-reassignment surgery. Because transsexuality crosses the boundary of gender-distinct appearance, and because the marriage of a transsexual woman to a man (or transsexual man to a woman) can be construed as a homosexual relationship, it follows that pastors should not marry the couple question 7 describes. This does not mean pastors cannot love, evangelize, and disciple transsexual people, however. Indeed, don't they deserve some measure of our sympathy and compassion? For what level of emotional confusion does it require to so hate your own body that, in the case of men, you desire to castrate yourself?[13]

Question 8 asks whether pastors should perform funerals for the homosexual relatives of church members. Let's reframe this question. Should pastors perform funerals for the unbelieving relatives of church members? Substituting *unbelievers* for *homosexuals* clarifies the question. Believers struggle with a variety of sins, including homosexuality. We should not have a problem performing their funerals — whatever their sin — whether they or their relatives attended our church. The real question is performing funerals for unbelievers.

Depending on their consciences (Romans 14:23), different pastors will answer this question differently. We need to consider, however, that performing unbelievers' funerals may open two doors of ministry for us. The first is ministry to fellow believers. Paul teaches us to "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15), and to "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4). The second is ministry to unbelievers. By identifying with them in their pain and offering them God's comfort, we sow the seed of the gospel into their hearts (Mark 4:1–20).



Participation

Participation describes a person's enhanced level of commitment to the church and its ministries, beyond mere attendance. For Assemblies of God churches, this commitment typically entails

formal church *membership* and lay or vocational *ministry*. *Enrichment* received two questions dealing with membership:

9. **Is heterosexual cohabitation grounds for denying church membership?**
10. **What is the church's position on a gay/lesbian couple that choose to be in a nonsexual domestic partnership yet desire to have membership with the church?**

For Assemblies of God pastors, the answer to the first question is yes. All can attend church; many can participate through membership and ministry; few can lead the church. The distinction between the *all*, the *many*, and the *few* is their level of commitment and responsibility. Attending church requires a low level of commitment and responsibility. Formally joining the church and its ministries, on the other hand, requires a higher level of commitment and responsibility.

Formal church membership involves faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Romans 10:9) as well as the pursuit of holiness (1 Peter 1:13–16). Such a pursuit does not mean church members are perfect (Philippians 3:12–14). Rather, it means that they commit themselves to biblical standards of behavior, confession of known sin, openness to fraternal admonition, and desire for continuing growth in holiness (Matthew 18:15–20; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:16,19,20).

Cohabitation (question 9) violates the biblical standard of sexual behavior and is grounds for denying church membership. But our ministry to the cohabiting couple does not end there. Do we love this couple? Have we evangelized them? Have we taught them both what Christ's commands are and how to keep them? Are we doing these things gently and personally?

Question 10 is complicated. The church does not have a problem with members of the same sex being roommates. And it encourages celibacy for all unmarried persons. So the critical component of this question revolves around the couples' experience of same-sex attraction and identification as "domestic partners." Are their experience and identification grounds for denying this couple church membership?

"Pastor, I find it offensive to be treated like a common hypocrite. There is *nothing* about me that is common!"

Consider an analogy: A man and a woman in a church feel attracted to each another. They identify themselves as "boyfriend" and "girlfriend." Though they practice celibacy, they live together. Assemblies of God pastors would deny them church membership. Why? Membership involves higher commitment and entails higher responsibility. Members commit themselves to pursuing integrity of head, heart, and hand. They are thus responsible to act in ways consistent with that pursuit. By living together they expose themselves to daily sexual temptation based on constant physical proximity. As disciples of Christ, they need to either reduce their exposure to temptation by living separately, or they should consummate their relationship in marriage.

As with the couple in the example above, the "gay/lesbian" couple that live together as "domestic partners" expose themselves to daily sexual temptation based on their constant physical proximity. Unlike the couple above, however, the "gay/lesbian" couple does not have the option to marry one another, since from a biblical point of view, homosexual behavior is sinful (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9). They need to reduce their exposure to temptation by living separately.

Furthermore, the fact they self-identify as "gay/lesbian" and "domestic partners" may signal a failure in discipleship. The experience of same-sex attraction is not in and of itself sinful,[15] any more than merely experiencing temptation is sinful. Same-sex attraction becomes "dishonorable passions" when it is entertained and embraced, for it leads to behavior that is "contrary to nature" (Romans 1:26, 27, ESV)[16] — that is, to the standard God established at creation (Genesis 1:27,28; 2:20–24; Matthew 19:4–6).

Christians who continue to identify themselves as "gay" or "lesbian" and who enshrine that identity with the legal status of "domestic partners" seem to reject the biblical teaching regarding "dishonorable passions," *even though they practice celibacy*. Their beliefs, emotions, will, and pattern of relationship constitute grounds for denial of membership, *even if their behavior is by the book*. With Paul, all believers should be able to confess: "in my inner being, I delight in God's law," even as they struggle against "another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind" and cry out for deliverance (Romans 7:21–25). This applies especially to church members, whose higher level of commitment to the church and its ministries entails a higher level of spiritual and moral responsibility.

Enrichment received four questions that deal with *ministry*:

11. **Should a church allow a single mother, who had a**

child out of wedlock, to serve in a church ministry? If the church removes her from church ministry for a season, when should the church restore her to full participation?

12. **Should a church remove a wife from church ministry if her husband needs to step aside because of struggles with pornography or other sexual addiction?**
13. **Should the church disqualify from church leadership the parents of a daughter who chose to have an abortion while still living at home?**
14. **Should the church distinguish between homosexual acts and homosexual tendencies (desires) when screening would-be volunteers? Isn't the most important issue, in the end, the issue of claiming a gay identity?**

In the New Testament, every Christian is a minister, though not all Christians have the same ministry (1 Corinthians 12:4–11). Each of these ministries is necessary to the proper functioning of the body of Christ, that is, the church. (12:12–31). Those who exercise ministries of leadership are subject to the higher levels of scrutiny because their ministries entail higher levels of responsibility for the spiritual and moral well-being of others. Would-be leaders need to scrutinize themselves (James 3:1). And church and denominational authorities need to scrutinize them as well. First Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9 outline the qualifications for and responsibilities of "overseers," "deacons," and "elders" — the highest levels of leadership in the local church.

The New Testament church also taught that churches need to exercise discipline over members and ministers who sin, a process outlined in Matthew 18:15–20; Galatians 6:1,2; and James 5:16,19,20. This discipline involves confrontation, repentance, discipline (including potential removal from membership and ministry), and restoration to the same. In 1 Corinthians 5:1–13, the apostle Paul advised the Corinthians, "Expel the wicked man from among you." In this case, confrontation did not bring about repentance, so discipline was the only option. In a separate case in 2 Corinthians 2:5–11, Paul advised the same church, "You ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" and "reaffirm your love for him." Here confrontation brought about repentance, resulting in restoration.

The crucial difference between these two cases is the heart of the Christian who sinned. "Godly sorrow," Paul wrote, "brings repentance" (2 Corinthians 7:10). In general, the church needs to restore to membership and/or ministry persons who have been disciplined because of sin after they have repented, although there may be cases where restoration to ministry in inadvisable.[17]

New Testament teaching regarding ministry and discipline helps answer question 11. Sex outside of marriage is a sin. Those who sin in this way should be temporarily removed from ministry but restored upon repentance. The duration and nature of the disciplinary process will vary depending on whether the minister is lay or ordained. During the disciplinary period, leaders need to focus on replacing the false beliefs, emotional needs, and behavioral patterns that drove the sexual sin with holy and healthy alternatives.

iStockphoto

Increasing obedience is an ongoing process in every believer, with both forward progress and frustrating setbacks.

Regarding question 12, the Bible teaches the general principle that people are responsible for their own sins (Ezekiel 18:19, 20). Removing a wife from ministry because of the sexual sins of her husband seems like disciplining her for his sins, in contravention of this general principle. Yes, good family management is a qualification for the ministry of "overseers" and "elders" (1 Timothy 1:4,5; Titus 1:6), but that qualification applies explicitly to children, not spouses. In cases involving Assemblies of God credentialed ministers, the disciplinary process sometimes includes removing the pastor from the church. Obviously, this affects his or her spouse.

The principle of good family management applies to question 13. Can a church disqualify a married couple from leadership because their daughter, who lives at home, had an abortion? The answer depends on the nature of their ministry as well as the age and maturity of the daughter. Good family management is, after all, an explicit qualification for the ministry of overseer/elder. There may be ministries where good family management is not as important. Moreover, one can imagine

scenarios where parents cannot be held responsible for the actions of their child, as for example, when that child is an adult. Regardless, in the aftermath of the abortion, we should be prepared to minister to the spiritual needs of both the parents and their daughter.

Regarding question 14, not all Assemblies of God churches screen volunteers (although they should).[18] Those who offer to volunteer for church ministries who continue to affirm they have a gay identity send a wrong message to those they seek to serve. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross that gives victory over the penalty and power of sin brings about the reality of the new life in Christ — "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). How can the old be gone if the individual remains convinced of his or her gay identity? The enhanced levels of commitment and responsibility inherent to church membership and ministry require us to reflect not only on what we believe and how we behave, but also on how we feel and what we desire to do.

Conclusion: How, Not Whether

This article has examined how to minister to and with people where sexual sin — whether their own or others' — has complicated their lives. I have offered answers to specific questions based on my understanding of biblical teaching and my pastoral experience with the kind of people mentioned in the questions. Some of the questions, and perhaps some of my answers, have made you uncomfortable. Feel free to reconsider the advice I have given based on your biblical understanding and pastoral experience.

But do not feel free to ignore the challenge of ministering to such people because their sexual practices and attitudes make you uncomfortable. The question is not *whether* to minister to and with such people, but only *how*. These people live in our communities; they worship in our pews. They are our neighbors, friends, and family members. And Christ said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," and "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12,13).

We may not know how to respond in every circumstance complicated by sexual sin, but we do know this: Christ accepts people wherever they are, but He never leaves them there. He moves them toward spiritual health and holiness.

Should we not strive to do the same?

GEORGE PAUL WOOD is director of Ministerial Resourcing for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.

NOTES

1. In this article, the word *pastors* refers to credentialed, vocational ministers. The word *ministers* refers to all people who exercise a ministry within the local church, whether lay or credentialed.
2. See especially George O. Wood, "Human Sexuality in the Image of God," and Robert A.J. Gagnon, "Understanding and Responding to Pro-Homosexual Interpretation of Scripture," on pages 30 and 92, respectively, of this issue.
3. The opinions expressed in this article should be construed as the advice of one Assemblies of God pastor to other Assemblies of God pastors and not as official guidelines promulgated by The General Council of the Assemblies of God.
4. National Marriage Project, When Marriage Fails: The New Middle America, The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America 2010 (Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project, 2010), 13. http://www.stateofourunions.org/2010/SOOU2010.pdf. Hereafter, page numbers will be cited in the text.
5. There has also been an increase in premarital sex. Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker report that 84 percent of 18- to 23-year-old adults have had sex. *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Kindle edition Location 53.
6. Gallup, "Americans' Acceptance of Gay Relations Crosses 50 Percent Threshold." http://www.gallup.com/poll/135764/americans-acceptance-gay-relations-crosses-threshold.aspx. Accessed March 8, 2011.
7. See Bradley R.E. Wright, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You've Been Told: A Sociologist Shatters Myths from the Secular and Christian Media* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2010), 149. See 131–49 for documentation across a range of practices and attitudes.
8. The choices to divorce or remarry after divorce are not necessarily sinful. See the Assemblies of God position paper, "Divorce and Remarriage." http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4189_divorce_remarriage.pdf.
9. Wood, "Human Sexuality in the Image of God," 30.
10. In an e-mail to the author, Joe Dallas of Genesis Counseling writes, "these are, by the way, scenarios we are currently facing and will surely face in greater numbers in the coming years" (March 8, 2011). See also John W. Kennedy, "The Transgender Moment: Evangelicals hope to respond with both moral authority and biblical compassion to gender identity disorder," *Christianity Today* (February 2008). http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/february/25.54.html
11. Nancy Heche, "Transgender Issues," in *The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding Homosexuality: A Biblical and Compassionate Response to Same-Sex Attraction*, ed. Joe Dallas and Nancy Heche (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 2010), 445.
12. See the Assemblies of God position paper, "Sanctity of Human Life: Abortion and Reproductive Issues," 2. http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/PP_Sanctity_of_Human_Life_Abortion_Reproductive_Issues.pdf. Accessed March 4, 2011.
13. "[I]t should be noted that suicide attempts, drug abuse, and horrendous efforts at self-mutilation are commonly reported among young transsexuals"; Heche, "Transgender Issues," 446.
14. Here, cohabitation implies both living together and engaging in sexual intercourse without benefit of marriage.
15. See the Assemblies of God position paper, "Homosexuality," 4n.1. http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4181_homosexuality.pdf
16. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright © 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
17. For example, the Assemblies of God removes credential holders from ministry who have sexually molested children and does not restore them to ministry.
18. For advice on how to screen ministry volunteers and church employees in a legally responsible way, see Richard R. Hammar, "Ten Legal Risks Facing Churches and Church Leaders," *Enrichment*, 9, no. 1 (winter 2004): 78–85, also online at: http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200401/200401_78_legalrisks.cfm; "Navigating the Sexual Minefield in Today's Culture" *Enrichment* 15, no. 2 (spring 2010): 54–63. See also G. Stanton Masters, "Avoiding Negligent Hiring, Retention,
and Supervision Claims Against Churches" *Enrichment* 15, no. 2 (spring 2010): 64–72.

shop talk

columns & departments

Summer 2011

HIGHLIGHTS:

Cooperation

Removing the "I" From Team: How To Tear Down Silos That Separate Your Team

By Glenn Reynolds

Church ministries often function in their own silos. There can be an incredible amount of activity and even accomplishment in each silo, but there is no coordination between these ministries.

120

Regeneration

Beyond Stem Cells: Ethical Issues in Regenerative Medicine

By Christina M.H. Powell

128

As with any frontier, risks and uncertainty coexist with the potential for great reward.

Expectation

I Have Trouble Dealing With My Husband's Unrealistic Expectations

By Gabriele Rienas

Power struggles happen when people do not feel heard or validated. They try harder and harder to assert their position as the other person does the same. The problem is that no one wins.

132

also:

etc.

iStockphoto

Whose Image?

Jesus was a brilliant communicator. Although He used simple language, underneath His simple speech ran a learned sophistication that conveyed Jesus' profound message. The unlearned in His audience enjoyed Jesus' direct, simple message, but the learned members of His audience grasped the sophisticated message imbedded within His simple words.

Modern readers often miss many of the associations within Jesus' words because they do not know their context. When we read the words of Jesus within their historical and cultural contexts, we can also grasp Jesus' profound message.

