

Safe Places

NEWS LETTER

MAY 2017

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Dear Colleagues,

May 2017

In March, our European *Building Safe Places – for Everyone* meeting was an interesting mix of theologians, present and former church administrators, conference program coordinators, pastors, lesbian and gay Adventists, and local church leaders. As we mentioned in earlier newsletters, the three foci of the meeting were: Exegesis and Theology, Working with Different Stages of Spiritual Development, and Living Stories. This year we introduced a well-attended devotional and prayer time, led by an attending pastoral couple. Over the days of our gathering, one of the conversations that stood out for me concerned an understanding that how we treat LGBTI Adventists is indicative of how we treat or will treat other Adventists “on the margins.” The lessons we learn at *Safe Places* are lessons we will take to all aspects of our spiritual life and work. Choosing a narrative, organic development model that is based on the requests of the attendees is always an adventure. This year, before my very eyes, the tenor of the meeting went from people who needed to learn about issues to people who are building Seventh-day Adventist programs of spiritual inclusivity. Our foci became:

A. How do we understand and study biblical concepts and texts to best share them with our conferences, congregations, and communities?

B. How will understanding various concepts of spiritual development affect how we talk to and work with individuals and groups?

C. Stories are powerful. Sometimes they make us uncomfortable. How do we make sense of stories for ourselves? How do we incorporate them into our work?

The group left with an outline for next year that includes Share Vision groups where we present our projects and collect ideas from our BSP colleagues, increasingly in-depth exegetical studies, and building an inclusive theology.

In this issue, you will notice some of the flavors of our meeting. Reinder Bruinsma wrote of his own personal spiritual journey with the beliefs of his church. Tanja

Koppers shared what it was like to attend one evening of the Safe Places meeting. We used the article on Stages of Spiritual Development by Anja and Jan-Rokus Belder as a foundation for our discussions on building bridges between ideas.

In RESEARCH we include more of the “alphabet” of scientific studies on sexual diversity as researched by brain-function specialist, Dr. Arlene Taylor. Dutch researchers are pioneers in studying physiological and sociological components of sexual diversity. We’ve include one of the most recent studies on the effects on children who have same-sex male parents or same-sex female parents. The area where I live and work is the home of the young transsexual man who is petitioning the United States Supreme Court for the right to use the appropriate bathroom for his sex. In his honor, we have included a study of the demographics of transsexual youth in the United States.

We include two very different RESOURCES. The Williams Institute Reading Room of literature around sexual diversity is part of the University of California at Los Angeles School of Law. The Institute has a comprehensive selection of materials and is open to the public. Gay Christian Network is a grassroots organization for LGBTIQA Christians, their families, friends, and spiritual communities.

At the meeting in March, we were again reminded of the importance of story. When we meet people, learn about their lives, know their struggles and their successes, and their dreams and values, our view of the issues they face and represent often shifts. The issue becomes personal. For that reason, we will always include a VOICES OF THE HEART section. This issue will continue Jerry’s story of his journey toward wholeness.

As always, if you would like to contact us for any reason, you can reach us at info@buildingsafeplaces.org.

We wish you many blessings,

Catherine Taylor, for the Safe Places Team



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Reinder Bruinsma: Does knowing the truth make me a better person, a more honest and just human being? Does it make me a more loving partner, a better father, a more social neighbor? Does it make me a truly integrated member of that unique community that the Bible refers to as the “body of Christ”?

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Research ————— Page 29

- Population-Based Study Shows No Difference in Outcomes Among Children Raised by Same-Sex and Different-Sex Parent Families in the Netherlands.
- New Estimates Show that 150,000 Youth Ages 13 to 17 Identify as Transgender in the US.
- Arlene Taylor: Sexual Orientation and the Brain; the Alphabetical List of Research

Resources ————— Page 39

Support: *Gay Christian Network*

What began as an organization to provide support to LGBTQ Christians has grown into a worldwide movement for compassion with many straight members as well.

Movie: *The Freedom to Marry*

We never expected to be in the national spotlight, and we certainly never expected to have film crews in our living room as we went about our daily routine of making breakfast and getting the kids ready for school.

Voices of the Heart *Page 42*

Jerry McKay's Journey: *Back to Japan*

When I left Japan in 1976, I never thought I would be back except, possibly, at some point far in the future. I don't remember anything about the return trip except landing in Tokyo. This time, I had no anxiety about living in the land of emperors and atomic bombs. Everything foreign that had concerned me the first time now reminded me of a place I loved.





How my Faith Impacts My life



By Reinder Bruinsma

More than fifteen years have passed since I wrote a small book with the rather lengthy title: *It's Time to Stop Rehearsing What We Believe and Start Looking at What Difference It Makes*. In 159 pages I tried to explain what relevance the fundamental beliefs of my church might have for my personal everyday life. Two things made me decide to write this book. First, I had experienced something that kept me thinking. It had to do with an ultra-orthodox church member who had repeatedly lambasted me for what he considered my doctrinal laxity. His presence in the weekly Bible study at

church was feared by most people, rather than appreciated, because of his insistence that he had the correct interpretation of The Truth.

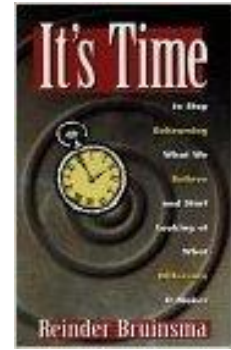
In the last days of his earthly life, while he knew he might have just hours to live, this holier-than-thou brother made sure that a significant amount of money was withheld from the rightful recipient. Surely, he had thought of a pious reason for doing so. I guess that this very aspect, especially, continued to haunt me. How could a believer separate the content of his beliefs so far from the actual practice of faith?

The other thing that inspired me to write the book was my reading of the Gospel of John. At some point, chapter 8, verse 31 impressed me as never before. There Christ underlined that the truth is not just a doctrinal system or a shortlist of propositions—however important such things may be. The Truth, Jesus said to his disciples, is embodied in a relationship with Me, for I am the Truth. If you experience Truth in this relational way, He added, you will find that it does something for you: The Truth will set you free.

What does it do for you?

So, with the uncanny experience of our ultra-orthodox brother still vividly in my mind, and reflecting further on the meaning of Jesus' words in John 8, I asked myself a very personal question: To what extent has "knowing the truth" done something for me? Has it increased my theological insights? Has it helped me to provide some intelligent answers to questions people around me might ask? Probably. But if that is all it has done, the essence of "being in the truth" still escapes me. For the real question is: Does knowing the truth make me a better person, a more honest and just human being? Does it make me a more loving partner, a better father, a more social neighbor? Does it make me a truly integrated member of that unique community that the Bible refers to as the "body of Christ"? Writing the book, therefore, was an exercise in self-reflection. Does the fact that I "know the truth" make any difference in the way I speak, in the way I relate to others, in the priorities in my daily life, and in my long-time goals? Or does it merely affect me on a theoretical level, without truly changing me into a better, more balanced, more pleasant, and more loving human being?

Writing the book was far from easy. I had to deal with all kinds of questions. Does it make any difference to my daily life whether I believe that there will be a thousand-year period at the end of time, dedicated to a special phase of the divine judgment? Would it change my life if I did not believe in a literal, recent creation but would prefer to think of the origin of our world in terms of much longer periods? Would it change my fundamental approach to life if I would occasionally eat a ham sandwich? And so on.



I must admit that when I went through all the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church, I struggled at times to find real relevancy for my daily life in certain aspects of our beliefs. But it became an extremely useful exercise, which I can recommend to every reader of this short article. Because, unless it does something for you, you have not truly discovered the truth.

I have written many books and numerous articles over the years and, on a regular basis, I have received comments and criticisms. At times those who have disagreed with me have tended to be more vocal than those who liked what I said. Significantly, however, I received more feedback and more comments regarding this book than regarding anything else I have written (except my most recent book entitled *Facing Doubt*). Many readers clearly were looking for this kind of approach to their faith. Some said, “Well, maybe if I can think about my faith in this way, then possibly, I should not abandon my faith or leave the church! Maybe my faith can still be meaningful. Let me try again.”

What did it do for me?

I realize I am far from perfect and that there is still often a tragically wide gap between what I should do and what I actually do. My faith should still do much more for me than it presently does. But I think I can in all honesty report that looking at my faith from the perspective of John 8 has helped me to focus on the relevance of my faith. It has helped me in the way I relate to many of the issues of every day and to the people who are important to me; it has influenced my long-term strategies; it has influenced my perspective on the world and my priorities in life. Let me give a few examples.