Render to Caesar

The Gospels record how during the week before Passover the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the Law sent some Pharisees to question Jesus (Matthew 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26). They asked Him, "Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Luke 20:22). Jesus had become a target for the chief priests because He criticized their abuse of power and corruption (cf. Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 19:45–48; 20:9–19). They could not take action against Him publically because of His popularity with the people (cf. Luke 19:47,48; 20:19). Therefore, they sought to entrap Him and accuse Him before Rome.

In the first century, as today, paying taxes indicated the subjugation of the people to a government. Roman taxation was the source of bitter conflict between the Jewish people and Rome. The Zealots, a revolutionary Jewish group, believed it was against the law of God for Jews to pay taxes to Rome. The first-century historian, Josephus, relates an episode that happened early in that century, in which Judas of Gamala (Acts 5:37) initiated an uprising of his countrymen in Galilee in response to the census of Quirinius, the governor of Coele-Syria (cf. Luke 2:2), who ordered the census for the purposes of taxation: "(Judah) incited his countrymen to revolt, upbraiding them as cowards for consenting to pay tribute to the Romans and tolerating mortal masters, after having God for their lord" (*Jewish War* 2:118).

When asked about paying taxes, Jesus responded, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it? . . . Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:24,25). This demonstrates His creative genius as a communicator and His sensitivity to the difficult situation in which He found himself.

On the surface, Jesus' answer seems like an evasion of the question. In fact, one wonders what He meant by His response. This confusion did not exist with His audience, however, because they would have picked up on the subtle association Jesus wanted to evoke in the heart of His listeners.

Jesus' audience, many of whom knew the Old Testament by heart, would have recognized in His response a hint at the first appearance in

the Bible of the word *image*: "In the image of God, he created him" (Genesis 1:27). Jesus' real message was, "Render to Caesar that which bears his image, and to God that which bear His." Jesus' subtle use of the word *image* in His response recalls the importance Genesis 1:27 played in the worldview of the Jewish sages. They concluded that since every human bears the image of God, each person has intrinsic value.

Render to God

One of the great proponents of this view was the first century B.C. sage, Hillel. He once took leave of his disciples to bathe in the bathhouse. They inquired where he was going, to which he replied, "to perform a mitzvah (a religious commandment)." Hillel's disciples questioned him how bathing performed a religious act. Hillel responded, "If the man appointed to the duty of securing and rinsing the statues of the king set up in the theaters and circuses is for that paid by maintenance, and, in addition, he is one of the government officials — how much more I, who have been created in the divine image and likeness, have a duty to care for my body" (*Leviticus Rabbah* 34:3).

The irony of Hillel's response underscores his fundamental assumption of the intrinsic value of every person because each person bears God's image. Because of this, Hillel concluded that the summary of all the commandments was the verse, "You shall love your neighbor who is like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; b. *Shabbat* 31a; cf. Matthew 22:39,40; Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

Because we all descend from Adam and therefore all bear the image of God, Jesus and the sages conclude that each person has a moral responsibility to his neighbor: "Therefore but a single man was created in the world, to teach that if any man has caused a single soul to perish Scripture imputes it to him as though he had caused a whole world to perish; and if any man saves alive a single soul Scripture imputes it to him as though he had saved alive a whole world ... for man stamps many coins with the one seal and they are all like one another; but the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be he, has stamped every man with the seal of the first man" (*m. Sanhedrin* 4:5; cf. Luke 6:9).

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

This conviction led to the corollary idea that in the way I treat another, who is like myself, God will act toward me: "Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does anyone harbor anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord? If one has no mercy toward another like himself, can he then seek pardon for his own sins? If a mere mortal harbors wrath, who will make an atoning sacrifice for his sins? ... Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbor, remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults" (Ben Sira 28: 2–5, 7; cf. Matthew 5:7; 6:14,15; 7:1,2).

Because every person bears the image of God, shedding of blood, even of the wicked, diminishes the divine image: "This tells that if one sheds blood it is accounted to him as though he diminished the divine image. To give a parable: A king of flesh and blood entered a province and the people set up portraits of him, made images of him, and struck coins in his honor. Later on they upset his portraits, broke his images, and defaced his coins, thus diminishing the likeness of the king. So also if one sheds blood it is accounted to him as though he had diminished the divine image" (*Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* to Exodus 20:13).


iStockphoto

When we read the words of Jesus within their historical and cultural contexts, we can also grasp Jesus' profound message.

The Zealots sought to advance God's reign through violence and shedding blood. The sages responded to the worldview of the Zealots stating that only through repentance and obedience to God's will (Matthew 6:10) can His reign be established.

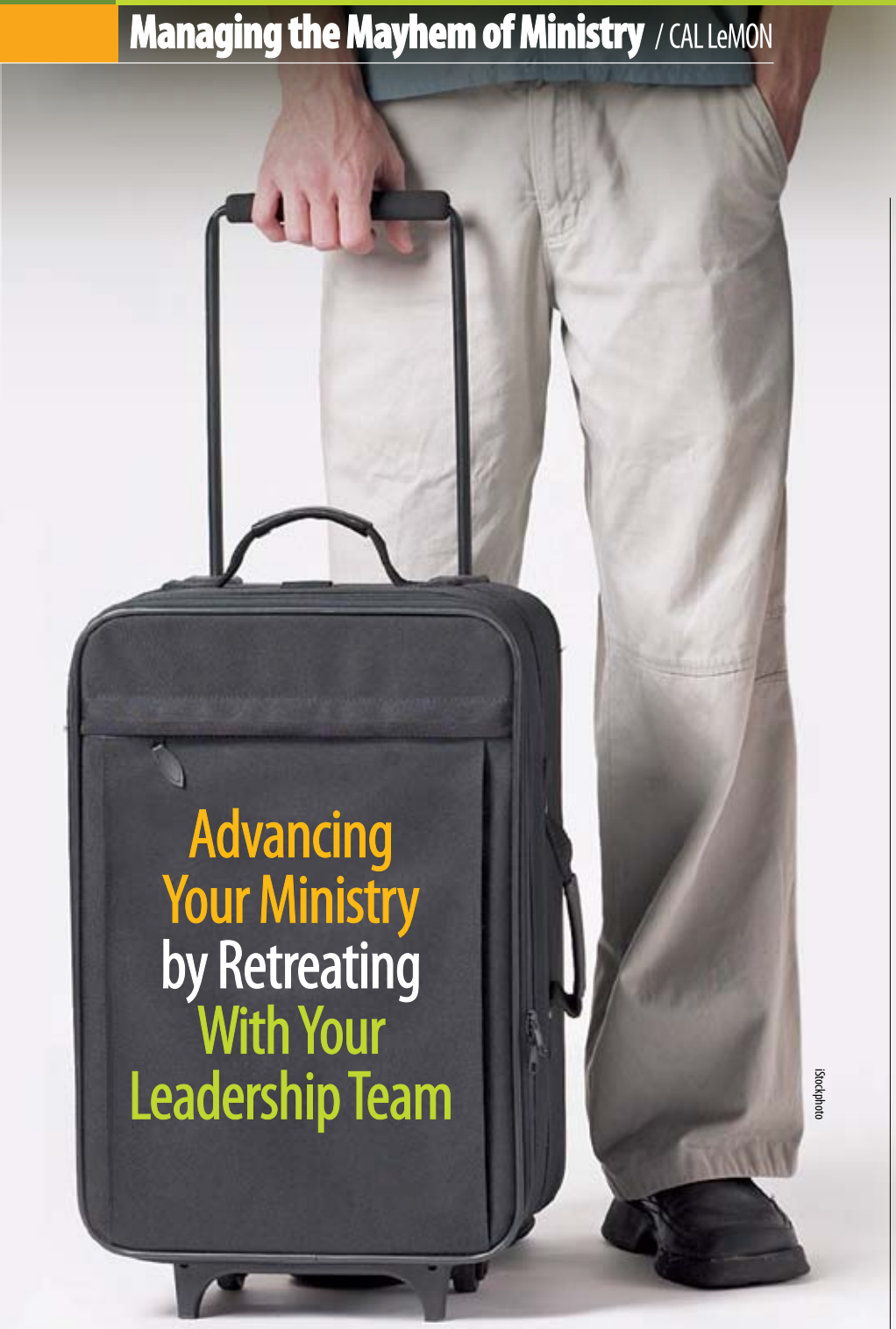
During the First Jewish Revolt, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai saw the daughter of Nicodemus (John 3:1) plucking grains of barley from the dung of an Arab donkey. He mourned, "As long as Israel does the will of God, no nation or kingdom shall rule over it. But if they are not doing the will of God he will deliver them into the hand of the lowest nation and not only this, but under the legs of the beast of the lowest nation" (*Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* to Exodus 19:1). Only by obeying the will of God could Israel remove from itself the yoke of foreign oppression: "Everyone who takes upon himself the yoke of the Torah removes from himself the yoke of the government and daily sorrows, but whoever removes the yoke of the Torah will be burdened with the yoke of government and daily sorrows" (*m. Avot* 3:6; cf. Matthew 11:28–30). In seeking to forcibly bring about the kingdom of God, the Zealots cast off the yoke of heaven: "The rulers of the cities of Judah, who have put off the yoke of Heaven and assumed the yoke of the kingdom of flesh and blood" (*Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* version A, 20).

Conclusion

Like His contemporaries, Jesus identified with the Jewish hopes of redemption, and added His voice to those calling on the people to repent and obediently submit to the will of God: This was the path to redemption (cf. Matthew 5:21; 11:28–30; Luke 11:27,28; 19:41,42; 22:24–27). Jesus' rejoinder, "Render to Caesar that which bears his image, and to God that which bears His," challenged those who sought to establish God's reign with the sword, a kingdom of "flesh and blood." His creative genius called on His hearers to recognize the value of every person because each bears the image of God.

Jesus' audience grasped His direct challenge. Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet, nor a pacifist; rather, He viewed the repentance of the people as an active catalyst that would move God to bring forth redemption: "Great is repentance, for it brings redemption near" (*b. Yoma* 88b). I wonder how different our world would look if we embodied Jesus' message today.

MARC TURNAGE, director, Center for Holy Lands Studies for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri



Advancing Your Ministry by Retreating With Your Leadership Team

iStockphoto

A retreat can be a lot of work with minimal, lasting results. Sometimes only the memories of dive-bombing mosquitoes, evangelistic poison ivy, and sleep deprivation survive.

To be honest, the retreat format has become an organizational hula-hoop. The time demands of the two wage-earner family along with the constant intrusion of buzzing and tweeting communications channels have dampened enthusiasm to get away. After all, who has time to get away when you do not have time to get to your next appointment?

But, we are Kingdom people who have heard the beat of a different drummer. And, the Drummer often retreated to the wilderness. This biblical motif of following Christ into nothingness to rediscover significance is still valid. I am convinced the wilderness experience has immense spiritual benefit, but the practice does need revision.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

The Wilderness Welcome Wagon

Here are five suggestions on how to update a retreat experience and put out the Wilderness Welcome Wagon for your leadership team. These are the best practices I have observed and implemented over the past 20 years in a corporate environment.

First, at your next regularly scheduled organizational meeting with your leadership team ask, "What do we gain as a leadership team in a retreat setting that we cannot achieve in our regular sessions?" The answer to that question will determine if reading the rest of this column is a good use of your time.

If the majority of your leadership team views a leadership retreat as a value-added feature of serving this ministry, but not essential, you may want to place the brochures of log cabins nestled in the middle of primeval forests into the circular file next to your desk. To drag or cajole a group of leaders 60 miles to sit in a conference room (with a marvelous view) and do what they always do is a poor use of time and talent.

Second, once there is unanimity about the value of retreating, make a group decision about frequency and projected calendar dates. Will your leadership team commit to one, two, or more retreats every 12 months? It is important that the leadership team, collectively, make this decision because buyer's regret may become a reality. When the team realizes it is retreat time again, they may ask, "Who decided we have time for this?"

The calendar planning, in my opinion, is the most significant issue because the retreat date(s) will impinge on personal and family agendas. You will hear, "Sorry, that date is our family's annual hiking trip in Utah." Or, "That is my wedding anniversary and there is no way I will be given a gift of grace at home if I trek off with you folks."

When everyone can agree to one date, this box on the annual calendar needs to remain inviolate. This is the only logical and equitable method to protect the integrity of the retreat in the future.

Communion and Creature Comfort

Third, attend to the creature comfort needs of your leadership team. We have all attended a retreat when the perspiration dripping off the

end of one's nose, the full frontal attack of some diabolical stinging insects, or a malfunctioning bathroom fixture became the predominant concern. Creative thinking, focused prayer, or fellowship with each other will come in a very poor second to suffering from some undefined intestinal malady or the pain of exposed bed springs.

There is no better place than the boundary-less atmosphere of a retreat for God to dip His brush into the palate of His Spirit and then splash minds with iridescent solutions.

This is not an appeal to schedule your next retreat at Atlantis Resort Bahamas. At the same time, if you ignore meeting the first two needs in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (hygiene and safety), self-actualization — or healthy spirituality in our parlance — will always be an unanswered prayer request.

Planned Spontaneity

Fourth, develop a detailed schedule for the day(s) you will spend together. I am convinced we ultimately exemplify our stewardship of people who share a common ministry with us in how we honor their time. If I have surrendered a Friday evening and all day Saturday to retreat with you and discover you function with the adage, "make it up as we go," I will be frustrated, angry, and probably a no-show at the next spiritual outward-bound event.

As people of the Spirit, we are comfortable with spiritual intuition. At the same time, this theological and pragmatic truth does not excuse indolence. Frankly, for those designing the content of a retreat, this venue demands hard work that should result in planned spontaneity.

There should be four components to a leadership retreat for a faith community: (1) determining the strategic direction for the ministry's future, (2) problem solving repetitive challenges, (3) providing skill development for leaders, and (4) encouraging a renewed personal devotional life which results in vibrant, shared worship. Here is more detail about these components.

Strategic thinking carefully reviews the realities of the present and then projects what the priorities of the ministry will be in 2, 5, and 10 years. To define this future, spiritual leadership has to research and then carefully define the "emerging congregation." In other words, the consumers of the unchangeable gospel will change. Is the ministry preparing to get in front of the constantly morphing new seeker of God's truth and presence?

Undoubtedly, the participants at a retreat will also have to admit to the tyranny of the present. This tyranny includes the systems, programs, and people who consistently are present, but are resistant to building the Kingdom. There is no better place than the boundary-less atmosphere of a retreat for God to dip His brush into the palate of His Spirit and then splash minds with iridescent solutions.

Another way to take advantage of a retreat setting is to provide leadership-development skills. Do the leaders in your ministry need to learn the skills of active listening, how to frame words in uncomfortable conversations, the merits of asking questions instead of just making declaratory statements, the skills to take the initiative in moments of indecision? The list goes on.