How does faith in the biblical God impact on the way I live? When people are asked, “Do you believe in God?” many will say something like, “It depends on what you mean. But yes, I believe that there is something...” But when I confirm that I believe in God, I do not intend to say that I believe in a mere “something.” No, I believe in a personal God, Who wanted me to exist, with whom I can communicate, Who helps me to live a happy and satisfying life, and Who will ultimately keep me safe for eternity. Having that kind of faith is a vital ingredient of my life. It gives my life direction and meaning. Knowing this God is more than having a theological view about the personhood of God, his eternity and omniscience, etc. All these terms are human constructs that may be useful, but they cannot begin to describe what it means to experience a bond between me and God. My life would be totally different if I did not have this faith in God. I would make other choices and definitely live differently. And I would be less happy and fulfilled.



Here is another example: How does the Fatherhood of God inform my own fatherhood? Among the names and titles given to our God is the word, Father. I don't want to get sidetracked by focusing on the question whether this term might be rather prejudicial towards women. Call God your heavenly Parent, if you want. But calling God “our Father” is not about gender and does not carry any thought of male superiority. This is about a supreme assurance of unconditional love, of providing

security and protection, and manifesting total dedication. I am a parent. But what kind of parent am I? Can I, in whatever partial and preliminary way, reflect something of the kind of sublime parenthood that God shows towards me? Few things could be more relevant to me than being a good father!

What does the doctrine of the church as the “body of Christ” mean to me? Does it have more than theological significance? Does it change how I relate to the church and does it influence what kind of a church member I want to be? It certainly does. I have worked for the Adventist Church for well over forty years and continue to be active in the church. Through the years I have met many people who love their church and who have inspired me with their enthusiasm and vigor. But I also met lots of people who were critical and told me about all the things that went wrong in their local church, and about the foolish decisions by their conference or union. And true enough, it is tragic to see how many things in the church turn sour and how many people—leaders among them—become frustrated and eventually leave. It is a tragedy to see how even in 2017 many Adventists treat LGBTI people as (at most) second-class members.

If I thought that the church was just a group of like-minded people, who happen to share certain spiritual viewpoints, I doubt whether I would bother to keep on working for the church, even at age 74. If I thought that the church was merely a voluntary association that was initiated and maintained by imperfect human beings like myself, I might also have become disenchanted long ago. But the church is much more than that. It is not my church or your church, but it is God’s church. The church is so intimately connected with Him that He calls it His body. The conviction that groups of people may lose their way, or organizations might disappear, but that the church invisible and visible (in some form or another) will survive, impacts me on a profoundly existential level. It is a truth that does something for me that mere human projects could never do.

Does my belief in Christ’s second coming affect the way I look at the world? You bet it does. As a Christian, I am not oblivious to what happens in the world. I follow the papers and the news on television and on the internet quite closely. I know that

people in all time periods have wondered what the world is coming to, and that many have predicted that it will all end in chaos and destruction. If I did not have my faith in the second coming, I would be very pessimistic about the future. For who will solve the ecological crisis? How will the world continue to feed seven, or eight, or ten billion people? How will we protect ourselves against climate change or from some deadly Ebola-like virus? How will the nations of this world ever live in peace? How will our society ever become less selfish and more just? How will we deal with the economic problems this world faces? What happens when one day all banks collapse?



Because I believe in Jesus' second coming, I know that there will, someday soon (whatever the human word "soon" may mean in the divine order of things), be a supernatural solution to all these superhuman problems. And because I believe this, I can live with hope. I may have my cares and worries, but deep down I can relax. God will take care of this world. He will take care of me. That hope truly changes my perspective on life.

I could mention many other examples of how my beliefs impact on my life. But let me just briefly also mention the meaning of the Sabbath for me. I realize that one of the Ten Commandments instructs us to keep the Sabbath "holy." I am aware of the

biblical statement that tells us how breaking one of these divine instructions equals breaking all of them (James 2:10). But keeping Sabbath is not just a matter of wanting to be obedient to God—though, of course, it is that also. Celebrating the Sabbath puts a totally different spin on the way I spend my time. It changes the way I relate to my work. After a week’s work, the Sabbath gives me the opportunity to leave all the work-related stress behind. It gives me quality time for physical rest, but also time for those who are dear to me, and time to seek a spiritual environment where I can tune in to God’s world. If ever there were a relevant aspect of truth, it is the Sabbath that lets us deal in a unique way with our stress-infected lives; and that restores the rhythm of creation in our souls.

It was a challenging exercise to think through how in some way all the fundamental beliefs of my church might impact on my life. In some cases, it was quite easy, while it was not when I was dealing with some other doctrines. But I managed to find at least something in every Adventist doctrine that did have practical meaning for me, or could potentially have such meaning. Yes, even such Adventist teachings as the doctrine regarding the 1000 years, and the doctrine that suggests that a ham sandwich is unsuitable for human consumption, did rise beyond mere religious theory, and told me something about myself and my relationship to God, and to my fellow human beings, and added something to my perspective on this world and a meaningful life in it.

Yes, the One who is the truth is also the way—the only way to a good life. For, after all, He also is the life—and He is more than willing to share His kind of life with us. That is how the truth can do something for us!



A Visit to Building Safe Places – For Everyone



By Tanja Koppers

On March 6-8, 2017, twenty-three European and Central/South American pastors, counselors, theologians, church administrators, and lay leaders met in Odenwald, Germany, for a Building Safe Places workshop. For Thursday evening's session, Catherine* asked members from SDA Kinship Germany to join the group discussion so some issues could be discussed with us (as LGBTs) and not about us.

Like last year, Rene Tuchtenhagen (SDA Kinship member) and I responded to her invitation. In 2016, we were asked to tell our stories. This year the participants prepared three questions for us.

1. What was your first positive dialogue with an Adventist church member? How did it affect you?
2. What do you think about the Adventist Church's recommendation that gay men and lesbians practice celibacy?
3. How would you like to be treated if you visited or joined a church with your partner?

I will answer the last question first. Rene and I both responded quickly. *We do not expect any special treatment. We only want that we and our partners will be welcomed as every other church member; nothing more, nothing less. Without*

question, we are a long way from our wish becoming reality. That said, this is what we seek: normality, no hiding, no discussion, no disapproving glances or whispering. We want to be welcomed as human, as persons, whether heterosexual or homosexual.



The second question, as well, was not hard to answer but has different levels for me. First, it is simply that a celibate lifestyle should be a matter of choice and not everybody is called for it. Another way to phrase my thoughts is that not everybody has the gift of celibacy. If Paul admits that it is not for every man (or woman), why does our church leadership expect celibacy from all homosexuals? Are we more blessed with this gift than heterosexuals?

In addition, most relationships do not end at having conversations and holding hands. We, who fall in love with each other, also long for the physical part of our relationship. *Why should this level of intimacy be denied within a homosexual relationship? It is a natural part of our love.*

Personally, I also wonder why the influence of the church should reach into my privacy. *What right does the church have to stick its nose into my bed? This is a very intimate part of my life, and what happens in my bed should only matter to me and my partner. Are heterosexual partners asked what they are doing in their beds, if and how often they have sex? I do not think I want to allow the church to have a voice on this issue. I also assume that no heterosexual couple would like to give account of their sex life to the General Conference. They would refuse to tolerate this invasion by the church.*

Catherine had another interesting point. Statistics show that people in committed romantic relationships live longer. With this data in mind, requesting that homosexuals be celibate can sound as if the church wants them to die sooner. I do not think that people in the General Conference thought about this data and concluded:

Celibacy is good; we will get rid of gays and lesbians sooner as they will die sooner.
But you never know.

The first question was a very personal one and it is difficult to repeat our answers here. For me, it was hard to answer because I have had a lot of great encounters and talks over the years with SDAKinship/HAD members, which I still have in my memories.

The evening ended, as such evenings always end, with lots of one-to-one talks and questions from the participants to Rene or me. Some questions seemed to be very odd, like the one about how falling in love feels for LGBTs. I paused briefly, and then I answered on behalf of LGBTs. The pastor was surprised to hear that it sounded exactly like falling in love for heterosexuals like himself. (Really? *LOL*) But he said it was important for him to understand that it is the same.



It was clear that the participants simply wanted to understand. Some had more problems than others and needed to find a way to approach the subject. Personal conversations seemed to have a big influence. Some participants emphasized that hearing LGBTs' stories and seeing the emotions which came with telling the stories changes views, because then they put faces with the topic and homosexuals become no longer an anonymous group of people.

I believe our stories are a helpful entrance. But we will not have any effect if the listener is not open to changing his/her mind, to rethink their position, and to let go of their fear. If only personal encounters mattered, many LGBTs would not have found such discouragement in their home churches. *These brothers and sisters really did know us and nevertheless refused to accept us.*

I am happy that, through the Building Safe Places event and through the empathy of the participants, insights into diversity are carried forward.

My personal wish would be that the sphere will be enlarged and participants from the rest of Germany and other European countries will join. We need for SDA Kinship members to find safe pastors to contact and safe churches over all of Europe.

Tanja Koppers is the coordinator of SDA Kinship Germany and this year's European Kinship Meeting coordinator. She lives with her partner Bianka.

<http://sdakinship.org/en/blog/450-coming-events/1404-european-kinship-meeting-2017.html>.

*Catherine Taylor planned and coordinated the Building Safe Places workshop designed for Adventist pastors, educators, counselors and therapists, administrators, family life leaders, youth directors, Pathfinder leaders, dorm advisors, and chaplains. More information at <http://buildingsafeplaces.org/training-opportunities/about-consultations-training>.



Stages of Spiritual Development



By Anja and Jan-Rokus Belder



Using Kohlberg’s individual stages as a starting point, we will first briefly describe the stage under observation, then try to find some Biblical examples of that particular stage. Next we will look at that stage with a special focus on the church and see if there is any recognition of that stage in church-life.

STAGE 1 “I don’t want to get in trouble”

General Description

Stage 1 describes our situation when we choose our actions from a place of fear. Our responses are motivated by obedience to avoid punishment. Compliance with rules is external, not self-motivated.

The Bible

When we looked for Biblical examples of Stage 1, we noticed the reactions of the Israelites after the incident of the golden calf and the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. In the book of Judges, we saw obedience because Israelites did not want to be dominated by Philistines. The same attitude is found after the return from Babylon. Many people stayed away from idolatry to stay out of Persian captivity. The Lord understood their attitudes at this stage using fire and earthquakes at Sinai to get their attention and desired behavior.

It seems very clear to us that God wished for His people to move beyond Stage 1.

“You shall, therefore, lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deuteronomy 11:18). He wanted truth to become internalized.

Reading further, we noted the direction God gave to His people, “For if you will be careful to do all these commandments that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him...” Verse 22 is a description of a people following commandments, not from fear, but because they love the Lord.

But that is not Stage 1. We are getting ahead of ourselves!

We wondered if it was a Stage 1 when Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus. Afraid of consequences, he denied his Lord (Mathew 26:74; Mark 14:71). We also wondered if the Pharisees took conscious advantage of Stage 1 Jews by threatening them with being thrown out of the temple if they followed the Messiah. We wondered if Jesus not responding out of fear is part of what infuriated them.

The Church Today

Do we have any of the following Stage 1 responses to church and spirituality?

- * Our view of God’s commands needs to be unquestionably obeyed at all times, whatever the consequences to human beings.
- * The Bible is comprised of God’s individually dictated words.
- * Church rule/policy is binding. The manual must be followed. The pastor and elders are authority figures and should be consulted for accurate decisions. If we don’t obey the church leadership, we are afraid we will be disfellowshipped.

Following the literal words of Leviticus 19:27 (*“Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard”*) caused issues in the young *Seventh-day Adventist Church*. There was enough contention that in the July 8, 1858, issue of the *Review and Herald*, Ellen White had to respond to the question whether God’s image in man is marred if men cut or shave their beard. She wrote, “We have to take

the ground of neutrality: that is, we care not whether a man wears a beard or not. The Bible says nothing against it and it says nothing for it.”



Stage 2 “I expect a reward”

General Description

Stage 2 describes our situation when we act in certain ways because we believe we will be rewarded. We are motivated by the possible benefits our actions will accrue for ourselves or for those in whom we have a personal interest. The authority figure’s standards, expectations, and the promise of reward are the basis of action.

The Bible

Mathew 20 – The workers in the vineyard wanted the “most money for the longest work.” They disputed the fairness of the reward given to those that worked only for one hour. Grace was not part of their acting vocabulary.

Mark 10:17-22 – The rich young man was interested in the reward for his good deeds, not the relationship Jesus was offering.

Luke 15 – There is an argument that the true prodigal son was the one who stayed home.

The Church

Stage 2 Christians sing, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through,” and look forward to the results of their deeds being rewarded by streets paved with gold,

mansions, and crowns. They see this life as an event to be endured. A Stage 2 church focuses on the reward for “good behavior.”

We wonder if, by extrapolation, Stage 2 Christians tend to see part of their reward being the punishment of the wicked who have made their lives miserable or kept their congregation or family from receiving expected benefits. Psalm 73 is an example of reward-based thinking and the unhappiness caused by it. We believe this kind of thinking leads to a focus on a narrowly defined pure church and the expulsion of those who do not follow “the rules” as we see them.

At this stage of spiritual development, as in Stage 1, the Bible is often seen as the dictated words of God and church leaders must be followed in order to receive the reward of Heaven and eternal life.



STAGE 3 “I want to please somebody”

General Description

Stage 3 reflects a focus on the approval of others, authority figures or peers. At Stage 2 our actions are motivated by that need. Decisions are made on the basis of what others think and what may please them. Many Stage 3 believers can find themselves with a “good girl/good boy” label. The reward is approval here and now.

The Bible

Jesus addressed this focus in Mathew 6:5 when he said, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and

at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”

In Galatians 2:11-13 Paul writes, “*When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.* ¹²*For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.* ¹³*The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.*” This is a perfect example of Stage 3 behavior. Given that, at the trial of Jesus, Peter was exhibiting Stage 1 behavior we could consider Peter’s journey one of quick spiritual development. In fact, we’ll talk later about the possibility that Peter’s behavior was actually an example of Stage 5 spiritual development.

Old Testament prophets and writers often talk about the peer power of marital relationships. The effect of Solomon’s pagan wives on his spiritual journey is one example. Jeremiah’s issues with Jews who had moved to Egypt are another (Jeremiah 44).

The Church

We think most of us have participated in Stage 3 behavior at some point.

We are and know people who, faced with certain unexpected Adventist guests, have panicked about the fried chicken in the refrigerator, cottage cheese hidden on a vegan college campus, wine in the back-kitchen cupboard, the Sabbath football game playing loudly, prodigal friends on the backyard patio, Harry Potter books on the coffee table, coffee on the coffee table...and the list goes on. Many have wondered what people would think of them if they appeared at church late or skipped Sabbath school completely. What about drums in church? What about eye shadow and wedding rings? Whose opinion matters to us at that level? Why does it matter? How easy is it to create a tyranny of the orthodox?

On the other side, why should some who don’t wear mixed fibers in their clothing worry about the opinions of those who wear cotton/polyester on a daily basis?

Church positions may be taken to please the church or the leader(s). In other instances, church positions may be accepted as an attempt to gain status.

At this stage the Bible is seen as a codebook, describing expected behavior and requiring fellow believers to keep an eye on one another.

How do we develop a personal relationship with God when there are so many opinionated and flawed mortals around us at this stage?



STAGE 4 “I follow rules”

General description

People in Stage 4 have a concern for social order. There is a strong awareness of the need for rules, so there can be order. Rules are followed, because they are your duty, they may be agreed upon, they are needed, unchangeable and not flexible. When right rules are followed, rules that lead to the common good, this stage may be very helpful and positive. Yet the danger is that rules can be very dangerous and destructive; even leading to such extremes as religious or political martyrdom. Rules at this level may stifle creativity or cause arrogance. For, when you believe you follow the rules perfectly, you are ever so much better and superior to those who do not.

The Bible

After the Babylonian captivity, the people of Israel built themselves a wall of rules designed to protect themselves from idolatry. The rules worked so well Israel’s leaders orchestrated the death of their Messiah for violating them.

Centuries earlier God instituted the rules given in Leviticus 25 which protected the earth and the vulnerable.

We could give examples of the way God ignored “rules” to bless people: Moses and the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 and Ruth the Moabitess as a part of the children of Israel are two notable ones.