The final residue of any leadership retreat should be personal, spiritual renewal. A word of caution: We can use the scheduling of the four components just described as a great excuse to explain why there was "just not enough time" for what Henri J.M. Nouwen (*The Way of the Heart*) calls "the ministry of silence." We can assume because we are retreating with a spiritual community, we have accomplished the spiritual by just showing up.

Identifying the Deliverables of the Divine

The fifth and final suggestion guarantees the longevity of the retreat. Before you pack your bags, grab your insect repellant, and stuff your favorite pillow under your arm for your trek into timber and theocracy, ask, "How will we capture and then implement the insights, strategic plans, creative solutions, and refreshed spirits when we arrive back home?"

My experience is that corporate institutions have a lot to teach the church about finding the "legs" in a retreat. A for-profit company will not keep writing a check for an event that does not promise "deliverables." There has to be some tangible result that pays for the absence of time and talent in the workplace. So, here are four definitive methodologies to guarantee the retreat remains alive and well in your ministry.

First, in substantive discussions resulting in organizational change, you must assign sponsors who will commit to stitch this initiative into the fabric of your ministry. This means there is never a new initiative that leaves the retreat center without a participant's name glued to it.

Second, when you birth creative ideas in the purity of the wilderness experience, your group needs to mentally sift these ideas at that moment. You need to leave with a gutsy, "ready-or-not-here-we-come" application. If the result of the retreat was, "You know, we had some really great ideas," but no one can remember any of them, then you need a creative method to retrieve your creativity.

Third, report the results of the retreat to your ministry. Most adherents in your spiritual community will know the leadership team was retreating last week. What they really want to know is how are these leaders transformed people and what does their transformation mean for our future? They are looking for the return on their investment.

Finally, consistently ask the alumni of the wilderness, "What has the Holy Spirit taught us?" Our Lord, with great consistency, would ask His ragtag team of 12 to leave the throngs and follow Him into the nothingness of Middle Eastern hills. In the quietude, with its absence of the pleading voices and outstretched hands, He renewed His mission and His spirit.

The gospel is always advanced when we retreat to hear His voice . . . again.

CAL LeMON, D.Min., is president of Executive Enrichment, Inc., Springfield, Missouri, a corporate education and consulting firm.

Removing the "I" From Team: How To Tear Down Silos That Separate Your Team

Every football team is composed of three different units: the offense, the defense, and special teams. To win a championship, these units must work well separately and together.

I watched a game where a special teams member did not fight for extra yardage on a punt return. Instead, he ran out of bounds to avoid being hit. A few plays later, the quarterback was shellacked trying to eke out a few more yards on third down to get into field goal range. The commentator mentioned how often this scenario happens: A special teams player does not value how difficult it is for the offense to move the ball even a few yards under certain game conditions. In no uncertain terms, the commentator (a former offensive lineman) explained how the special teams unit put the win in jeopardy with that one play.

A football team may have three separate units, but it must function as one team to win championships. Going a step further, we can expand the team from the players on the field to include the coaches who call the plays and the front office that negotiates salaries, makes draft picks, hires and fires coaches, and builds the roster.

How many times have we watched a team implode to the point where the players call a "players' only" meeting, managers are not talking to general managers, and quarterbacks refuse to comment on the coaches' play calling?

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Once a silo mentality is in place, a team tends to compartmentalize into its own subgroups, further hindering the ability of the team to win. Instead of fighting for the team, the offense bickers with the defense, the front office fights the coaching staff, and the parts of the team look out for themselves instead of the team as a whole.

This does not just happen to sports teams — it happens in the academic and business world as well. The faculty can be at odds with the administration; the advancement team is working against the maintenance team; marketing is pushing the supply chain to the end of their limits; and management is distrustful of the people on the line. This type of mentality creates silos.

Farmers use silos to store grain. The silo, usually above ground and cylindrical in shape, keeps the grain in and the elements out. The military stores missiles in underground silos. The principle is the same. The missile stays in and everything else stays out.

In the church, people can easily create silos. Men's ministry, women's ministry, youth ministry, and children's ministry can function in their own silos. There can be an incredible amount of activity and even accomplishment in the silo, but there is no coordination between these ministries. The same can be true of the board and staff — each can operate in its own silo, not respecting or understanding the work of the other.

Silos can even exist in the worship service. How many times has a pastor needed to referee between the audio team who wants to get the house balanced just right and the singers who constantly need more voice in the monitor. This one is fraught with trouble because audio volunteers tend to be engineers and musicians tend toward the creative side — making communication even more difficult.

The result of silos is an "us against them" mentality on your team. The team winds up fighting each other for space in the worship folder, time with the lead pastor, and money in the budget. As leader, how do you tear down silos and get your team to work together?

Develop a Common Vision

A common vision is a single focus that the entire leadership team shares. When a silo mentality pervades the team, leaders need to develop an overarching and common vision that brings everyone on the leadership team together around a common purpose.

Many resources are available to help the leader

and team develop a common vision for the future of the church. Two of the best are: *Masterplanning* by Bobb Biehl, and *Advanced Strategic Planning* by Aubrey Malphurs. The key is for the entire leadership team to have input and buy into the process of developing the common vision for the organization.

Vision answers the "why" questions: Why is it important for ushers and greeters to be well trained? Why does the media team need to better connect with the worship team? Why do the pastoral staff and the deacon board need to understand their roles and purposes? The answer: We are all working toward a common vision, rather than a vision of each department working independently toward its own goals and vision.

Establish Clear Objectives

The vision determines the direction for the team to travel, but clear objectives describe the way forward toward that destination. Clear objectives, or goals, give the team the context of action. These are the building blocks that clarify how to move forward toward the vision.

These objectives need to be both qualitative and shared by the team. For example, at Bethel, part of our vision is to reshape the future by passing the baton of faith to a new generation. To do that, we established several clear objectives that the entire team understands. These objectives must be measurable.

Some of these goals included renovating our children's center, launching a new Wednesday night children's program, and recruiting 25 percent more workers for children's ministry.

The result of silos is an "us against them" mentality.

If the vision answers the "why" questions, then the objectives answer the "what" questions. What are we going to do to move forward? What are our next steps as a team?

Cultivate Respect for Different Roles

When a silo mentality is in place, the members of the team usually lack respect for the roles and responsibilities of other team members. Because of this, team members make decisions that create conflict among the team. One church I worked with lacked a respect for the roles of different departments. As a result, the adult ministries department scheduled events and lengthened services with no regard to the consequences to the children's ministry.

Insist that your team develop and review event-planning guides together. Create opportunities for team members to share experiences at retreats and other out-of-office events. Develop cross-departmental teams allowing the team to cultivate respect for each other's role. It answers the questions of who we are and what we need from each other.

Demand Constant Communication

As the team leader, you must demand constant communication among team members. While all of us bemoan the endless meetings that produce little result, meetings, memorandums, event planning guides, and digital applications like Dropbox, Basecamp, or Huddle can help your team in their ongoing communication with each other.

Speak a Shared Language

If you can give language to something, then you can steward it. Even beginning to describe the silos in your ministry allows you to begin talking about the issues using a common language. The language of the vision enables the team to mentor and monitor each other. For example, one of the things we talk about at Bethel is reaching people under 40 while keeping people over 60. That common language helps us make decisions as we plan our services and ministries.

Too often each department has a language of its own. To bring the team together, the leader needs to teach the team a common language.

Make Symbolic Moves

Here is an example of a move we made within our organization to remove a silo and symbolize unity. The offices of Bethel College were located on the same property as Bethel Temple, but in a different building from the main church offices. That separation symbolized a silo that had infiltrated our organization. To combat the silo, we moved the offices of the college into the main church office building. That move symbolized the idea that we are all part of one organization.

It takes time and energy, but when the leader enables the team to tear down silos and begin working together for a common vision, the church moves from an incredible amount of disparate activity to a common thrust forward in mission and purpose.

"Your humble views on money and the church impressed us so much we've decided to let *you* pay *us* to work here."

GLENN REYNOLDS is lead pastor of Bethel Temple (Assemblies of God), Hampton, Virginia. He is a doctor of ministry candidate at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, where his degree concentration is redemptive leadership and organizational development.

iStockphoto

Tear Down This Wall: Are You Preaching "Performance" Instead of "Promises"?

The Berlin Wall

The year was 1987. He stood larger than life at Brandenburg Gate. He said, "Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Within 2 years of President Ronald Reagan's bold declaration, the Revolution of 1989 brought about the collapse of the Berlin Wall. A reunited Germany soon followed. In many ways, this finally severed the Goliath head of Hitler's lingering ghost.

Looking down from well above the earth's atmosphere, the human eye can trace a thin vein coursing through the nation of China. That vein is the Great Wall of China, which is roughly 4,154 miles long — greater than the distance between Miami and Seattle.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

I'm on a quest to understand how walls get built and why they last — not so I can build one, but so I can destroy one.

Walls of all kinds exist. Racism walls and denominational walls are just two of the walls I am surveying. But one wall seems to stand above the rest when it comes to division and separation.

This wall excludes and condemns like no other. It is the "Great Wall of Legalism." I am convinced God can see it coursing through the body of Christ from His vantage point in heaven.

The foundation for all legalism and false religion is competitive fear as opposed to servant love.

Raised my whole life in the church, I have danced between the world of authentic biblical holiness and a world of prescribed human restrictions. I am chronicling the characteristics of that world.

You will not find the term *legalism*, or *legalist* specifically mentioned in the Scriptures. But Jesus and Paul clearly denounce the idea. They use terms such as *dogs* and *the circumcised* to describe the harsh opposition of legalism to the kingdom of God. *Pharisee, religion,* and *traditions of men* are a few more terms Jesus uses to define this tormentor of grace.

Legalism, in its basic form, is the art of mixing personal achievement and unconditional acceptance into a single belief system. When you

discover the nature of grace, you realize this is an impossible proposition.

The foundation for all legalism and false religion is competitive fear as opposed to servant love — the basis for the kingdom of God. I now realize that not becoming something will only motivate my behavior for so long. I must gain a vision for what God wants me to become if I am going to thrive over the long haul in faith and leadership. Legalism as a way of life is problematic because it focuses on avoiding failure and not on the pursuit of joy.

Our pursuit as leaders and believers is not to keep from failure, but to enjoy and enter into the life God has for us. In Christ we are dead to sin, but it must become more than a message of death. We are alive to God. Pastors and teachers cannot continue presenting a *performance-based* message but expecting the kind of miracles and sacrificial love that only a *promise-based* community can produce.

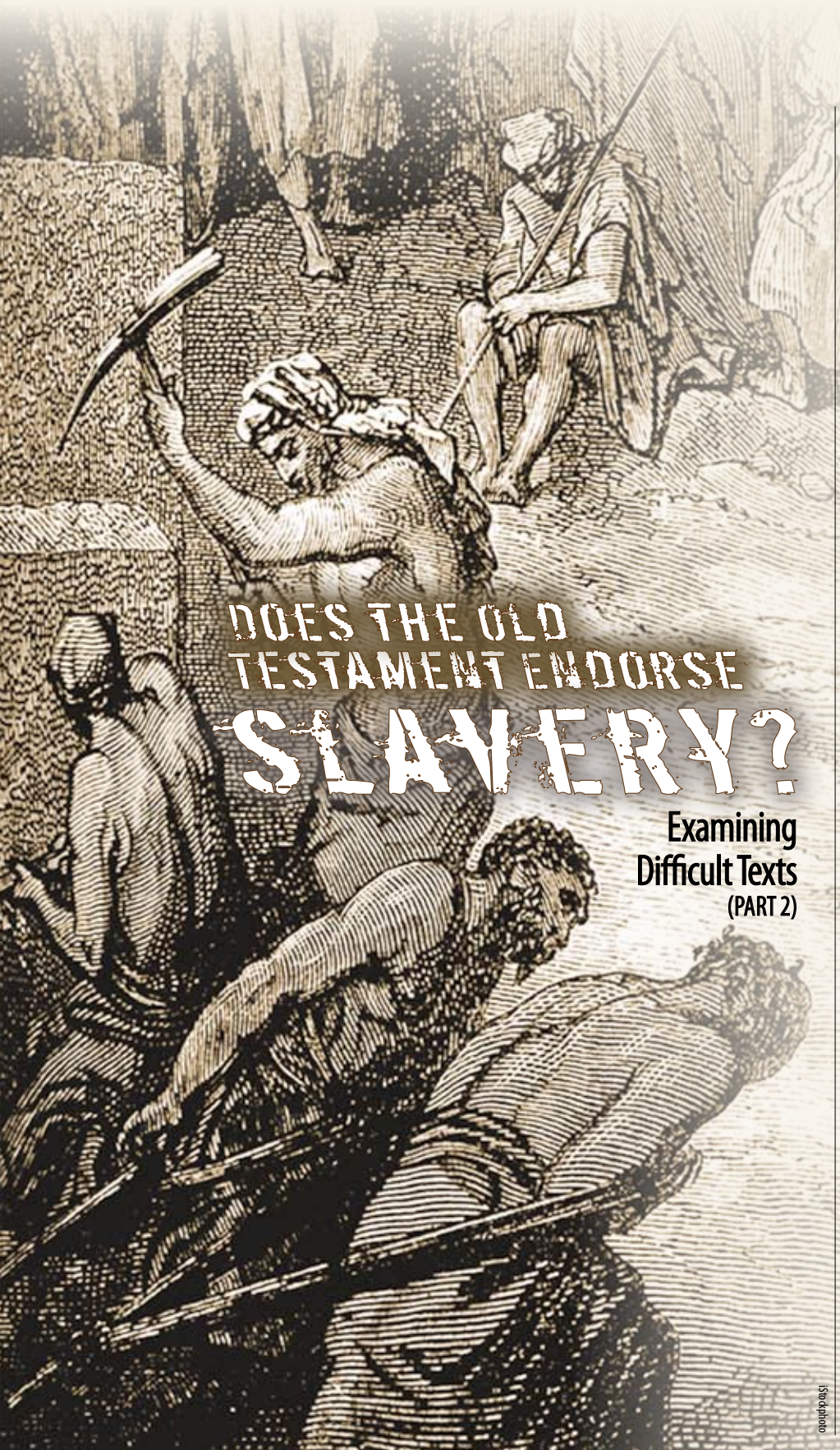
Holiness to the legalist is the result of separating from a world he considers fallen and dirty. Holiness for the Kingdom child is entirely the opposite. It comes from his attachment to God that is holy. It is the goodness and virtue of God that is creating the transformation in our lives, not the mere absence of evil. Legalism sees evil as its focus. The Kingdom keeps love as the goal.

There are a myriad of contrasts between the religion of man and the kingdom of God. Here are a few that top my list:

- Years of service are more valuable than grace to a legalist.
- A legalist views repetitious behaviors and faithfulness as equal.
- A legalist pursues form without substance.
- A legalist cannot stand delayed rewards from an invisible God; his performance of deeds must have an immediate audience.
- Legalism uses the fear of rejection as the control tool; the Kingdom motivates people with the hope of a coming reward.
- Legalism tries to mandate attitudes; the Kingdom produces new attitudes.

The Holy Spirit seems to be saying to the church what Ronald Reagan said to Gorbachev that pivotal day in 1987. It is time once and for all to "tear down that wall" and to start living as free people — people who have experienced the freedom of Christ and who can proclaim that freedom to others.

SCOTT HAGAN is senior pastor, Mars Hill Community Church of the Assemblies of God, Sacramento, California.



DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT ENDORSE SLAVERY?

Examining Difficult Texts (PART 2)

istockphoto

In "Does the Old Testament Endorse Slavery? An Overview" (*Enrichment* journal, Spring 2011), I discussed the general nature of Old Testament servitude. In this essay, I examine three of the most challenging Old Testament servitude texts. For a more in-depth treatment, see my book, *Is God a Moral Monster?*

Beating Slaves to Death?

"If a man strikes his male servant or his female servant with a staff so that he or she dies as a result of the blow, he will surely be punished [*naqam*]. However, if the injured servant survives one or two days, the owner will not be punished [*naqam*], for he has suffered the loss" (Exodus 21:20,21, NET[1]).

Is the servant here merely property? The Old Testament affirms each person's full dignity (e.g., Genesis 1:26,27; Deuteronomy 15:1–18; Job 31:13–15). Exodus 21:20,21 proves no exception. If the servant died after "one or two days," the Law gave the master the benefit of the doubt that he had no murderous intent. But if the master's striking his servant caused immediate death, the courts would charge the master with capital punishment: "He shall be avenged" (ESV[2]). The verb *naqam* always involves the death penalty.[3]

This theme reinforces the "life for life" theme (21:23,24), which follows this servant-beating passage. The master was to not treat his servant as property, but as a dignified human being.

Leaving Wife and Children Behind?

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years, but in the seventh year he will go out free without paying anything. If he came in by himself he will go out by himself; if he had a wife when he came in, then his wife will go out with him. If his master gave him a wife, and she bore sons or daughters, the wife and the children will belong to her master, and he will go out by himself. But if the servant should declare, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master must bring him to the judges, and he will bring him to the door or the doorposts, and his master will pierce his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him forever" (Exodus 21:2–6, NET).

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

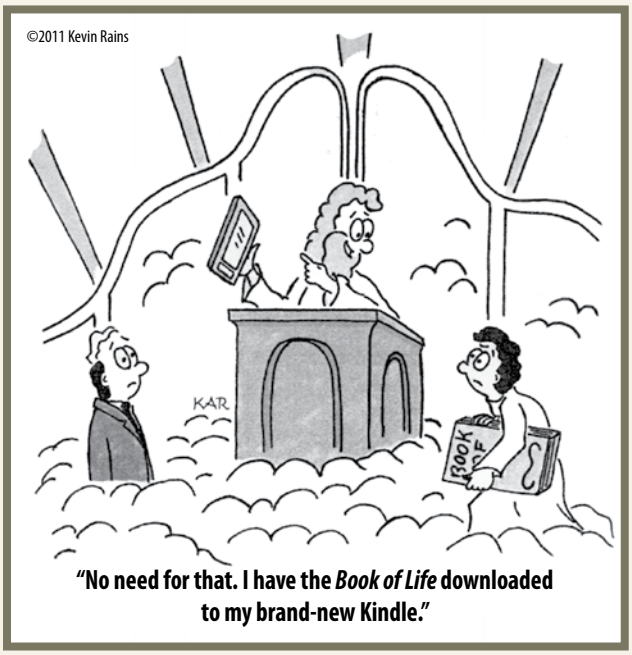
In my spring 2011 article, I noted that, out of desperation, a man might hire out temporarily ("sell") his wife, children, or even

himself to help get the family out of debt — a *voluntary* servitude, quite unlike antebellum slavery. The man, wife, and children would have a roof over their heads with food and clothing supplied by the employer ("master"). As for this particular law in Exodus 21:2–6, some critics complain that a woman and children are disadvantaged — even trapped. To them, since the man gets to go free, this reflects an antiwoman, antichild bias — or it traps the man into staying with the master if he marries a fellow servant woman.

Three responses are in order:

First, we have good reason to think this passage is not gender specific. This is an example of case law ("if such-and-such a scenario arises, then this is how to proceed"). Case law was typically gender-neutral. Furthermore, Israelite judges were quite capable of applying laws to male and female alike. An impoverished woman, whose father did not give her as a prospective wife to a (widowed or divorced) man or his son (Exodus 21:7–11), could perform standard household tasks,[4] and she could go free by this same law.[5]

Various scholars suggest this legitimate, alternate reading: "If you buy a Hebrew servant, *she* is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, *she* will go out free. . . . If *her* master *gives her a husband,* and they have sons or daughters, *the husband and the children will belong to her master, and she will go out by herself."* This reading makes perfect sense, and does not violate the law's spirit.



"No need for that. I have the *Book of Life* downloaded to my brand-new Kindle."

Westerners should not impose modern solutions on difficult ancient problems; rather, we need to better grasp the nature of Israelite servitude and the social and economic circumstances surrounding it.

Second, this scenario is not as harsh as it first appears. Let us stick with a *male* servant scenario. In this case, the employer arranges for a marriage between this unmarried male servant and a female servant. (In debt servitude, the employer's family could engage in marriage negotiations.) By taking the male servant into his home to work off a debt, the boss has made an investment. *He would stand to suffer loss if the servant walked out on the contract.* In military service, even if a soldier marries, he cannot simply walk away because he still owes the military his time. So it would not make sense to let the man go with his family without paying off the debt.

Third, the released man has three options: *(a) He could wait for his wife and kids to finish their term of service while he worked elsewhere.* His wife and kids were not "stuck" in the employer's home the rest of their lives. They could be released when the wife worked off her debt. Yet, if the newly freed man worked elsewhere, he would have been separated from his family, and his boss would no longer supply him with food, clothing, and shelter. On the other hand, if he lived *with* his family after release, he would still need to pay room and board. So this scenario created its own set of financial challenges.

(b) He could get a decent job elsewhere and save his shekels to pay his boss to release his wife and kids from contractual obligations. The problem is that it would have been very difficult for the man to support himself *and* to earn enough money for his family's debt-release.

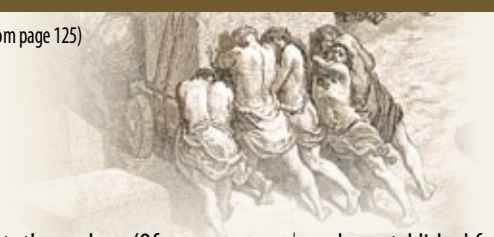
(c) He could commit himself to working permanently for his employer — a lifetime contract (verses 5,6). He could stay with his family and remain in fairly stable economic circumstances, formalizing his intent in a legal ceremony before the judges ("God") by having his ear pierced with an awl.

Westerners should not impose modern solutions on difficult ancient problems; rather, we need to better grasp the nature of Israelite servitude and the social and economic circumstances surrounding it. We are talking about *voluntary* servitude in unfortunate circumstances during bleak economic times. Israel's laws provided safety nets for *protection*, not oppression.

Owning Foreign Slaves?

"[Israelites] are not to be sold in a slave sale. . . . As for your male and female slaves whom you may have — you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves" (Leviticus 25:42–46, NASB[6]).

This text troubles many, but consider the following points. First, according to Leviticus 19:33,34, Israel was to love the stranger in the land. Also,



Exodus' laws (Exodus 21:20,21,26,27) protect *all* persons in service to others — not just Jews — from abuse.[7]

Second, the verb acquire *[qanah]* in Leviticus 25:39–51 need not involve selling or purchasing foreign servants as property. This verb appears in Genesis 4:1 (Eve's having "*gotten* a manchild," KJV); and 14:19 (God as "*possessor* of heaven and earth," KJV);[8] and Boaz "acquired" Ruth as a wife (Ruth 4:10) — clearly a full partner and not inferior.

Third, the "aliens" in servitude (Leviticus 25:45) are the same ones capable of sufficient "means" to purchase their own freedom (verse 47). They were not inevitably stuck in lifelong servitude. The text continues: "if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient" (verse 47). The terms *stranger (ger)* and *sojourner (toshab)* are connected to the terms used in verse 45. That is, these "acquired" foreign servants could potentially better themselves to the point of hiring servants themselves. (Of course, an alien's hiring an Israelite servant was prohibited.) In principle, *all* persons in servitude within Israel could be released, unless they had committed a crime.[9]

Israel's laws provided safety nets for protection, not oppression.

Fourth, in some cases, foreign servants could become elevated and apparently fully equal to Israelite citizens. For instance, Caleb's descendant — Sheshan's daugher — ended up marrying an Egyptian servant: "Now Sheshan had no sons, only daughters. And Sheshan had an Egyptian servant whose name was Jarha. Sheshan gave his daughter to Jarha his servant in marriage, and she bore him Atta" (1 Chronicles 2:34,35, NASB). Here we have marriage between a *foreign* servant and an established *free*person with quite a pedigree. The key implication is that *inheritance rights* would fall to the servant's offspring, Atta.

Fifth, God required Israel to give foreign runaway slaves protection within Israel's borders and not let them be returned to their harsh masters (Deuteronomy 23:15,16); kidnapping slaves was also prohibited (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7). Thus, we need to understand Leviticus 25 with these general humanizing protections in mind.

Sixth, since non-Israelites were not to acquire land in Israel, homeless and landless foreigners would not have much choice but to attach themselves to Israelite households as servants, which might have been the only alternative possible

— and not necessarily a bad alternative. John Goldingay writes: "Perhaps many people would be reasonably happy to settle for being long-term or lifelong servants. Servants do count as part of the family." He adds: "One can even imagine people who started off as debt servants volunteering to become permanent servants because they love their master and his household" (cp. Deuteronomy 15:16,17).[10]

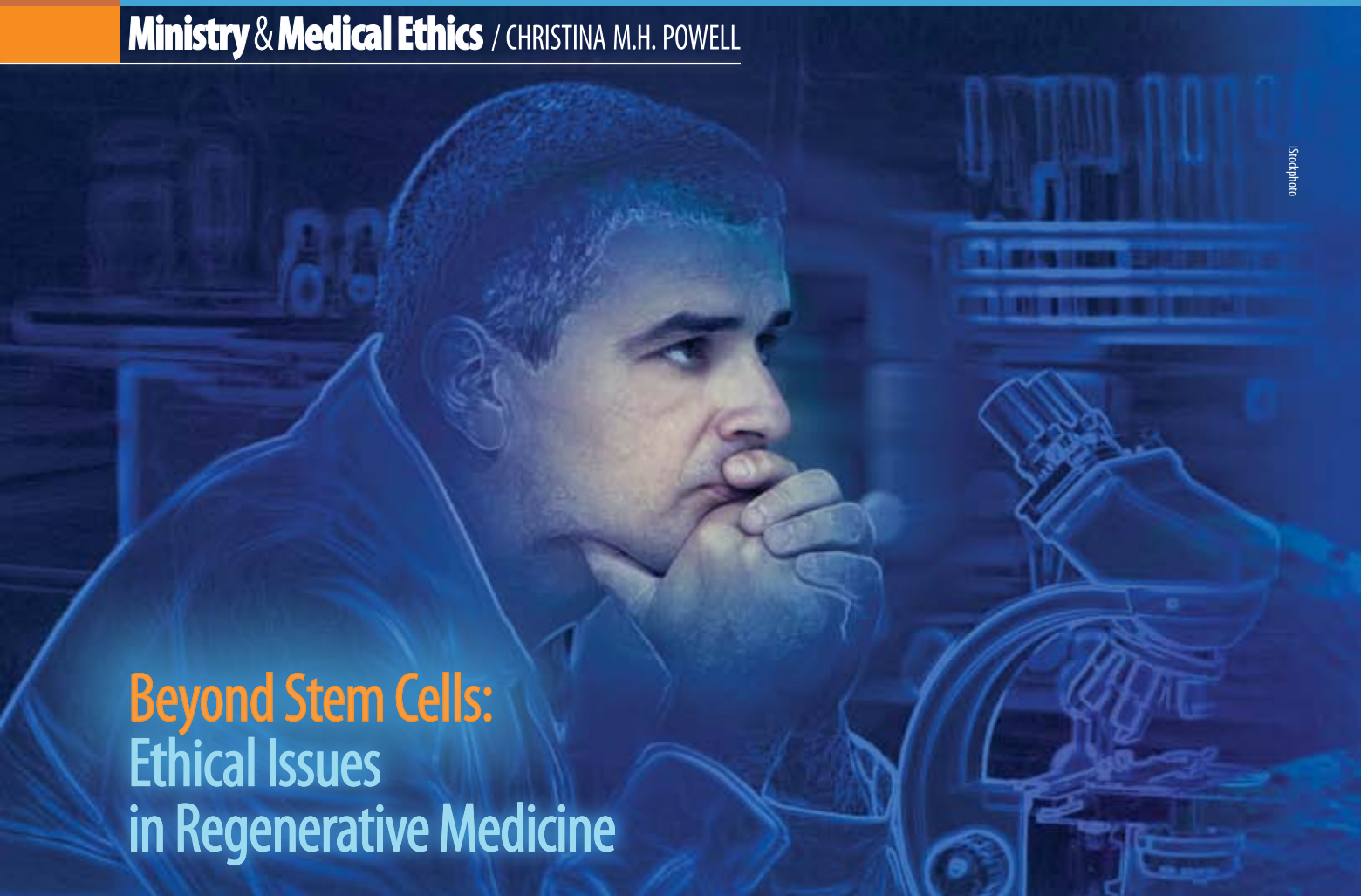
Seventh, various scholars see the "Hebrew" servant of Exodus 21:2 as a foreigner without political allegiances who has come to Israel. Note that he was not locked in to lifelong servitude (unless he chose this); he had to be released in the seventh year — presumably to go back to his country of origin.

These, then, are some of the sticky Old Testament servitude passages, and reasoned explanations for them. In the next issue of *Enrichment*, I will look at slavery in the New Testament.

PAUL COPAN, Ph.D., West Palm Beach, Florida, is professor and Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Florida. He is author and editor of a number of books, including *When God Goes to Starbucks, True for You, But Not for Me, That's Just Your Interpretation,* and *Creation Out of Nothing.* He is also president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society.