The Church

The church's task to bring the gospel to the world, at this stage, is strongly motivated by the “we are right” perspective. We have a message for the world: “Join this church, follow the law, and you will be saved.” At this stage, there is a strong conviction of the rightness of the rules with a tendency to describe the rules and beliefs in a well-defined manner so the community may all know exactly where we stand. There is a need for rules to have an orderly family, community, and society.

However, the danger is that the church, individually and corporately, can become arrogant and inflexible. We may develop an inability to see that our understanding of a certain rule, Bible text, quotation of Ellen White, may be rather off the mark or good for us but not for others. There is little room for individual convictions that differ from the prescribed view: “Here is what we believe; take it, or leave it.”

This may be the stage or attitude to which Ellen White referred when she wrote: *The people partook largely of the same Spirit, intruding upon the province of conscience and judging one another in matters that lay between the soul and God. In reference to this Spirit and practice, Jesus said, “Judge not that ye be not judged.” That is, do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of the Scripture, a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them.* —Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*.



STAGE 5 “I am considerate of other people” & STAGE 6 “I have a personal code of behavior and I follow it”

There is so much overlap between Stage 5 and Stage 6 that we are going to combine our thoughts and comments about them. Stage 5 and Stage 6 are notable because our actions at this stage come from internalized motivations. Only God sees the heart (I Samuel 16:15; Luke 16:15; Acts 15:8).

General Description of Stage 5

People at Stage 5 have their behavior dictated by internalized values rather than externalized authority. They tend to display a willingness to forfeit personal rights or privileges in order to do good to another. They believe that opinions, values, and principles differ; yours is just one of many. They exhibit empathy derived from biblical principles. People in Stage 5 live and act from the decree of their heart, from their intimate connection with God (knowledge in the Hebrew sense “JADAH,” meaning knowing, being in personal experience with someone, doing what you know is right) and commitment to God’s and Heaven’s principles.

General Description of Stage 6

In Kohlberg’s model, this is the summit. It is where we realize that all we do is fully internalized. We alone are fully responsible for our own (re)actions. There is no need

for reward, no fear of punishment. The positive moral codes of Stages 4 and 5 are integral parts of us.

As we write this article, we believe that Jesus is THE (possibly only) example of fully Stage 6 behavior. He modeled total intrinsic love, care, and understanding. He knew the law as a force of good, a set of ethical guidelines that have only one purpose: the good of all. He truly manifested the Hebrew concept of Law, namely “Torah.” Torah is distinct from the Greek “Nomos,” which also means law, but from a different perspective.

“Nomos” (law) is probably known by most of us as we approach a speed camera. We will hit the brakes, for we do not wish the ticket. So we obey the law to avoid punishment (Stages 1-3!)

“Torah,” on the other hand, is more like a teacher that accompanies you throughout life, picks you up when you fall, and helps you evaluate what went wrong and what to do about it. Helps you grow in the right direction!

This way “Torah” is good, perfect even, for it reflects the ultimate good; it reflects the character of God.

The Church

The church in these stages will be the place to care for each other, care for the world, prepare for the return of Jesus. In a Stages 5 and 6 church, people accept the variety God has created. They accept differences and celebrate them! People accept the various levels where others are, without condemnation. People stimulate growth without being derogative about those who are at a different stage. The church is a safe place to grow, to love, live, learn, mourn, and be who you are.

The Bible

We choose to present two main examples from the Bible in which we think some Stage 5 and 6 behavior is modeled as well as the movement from one stage to the other as circumstances vary (fluidity between stages and tiers seem to be as proposed in Spiral Dynamics).



Behavior

Let's start with the most obvious texts and examples of Stage 6 behavior, or at least the invitation to grow towards it.

Jeremiah 31:33 (see also Isaiah 51:7; Joshua 22:5)

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Hebrews 8:10, 11 (see also 10:16)

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”

Bible Examples

We think the following story about David and Saul in I Samuel 24 is an example of Stage 6 spirituality.

“After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, ‘David is in the Desert of En Gedi.’”² So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.

³He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.⁴The men said, “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.⁶He said to his men, ‘The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.’⁷With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, ‘My lord the king!’ When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.⁹He said to Saul, ‘Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you’? ¹⁰This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lay my hand on my lord because he is the LORD’s anointed.’ ¹⁰See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹²May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you.”

By all rights of battle, David had every right to kill the man who sought his life. Yet David seems to be guided by a higher rule. He refused to do as his men urged. “Saul is the anointed of the Lord; I will not touch him” (v. 7).

Syrian Slave Child

As young as the little girl was, we believe the servant in I Kings 5 acted in Stage 5 or 6 behavior.

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man

in the sight of his master and highly regarded because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

“²Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. ³She said to her mistress, ‘If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.’”

“⁴Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵‘By all means, go,’ the king of Aram replied. ‘I will send a letter to the king of Israel.’ So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: ‘With this letter, I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.’”

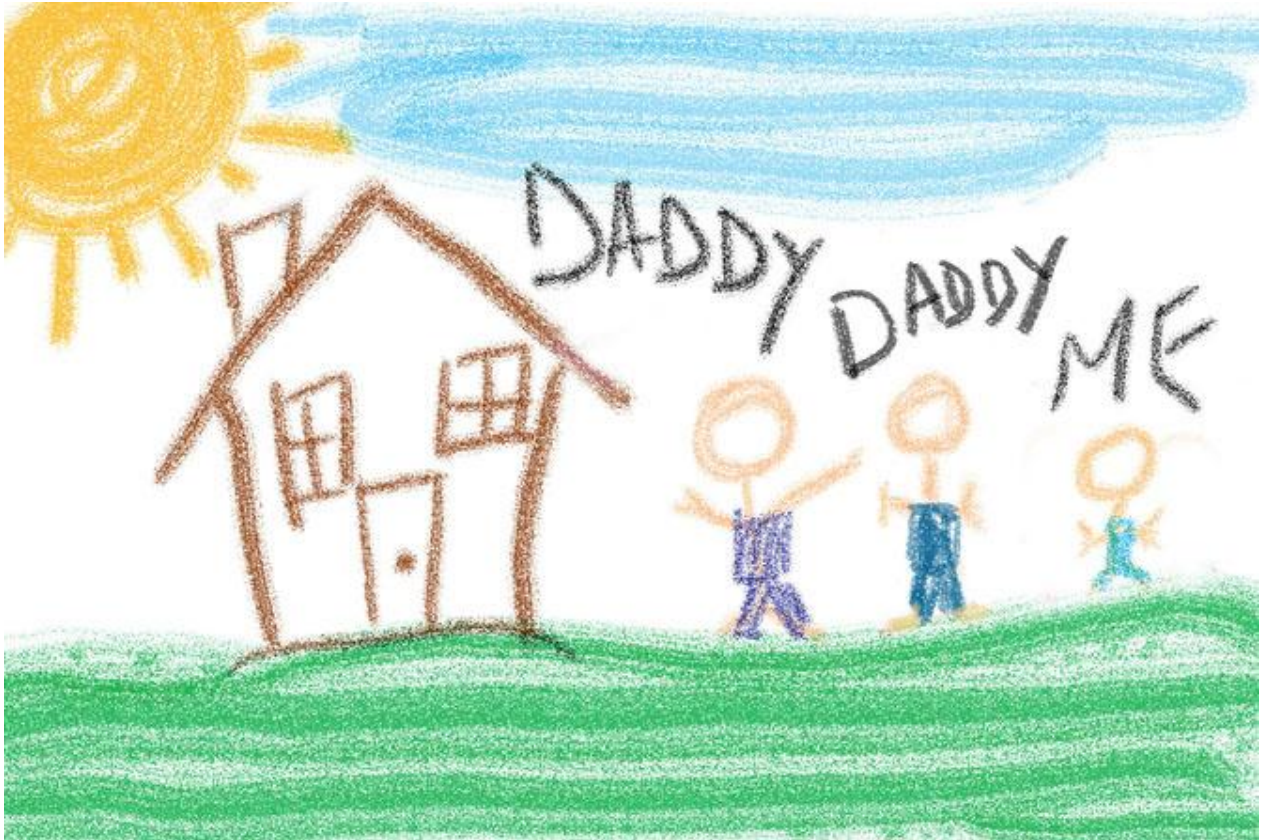
Never be afraid to travel that road, for Jesus himself gave us the great promise in John 16:13.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

The Dutch translation has here: “The Spirit will SHOW you the way to the FULL truth,” emphasizing the fact that there is movement on your part. The part of the Spirit is the “showing of the way,” but it remains your task to put one foot in front of the next! So, the Spirit will guide and show the way; you are not alone.