NOTES

1. Scripture quotations marked NET are taken from New English Translation [computer file]: NET Bible. — electronic edition. — Dallas, Texas: Biblical Studies Press, 1998. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
2. Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3. Gregory C. Chirichigno, "Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *JSOT Supplement Series* 141 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1993), 155–63.
4. This passage incorrectly implies polygamy or concubinage. The daughter was to be married either to the master (who was divorced or widowed) or to the master's marriageable son — not as a backup wife to provide offspring. We are already told in verse 8 that the man does not choose to take the servant woman as his wife. In that case, we should understand verse 10 to mean that he marries another instead of the servant woman. Also, verse 11 is sometimes misleadingly translated "conjugal rights"; it more likely means "oil" or "shelter/protection." On this, see chapter 11 in Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*
5. Chirichigno, Chapter 6.
6. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.Lockman.org).
7. Roy Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, *NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 441–2.
8. Goldingay, *Israel's Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009), 464 and note.
9. Walter C. Kaiser, "A Principlizing Model," in *Four Views of Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology,* eds. Stanley N. Gundry and Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 40.
10. Ibid., 465–6.



iStockphoto

Beyond Stem Cells: Ethical Issues in Regenerative Medicine

In the days ahead, pastors will need to help parishioners with serious medical needs navigate the uncharted territory between future promise and current reality.

Ask most pastors what ethical issues arise in regenerative medicine and you most likely will hear "stem cells." Stem cell research commandeers the lion's share of ethical attention because isolation of one type of stem cell involves the destruction of human embryos — the earliest stage of human life. These embryonic stem cells retain the flexibility to become any one of the more than 200 cell types in the human body. Thus, scientists prize embryonic stem cells as valuable research tools useful in finding treatments for diseases.

Isolation of two other types of stem cells, however, does not require destruction of human embryos: somatic stem cells (taken from adult tissues), and induced pluripotent stem cells (adult cells, such as skin cells, genetically reprogrammed to behave like embryonic stem cells). Some techniques in regenerative medicine, such as growing a new organ in the laboratory from a patient's cells, do not involve stem cells at all. Thus, the field of regenerative medicine encompasses more than the embryonic stem cell controversy.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

Without minimizing the importance of the embryonic stem cell controversy, I would like to highlight other ethical issues in regenerative medicine particularly relevant to pastoral ministry. In the days ahead, pastors will need to help parishioners with serious medical needs navigate the uncharted territory between future promise and current reality.

Regenerative medicine is medicine's latest frontier. As with any frontier, risks and uncertainty coexist with the potential for great reward. Patients faced with difficult decisions will appreciate the support of knowledgeable pastors.

Understanding the Salamander

If regenerative medicine had a mascot, the animal of choice would be the salamander. No other animal with a backbone can regenerate a lost limb. Yet the salamander can regenerate a lost leg or tail in just weeks. Recently, researchers discovered that salamanders do not convert adult cells all the way back to stem cells as originally expected. Instead, the salamander only partially reprograms cells at the site of an injury. Such a finding makes sense. One of the major problems with stem cells is their tendency to form cancerous growths. Cells that turn back the developmental clock only partially, instead of fully resetting the clock to an embryonic state, are less likely to turn cancerous.

Even though a human being does not regenerate a lost limb, regrowth of tissue regularly happens within the human body. Every 2 weeks you change your skin. Every 10 years you replace your bones. The human liver can regenerate as long as one quarter of the organ remains.

Researchers in the field of regenerative medicine hope to expand the human body's ability

to repair itself. In some cases, doctors might be able to use biologically active molecules to stimulate tissue regeneration. In other cases, doctors might take a small amount of a patient's own tissue and use it to grow a replacement organ in a laboratory. Researchers at Wake Forest University in North Carolina already have used this approach to grow new bladders for spina bifida patients.

The ability to grow organs in the laboratory from a patient's cells solves two of the current problems with organ transplantation: the risk of rejecting tissues from another person, and the shortage of available organs. Any patient needing an organ transplant could benefit from regenerative medicine. Other potential patients include injured soldiers, accident victims, and those born with congenital defects.

Regenerative medicine represents the future of medicine. Consider the treatment of a patient with kidney failure. In 1943, a Dutch physician constructed the first working dialysis machine. The next major breakthrough in treating patients with kidney failure came in 1954, when Dr. Joseph E. Murray and Dr. J. Hartwell Harrison, two surgeons in Boston, performed the first successful kidney transplant between identical twin brothers. The next logical breakthrough is growing a new kidney in the laboratory from a patient's own cells.

Regenerating Established Ethical Concerns

King Solomon wisely stated in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." In a new frontier, such as regenerative medicine, longstanding ethical issues resurface with fresh significance. The journey from exciting scientific breakthrough to routine medical procedure passes through the phases of clinical research trials. In the first stage of clinical research, Phase I trials, researchers test a new treatment on a small group of patients to evaluate if the treatment is safe and discover possible side effects.

Ethical issues arise any time patients become research subjects. Designing a clinical trial to yield the medical information needed while also protecting the rights of the patients in the trial requires careful thought. Avoiding both financial and nonfinancial conflicts of interest in human research studies is a perennial ethical challenge. New therapies arising from breakthroughs in regenerative medicine will face the same ethical concerns long established as significant for all medical research.

Certain aspects of regenerative medicine, however, make the established ethical concerns in clinical research particularly crucial in this new frontier. For example, the nature of regenerative research involves creating individualized therapies. In the typical development of a drug, researchers can apply knowledge gained from initial studies on a small group of people to the design of the next clinical study. Thus, the chances of harm to the participants in the next study decrease, while the chances of potential therapeutic benefit increase. The individualized nature of regenerative medicine makes the conclusions drawn from one study less transferrable to the next study.

Another distinctive feature of some regenerative research is the short time frame a patient may have to make a potentially irrevocable decision. For example, imagine a man in an emergency room deciding whether or not to choose an experimental protocol that may be able to fully restore the use of his injured hand. If he participates in the research study, he will forgo the standard treatment capable of partially restoring function to his hand. Should the experimental treatment fail, he could lose his hand completely. The stakes are high for the patient, who must try to think clearly in the midst of medical trauma.

Avoiding Patient Confusion

The ethical issue in regenerative research a pastor is most likely to encounter is *therapeutic misconception.* For a patient to provide informed consent, the patient must clearly understand the choice he is making. Therapeutic misconception is an ethical term for patient confusion about the nature of a clinical study.

Patients who participate in research studies often are encouraged to see themselves only as patients and not also as research subjects. Thus, patients focus on the possibilities for direct personal benefit when enrolling in a research study. The purpose of early clinical trials, however, is to determine safety and look for side effects, not to determine effectiveness. What the patient may consider therapy is truly only scientific research.

Consider all the excitement and media attention surrounding possible stem cell cures. Most uses of stem cells still qualify as research, not treatment. The hope surrounding stem cell research, which sometimes borders on hype, creates an atmosphere ripe for patient confusion. Participation in a Phase I clinical trial may be an appropriate choice for a patient willing to contribute to medical knowledge even if he himself receives little to no personal benefit. The danger to the patient, however, comes when the distinction between research and treatment is blurred, causing the patient to mistakenly choose a risky experimental protocol over an established clinical procedure.

Most uses of stem cells still qualify as research, not treatment.

What should a pastor standing by the bedside of a parishioner faced with such confusing medical choices do? In such a situation, the patient and his family need support in discerning a wise course of action. Ask them if they clearly heard the information provided by the doctor and read all consent forms completely. Make sure the patient has a realistic view of his condition and the likelihood of receiving medical benefit from his participation in a particular clinical trial. Is the patient at peace with the decision he is making or does he feel pressured to choose to participate in a study?

Of course, the importance of avoiding patient confusion about clinical trials applies to well-established medical fields such as cancer research as much as it does to the new frontier of regenerative medicine. After all, King Solomon was right in stating "there is nothing new under the sun." e

CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL, Ph.D., is an ordained Assemblies of God minister, Harvard-trained research scientist, and medical writer. She speaks in churches and conferences nationwide.

iStockphoto

Performing "Religious" Marriages

Parishioners occasionally ask their pastor to perform a "religious" marriage ceremony without complying with the legal requirements for a valid marriage prescribed by state law. There are many reasons for doing so. Consider the following examples:

- One or both spouses are undocumented aliens.
- Compliance with one or more of the civil law requirements is not possible. For example, a couple fails to obtain a license within the time prescribed by law, or one of the spouses is underage.
- A pastor is asked to perform a marriage in another state in which nonresident pastors are not authorized to perform marriages.
- A divorced spouse will lose alimony from her former husband if she remarries.
- A divorced spouse will lose insurance or other benefits in the event of remarriage.
- A couple believes their Social Security retirement benefits will be higher if they are not legally married.
- A couple regards the civil law requirements for marriage as an unnecessary nuisance, or even an unwarranted government intrusion into an essentially religious ceremony.

Whatever the reason, pastors need to understand there are several potential legal and tax consequences associated with a "religious" marriage that is not in compliance with state law. A recent case in Tennessee illustrates this point.

A couple had a "religious" marriage in their church, presided over by a church elder. However, the couple never obtained a marriage license. Instead, they testified that they obtained a "certificate" from their church documenting that they had been married. One spouse was injured in a traffic accident and her "husband" sued the other driver for "loss of consortium." The court ruled that only a married spouse can maintain a loss of consortium claim based on the death or incapacity of the other spouse. It concluded:

"As far as the law of Tennessee is concerned, without a valid license, the plaintiffs do not have a valid marriage. The Tennessee Code section on marriage 'licenses and permits' states that, 'before being joined in marriage, the parties *shall* present to the minister or officer *a license* under the hand of a county clerk in this state, directed to such minister or officer, authorizing the solemnization of a marriage between the parties. Such license shall be valid for thirty (30) days from its issuance by the clerk.' Multiple other code provisions reinforce this notion that obtaining a valid license from the county clerk is a necessary step toward a valid marriage, as it protects the State against recognizing marriages that are contrary to the public interest. . . . Plainly, in order to have a valid, recognized marriage under Tennessee law, there must be a marriage license. Here, there is no license, so there is no marriage that the state of Tennessee will recognize."

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

The couple claimed that, even if they did not have a marriage license, they believed themselves to be married, they had a marriage ceremony, they obtained a "certificate" of marriage from their church, and they had cohabited for more than 5 years. The court was not impressed:

"The plaintiffs believe in the validity of *their* marriage, but they affirmatively do not recognize the authority of the state of Tennessee to sanction or regulate the validity of their marriage. Therefore, reasonably, the plaintiffs can be viewed as 'believing in the validity of their marriage,' but also 'knowingly living together in an unmarried state.' The couple's decision not to obtain a license was a knowing choice; their deposition testimony showed that they had both been married and divorced before. . . . This plainly shows they are familiar with the formalities of marriage, including licensing."

The court stressed that this is not a case in which the parties attempted to obtain a license and there was a technical glitch, such that, in fairness, the marriage should be recognized. Rather, here the plaintiffs made the conscious choice to forego a basic requirement of a valid marriage in Tennessee. That is, of course, their choice, but nothing in fairness and equity dictates that the court should now — when it suits the couple's financial objectives to have a government-sanctioned marriage — recognize their

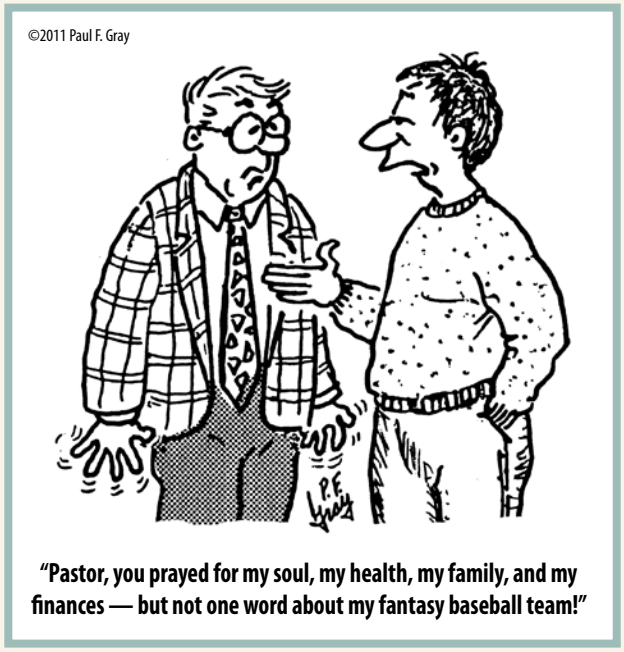
marriage as valid for purposes of this case.

There are many other possible legal and tax consequences associated with a "religious" marriage that is not in compliance with state law, including those listed below. Pastors may be subject to criminal penalties (typically a misdemeanor involving a fine or short prison sentence) under state law for performing a marriage that does not comply with state law. It is imperative for pastors to understand the possible application of such penalties before performing a religious marriage.

- As this case illustrates, a religious marriage that does not comply with civil law requirements may preclude one spouse from suing for money damages based on "loss of consortium" for injuries sustained by the other.
- In general, your tax filing status depends on whether you are considered unmarried or married. For federal tax purposes, a marriage means only a legal union between a man and a woman as husband and wife. You are considered unmarried for the whole year if, on the last day of your tax year, you are unmarried. State law governs whether you are married or legally separated under a divorce or separate maintenance decree. An unmarried couple may not file a joint tax return as a married couple. Each files an individual tax return.
- If a couple is "considered married" for the whole year, they can file a joint return or separate returns. A couple is "considered married" for the whole year if on the last day of the tax year they were living together in a common law marriage recognized in the state where they live or in the state where the common law marriage began. Only nine states currently recognize common law marriages, and in many of these states only some common law marriages are recognized.
- An unmarried person may be able to file as head of household if certain conditions are met.
- An unmarried couple cannot claim each other as an exemption on their individual tax returns.
- An unmarried couple cannot claim each other as a dependent on their individual tax returns, unless certain conditions are met.
- Unmarried persons cannot combine tax deductions, and cannot claim expenses paid by their partner.
- The phaseout for an IRA deduction begins at a lower amount of income for unmarried persons than for married persons.
- Married spouses generally avoid estate taxes upon the death of the first spouse. This is not necessarily the case with unmarried partners.
- Married spouses generally can transfer property back and forth without gift taxes due to the unlimited marital deduction. This is not the case with unmarried partners.
- If an employer provides health benefits to employees and their "domestic partners," the amount paid by the the employer is generally a tax-free fringe benefit to employees but is taxable to unmarried partners.
- An unmarried partner generally cannot receive death benefits payable as a result of the death of the other partner. There is an exception for couples who have a "common law marriage" recognized under state law. However, these marriages are recognized in only nine states, and conditions apply.
- Unmarried partners can execute wills (or other legally enforceable instruments) that leave some or all of their estate to a surviving partner. However, without a will, a deceased partner's estate that is not otherwise disposed of will be distributed according to the law of intestacy. Unmarried partners have no rights under intestacy laws. A few states have passed laws that permit domestic partners to receive a share of a deceased partner's estate.
- If an unmarried couple ends their relationship, there generally is no right of alimony or support from one former partner to the other. A few states have enacted legislation that in some circumstances permits the provision of support (sometimes called "palimony") from one former partner to the other. Conditions apply.

Pastors should not consider performing "religious marriages" without carefully considering these possible ramifications. Legal counsel can assist pastors in making an informed decision.

There are several potential legal and tax consequences associated with a "religious" marriage that is not in compliance with state law.



"Pastor, you prayed for my soul, my health, my family, and my finances — but not one word about my fantasy baseball team!"

RICHARD R. HAMMAR, LL.M, CPA, is legal counsel for The General Council of the Assemblies of God.

I Have Trouble Dealing With My Husband's *Unrealistic Expectations*

iStockphoto

Q. I have been a pastor's wife for 15 years. I always said I would never marry a minister. Once I made my decision, however, I have done my best to be a good pastor's wife. I am not an up-front person, but I have tried to support my husband while helping out where I can at church. I love being a mom to my children (9 and 11), and I like to work in children's ministry wherever needed.

My husband is constantly pushing me to do more — for example, lead a ministry to women, host dinners, or plan events. I am not gifted in these areas — in fact, I dread the thought. He reminds me that I knew I was marrying a minister and am therefore obligated to support him. In the past, I gave in to his requests to keep the peace, but felt miserable and exhausted. Lately, I have been more resistant, and it is causing tension in our relationship.

A. The key concept here is support. One of the major challenges for pastors of small-to-midsized churches is finding the right volunteers to take care of the many needs of church life, while at the same time avoiding incompetent helpers and great expense. This is especially true in churches where there is one paid pastor. Apparently your husband feels supported when you are willing to fill in the gap where he needs help.

First, allow me to reframe your situation. While this is becoming intolerable to you, keep in mind that his desire to have you involved is in fact a compliment. He knows where to go to get the job done. He believes in your abilities. I suppose it would be worse if he discouraged you from doing anything because he questioned your competence. Seeing your situation from this perspective will help you to be less angry and resentful approaching this topic with your husband.

Your situation can easily become a power struggle. The more your husband insists you be involved, the more you resist, making him more insistent, making you more resistant, and so on. Power struggles happen when people do not feel heard or validated. They try harder and harder to assert their position as the other person does the same. The problem is that no one wins, each feeling unheard and uncared for. Likely, your husband feels you are being insensitive to him just as you feel he is to you.

If this continues, it could potentially lead to

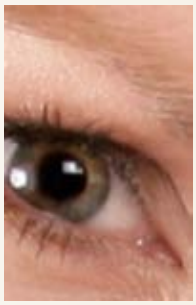
your disengagement from church ministry entirely to make your point. This would then confirm your husband's suspicion that you do not want to support him in ministry. Again, no one wins, least of all the congregation.

Your husband's intensity about this leads me to believe he could possibly have some insecurity about your role in his ministry. Perhaps you and your husband have never discussed this in concrete ways or perhaps past experiences have led him to conclude you are not supportive. Be willing to look at this honestly and humbly. Explore this with him and talk about what supporting one another looks like. Be nondefensive and ask forgiveness for the times you have been absent or insensitive to your husband's challenges in ministry.

ways of getting the job done. ("I am really not cut out to cook a meal for 30 people — just the thought overwhelms and stresses me. But I would be happy to organize other people to do the cooking and to do other things to support the event.")

Talk freely and frequently about what you feel called to do and how you would like to apply that at church. Share your passion for children's ministry and your dreams. Stress the things you love to do and share how you feel when you are carrying out this calling.

Appropriately set some boundaries. If there is a chance that you have not been clear with your husband about your limits, then take responsibility for correcting this. He may be surprised to learn how you feel. Clearly state what you are not comfortable doing. If you have any question about setting boundaries, I would recommend reading *Boundaries*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. This resource will clarify appropriate ways to define your limits.



Power struggles happen when people do not feel heard or validated. They try harder and harder to assert their position as the other person does the same. The problem is that no one wins.

Your current frustration requires more discussion about the overall dynamic of what is happening. As with any potential conflict, two things are needed: a strong dose of validation and understanding for the other person's position, and clarity about your own position, which includes firm, nonpunitive boundaries.

Reaffirm your commitment to the ministry and your desire to help. A heart-to-heart conversation is a good start, but an ongoing dialogue is also necessary. Emphasize your calling to be a good pastor's wife and your desire to do your best. Let your husband know that you understand and join his desire to work as a team.

Next, communicate your feelings and frustrations. Talk about your exhaustion, weariness, and how you feel when he requires you to do certain up-front things. Chances are your husband is not clear about the internal struggle you have with some of these expectations. At the same time, offer alternative

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

You desire to be a good pastor's wife. No doubt your husband desires to carry out his calling with excellence as well. In that, you have a strong common goal. The challenge is to blend your individuality and uniqueness in the pursuit of that goal, honoring both God and one another. With humility, clarity, and dependence on God's help, I am convinced you can meet the challenge.

GABRIELE RIENAS, a pastor's wife for 28 years and a professional counselor, lives in Beaverton, Oregon. She speaks at retreats, conferences, and events worldwide. Contact her at 503-705-9230.

Search for the Ideal Mother

DAVID C. HAMMERLE, Fallentimber, Pennsylvania

TEXT: Luke 1,2

INTRODUCTION

Few individuals shop for a husband or wife in the same way they would look for a new car or home. However, one of the primary reasons for the rush on divorce courts is a lack of consideration regarding such matters as what kind of a parent, business partner, housekeeper, and provider a potential mate will be.

What qualities did God seek when He chose a mother for His only begotten Son? The Bible does not reveal much about Mary's background and childhood, but we can discover certain facts about her character that pleased God.

MESSAGE

1. Above all, she was a believer (Luke 1:38).
2. She was submissive to God's will (verse 38).
3. She had spiritual insight (verses 46–55).
4. She gave God all the glory (verses 46–55).
5. She was religiously faithful (Luke 2:22–24).
6. She had patience (Luke 2:39–51).
7. She knew when to let go (John 2:3–5).

CONCLUSION

Mary was not an experienced mother, but she had qualities that pleased God — qualities that should be desired and sought by every mother in our society.

The Freedom of Faith

STEVE D. EUTSLER, Springfield, Missouri

TEXT: Galatians 5:13–15

INTRODUCTION

"True freedom is the right to do what we should, not what we would." Liberty is not license to sin. Liberty is love for what's best. For these reasons Christians should not abuse their liberty.

MESSAGE

1. The Call to Liberty

"You, my brothers, were called to be free" (5:13).

a. Free from bondage to Satan.
b. Free from bondage to society.
c. Free from bondage to sin — "do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature."
d. Not free from bondage to service — "rather, serve one another in love."
e. Not free from love bondage to the Savior.

2. The Command of Liberty

"Love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14).

a. Overlook his faults as you do your own.
b. Avoid offending him if possible (Romans 13:10). "Love does no harm to its neighbor."
c. Go the second mile for him.
d. Obey the Golden Rule toward him.

3. The Consequences of Liberty

"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (5:15).

a. Inappropriately used.
   (1) Destroys the unity of the church.
   (2) Destroys its usefulness.
b. Appropriately used.
   (1) Builds goodwill in the church.
   (2) Results in members bearing each other's burdens.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, Christians should not abuse their liberty.

a. Lest they lose their vote (democracy).
b. Lest they lose their voice (example).
c. Lest they lose their victory (faith).

Power of the Gospel

JERRY NEWSWANDER, Huxley, Iowa

TEXT: Romans 1:16,17

INTRODUCTION

The gospel greatly influences the world and makes positive changes in people's lives. The word *power* (verse 16) comes from the Greek word *dunamis*, which means "strength, ability, power; inherent power that resides in a person by virtue of his nature."

MESSAGE

1. The gospel has power to cleanse.

a. Cleansing deals with a person's spiritual condition (2 Corinthians 5:17).
b. Christians were once "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1,2).
c. Christians are made righteous through faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1).

d. Christians are cleansed through Jesus' blood (Ephesians 1:7).

2. The gospel has power to change lives.
   a. Lifestyle of a Christian (Colossians 3:12–17).
   b. God's power is demonstrated in effective work in a Christian's life.

3. The gospel has power to conquer (Romans 8:31–39; Ephesians 6:10–18).
   a. Victory over the negative pressures of life.
   b. Victory independent of circumstances (1 John 5:4,5).
   c. Victory — state of heart, mind, action grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christians are partakers of God's divine nature, and God provides power for victorious living.

Proclaim His Name

CLANCY HAYES, Waxahachie, Texas

TEXT: John 1:6–9

INTRODUCTION

John the Baptist did not hesitate to tell people about Jesus. We can learn much from how he proclaimed the name of the Lord.

MESSAGE

1. He was a mere man (verse 6).
   a. God chose man to witness rather than angels.
   b. He chose a common man.
      (1) We see no miracles.
      (2) We see no visions.
   c. He chose a self-denying man.
      (1) He could have been successful doing something else.
      (2) He could have developed a competitive spirit.

2. He was sent from God (verse 6).
   a. He recognized his calling.
      (1) We are not accountable for what we are not called to do.
      (2) We are accountable for what we are called to do.
   b. He recognized his authority to carry out his call.

3. He understood his commission.
   a. He came to be a witness.
      (1) A witness must be at the scene.
      (2) A witness must have the facts straight.
      (3) A witness must be willing to speak.
      (4) A witness sometimes needs courage.
   b. He came to point toward the Light, not be the Light.

CONCLUSION

So who was John the Baptist, and what can we learn from him?
   (1) He was a man like us — nothing more or less.
   (2) He understood who he was in God.
   (3) He was willing to carry out his commission.

Like John we too can prepare the way of the Lord.

Elijah

JERRY NEWSWANDER, Huxley, Iowa

TEXT: James 5:17

INTRODUCTION

Elijah was a man with great faith. He was also a man with weaknesses like all men. He dealt with his weaknesses in God's power, became victorious, and was an effective instrument of righteousness in God's hands.

MESSAGE

1. A man of prayer (James 5:17).
   a. Prayer is communication with God.
   b. Prayer is a time when God talks to us.
   c. Prayer is sweet fellowship with God.
   d. Prayer strengthens the child of God.

2. A man of purpose (1 Kings 18:17–40; Philippians 3:7–10)**.**
   a. Earthly man asks, "What can I do to preserve the human race?"
   b. Spiritual man asks, "What can I do to advance the kingdom of God?"
   c. Our purpose is to live for and serve the Lord.

3. A man of like passions (1 Kings 19:3,4; James 5:17)**.**
   a. Elijah faced the same emotional, mental, and psychological problems man faces today.
   b. He dealt with those problems with God's help.
   c. Jesus will give us rest as we go to Him (Matthew 11:28).

4. A man of possibilities (Mark 9:23; Luke 1:37)**.**
   a. He believed and obeyed the Lord.
   b. Believing and obeying will result in possibilities that become realities.
   c. Understanding our purpose for being helps us realize "all things are possible to those who believe."

5. A man of the "parousia" (2 Kings 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)**.**
   a. Elijah was "caught away."
   b. A type of rapture of the saints.
   c. When Jesus returns He will Rapture all Christians.

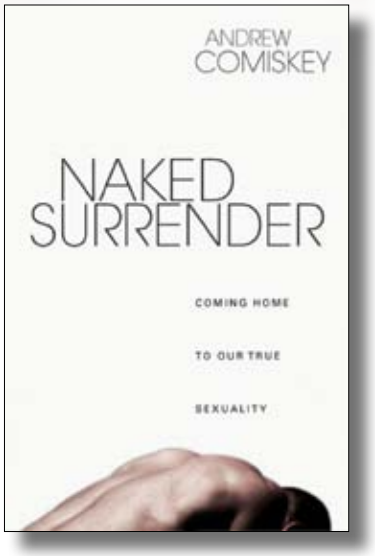
CONCLUSION

As Christians follow these characteristics of Elijah, they will become victorious and more effective instruments for the advance of God's kingdom.

For additional sermons, visit enrichmentjournal.ag.org. Look under Resources for Practical Ministry.

Naked Surrender: Coming Home to Our True Sexuality

ANDREW COMISKEY (InterVarsity Press, 220 pp., paperback)



***Naked Surrender* presents sexuality as no secret to God.** He already knows us as His originally whole creatures, which includes our sexuality.

The words *coming home* in the title denote a previous departure. Was sex ever understood different from its understanding in today's culture? Yes. Originally sex was a gift from God reflecting the oneness of the Godhead, minus unrestrained lust's influence and its contrast with societal distortions.

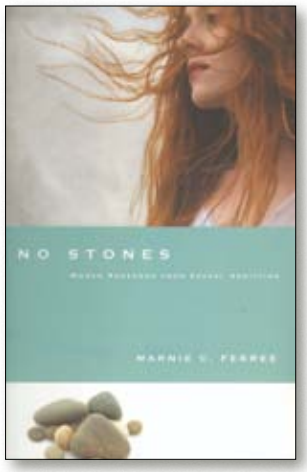
In *Naked Surrender's* nine chapters, the author makes poignant use of story because stories sell. The author is selling a healthy balance of Christian sexuality by reiterating the truth that human sexuality is God's gift to celebrate, qualified by the lordship of Christ. The foundation for this balance is love, both God's love and human love.

The author emphasizes sexual expression as self-giving. The world fights what it sees as puritanical repression of sexuality. As the author points out in chapter 5, however, appropriate limits on sexual expression liberate rather than deprive. Putting sexuality in its proper place will set the true self free, rather than restrict it. Comisky, like other authors, addresses sexual idolatry. Over-ascribing to sex makes sex an idol.

Naked Surrender: Coming Home to Our True Sexuality is about balance, truth, and godliness in our expression of maleness and femaleness. Further, it displays our sexual expression as a gift from God, emphasizing liberty and the freedom it creates.

Pastors will profit from reading Comiskey as they counsel and disciple others. It would be a good read for undergraduates as well.

— Reviewed by Jim Harris, Ph.D., LPC,
ordained Assemblies of God minister and owner of Insight Counseling Associates, LLC, Springfield, Missouri.



No Stones: Women Redeemed From Sexual Addiction

No Stones: Women Redeemed From Sexual Addiction

MARNIE C. FERREE (InterVarsity, 276 pp., paperback)

From a personal and compassionate perspective, Marnie Ferree tackles the extremely difficult and sensitive topic of women struggling with sexual addiction. Her self-disclosure, as well as the stories she includes from women she has worked with, opens the way for women struggling with sexual addictions to gain assurance that they are not alone in their sin, and knowledge that she is not judging or condemning them. The author is not throwing any stones as she works to instill the truth that hope and healing are available through a balance of biblical and psychological principles.

Parts one and two of the book focus on describing the problem of sexual addiction in women and explaining the underlying cause or root of that problem. Although well written and informative, these two sections do have a tendency to come across as a bit textbooky at times. The true gem in this book, however, is in part three where Ferree moves past the theories and explanations and gets to the heart of what every woman dealing with sexual addiction is looking for — the solution. This is where the book really came alive for me as Ferree presents clear and practical advice about how to go about the healing process. She does not sugarcoat any of these steps. She strongly states more than once that particular steps to healing are nonnegotiable regardless of how painful they may be.