May the thoughts we have shared with you help you find that peace.





Population-Based Study Shows No Difference in Outcomes Among Children Raised by Same-Sex and Different-Sex Parent Families in the Netherlands

February 23, 2017 – Media Contact: Noel Alumit, alumit@law.ucla.edu

This is the first Dutch study based on a nationally representative sample to compare both male and female same-sex parent families with different-sex parent families

A new study found that there was no difference in child outcomes among Dutch same-sex and different-sex parent families. Based upon a nationally representative sample from the Netherlands, the study compared same-sex and different-sex parent households on children's psychological well-being, parenting stress, and the parents' use of informal and formal support in child rearing.

Key findings from the study include:

- * There were no significant differences found in any assessment of children’s psychological well-being in female same-sex and male same-sex parent households versus different-sex parent households.
- * This similarity in child outcomes regardless of household type parallels the results of most other studies on same-sex parent households, including an earlier American study.
- * Mothers in different-sex parent households and fathers in same-sex parent households felt less competent in child rearing than their counterparts.
- * For all parents in the current investigation, analyses showed that being worried about child rearing was a significant predictor for reporting higher levels of problem behavior in their children.

“Our findings are consistent with many international studies using community samples showing that family functioning—not whether the parents are same-sex or different-sex—is the key ingredient for healthy child development,” said co-author Nanette Gartrell, a psychiatrist and a Williams Institute Visiting Distinguished Scholar.

“It is important to compare children whose backgrounds are similar,” said Douglas NeJaime, UCLA Professor of Law, Visiting Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and Faculty Director at the Williams Institute. “In the United States, courts have thrown out the testimony of witnesses who introduced studies comparing children of same-sex parents who had experienced family transitions—adoption, foster care, parental divorce/separation, et cetera—with children of different-sex parents in families who had not experienced these transitions.”

Lead author Dr. Henny Bos, from the University of Amsterdam, added, “This study is pertinent to family therapists, practitioners, court officials, and policymakers who seek information on parenting experiences and child outcomes in female and male same-sex parent families.” The study, “A Population-based Comparison of Female and Male Same-Sex Parent and Different-Sex Parent Households,” was published in

Family Process, a peer-reviewed academic journal, and co-authored by Williams Institute-affiliated researchers Henny M.W. Bos, Ph.D., and Nanette K. Gartrell, MD, along with Lisette Kuyser, Ph.D. The authors utilized data derived from the Dutch study “Youth and Development” which was carried out by The National Institute of Social Research | SCP (SCP) in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands.



See more at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/marriage-and-couples-rights/population-based-study-shows-no-difference-in-outcomes-among-children-raised-by-same-sex-and-different-sex-parent-families-in-the-netherlands/>.





New Estimates Show that 150,000 Youth Ages 13 to 17 Identify as Transgender in the US

January 17, 2017 – Media Contact: Noel Alunit, alunit@law.ucla.edu

In addition to 0.6 percent of U.S. adults (1.4 million individuals), a new study finds that 0.7 percent of youth ages 13 to 17 identify as transgender.

An estimated 0.7 percent of youth ages 13 to 17, or 150,000 youth, identify as transgender in the United States, according to a new study released by The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law. This study is the first to provide population estimates for youth who identify as transgender in each of the 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. The study, titled “Age of Individuals Who Identify as Transgender in the United States,” by Jody L. Herman, Ph.D., Andrew R. Flores, Ph.D., Taylor N.T. Brown, MPP, Bianca D.M. Wilson, Ph.D., and Kerith J. Conron, Sc.D., provides new estimates of the age composition of individuals who identify as transgender in the U.S. and estimates of the size of the transgender-identified

population by age group. The youngest age group, 13 to 17, has the highest estimated percentage of individuals who identify as transgender.

“Current policy debates in several states have involved legislation that would impact transgender students,” said Dr. Jody L. Herman. “Our estimates suggest that thousands of youth could be negatively impacted by laws that would limit their access to school facilities and undermine protections against discrimination.”

Key findings from the report:

- * In the U.S. population, the study estimates that 0.7 percent of youth ages 13 to 17, 0.7 percent of young adults ages 18 to 24, 0.6 percent of adults ages 25 to 64, and 0.5 percent of adults ages 65 and older identify as transgender.
- * About 150,000 youth (13 to 17) and 1.4 million adults (18 and older) identify as transgender in the U.S.
- * Of individuals ages 13 and older who identify as transgender in the U.S., 10 percent are youth (13 to 17), 13 percent are young adults (18 to 24), 63 percent are ages 25 to 64, and 14 percent are ages 65 and older. This distribution is similar to the age distribution of the general population.
- * Mirroring the relative population size of U.S. states, the largest populations of youth that identify as transgender are found in California, Texas, New York, and Florida. The smallest populations are found in North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

“Agencies and institutions that have a responsibility to protect and promote the wellbeing of adolescents now have an idea of how many transgender youth should be served in every state in the U.S.,” remarked Dr. Kerith J. Conron. For “Age of Individuals who Identify as Transgender in the United States,” the authors utilized data from the CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a national, state-administered survey, which collected data on transgender identity among adults in 19 states for the first time in 2014. The BRFSS represents the best available population-based data to study the size and characteristics of adults who identify as transgender. The authors used an advanced statistical method to produce

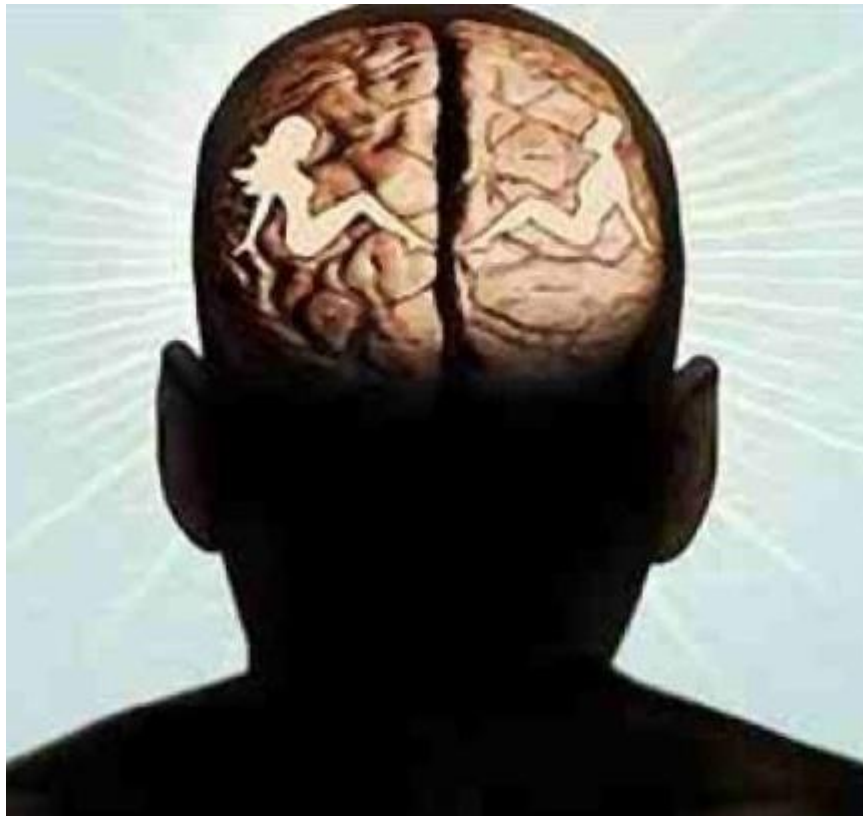
population estimates for youth, as well as adults. The inclusion of gender identity measures in population-based youth surveys remains necessary to advance knowledge about the size, characteristics, and needs of the transgender youth population.

The Williams Institute, a think tank on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy, is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research with real-world relevance. Read the report.



See more at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/transgender-issues/new-estimates-show-that-150000-youth-ages-13-to-17-identify-as-transgender-in-the-us/>





Sexual Orientation and the Brain

The Alphabetical List of Research, cont.



By Arlene Taylor PhD (<http://arlenetaylor.org/>)

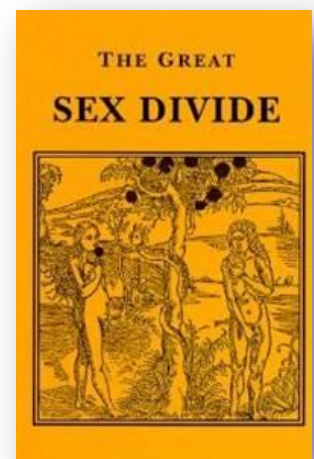
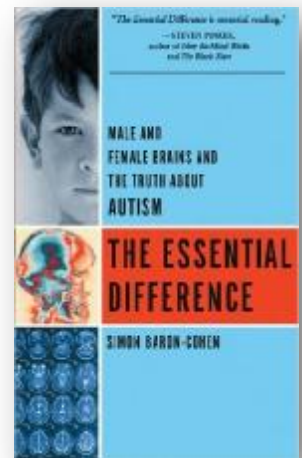
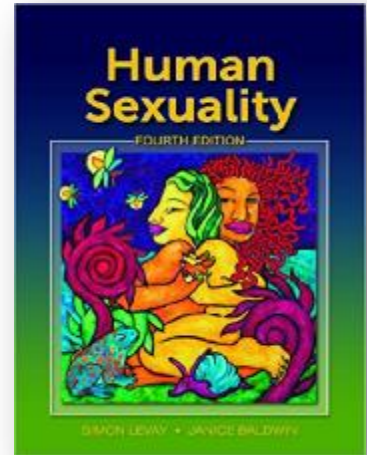
<http://arlenetaylor.org/brain-references/brain-relationships/sexual-orientation-and-the-brain>

Definition

Sexual orientation may be defined as the direction of a person's sexual attraction. A person may be disposed to experience sexual attraction to individuals of the opposite sex (heterosexual or straight), to individuals of both sexes (bisexual or bi), or to individuals of the same sex (homosexual or gay or lesbian). Androphilia is a term to describe the disposition to be attracted to men; bisexuality to describe the disposition to be attracted to both sexes; and gynephilia to describe the disposition to be attracted to women. Of note: the presence of homosexuality is higher among males; the presence of bisexuality is higher among females. (Simon LeVay and Janice Baldwin. *Human Sexuality*; p 166-180. MA: Sinauer Associates, Inc., Third Edition, 2009.)

Homosexual males: the anterior commissure is larger (than in heterosexual males) and is about the size of that in the brains of heterosexual females. (Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen. *The Essential Difference: The Truth About the Male and Female Brain*; p 111. NY: Basic Books, 2003.)

Contributors to the development of homosexuality may include: Direct alteration of hormones during fetal development, use of drugs that impact androgens (e.g., Depo-Provera, diazepam, marijuana), maternal severe emotional stress (stress hormones may cross the placenta and interfere with testosterone production in the baby), immune reaction against chemicals necessary for sexual differentiation. (Glenn Wilson. *The Great Sex Divide*; p 78-80. England: Peter Owen Publishers, 1989.)



Most straight males are very uncomfortable with the idea of homosexuality, no matter how liberated they may be in their thinking. Females seem to be far less threatened by homosexual contact. (Herb Goldberg, Ph.D. *The Hazards of Being Male*; p 24. NY: Nash Publishing, 1976.)

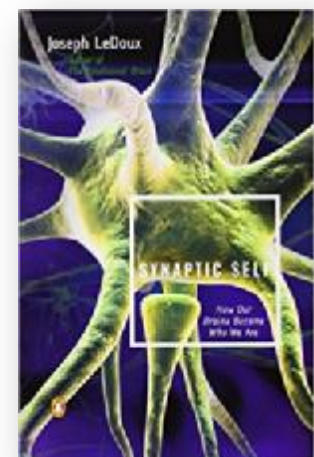
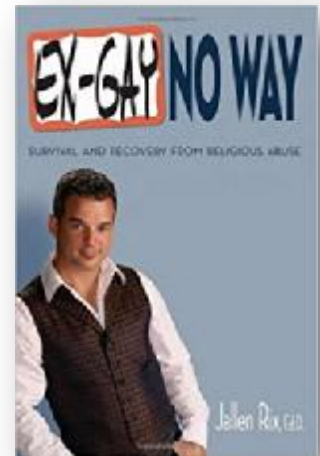
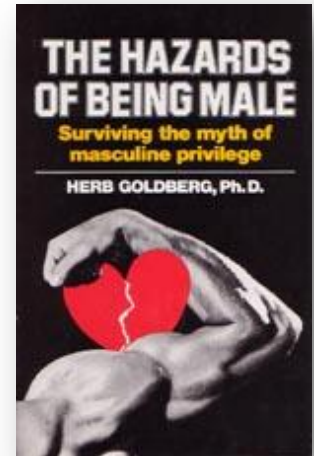
Emotions

Avoiding and suppressing does not dissipate the heart's natural yearnings. It just stockpiles emotional energy. In addition, shutting down some emotions and feelings may shut off most other emotions, as well. (Jallen Rix, Ed.D. *Ex-Gay; No Way. Survival and recovery from Religious Abuse*; p 13-14; 190-196. Scotland: Findhorn Press, 2010).

The brain has a number of emotion systems. When one is active, the others tend to be inhibited. Once aroused, sexual desire can override many other systems—people risk all types of adverse consequences for an adulterous fling. Doing the right thing doesn't always flow naturally from knowing the right thing to do. (Joseph LeDoux. *Synaptic Self, How Our Brains Become Who We Are*; p 321-323. NY: Penguin Books, 2002.)

Endocrine

There is an endocrine basis for homosexual preference if fetal development is interrupted and mother's androgens are interfered with at the time of sexual differentiation in the brain. (Donald Joy, Ph.D. *The Innate Differences Between Males & Females* (Audio Cassette). CO: Focus on the Family, 1967.)



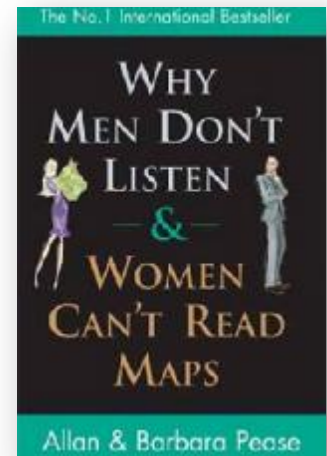
Familial Component

Study: Homosexuality tends to run in families. 3x greater chance of a male being gay if he has brothers, uncles, cousins, or parents (more on the mother's side and fewer on the father's side) who are also gay. (Barbara and Allan Pease. *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps*; p 179-186. NY: Broadway Books, 1998.)

Study of 944 men, Psychologist Anthony Bogaert of Brock University in Ontario Canada: Risk of being gay increases with the number of older brothers. Some mothers may develop antibodies to male fetuses and, in subsequent pregnancies, the antibodies may impact portions of the fetal brain that determine sexual orientation. (Joe Klein. *Born Gay, the Brother Factor*; p 55. *TIME*, July 10, 2006.)

Several studies also have shown that homosexuality tends to run in families. The probability that the brother of a gay man is gay is about four times higher than normal. Similarly, the odds that the sister of a lesbian is also a lesbian is significantly higher than normal. However, male homosexuality and lesbianism tend to run in different families: sisters with gay brothers are not more likely than normal to be lesbian. A 1993 study that traced the pedigree of pairs of gay brothers found that homosexuality tends to run on the maternal side of the family tree: the brothers had a higher-than-average number of maternal nephews and uncles who are gay. (<http://news.stanford.edu/pr/95/950310Arc5328.html>)

Studies: the real percentage of gay twins who were separated at birth and who have identical genetic makeup is 60-70%, or 2 out of 3. (*Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps*; p 179-186. NY: Broadway Books, 1998.)





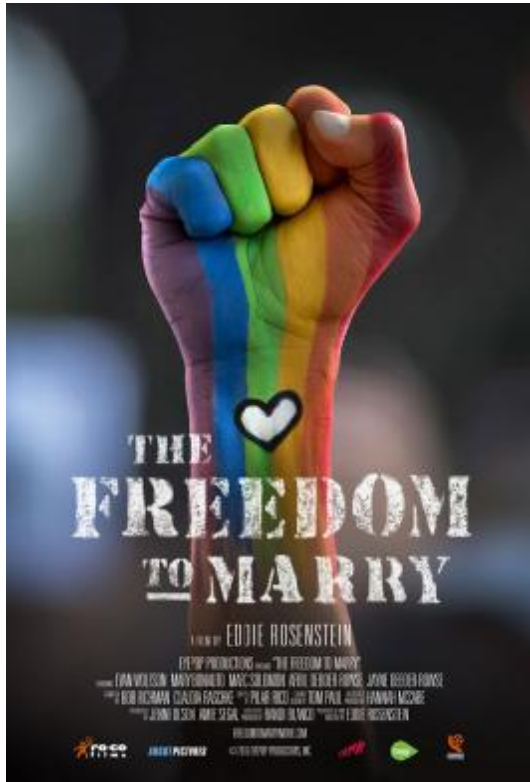
Gay Christian Network

Founded in 2001, GCN is an international network of Christians working for a fully inclusive Christian community and a world where all people are treated as the beloved children of God. It is our mission to transform attitudes toward LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people and bring about a day when the church is the biggest ally and defender of LGBTQ people rather than a chief opponent.

What began as an organization to provide support to LGBTQ Christians has grown into a worldwide movement for compassion with many straight members as well. Through conferences, speaking events, videos, message boards, and more, we work to end prejudice and discrimination both inside and outside of the church, combat negative stereotypes about LGBTQ people, and support those who have been hurt by anti-LGBTQ attitudes.

Because GCN works across so many different denominations and communities, we recognize that Christians are divided on myriad theological questions, including some pertaining to LGBTQ people. We believe in approaching these disagreements with grace, compassion, and education, rather than demonizing those who disagree with us. This doesn't mean, of course, that we accept all views as "equally valid." Some views are wrong or harmful and must be challenged. Even in such cases, however, our goal is to unite, not to divide, while ensuring every Christian is allowed to live out his or her own conscience on matters of dispute (Romans 14).

Whatever your own background, we invite you to join us online and offline to help the church better live out the love of Christ for all people.



The Freedom to Marry

By April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse

We are just two moms from Michigan who love their kids. So, we'll confess: We never expected to be in the national spotlight, and we certainly never expected to have film crews in our living room as we went about our daily routine of making breakfast and getting the kids ready for school.

But we knew that the country needed to hear our story. They needed to know that we weren't paid activists pushing a political agenda. We are a family. We are moms. And we were just doing what any other parent would do: Protecting our children.

When we filed a lawsuit in 2012 challenging our state's anti-gay laws, we did it simply to protect our children. In our wildest dreams, we never imagined where it would take us.

Fast forward more than three years, and we were waiting alongside our legal team and holding our breath along with the rest of the country, including stalwarts like Mary Bonauto and Evan Wolfson, as the U.S. Supreme Court was set to issue its ruling—in our case—that marriage is a fundamental civil right for all Americans.

The Freedom to Marry gives you a gripping, front-row view of the campaign that won marriage nationwide. And whether it's in our living room in Hazel Park or up close and personal with Mary Bonauto moments after she argued before the nation's highest court—this film will show you the marriage movement as you've never seen it before and have you on the edge of your seat until that final fateful moment when the freedom to marry wins nationwide.

The Freedom to Marry is the documentary that captures the story of our family and millions of Americans who fought to win marriage nationwide—and now, you can book a screening of this award-winning film in your community.

We're excited for you to see it! Please visit our website to see a trailer and book a screening at <https://freedomtomarrymovie.com/>.



Voices of the Heart

Journey

By Jerry McKay

Chapter 11 – Back to Japan



When I left Japan in 1976, I never thought I would be back except, possibly, at some point far in the future. I don't remember anything about the return trip except landing in Tokyo. This time, I had no anxiety about living in the land of emperors and atomic bombs. Everything foreign that had concerned me the first time now reminded me of a place I loved.



1978 was the year of the horse according to the Chinese zodiac, so it was featured everywhere. Remnants of New Year's celebrations still hung in the streets and on private entranceways. Gifts could be seen at shrines and temples left by visitors, and there was still time for me to sample New Year's goodies—many of which were made of or with *mochi*—a sticky paste from pounded rice prepared and served in every imaginable way.

There were other aspects to arriving in January that I had forgotten. The air is clear in winter, making it possible to see the summit of

Mount Fuji from the roof of the Adventist hospital. If you timed it right, you might see the silhouette of that sacred mountain as the sun set behind it. Winters are mild by Canadian standards. Minus five degrees centigrade is a cold night in Tokyo. Japanese homes typically have no central heating. The rooms that are heated when occupied are not heated when vacant. The not-so-uncommon result was seeing my breath when I entered a room and occasionally finding a thin layer of ice in the toilet bowl in the morning.



One of my fondest winter memories is of the yakimo man. *Yakimo* is Japanese for roasted sweet potato. At the time, men roamed the narrow streets pulling carts carrying wood burning stoves. From those carts, the yakimo man sold baked yams and roasted chestnuts. You knew he was in the area because a pre-recorded message cried out from a loudspeaker at his approach. The rather mournful song of—*yaaaaaa-kiiii-moooooo*—would draw people from their homes. The smell of wood smoke and baked yams against the cold night air added to this special treat.

The most significant difference was my accommodations. The male teachers now lived within walking distance of the school rather than the 40-minute commute by train. I had enjoyed the commute, but the now 20-minute walk through suburban Tokyo was pleasant in any season, day or night. During those walks, I grew to admire the symmetry and clean lines of Japanese architecture. I was drawn to the older homes with their weathered wooden exterior, old and patched paper screen doors, and worn tatami floors. I often wished I could have exchanged our nearer home for one of those old houses. There was just something inviting and comforting about them.

In most respects, my life throughout 1978 was a mirror image of my first year in Japan. That did not mean it was routine. Every day was filled with fascination and meaning. Seeing friends whom I thought I might never see again was the real joy. As before, I spent endless hours teaching English and trying to get as many students as possible into my Bible study classes. Seeing the impact of my efforts in both areas from 1975 held great personal reward.

I was pleased to find former students succeeding in English. One middle-aged man who spoke little English when we met in 1975 had moved through the 10 levels the school offered. He beamed when he told me that because of his hard work his company was sending him to Europe and the United States on business. His delight heightened my interest in teaching as a profession.

Some friends were still studying the Bible and wanted to pick up where we had left off. I was as eager as they were to do so. A few had been studying with the local



pastor and while I was there decided to be baptized. During that summer's English camp, a student-become-friend was baptized. Everyone gathered on the shore of Lake Inawashiro to watch. It was early evening and the setting sun had turned the sky and lake a soft pink. When the language school director raised his hand over my friend and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," I felt connected to the two millennia of Christian history in a way I had never before.

There were two highlights of the year. The first included sharing my love of Japan with my mother. She is an introvert, so she often pushed herself well beyond her comfort level just to experience the world that I had often written home about. Students and friends treated her like royalty, and she was frequently complimented on having raised "such a wonderful son!" Like a trooper, she even went to a public bath with the friend who graciously hosted her during her stay.

Donna was the other highlight. Much to my envy, she had returned to Japan the

previous fall for a visit. She was asked to stay longer by the language school director until a replacement could be found for a teacher who had to return to the United States. Donna loved Japan as much as I did, so agreeing to stay for a couple of months was not difficult. We visited numerous times, and she joined my mother and me for part of our whirlwind tour of Japan. All of this added to the uniqueness of our long and deepening friendship. Eventually, she headed back to CUC. From there, we communicated regularly until I returned.

On a humorous note, there was an ego boost aspect about Japan which I had also forgotten. In Canada, when I shop, my clothing size is *small*. In Japan, I immediately jump to a medium without having to do anything more than buy clothes!



My Spiritual Life

Although most of my religious experience was built on my contemplation of Jesus' life, it also included random selections of scripture. Those random bits had a far greater influence on my spiritual formation than I often realized. One of those bits was Psalm 139. I memorized the chapter in high school. While I found many verses meaningful and encouraging others troubled me. As a young missionary living on the far side of the Pacific, these verses often came to mind and comforted me:

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Thy presence?...
If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.*

On the other hand, as awareness of my orientation intensified, these verses troubled me:

*For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother's womb....
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.*

Psalm 139 helped to create my theology and then collided with it. If I had not taken scripture so seriously, the angst would not have been so intense. I wrestled with texts like this because I filtered my experience through scripture—as I had been taught to do. Beautiful passages like Psalm 139, which friends might ponder for a time and move on from, caused me spiritual distress. Whether it was in the womb or in my formative years, I experienced my orientation as something “woven” into my person. To borrow Jesus’ comment about eunuchs—I felt I was either “born that way” or “made that way.”

I often wondered how God could have been so involved in the forming of my “substance” and yet have handed me over to dishonorable passions because I failed to worship God correctly. This is where my “plain reading” approach to Romans chapter one got me into trouble. While I can reconcile these passages now, at the time they

bewildered me. Sometimes the conflict tore down my faith rather than build it up. To this spiritual background noise, I added my new preoccupation with personal victory and continual obedience.

I had brought my copy of Venden's sermons on victory and continual obedience with me. Many a quiet morning while still alone in the empty language school, I reflected on his writings. I was more determined than ever to practice the three tangibles he insisted would bring me to a place of personal victory—prayer, Bible study, and Christian witness. For yet another year, I was as intentional about my devotions as I had ever been. I studied my Bible daily and I prayed over the names of family, friends, and students. As a missionary, of course, my days were filled with “Christian witness.”

My devotional life was personally uplifting and gave me a great sense of peace and contentment as well as cultivating a deep appreciation of the way of living that Jesus modeled. At the same time, there was no change in my orientation. Because I longed to experience some form of victory over my attractions or some reprieve from the distress, my devotions started to feel like a formula rather than the “thoughtful hour with Jesus” it had always been. Like with insanity, I was doing the same thing over and over and over without experiencing the desired result. My devotions became a substitute for reaching out to someone to talk to. By withdrawing into my very private world of study and prayer, I kept everything locked up inside. I fooled myself into thinking my emotional numbness and stoic control over needs and passions were evidence of victory in my life. This false victory had consequences. I started to experience resentment toward others when they expressed human need—especially intimacy.

One female teacher, for example, experienced more homesickness than the rest of us; or at least she expressed it. I remember feeling annoyed that she was so easily affected by such a mundane need as a connection with family and friends. I did feel lonely from time to time; but when I did, I pushed that feeling aside. I was not able to appreciate her need as a normal response to her circumstances because I never allowed myself to feel much of anything. While I responded appropriately, I could

feel the resentment within. I remember thinking that if she would just do as I did—study the Bible and seek God in prayer—she would experience the same control as I did, the same victory!

The other experience of resentment was tied directly to my orientation.

It was obvious that one male teacher liked “the ladies.” He also liked photography, and he had many pictures of and with female friends. When I say that they were constantly frolicking in parks and hugging trees in playful poses, I want you to pick up on my resentment. It rose out of a deep ache from wanting to experience his freedom, his comfort, with physical affection and playful intimacy. Every time I saw one of his photos, however, I was reminded of how different we were. I didn’t long to frolic with the girls, and I knew it. I wanted to hug trees with male friends, and I could feel it. Whether it had been five photos or five hundred, it would have made no difference. Each picture triggered those why questions, and I felt a profound psychological and spiritual weight.

My feelings of resentment toward the homesick female teacher and the playful male teacher were the result of moving through life as I had walked through that shed full of bees during my summer job—aware of everything around me but detached from it all. Coping with my orientation the way I did created a wound, and the wound was growing deeper. I was numb but interpreted it as strength. My personality was changing and resentment was one of the consequences.

Like my first year in Japan, my orientation made itself known in the usual ways. Certain male students triggered strong feelings of attraction, and that troubled me. On occasion, at the invitation of a friend, or out of necessity, I was obligated to make a trip to the public bath. With each visit came the accompanying angst. As I said, my accommodations were different. In the little house I shared with the other male teacher, we had our own rooms. It was much easier to be as private as I wanted. As before, there were opportunities to date, but I easily complied with the unspoken expectation not to get involved with the locals. One anecdote with respect to awareness of my orientation stands out from that year.

As a typical twenty-two-year-old, I had a normal curiosity about sex. The mix of my faith and my orientation added a layer of complexity, and Tokyo provided the opportunity to explore my curiosity. No, I didn't have a sexual encounter. The situation was more adolescent in nature, but no less stressful.



I was pretty naïve when it came to condoms. My earliest memory of such is of a “used one” ground into the gravel in our elementary school parking lot. The older guys made jokes about “it” which I pretended to understand. All I picked up on was that it was somehow related to something men and women did in cars late at night. Except for that schoolyard discovery and seeing the odd condom dispenser in grungy service station washrooms, condoms were never a part of my world—until Japan.

The ubiquitous vending machine that dispensed everything from cigarettes to soap to rice also dispensed condoms. Not tucked away in washrooms but out on the streets usually in front of pharmacies. During my first year, I corralled a Japanese friend into explaining what those machines dispensed. That awkward conversation occurred only once. At that time, I wasn't very interested. Things were different this time.

Like trying not to think about pink elephants after saying pink elephants, those machines beckoned me every time I passed one. After months of thinking about the contents, I couldn't resist any longer. Late one night, I told my roommate I was “going for a walk.” That walk took me past a pharmacy I knew was located on a very quiet street in our neighborhood.

As I deposited the appropriate yen into the machine and waited for the contents to emerge, my heart beat as if I were committing a crime. When the little box slid into the mouth of the dispenser, it sounded like a passing train. I grabbed my purchase and fled down the dimly lit street hoping no one had seen me. After all, what would a “single” missionary need with condoms?

I examined the contents, but only when I knew for certain that I was home alone. I discarded them as quickly and discreetly as I had obtained them. I did this a couple of times.

I'm sure my foray into sex education was not unique to me. While others might have felt a sense of naughtiness, their experimentation would have been within the realm of acceptability even within a conservative religious context. Naughty isn't how I felt. When I examined my purchase, it was through the filter of my faith and orientation. Although I "made" myself create images of what was supposed to be the "natural" use of a condom, those images soon faded. The images that flowed naturally were linked to men.

Whatever one might think about a single Christian buying condoms, you can't imagine the angst I felt when I couldn't separate my sexual interests from my same-sex attraction. I couldn't even buy a condom without homosexual images intruding. When the natural biological functioning that God had woven into my male substance responded accordingly, I felt my body was betraying me. With this, more shame was linked to my physical being. If I could have turned off my attractions I would have. If I could have produced feelings for "the girls" I would have. How was I to confess or repent of my body? I ached at times from the stress, and I cried in secret when I couldn't manage it any longer. A good cry released some of the energy, but it all returned the moment I interacted with the world again.

This brings me back to Psalm 139. Reciting the first six verses in prayer was often the closest I came to naming my experience before God. I believe that by repeating back to God—pushing back at God—with the heartfelt words of King David my faith and sanity were preserved. Despite my conflict and confusion, I clung to the belief that like David, God knew me, understood me, scrutinized me, and was intimately acquainted with all my ways—even before there was a proper "naming of my experience" on my tongue.

As I have told my story, I have purposely separated my spiritual practices from awareness of my orientation in order to highlight each. They were, in fact, inseparable and played off each other constantly. Everything or everyone I interacted

with throughout the year was touched by my orientation in some way. It was another wonderful year despite the weight I carried.

This year, like the first, came to an end faster than I had hoped. Only a sense of obligation to complete my degree tore me from the work, the country, and people I loved. I had arrived in winter and I would leave in winter. One farewell gift made up for the sadness of my approaching departure. The language school director and two students decided to take me on a road trip to Mount Fuji. I had climbed the mountain twice already, once the first year and again that August. Getting up-close-and-personal with this iconic symbol of Japan was not the treat, it was the uniqueness of the trip.



Being December, Fuji was capped in snow and every view was spectacular. We stopped many times as we circled its base. In the late afternoon, we drove as far up the mountain as we could before stopping in a parking lot just above the tree line. The sun was intense enough to entice us to remove our coats despite a cool breeze. There wasn't another person in sight—an unusual experience in Japan. With no one around to trigger our adult inhibitions, we played on the slopes in the snow like children. We

would have hiked higher had we had more time and not been startled by thunder coming from one small passing cloud. It was a surreal hour and the perfect farewell gift.

I made it home for Christmas Eve, but barely. As my flight from Tokyo approached San Francisco, we were diverted to Los Angeles because of fog. My connecting flight was from San Francisco! Miss it, and I would miss Christmas. After an hour and a half of sitting on the tarmac in L.A., we headed back for San Francisco. The same fog that had prevented our initial arrival had also delayed the departure of my connection. I made it home for Christmas. Spending Christmas at home was pleasant, but I missed Japan. Within a week, I was back in Alberta and ready to pick up where I had left off the previous year.

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