In this book, any woman struggling with sexual addictions can find the answers to many of the questions she is too ashamed to ask. She will also find the hope that healing can be a reality for her.

— Reviewed by Debbie L. Cherry, Ph.D., LCP,
Eaglecrest Counseling Center, Springfield, Missouri.

No Sex in the City: One Virgin's Confession on Love, Lust, Dating, and Waiting

LINDSEY N. ISHAM (Kregel Publishing, 176 pp., paperback)

If you are a twenty-something female and looking for an honest reflection on "love, lust, dating and waiting" from a single lady's perspective, this is the book for you. Author Lindsey Isham does not hold anything back in her book *No Sex in the City*. She lets readers in on her real life without covering up the details that many authors do not talk about. This approach is different from many Christian books you would traditionally read on the topic of relationships.

Lindsey has been traveling and speaking to audiences of youth and young adult women for over 13 years. She gives a new spin to the typical purity talk, teaching that sex is created by God and is, in fact, good. She says, "I just like talking about sex — the good stuff, the way it is supposed to happen — in marriage."

Lindsey reminds her readers that even in their twenties, thirties, or later in life, waiting for the right relationship is still important. She shares candidly through her own experiences about the importance of not giving in to your desires, but continuing to keep your standards high. This book includes more than just dating advice. She covers topics from being single, to navigating the ins-and-outs of a relationship, to preparing for your wedding day, and future marriage.

Pastors and young-adult leaders would be wise to recommend *No Sex in the City* to the twenty- or thirty-something females in their congregations.

— Reviewed by Cheri Stevenson, student pastor, Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri.

Uncensored: Dating, Friendship, and Sex

JEANNE MAYO (Harrison House Publishing, 238 pp., paperback)

Have you had tough questions about a relationship and not known whom to ask? Have you faced a tough relationship situation and not known how to correctly navigate it? If you are looking for relationship advice, this book is a great place to start.

In today's culture, we need to work harder than ever to get relationships right. For teenagers, there are less and less strong examples of healthy relationship to follow. This makes *Uncensored* even more valuable. It is straightforward talk creatively laid out in a book that gets teenagers' attention.

Mayo's 26 information-filled chapters cover every topic and question teenagers could ask. Chapter titles include, "Where Playboy and I Agree," "How To Make More Friends Than You'll Ever Deserve," and "Guy Meets Guy; Girl Meets Girl." Mayo does not shy away from the tough topics; instead she faces them with honesty and love. Ultimately, this book gives students ammunition to walk through struggles they may be dealing with as Mayo closes the book with "13 Ways To Beat Temptation," and "Scripture Ammo To Fight Temptation."

I wish I had this kind of book when I was a teenager. As a student pastor, I am constantly handing out copies of Mayo's book to students who are sorting through any area of relational trouble. If you are looking for a great resource, Mayo covers all the questions you can think of and more in *Uncensored: Dating, Friendship, and Sex*.

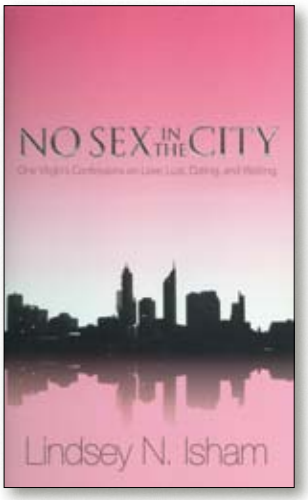
— Reviewed by Cheri Stevenson, student pastor, Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri.

Sex & the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses

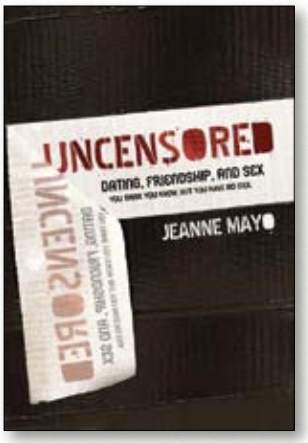
DONNA FREITAS (Oxford University Press, 336 pp., paperback)

"The overwhelming majority [of America's college students] do not know how to reconcile their religious identities with their sexual selves." This fact is unacceptable since college culture demands that students make life-changing decisions about both religion and sex almost daily. In *Sex & the Soul,* Donna Freitas, assistant professor of religion at Boston University, examines the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individual college students regarding sexuality, spirituality, romance, and religion.

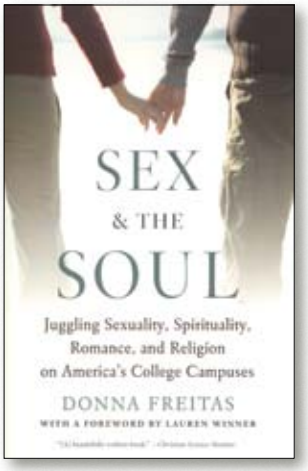
For this nationwide study, Freitas administered 2,500 surveys, conducted 111 one-on-one



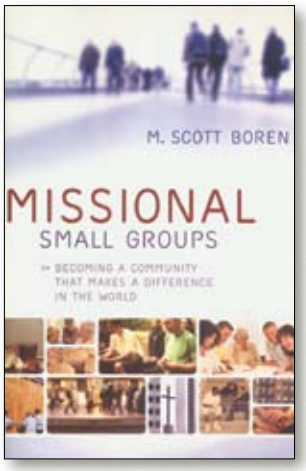
No Sex in the City: One Virgin's Confession on Love, Lust, Dating, and Waiting



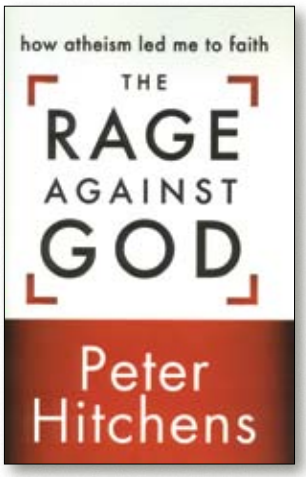
Uncensored: Dating, Friendship, and Sex



Sex & the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses



Missional Small Groups



The Rage Against God:
How Atheism Led Me to Faith

interviews, and consulted personal journals from students at two evangelical, two Catholic, two nonaffiliated private, and one public university. She asked tough questions and received honest, revealing feedback from students who were eager for a safe forum in which to discuss these deeply personal issues. Their emotional questions, struggles, and searches quickly engage the hearts of readers.

Freitas identifies distinct differences between the cultures of evangelical colleges and all of the other colleges she visited. Despite these differences, it is clear that the majority of students have four things in common: (1) they have high interest and investment in their religious and/or spiritual identities, (2) they experience sexual desire and urge to act on it, (3) they view fulfilling romantic relationships as a high priority, and (4) they have no clue how to reconcile the first three items. As a result, their campus community all but forces them to maintain an unhealthy silence about these very real struggles, or they come to believe their religion has nothing relevant to say about their sexuality.

Sex and the Soul is a powerful read and an excellent resource for students, parents, pastors, and educators. The candid, eye-opening narrative removes the barriers of ignorance and equips individuals to dialogue more openly about spirituality and sexuality. Students long for meaningful conversation about these important issues, but unfortunately they are often left to navigate them alone.

— Reviewed by Christy Rowden,
administrative coordinator for The Alliance for AG Higher Education, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.

Missional Small Groups

M. SCOTT BOREN (Baker, 186 pp., paperback)

In an era of how-to books, Scott Boren has penned a relevant why-to book. He presents a sound biblical and theological basis for participating in a small group. His use of the term *missional* along with its definition and application to small groups is apropos. Boren believes there are three basic categories that most groups fall into: personal improvement, lifestyle adjustment, and relational revision. His argument as to which group setting is most missional is viable and persuasive.

His focus throughout the book is not about doing another meeting, but being in each other's lives. He encourages the reader to make small groups part of the rhythm of life, not just an addition to an already overcrowded calendar. To do this, Boren describes three rhythms: Missional Communion, Missional Relating, and Missional Engagement. Within the setting of these rhythms there are 21 practices that help create small-group life. The author, however, does not complicate things by telling the reader the how-to steps to accomplish these practices.

His last chapter focuses on missional leadership for small groups. Boren does not add anything new to the topic of leadership, but the author is on point in his description and function of the small-group leader.

For those looking for a good starter book or a refresher on small groups, this is an essential read.

— Reviewed by Jim Risner, M.Div.,
small-group coach, Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri.

The Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith

PETER HITCHENS (Zondervan, 224 pp., hardcover)

The cultural shift in American society brings with it a growing hostility toward religion, particularly Christianity. Reflecting on his personal spiritual journey, Peter Hitchens recounts the story of his rebellion against God and subsequent return to faith. The work also poignantly responds to the writings of his brother, world-renowned atheist Christopher Hitchens.

Hitchens utilizes his gift of communication to compose his work from three major sections. He first recounts his rebellion against God, initially proclaimed by the burning of his Bible, but discusses how both reason and experience guided his journey out of atheism. Next, he deconstructs what he calls the "three failed arguments of atheism." He concludes the book by addressing the logical fallacies of atheism.

Wrestling with the questions of conflict, morality, and government, Hitchens crafts his arguments concerning the allegations of atheism against Christianity by examining them,

not only within the context of Christianity, but in light of human depravity. Hithchens carefully acknowledges the rationality of some atheistic arguments. At the same time, he points out the blind faith exhibited by atheists who hold to their beliefs while ignoring the flaws of their own thinking.

The Rage Against God represents a timely resource for Christians and non-Christians alike. Hitchens' lack of theological terms and rare use of Scripture present a "not-so-religious sounding" response to present-day atheism. Showing reverence for faith and sensitivity to the unbeliever, Hitchens' work challenges the atheist and the Christian to reconsider their perceptions of God.

— Reviewed by Dan Morrison, M.Div., editor/media specialist, Springfield, Missouri.

Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding Creation: A Biblical and Scientific Overview

MARK WHORTON AND HILL ROBERTS (Holman Reference, 378 pp., paperback)

Pastors and church leaders needing a refresher on the current state of the creation-evolution debate will find this book challenging and enlightening. The authors are physicists working in the aerospace industry. They endeavor to integrate their faith in the Creator God of the Bible with their scientific knowledge and worldview — a difficult but laudable task.

As creationists (in the broad sense), they affirm the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. They state, "The inerrant biblical message about creation is foundational to our faith and that scientific truths about creation will not contradict the Bible."

This work is comprehensive, covering ancient Near Eastern creation stories and their relationship to the Genesis creation account; an analysis of Genesis 1 and other biblical references to the Creator's work; a contrast between the general and the special revelation; and the effect of a person's worldview on understanding radiometric dating, the age of creation, and patterns of integrating science and the Bible (e.g., concordism and accommodation). This book is well-illustrated and well-written. The authors clearly define technical terms.

Whorton and Roberts label the three positions that most Christians currently embrace as "Scientific Creationism," "Progressive Creationism," and "Evolutionary Creationism." One of the strengths of this book is the fact the authors evenhandedly critique these three theistic positions instead of trying to defend one position over the others. They close with a plea for Christians to focus not on what divides us but on what unites us.

Anyone needing a reference guide on creation-evolution will benefit from this book.

— Reviewed by Steve Badger, Ph.D., professor of chemistry, Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri.

Unleashing the Power of Rubber Bands: Lessons in Non-Linear Leadership

NANCY ORTBERG (Tyndale, 272 pp., hardcover)

In her first leadership book, Nancy Ortberg teaches leaders how to stretch without breaking. Ortberg draws valuable lessons from her years of leadership in the Willow Creek Association. Beyond the memorable catch phrases and stories scattered throughout this work, the author has managed to incorporate critical leadership insights for young and developing leaders.

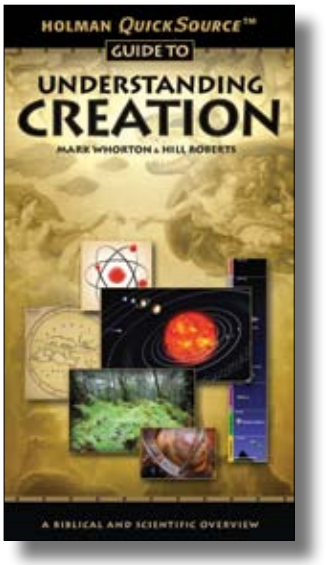
Ortberg takes a step back from the traditional genre of leadership books in her non-linear approach, hinted to in her subtitle. This allows the author to focus on an amalgam of issues without losing the reader in unnecessary details.

Readers will find Ortberg's personal stories of pioneering Axis, the postmodern expression of Willow Creek Church, intriguing and humorous. Expressing the unique challenges she faced as a middle-aged female taking leadership in a young male environment, the author challenges leaders and their teams to stretch to accommodate their common mission.

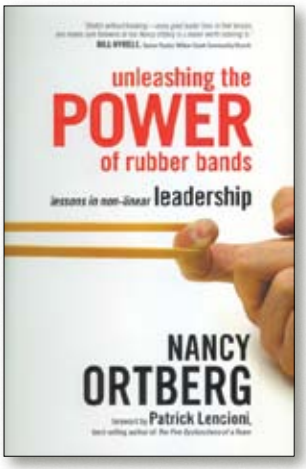
This book refuses to enter the dangerous, but too often chartered territory of offering specific steps or plans for leaders. Ortberg insists on the individuality of leaders, supplying a quiver full of wide-ranging leadership principles.

Leaders in transition and leaders facing new challenges will find Ortberg's experiences and insights a valuable source of inspiration.

— Reviewed by Mark Forrester, M.A., strategic initiatives manager, MinistryDirect.com, Springfield, Missouri.



Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding Creation: A Biblical and Scientific Overview



Unleashing the Power of Rubber Bands

With Christ

L. Glen Ahlf
Port Charlotte, Florida

Troy L. Allen
Flora Vista, New Mexico

Mardria M. Anderson
Narrows, Virginia

Earl J. Banning
Dallas, Texas

Martha Bauer
Springfield, Missouri

Mildred F. Beem
Fort Myers, Florida

Robert J. Bell
Jackson, Mississippi

Arlan J. Berglund
Sandy, Oregon

Willis E. Berry
Springfield, Missouri

Lloyd R. Bilhimer
Baldwin City, Kansas

Annie C. Brandon
Anchorage, Alaska

C. Duane Brogdon
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

Everett M. Brown
Owasso, Oklahoma

Frances E. Brown
Yakima, Washington

Dillard P. Burgess
Marshfield, Missouri

Mitchell K. Burriss
Newberry, South Carolina

Wesley E. Butler
Wichita, Kansas

John L. Clayton
West Fork, Arkansas

Rodolfo Corral
Montebello, California

Gladys L. Cottriel
Bakersfield, California

D. Elaine Crawford
Hemet, California

Fermin Cuni
South Gate, California

Eduvigen S. Diaz
Ozona, Texas

Levurn L. Dryden
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Wilson D. Dye
Vicksburg, Michigan

Walter R. Ernst
Springfield, Missouri

Clarence L. Ewing
Warrenton, Oregon

James E. Fields
Williamstown, Kentucky

Robert G. Florence
Fort Worth, Texas

Cecil S. Franklin
Yamhill, Oregon

Vernon D. Franklin
Strathmore, California

Gwendolyn D. Glover
Springfield, Missouri

Imelda D. Goree
Mobile, Alabama

Robert G. Gouge, Jr.
Wichita, Kansas

Charles J. Grant
Duck River, Tennessee

Rick D. Gulledge
Lehigh Acres, Florida

Harry J. Hamman
Muskegon, Michigan

George E. Harden
Dothan, Alabama

Joseph E. Harris
Lynden, Washington

Jack U. Heady
Inverness, Florida

Lillie B. Hebert
Des Allemands, Louisiana

Loren L. Henderson
Duncan, Oklahoma

Orvil L. Holden
Gillette, Wyoming

Thomas C. Holland
Cranford, New Jersey

Freeda J. Hotz
Elizabethtown, Kentucky

Evelyn L. Hurst
Claremore, Oklahoma

Jose Ibarra
Fullerton, California

Freda L. Jackson
Springfield, Missouri

Stanley W. Karol
Mount Laurel, New Jersey

Earl W. Kelly
Corpus Christi, Texas

Klaude Kendrick
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Milton J. Kersten
Waupaca, Wisconsin

Ronald D. Keyser
Springfield, Oregon

Herbert D. Kolenda, Sr.
Menominee, Michigan

Helen Krebs
Skidmore, Texas

Robert L. Kurka, Jr.
Cherry Tree, California

James H. Lee
Lynn Haven, Florida

Richard Lucero
Rosemead, California

Daniel I. Lund
Haslet, Texas

Ella H. Mack
Surprise, Arizona

Marvin J. Masten, Jr.
Lexington, Nebraska

Marin D. McCartt
Sunbright, Tennessee

John A. McLennan
Port Angeles, Washington

William J. Meszaros
Dearborn, Michigan

Gordon L. Morrison
Crestview, Florida

E. Doris Mynatt
Gadsden, Alabama

Floyd W. Newman
Costa Mesa, California

Lynn S. Nichols
Norfolk, Nebraska

Charles E. Northcutt
Little Rock, Arkansas

Elmer J. Nugent
Camden, Arkansas

Roy P. Nylin
Silver Springs, Florida

Dorothy E. Oberdorfer
Spokane, Washington

John P. Olson
Grand Forks, North Dakota

Jose Pagan
Old Tappan, New Jersey

Aldo Panzanella
Strongsville, Ohio

Mona B. Parker
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Mervin K. Peterson
Entiat, Washington

Michael Powers
Crown Point, Indiana

Karol L. Pruett
Princeton, Minnesota

Paul H. Radke, Sr.
Westwego, Louisiana

Joseph Ramdeen
South Richmond Hill, New York

Pedro Q. Ramos
Pueblo, Colorado

James K. Richard
Frankston, Texas

Herbert D. Riley
Westover, West Virginia

Michael S. Ring
Batesville, Arkansas

Berdetta M. Robeck
Las Vegas, Nevada

Arthur H. Robins
Bemidji, Minnesota

Jeffrey R. Rosinski
Middletown, Rhode Island

William R. Sanders
Jenkintown, Pennsylvania

Zona C. Sandlin
Lucerne, California

Daniel T. Sheaffer
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Mark R. Smith
Warrenton, Virginia

Homer E. Smithee
Mead, Oklahoma

Emma L. Stanley
Parker, Arizona

Danny L. Stevenson
Quitman, Louisiana

Zelma Strasdin
Somers, Montana

Roy W. Sullivan
Bee Branch, Arkansas

Arleta J. Turnbull
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Harry R. Turner
Billings, Montana

David F. Uttz
Upland, California

Carl Weddle
Olivehurst, California

Dennis W. Whaley
Springfield, Missouri

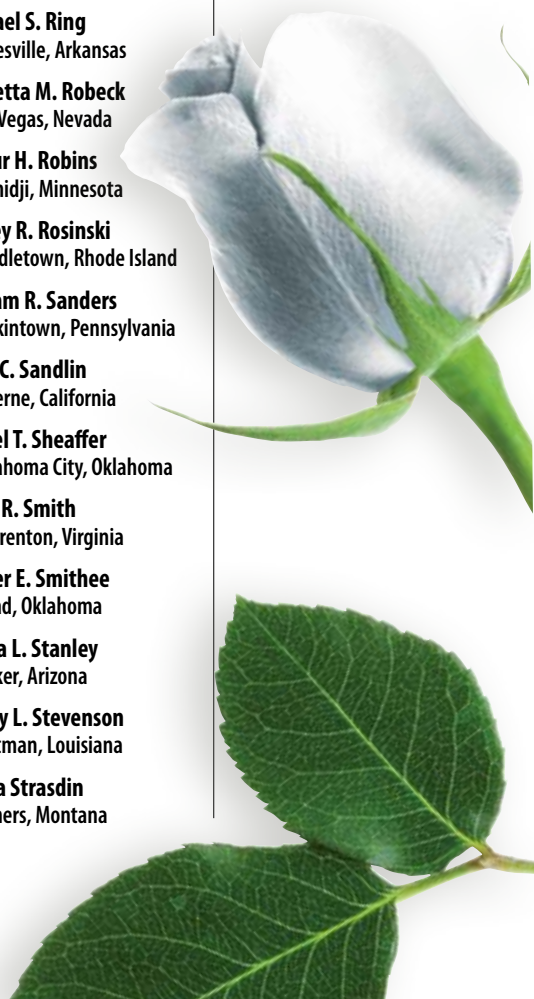
Joe T. White
Pooler, Georgia

Jack W. Wien
Paradise, California

Cary J. Wilkes
New Brockton, Alabama

Robert C. Wrasse
Ludington, Michigan

Samuel L. Wright
Bakersfield, California



Global University Names Provost

Global University, the fully accredited distance education arm of the Assemblies of God, has named John G. ("Jack") Nill, Ph.D. as provost.

Nill's experience includes vice provost and dean of education at Global University. From 2002 through 2006 he was chair of education at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Fla. From 1980 to 2002 he was an Assemblies of God appointed missionary.

According to Nill, the primary focus of Global University's Provost is to provide academic leadership to the university through strategic planning, organizing, interpreting of regulations, and maintaining smooth flow of operations.

"Making academic decisions that ultimately affect this institution's worldwide network is an awesome responsibility. But to me, having the opportunity to develop the academic character of Global University is a challenge to which I am honored to dedicate my life and energy," said Nill.

"Dr. Nill is uniquely qualified to serve as provost. His background as a pastor, missionary, educator, and accreditation official provides a tremendous asset to this position. He has a true heart for students and the impact they will make around the world during and after they complete their studies," said Gary L. Seevers, Ph.D., president, Global University.

Sunday School Teacher of the Year

Has a Sunday School teacher made a difference in your life? Help us find the teacher of the year. To nominate a special teacher in your church, go to **www.discipleship.ag.org/TOTY.**

FREE CONFIDENTIAL TELEPHONE COUNSELING 1-800-867-4011

- **Available to Assemblies of God ministers and their families living in the U.S.**
- **Call Monday – Friday 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time)**
- **A service of Pastor Care; counseling provided by EMERGE Ministries**

BGMC Kids!

Turning iGen Kids into iPray, iGive, iGo Kids

Some researchers have concluded that the family, social, and multimedia influences of today are producing an "iGeneration" of kids and youth. The iGeneration child, for example, thinks the world revolves around him.

Conversely, BGMC is developing a new generation of kid missionaries who are outwardly focused. This generation of iPray, iGive, iGo kids wants to reach other kids around the world for Jesus Christ.

This new generation of BGMC kids did not just happen. BGMC has equipped children's pastors and leaders across the nation with the resources needed to teach children about giving.

BGMC has as its base a five-fold purpose: To equip kids to know, to care, to pray, to give, and to go. By providing curriculum, resources, and a BGMCKids website that teaches children about world compassion, BGMC is empowering kids to reach the lost. The ability to understand the world's needs is developing a heart of compassion in these children. When kids learn to care about others and to look beyond their own needs, they want to pray, to give, and to go.

The BGMCKids website incorporates the pray, give, go focus. It teaches kids — through videos, virtual world travel, games, Scripture pictures, and object lessons — how to talk with Jesus; how to give of their time, talents, abilities, and offerings to Jesus; how to reach their schools and neighborhoods through E-LIFE; and how to reach the world for Christ through BGMC.

Enable your children's leaders to develop a new generation of kids. Contact the national BGMC office for resources and ideas. And point them to three important websites that are packed with free resources: **www.bgmc.ag.org**; **www.bgmckids.ag.org**; **www.elife.ag.org**.

U.S. MISSIONS
...that none perish

U.S. Missions Luncheon at General Council

The U.S. Missions luncheon will be held on Friday, Aug. 5, 2011, at the 54th General Council in Phoenix, Ariz. The luncheon will highlight the efforts U.S. Missions is making to reach America with the gospel. Tickets are $35 per person and may be ordered on your General Council registration form or online at **http://generalcouncil.ag.org/**. Districts and pastors wishing to sponsor a table and invite guests may reserve tables by marking "U.S. Missions Luncheon Table Sponsor" on their registration form. *(continued on page 143)*

HealthCare Ministries Help Churches Send Medical Missions Teams

HealthCare Ministries is hosting its fifth annual Medical Evangelism Forum in Springfield, Mo., Sept. 14–16, 2011, with a preforum session on Sept. 12,13, titled "The Role of the RN in International Medical Evangelism."

As the international medical outreach of Assemblies of God World Missions, HCM shares its 26 years of experience in medical missions helping churches organize their own international medical outreaches. The MEF is an open forum to inform churches of the logistics for putting together a medical team. It will include sessions about the vision of medical evangelism, development of a team, and logistics of the outreach.

For information, visit **www.healthcareministries.org** or call 1-417-866-6311.

Young Adult/Single Adult Ministries Release Two Free Promo Videos

Young adults live, work, and interact in society every day. In fact, there are currently 50 million people in the U.S between the ages of 18-35. This is one of the largest generations in American history. They have the energy, ideas, creativity, and passion that can help build the kingdom of God.

YOUNG ADULTS AND SINGLE ADULTS ARE TWO OF THE LEAST-CHURCHED GENERATIONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

Single adults are unmarried because of chance, change, choice, or someone else's choice. Many times they have more flexibility to minister with their time, talents, and resources than married adults because they do not need to obtain agreement with a spouse. Their talents, experience, and abilities can bless others. Yet, young adults and single adults are two of the least-churched generations in American history.

To assist you in reaching young adults and single adults, Young Adult/Single Adult Ministries has developed two, 2-3 minute promo videos that are available to churches, pastors, and leaders. These videos will inspire your congregation and church staff as they realize the impact young adults and single adults can have on your church and the kingdom of God.

Advertising Index

is anyone talking about sex — seriously?

By Rick Knoth

If anyone should be educating us about sex, it should be the church. Sadly, this does not appear to be the case.

Having the final word on an important subject like "sex and the church" is a little disconcerting. After all, what more can be said that the authors have not already asserted in their carefully crafted essays? Nonetheless, I offer one more thought to close this issue.

Two recent events happened in my extended family and church that illustrate my distress over this topic. I made a surprise visit to Michigan to visit my 80-year-old mother. Unfortunately, 3 days into my visit, she was taken by ambulance to the local hospital where she was admitted for 8 days. Not feeling well myself that day, I stayed behind to watch my 8-year-old great nephew as the family went to the hospital. Nothing could have prepared me for what happened next.

I left my nephew unsupervised for 10 to 15 minutes. On my return, I was horrified to discover my nephew viewing pornographic images on a family friend's laptop. During the ensuing conversation about what had just happened, I learned this was not the first time he had viewed pornography. Unfortunately, I doubt it will be his last.

The following morning I informed his mother of the incident. As you might surmise, she was beside herself and assured me he was not accessing pornography from home. Subsequent safeguards are now in place. As a great uncle, I have deep concern for my nephew.

Moreover, this week the church I attend called a special meeting of the church body to process and publically discipline a key pastoral staff member for moral failure. The offense? Adultery — sexual involvement with several women over several years. As a minister, my emotions swung from feeling angry and betrayed by a fellow colleague to feeling deep compassion toward him and his family.

Why do I share these two lamentable accounts? Because the reality is sex is everywhere: in advertising, in merchandising, in movies, on TV, in magazines, in e-books, in the classroom, on the Internet, and, unfortunately, in our churches. Sexual images and sexual conversations pervade every aspect of our culture, and they are no respecter of age, gender, or profession. The excessive pornification of our culture is contributing both directly and indirectly to the demise of the family, the church and its leaders, and the moral conscience of our nation.

Comment on this article
Visit the EJ Forum at http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal

This begs the question: Is anybody talking about sex — seriously? If not, why? If anyone should be educating us about sex, it should be the church. Sadly, this does not appear to be the case, at least not to any meaningful degree. Our conversations about sex with our congregations appear anemic at best and absent at worst.

To answer my question, "Is anyone talking about sex — seriously?" consider the following four observations on why I believe the church is relatively silent on the subject. First, many well-intentioned Christian leaders are concerned that talking too much about sex will encourage sexual activities among the underaged and unmarried. Second, our uneasiness in talking about sex stems from the fact many church leaders have left sex education to families and the secular world. Third, we are reluctant to acknowledge sexuality in the church because it may arouse suspicion and criticism from the congregation. And fourth, our uneasiness or silence from the pulpit may be due to our own unresolved sexual issues. How do we openly talk about sex with our congregation if our lives are complicated and compromised by the very issues we need to address?

Can we afford to relegate the topics of abstinence, cohabitation, masturbation, pornography, and homosexuality to the openness of the secular classroom? Absolutely not! We must address these issues and others openly and unashamedly from our churches and pulpits. The church can ill-afford to abdicate its responsibility in this all-important area. Too much is at stake.

Addressing sex in the church from a healthy, biblical perspective does not promote it, rather it creates a safe place where teens and adults can comfortably talk about their sexuality, and where they can filter the misinformation they receive every day from secular sources.

Finally, as ministers we must guard our own sexual integrity. I surround myself with three men to whom I am accountable. I meet almost weekly with two of them and monthly with the other. All of them have permission to ask me the hard questions. As well, my wife holds me accountable and is always free to ask: "Have you been faithful?"

Can you do any less?

RICK KNOTH is managing editor, *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri.