HUMAN SEXUALITY:
GOD’S SACRED and BEAUTIFUL GIFT

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“The Church of the Nazarene views human sexuality as one expression of the holiness and beauty that God the Creator intended. Because all humans are beings created in the image of God, they are of inestimable value and worth. As a result we believe that human sexuality is meant to include more than the sensual experience, and is a gift of God designed to reflect the whole of our physical and relational createdness.”
—From the Church of the Nazarene Manual ¶31
I brought home a box of unassembled parts from a furniture store last week. It seemed like a good idea to purchase the furniture unassembled as I wanted to save money. However, the enormity of the task sunk in as I laid the parts on the living room floor. I wish I knew who came up with the idea of throwing a pile of wood and a bag of screws in a box and challenging the consumer to make furniture out of it!

The challenge became even more complicated when I could not make sense of the poorly written directions and the supposedly simple drawings. So, I ignored them and assembled the pieces like a big jigsaw puzzle. This was not a good idea! I usually get in trouble if I do not follow directions carefully.

That reminder also applies to the lifestyle choices we make on a daily basis. Routine patterns of living often lull us into believing that our choices have no lasting effect. We can easily ignore negative consequences or long-term effects of our choices because they do not seem to warrant immediate concern. Unfortunately, many people live their daily lives according to what their needs and wants urge them to do.

Proverbs 16:25 reminds us, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.” Thankfully, God does not leave us to our limited reasoning capacities to figure out which lifestyle choices are best for us. God offers clear directions for living in Exodus 20:1-17. I know many people have relegated the Ten Commandments to the dusty shelves of a rundown antique store. We must never forget God always has our best interest in mind when giving such valuable directions.

God intervened long ago by giving us directions for living.

We often lament the brokenness, hurt, and pain people experience. Many times, psychological fracturing and dysfunctional relationships find origin in ignoring the guidelines for sexual relations and conduct stated in Commandments 7 and 10. Committing adultery and coveting another person’s mate always lead to pain, heartache, and a long list of damages suffered by innocent family members and friends. Some ask why God does not intervene to alleviate the pain, heartache, and damage. The truth of the matter is God intervened long ago by giving us directions for living. We have the privilege and responsibility of making daily choices that either promote wholesome living or lead to self-destruction.

Every culture and society in our world suffers from the damaging effects of sexual misconduct in its varied forms. This issue of Holiness Today offers Christian perspectives on many of these issues through the lens of God’s directions. As you read these articles, you may think of individuals impacted by such sin. We trust that the information and insights in these articles will be tools in your hand for ministry. Perhaps God can use you to speak with friends and family members about God’s directions for holy living. Share with them the good news of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to lead individuals out of the bondage, shame, and destructiveness of sexual sin. Remind them that God loves them very much and offers bright hope through forgiveness and restoration.

You are always welcome to request extra copies of this issue of Holiness Today. Simply email your request to holiness today@nazarene.org. Please indicate how many copies you require along with your name and mailing address. Who knows, God may use you to put this information into the hands of someone who will be eternally changed. ★

Frank Moore is editor in chief of Holiness Today

“The Church of the Nazarene purposes to relate timeless biblical principles to contemporary society in such a way that the doctrines and covenants of the church may be known and understood in many lands and within a variety of cultures. We hold that the Ten Commandments, as reaffirmed in the New Testament teachings of Jesus Christ, demonstrated most fully and concisely in the Great Commandment and the Sermon on the Mount constitute the basic Christian ethic.”—Church of the Nazarene 2017-2021 Manual ¶28.1
Our worship of Christ is essential in the ordering of life. Putting God first in all aspects and responding to His call must be the central focus of each Christian. When God is not glorified, a disordering occurs for the individual that ripples into society. In this chaotic and fallen state, creation worships itself or a distorted view of the Creator—the truth about God is traded for a lie. Thus, human desire gets fractured, "resulting in behaviors that elevate self-sovereignty, damage and objectify the other, and darken the path of human desire." Nothing but the light of salvation can redeem the world from the chaos and distortion that separate man from God.

In our pride, we selfishly claim our identity; in our fear, we reject it. It is only by faith that we come to know God and who He created us to be. The idolatry of worshiping oneself and the distortion of identity through sexual promiscuity harm both those who are engaged in this sin and those who encounter its destructive path. The Church must proclaim the truth and mercy of God against the lie of false identity and for those caught in sexual sin. The people of God must show the world that sin is not God's plan for us. True identity and freedom are found only in Christ.

“The Church of the Nazarene affirms that the human body matters to God” and that “our senses, sexual appetites, ability to experience pleasure, and desire for connection must be shaped out of the very character of God.” God created us out of an expression of His love, and through this love relationship, we come to know Him. God is relational, represented in the Trinity, and we were created in His image with a longing for connection. This connection is found “as we live in covenanted relationship with God, the creation, and loving one’s neighbor as one’s self.” We affirm that God blesses singleness and marriage alike, and that both require active faithfulness to God. Marriage reflects the unity of Christ and the Church. It is in this covenantal relationship that God intends for man and woman to “experience the joy and pleasure of sexual intimacy.”

This issue of Holiness Today follows the Church of the Nazarene’s Manual statement on human sexuality and provides a deeper reflection of Christ and His relationship to our identity. Each article and author encompasses God’s redemption of human sexuality and our call to make Christ the center of our lives.

The restoration of creation, society, and individuals can happen only through the re-centering of God as our focus of worship. We glorify God as Creator, Savior, and sustainer of creation. Our faith in the salvation of Christ and the decision to turn away from sin initiate renewal and restoration. Through loving and nourishing relationships with our neighbors, we can share this truth and bring the lost to the light of salvation.

*All quotations come from the Church of the Nazarene 2017-2021 Manual, ¶ 31. The Church of the Nazarene affirms the authority of Scripture as the rule of faith and practice (Deut. 4:2, 12:32).*
“Our leaders and pastors are expected to give strong emphasis in our periodicals and from our pulpits to such fundamental biblical truths as will develop the faculty of discrimination between the evil and the good.” — Church of the Nazarene 2017-2021 Manual ¶28.5
The globally unified Nazarene family seeks to speak the truth in love as we share our Christian witness with the world. An example of this in found in our Manual ¶28-35. This Covenant of Christian Conduct reminds us of the critical role spiritual interpretation plays in shaping life together. This covenant does not reflect a series of randomly selected moral statements. Rather, it represents the global Nazarene conscience.

Birthed from the guidance of the Holy Spirit and biblical interpretive strategies, we have adopted these beliefs as we seek to faithfully follow Christ. We must remember this as we engage meaningfully with other believers who use different interpretative lenses. Furthermore, clergy and laity alike must faithfully continue to study, be open to the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit, interpret with Wesleyan-holiness lens, and write and preach on moral issues.
The relativism and diversity within global cultures complicate writing and preaching on moral issues. The easy path invites us to refrain from addressing moral issues so as not to step on toes. However, we must speak to these issues in order to accomplish our critical denominational objectives. We must also teach what it means to live out the practical application of our beliefs. Hence, the Manual ¶28.5: “Our leaders and pastors are expected to give strong emphasis in our periodicals and from our pulpits to such fundamental biblical truths as will develop the faculty of discrimination between the evil and the good.”

Some of my life verses come from Psalm 1.

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.
Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

I learned this Psalm as a child; its truth sunk deeply in my mind and soul. It reminds me of the need to avoid destructive paths. It urges us to develop strategies that recognize and understand the difference between good and evil. It reminds me that good and evil coexist in my world. However, as a child of God, I am called to shun evil and live a holy life. In reading this Psalm, I used to hear the words evil and wickedness only in relation to people who do not profess to be fol-

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1 “The critical objectives of the Church of the Nazarene are ‘holy Christian fellowship, the conversion of sinners, the entire sanctification of believers, their upbuilding in holiness...’ Church of the Nazarene Manual 2017 – 2021, 5.
lowers of Christ. However, over the years, I have come to know that, if given room, wickedness can also infiltrate the lives of those who profess faith in Christ.

Evil often appears harmless. If we are not firm in our beliefs, the cultural voices around us (intentionally or unintentionally) can suggest that we are on the right path; later we realize that such detours have led us astray from fundamental biblical truths. God’s truth matters! Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Jesus implies that when we hold to His teachings, we will know the truth.

To live faithfully as Christlike disciples, we must give attention to biblical truth. “The most basic decision to follow God’s direction makes it possible to be rooted, grounded, and fruitful. The wisdom teacher in Psalm 1 operates from the belief that God created a moral order to life. He has observed that openness to divine instruction brings the possibility for full living. What directs life — how people live — matters. Thus, the poet places before hearers and readers the most basic decision about living. The psalmist’s hope is that readers and hearers will choose life in connection with God and God’s Torah, and so embrace life’s fruitful possibilities.”

As people living new life in Christ, we must put off the old patterns of conduct as well as the carnal mind and put on a new and holy way of life as well as the mind of Christ. The Lord, our God, who saved us from sin and transformed us into the likeness of Christ, continues to work with us. He transforms us, both individually and collectively, to live an alternative way of life in this world where good and evil coexist.

Christ empowers us to live a holy life. “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these, he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

2 Peter 1 invites us to deepen our walk with the Lord. This requires spiritual discipline and reminds us that we are on a journey with the Lord. God continuously transforms us in Christlikeness. Thus, teaching and preaching about moral issues is vital for building the body of Christ. We must speak biblical truth in our crazy world that offers confusing moral messages. May God grant us the courage to speak the truth in love to our generation.

Fili Chambo is a general superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene.


3 Church of the Nazarene Manual 2017 – 2021, ¶28; Ephesians 4:17-24
Each of us wrestles with this fundamental question. Society, bound by identity politics, tells us our identity is found in what we do, what we look like, who we love, what we enjoy, or what we believe. We might even convince ourselves this is true. Yet, each of these false sources of identity hinders us from fully becoming who God created us to be because each source is rooted in our fallen human nature rather than in God Himself.


Because “God created humankind in His image” (Gen. 1:27a), to truly know ourselves, we must first know who our Creator is. We can do that reliably only...
through God’s written Word, the Bible, and what it reveals about Christ Jesus, who “became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Too often, we begin with our own nature and our own desires, projecting these onto God as if He must be like us. We attempt to contort Him into our image rather than allowing ourselves to be transformed into His.

**BOTH MALE AND FEMALE**

Interestingly, God uses sex and sexuality to tell us both how we were created and how He relates to us. In Genesis 1:27b, we’re told “male and female He created them,” and that this male and female “become one flesh” in a garden they share with God (Gen. 2:24-25). Scripture is filled with additional references to sexuality and marriage. In the heart of Scripture (Song of Songs), we find a beautiful story of passionate love—emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual—between a husband and a wife, a story celebrating “martial intimacy [which] is intended to reflect the union of Christ and the Church, a mystery of grace.”¹ The first miracle of Christ was at a wedding ceremony, an act that foreshadows the importance of the mystical union of Christ and His Church (John 2:1-11). This marriage analogy will be used again throughout Christ’s ministry and by His apostles. In Revelation, we see the ultimate marriage of the Lamb of God with His bride, the Church (Rev. 21:9-11).

This bracketing of Scripture with such references suggests that sexuality within holy marriage is a primary metaphor that God uses to help us understand His past, present, and future relationship with us. When the woman exclaims, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Songs 2:16a), she echoes our joy as the Church; our Beloved is ours, and we are His.

Given that our created sexual nature serves as a splendid, powerful representation of both our created nature and our relationship with God Himself, it shouldn’t be surprising that the enemy of our souls would attack this symbol. The spiritual disease of original sin, which taints us all, fundamentally corrupts our understanding of the self. It deceives us, distorts our desires, and seduces us toward all sorts of unsanctified sexual behaviors. Many have struggled with identity issues and sexual proclivities which, without divine boundaries, would destroy us.

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“... the fracturing of human desire in the Fall, resulting in behaviors that elevate self-sovereignty, damage and objectify the other, and darken the path of human desire.” *Manual*, ¶ 31.

Let us be clear about this. Who we are is determined by God and it is neither bad nor mistaken; both male and female were created in the image of God. These distinguishers, ordained by God, are an essential part of how we come to know Him and His creation. Fundamentally, sexuality is neither impure nor degenerate; sexuality helps us to understand how God loves us. The real problem is sin. Sin makes it impossible for us to see clearly. Martin Luther explained:

> Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin being so deeply curved in on itself (*incurvatus in se*) that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, as is plain in the works-righteous and hypocrites, or rather even uses God Himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.2

> “As fallen beings, we have experienced this evil on every level—personal and corporate. The principalities and powers of a fallen world have saturated us with lies about our sexuality. Our desires have been twisted by sin and we are turned inward on ourselves.” *Manual*, ¶ 31.

Our sin results in brokenness and fractures the image of God in us. In our fallen state, we justify forms of self-understanding, identity, and sexuality which are at odds with God’s perfect design. In our sinful state, we trust our personal feelings,

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thoughts, and experiences over the authoritative Word of God and so do damage to the image of God within us. God’s Word is the supreme authority for living a victorious, whole, and holy life. The presence of sin obscures our understanding of God, His holiness, and His hatred of sin. In our pride and fear, we glorify our darkened understandings of sex and sexuality. Gradually, these obsessive false conceptions of self could become idols to the extent of deceiving us into believing that the Lord approves of it all.

“Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god (Ps. 24:3-4).” Ultimately, sin separates us from God.

**OUR LIVING HOPE: GOD’S HOLY LOVE**

We cannot make ourselves walk in holiness except through the blood of Jesus alone. Christ, our living hope, came into the world, lived a life of complete obedience and love as the second Adam, and sacrificed His sinless life to gain our reconciliation with the Father. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are brought into union with Christ. There we are made new, we become holy, and we find our identity in God, even as the incarnate Son did in His humanity.3 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

What does it mean to be in Christ? It means to surrender everything—our desires, our needs, our hopes, our presuppositions—in full submission to Him. “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). It means remaining in Him and He in us (John 15:1-4). It means loving and obeying Him (John 15:9-17; 1 John 5:2-4). It means finding our identity solely in our relationship with Christ. “…In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-27).

“We affirm belief in a God whose creation is an act of love. Having experienced God as holy love, we understand the Trinity to be a unity of...TO TRULY KNOW OURSELVES, WE MUST FIRST KNOW WHO OUR CREATOR IS.

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3 Chris Bounds, personal communication, August 28, 2019.
love among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are made with a yearning for connection with others at the core of our being. That yearning is ultimately fulfilled as we live in covenanted relationship with God, the creation, and loving one’s neighbor as one’s self.”


The call to holiness cannot be separated from the profound love and grace of God; God is holy love and calls us, His children, to the same. All of us will find ourselves searching for identity outside of Christ at different points in our lives. But with humility, we must always trust “…that He is ever present and efficiently active in and with the Church of Christ, convincing the world of sin,regenerating those who repent and believe, sanctifying believers, and guiding into all truth as it is in Jesus.”

Janet B. Dean is a licensed psychologist and associate professor of psychology at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, USA. She holds a District Ministerial License in the Kentucky District of the Church of the Nazarene. She and her husband, Rev. Kevin Dean, have two adult sons.

4 Church of the Nazarene Manual 2017-2021, Article of Faith 3.
WHY I CANNOT IDENTIFY AS A GAY CHRISTIAN

by TIM STEPHANSEN

“Our brokenness in the areas of sexuality takes many forms, some due to our own choosing and some brought into our lives via a broken world. However, God’s grace is sufficient in our weaknesses, enough to bring conviction, transformation, and sanctification in our lives. . . Because we believe that it is God’s intention for our sexuality to be lived out in the covenantal union between one woman and one man, we believe the practice of same-sex sexual intimacy is contrary to God’s will for human sexuality.”

I AM TEMPTED by same-sex attractions.

I have been for years, yet I have never been able to adopt the term “gay Christian” for myself. Understanding the reason for this predicament has taken some time. I have often considered doing so, questioning whether my rejection of the identity was simply me being too pedantic, too restrictive, or too prescriptive.

My reasons for not identifying as a “gay Christian” have always been multifaceted, yet the simplest of them is that the term does not reflect what I desire for my life. That statement may sound crazy if you knew my extensive track record with gay pornography, but I recognize that pornography is a vile, dehumanizing evil that focuses intently and purposefully on the carnal side of me. The spiritual, rational, and emotional sides of me would like to have a family. As a Christian, I have been redeemed and am living under the lordship of Christ, and I therefore want to honor Him. As evidenced repeatedly throughout Scripture, honoring Him through marriage is possible solely through the union of one man and one woman (Matt. 19). Given this reality, I gave up seeing “gay Christian” as a viable option for myself a long time ago. The part of me that is terribly practical does not see the point in taking on a label that commits me to something I have never planned on pursuing. More importantly, I have never heard a convincing argument that reconciles the phrase “gay Christian” with the Christianity that the Bible presents.
The Christianity found in Scripture calls for the complete removal of ourselves from any presence of sin or evil (1 Thess. 5:22), and any sexual acts outside the union of a man and a woman in the covenant relationship of marriage are listed as sin (Rom. 1:26-27, Heb. 13:4). Whether I am sleeping around with many people of either sex or in a loving, monogamous relationship with another man, I would still be in violation of God’s Word.

Some say that defining oneself as a “gay Christian” can stand alongside Scripture, as it is no different than employing other qualifiers, such as “male Christian.” Some may argue that, at face value, aspects of identity such as male, female, white, black, brown, American, or African may essentially serve the same purpose as “gay”; but, if they are all functionally the same, why has “gay Christian” become a normative phrase while the rest have not? If “gay” encompasses sinful desires, does the “gay Christian” label offer clarity or compromise? Is it truly a defining aspect of who I am or is it something that is part of the disordering of my Creator’s plan? Are other sinful desires used as adjectives before “Christian”? Do we use coveter, adulterer, alcoholic, etc., alongside “Christian” to qualify particular sins that a person may have struggled with or is currently tempted by?

Humanity is eternally called to give God everything and to serve only Him (1 Sam. 7:3). Every means by which we understand who we are, both individually and universally, must be obedient to God and His will (Exod. 19:5). To say “I am a gay Christian” is to say, “I am one who views my faith through the lens of my fleshly desires in a way that makes it okay for me to pursue both God and sin.” It places Christianity in a narrative defined by an opposing identity that is against the will of God.

The problem with this narrative is that humanity was not created to live in sin. Christians proclaim the truth that we are created to exist in the measureless expanse of Christ Himself (Phil. 1:21). Christianity as presented in Scripture makes precisely zero allowances for any retention of self-definition that is false and not surrendered to the authority of Christ (Matt. 16:24-27). We are to completely and utterly submit to Christ and His will.

A few months ago, I was again contemplating my views on why I do not call myself a “gay Christian,” trying to determine why it would be important for me to claim that designation. Possibilities included the fact that my desires influence the way I understand the workings of my mind, and that my desires affect my relationships and how I relate to other people in general.

As I was going through this line of reasoning, I realized that I could replace “my desires” with “my sin,” and the logic was the same. My sin influences the way I understand the workings of my mind. My sin affects each and every one of my relationships and affects how I relate to other people in general. The part of me that belongs to Christ, the part that is fighting to become the whole of me, cannot reconcile the melding of my faith with a lifestyle that is in direct contradiction to what the Author of that faith has commanded. To belong to Christ means I cannot be defined by sin.

Many people argue that freedom is found in embracing who you truly are, and many people would argue that I should accept that my identity is a gay man; however, nothing about my same-sex attraction has ever felt like “me.” It’s always been hollow. It’s always been missing something. In short, it has always left me unfulfilled.

Denying myself is incredibly difficult, but it is also the thing most worth doing. True freedom is found only in Christ (John 8:31-32). When God breaks through, and when living in pursuit of Christ and holiness takes precedence over living in pursuit of my own desires, I become free from the shackles of sin—free to be more than I could ever imagine.

Christ has never left me unfulfilled. I have run away from Him and pushed Him aside so many times, but every time I run back to Him, He is there. He welcomes me back and overwhelms me with His unending and unconditional love. When I submit to God and allow Him to remove the blinders of my own selfishness, I am able to see all He has done for me and all that He has purposed for my life. I see that He is all I need.

So, while I will never call myself a “gay Christian,” I have found that “Christian” is more than enough.

Tim Stephansen (ONU ’11) is an uncle, an ultimate frisbee coach, a photographer, and is always learning that his life is not his own, but Christ’s.
THE PROBLEM WITH THIS NARRATIVE IS THAT HUMANITY WAS NOT CREATED TO LIVE IN SIN.
“The principalities and powers of a fallen world have saturated us with lies about our sexuality. Our desires have been twisted by sin and we are turned inward on ourselves. We have also contributed to the fracturing of the creation by our willful choice to violate the love of God and live on our own terms apart from God. Our brokenness in the areas of sexuality takes many forms, some due to our own choosing and some brought into our lives via a broken world. However, God’s grace is sufficient in our weaknesses, enough to bring conviction, transformation, and sanctification in our lives.”

Love and faithfulness, if they are to have any real meaning, cannot exist merely as abstract notions or disconnected, idealized sentiments. They seek to be embodied, given life and expression in a very real world marked by both the beauty and brokenness of very real human beings. Finding their voice in relationship, love and faithfulness speak the language of value, identity, and belonging to the heart of another, wanting above all to know and to be known. Nowhere is this more fully displayed than in the proclamation, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NRSV). God’s faithful love for us was embodied as God with us.
As we listen and respond to the voice of faithful love revealed to us in Jesus, we come to recognize that He is the source of our identity. To be united with Christ is to find our true selves in the Father’s deep, unconditional love and our intended role as God’s image bearers in the world. From this deep sense of belonging and value, we are called to witness to this faithful love through our life and actions. This call is not separated from the everyday realities of our lives but finds expression in all things, both the public and the personal, the extraordinary and the mundane. Even in the most intimate and personal aspects of our lives, the sense of belonging provides the freedom and desire to reveal God’s faithful love.

As human beings, our desire for sexual intimacy is not to be isolated or separated from the call to bear witness to God’s faithfulness and love but should be understood within that call. Admittedly, the church has not always done this well. We have, at times, reduced sexual intimacy to something merely tolerated within a strict moral code, often accompanied by a dose of guilt that left many feeling ashamed that their desires even existed. In contrast, and perhaps in response, others have chosen to throw off all restraints as artificial and unnecessary, insisting that desire can and should be fulfilled for desire’s sake alone. Both perspectives err, not by making too much of sexual intimacy, but by diminishing it. One denies the goodness of sex as a part of God’s good creation and something to be celebrated within the covenantal relationship of marriage. The other exchanges intimacy for sexual gratification as a commodity in which others are easily objectified.

Both perspectives—the moralistic impulse to enmesh sexual intimacy in a web of shame and guilt and the temptation to idolize sex as the one great desire to be pursued and fulfilled at all costs—arise from the same source. That source is our failure to hear the voice of faithful love, embodied and revealed in Jesus, that tells us who we truly are. When our worship is not centered on Christ, sex inevitably takes a wrong turn in one direction or another. For those whose sense of worth is formed by sheer obedience to a religious list of dos and don’ts, sexual desire can remain a source of shame and guilt, even when expressed within marriage. Others struggle to find freedom from their pasts, hearing only the voice of accusation that tells them they are forever impure and will always be seen as “damaged.” And, as our culture so clearly testifies, many will turn to sexual gratification itself as their source of identity. Running from one sexual experience to another, they chase after the wind in an attempt to find fulfillment, love, and self-worth. A wrong sense of identity always leaves us enslaved by something.

The Apostle Paul, when speaking of misdirected sexual desire in particular, connects our sexual intimacy to our relationship with Christ. He tells the believers in Corinth that in sexual union, “two become one flesh” and, therefore, we cannot be joined to a prostitute because “anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:16-17, NRSV). Our union with Christ defines us, and what we do with
our bodies matters. When we find ourselves embraced by the loving faithfulness of God, and this becomes the foundation of our worth and significance, we are released from the impulse to define ourselves through sexual fulfillment or anything else. We are set free to embody the faithful love of God in all of our living and being, including our sexual desire.

The husband and wife living in the covenant of marriage can celebrate sexual intimacy as God’s good gift. This gift is free of shame and affirms the goodness of the body, pointing us toward God as the gift-giver. Sexuality then becomes a gift offered to one another, a renewal of the covenant that expresses the faithful love they have received from Christ which now defines them. With their identity firmly grounded in the loving faithfulness of God, sexual involvement outside of their marriage covenant is simply not an option because it contradicts the faithfulness of God. Extramarital sexual relations become more than the violation of a moral code—they become a violation of who we are.

At the same time, the person who remains single and celibate equally testifies to the loving faithfulness of God. We have not always celebrated the path of celibate singleness as a God-honoring way of life, and yet such a life clearly bears witness, in a truly counter-cultural way, to the deep truth of Christ being our greatest desire. For single persons united with Christ and finding their identity in Him above all, the idea of sex outside the covenantal relationship of marriage runs contrary to the faithful, covenantal love they know in Christ. Rather than futilely seeking meaning through expressions of sexual intimacy that do not reflect God’s faithfulness, they live into the fulfillment of being in and with Christ who truly knows them. Understanding who they are, with no need to idolize sex, they are free to bear witness to the sufficiency of God’s faithful love.

Married or unmarried, embracing who we are in Christ shapes the life we live in the body. Sexual desire and intimacy cease to be subjects of either shame or selfishness. When submitted to Christ, they are witnesses to His faithfulness. As Beth Felker Jones sums it up, “The path of faithful marriage is a sign of God’s faithfulness. The path of celibate singleness is a sign of God’s faithfulness. When a single person doesn’t have sex, his body is a testament to God’s utter refusal to forsake us. When a married person remains faithful, her body is a testament to the same God.”1 The Word indeed became flesh, the bodily revelation of our faithful God and the call to come home to our true selves. And the true self, firmly established in Christ alone, is free to live life in the body as a signpost and witness of God’s loving faithfulness to the world.


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**When Our Worship Is Not Centered On Christ, Sex Inevitably Takes a Wrong Turn…**

Doug Van Nest is the dean of the School of Christian Ministry at Mount Vernon Nazarene University.
“...we affirm that some believers are called
to be married. As defined in Genesis, “a man
leaves his father and mother and is unit-
ed to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

(Genesis 2:24) The marriage covenant, a
reflection of the covenant between God and
the people of God, is one of exclusive sexual
fidelity, unselfish service, and social witness.
A woman and a man publicly devote them-
selves to one another as a witness to the way
God loves. Marital intimacy is intended to
reflect the union of Christ and the Church, a
mystery of grace. . .” —Church of the Nazarene

2017-2021 Manual, ¶ 31
It’s not a big deal.” My neighbor spoke those words with conviction as we chatted over the fence, and then she walked back to her house. Her relationship with her live-in boyfriend was over. They were splitting and going their separate ways, and her words implied that none of it mattered. Yet somehow, I was not convinced. Apparently, the upcoming separation was the result of a new job opportunity for her. She wanted me to believe that forfeiting her relationship was little more than a minor inconvenience, the unavoidable price of chasing a career dream.

Her family had certainly looked and functioned like a typical family over the two years they lived next door. They traveled, biked, and laughed together. They hauled in groceries, barbecued, and played together. Together, they smiled and waved at their neighbors. However, now it was all coming to an end. Perhaps anticipating this possible outcome years earlier, my neighbors had never married in the first place. What a relief!

Or was it?
MARRIAGE WAS DESIGNED AND, THEREFORE, DEFINED BY GOD.

These scenarios are becoming more and more common today. The script for marriage—and marriage-like relationships—has never been so unpredictable. In some ways, it seems that my neighbor’s words have come to summarize a larger perspective on relationships in general: they are simply “not a big deal” anymore.

Recent research focused on marriage has resulted in headlines announcing that the entire institution may now be obsolete or outdated. Once thought to be the bedrock of family life and civil society, marriage is now increasingly seen as something uncertain and disposable—a relic of a bygone era. Before paying our last respects to this vanishing institution, however, it might be wise to review what God has to say. What are His thoughts on marriage? Scripture contains at least three dominant and enduring themes on the subject:

First, marriage was designed and, therefore, defined by God. Genesis makes clear that marriage was God’s idea before sin ever entered the world. Prior to the fall in Genesis 3, God created the institution of marriage as a male-female, monogamous, permanent, procreative foundation for a healthy society. Sadly, humans have sought to redefine God’s design ever since then. Sociology and anthropology have documented numerous variations in marriage patterns across history and cultures, suggesting that such diversity ought to be viewed as normative. The Judeo-Christian position, on the other hand, explains that these historical and cultural variations are not normative, but are actually deviations from God’s design—the result of fallen, sinful humanity. It is noteworthy that both Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6) and Paul (Eph. 5:31), thousands of years later, still affirmed God’s original design established at the time of creation.

Second, marriage is valued for the role it plays in civilization. The institution of marriage is found at strategic historical junctures throughout Scripture. Each major community-producing movement of God begins with a marriage. For example, at creation, human civilization started with the marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2). Later, when God promised His blessing to the Hebrew people, that blessing was passed along through the line of Abraham’s marriage to Sarah rather than through his liaison with Hagar (Gen. 17:19-22). In the New Testament, Jesus’ earthly ministry was inaugurated and confirmed at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, after which many “put their faith in him” (John 2:11). In other words, the formation of Christian community was an unexpected outcome of that eventful wedding.

The eternal heavenly kingdom will likewise commence with the “marriage” of Christ to His bride, the Church (Rev. 19:7-9; 22:17). God clearly values marriage, repeatedly launching His biggest initiatives with weddings. Marriage and the formation of communities, or civilizations, are consistently linked. In a sense, every marriage marks the beginning of another small civilization. Perhaps we should not be surprised, then, that as marriage has been unraveled in our day, we have also witnessed the parallel erosion of civility. Healthy marriages have always produced healthy communities.
Third, marriage is used as an earthly picture of how God relates to His people. This truth, like the previous ones, is evident in both the Old and New Testaments (Hos. 1-3; Eph. 5:31-33). Marriage serves as one of the leading metaphors for God’s unconditional, unrelenting, unfailing love for His people. The marriage covenant reflects God’s pursuit of and covenant with those He loves. To violate either covenant—the marriage covenant with one’s spouse or the spiritual covenant with God—is an affront to the Creator. Thus, imprudent acts like adultery and idolatry are both destructive and displeasing to the Lord. Dismantling or redesigning marriage is an act that usurps God’s role and compromises His intention.

From God’s perspective, then, marriage is a big deal and is not going away. Therefore, as the holy people of God, we would do well to pause and consider how marriage might be honored today. What should a godly and healthy marriage look like in a world like ours? Based on the three Scriptural themes noted above, it seems reasonable to expect the following:

Since God designed marriage, a healthy marriage ought to look like His design and definition. The Word, not the world, is our authority on the matter. Do we reflect and lovingly point others to that design?

Since God values marriage, a healthy marriage ought to be our priority, too. In other words, its daily care, nurture, promotion, and protection should be our goal. Do our priorities exhibit how much we value marriage?

Since God uses marriage to illustrate His own interactions and longings, a healthy marriage ought to be marked by persistent pursuit, faithfulness, grace, forgiveness, sacrifice, and respectful communication. After all, this is how God interacts with us. Do we treat marriage as the model and metaphor that God wants us to uphold so that the world will know how much He loves and relates to us?

In a broken world, we should not be surprised that relationships in general, and marriages in particular, are troubled and unstable. The temptation is to copy our neighbors and conclude that marriage and relationships really do not matter much these days. However, that would be a tragedy for several reasons. First, God’s Word trumpets the significance of marriage. He has not changed His mind, regardless of what our neighbors may say. Second, young people today are seeking guidance from trustworthy sources on the subject. For their sake, we dare not keep silent. Third, numerous examples of healthy marriages still exist in our churches and communities. These serve as wonderful role models and need our support. We must not abandon them. To the contrary, let us look for ways to celebrate and elevate such sacred unions.

Marriage is indeed a big deal, and there is much more at stake than most people would realize. To advocate for it is to point people back to God, the Designer and Creator.

Kent R. Olney, Ph.D., is in his 25th year as professor of sociology at Olivet Nazarene University. He is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene, has been married to his wife Beth for 43 years, and together they have two married sons and four grandchildren.

HEALTHY MARRIAGES
HAVE ALWAYS PRODUCED
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.
“Sexual sin and brokenness is not only personal but pervades the systems and structures of the world. Therefore, as the church bears witness to the reality of the beauty and uniqueness of God’s holy purposes we also believe the church should refrain from and advocate against pornography in all its forms, which is desire gone awry. It is the objectification of people for selfish sexual gratification. This habit destroys our capacity to love unselfishly.” —Church of the Nazarene 2017-2021 Manual, ¶ 31.
One of the most striking aspects of the creation narrative is the concept of *tobh* or *tov*, God’s proclamation that His creation is defined by His inherent goodness. It is an expression of congruence between the Maker and that which He has made, the resonance of love between a Father and that which has been birthed into existence. Inherent in this goodness, we see connectedness and relationality as defining features of the created world, epitomized by the first man’s awakening attunement to God, to creation, and ultimately, to another—woman.

**THE BEAUTIFUL GIFT OF SEXUALITY**

In fact, the first space where this goodness is compromised is in the state of disconnection, as Scripture states, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). This goodness is reflected in the spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy shared within the covenant of marriage. It is a covenant that is intended to emulate the same self-giving nature and *agape* that is rooted in the Trinity (Eph. 5:21-33), and captured in the phrase, “Two will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Mark 10:8; Matt. 19:5-6; Eph. 5:31).

Two becoming one flesh is far more than a sexual euphemism; rather, it allows us to see the unfolding of God’s design for the beautiful gift of sexuality. It is a gift that is found in our human physiology, in the procreative and unitive dimensions that serve to proclaim the gospel even on a biological level. We were created specifically for connection by a God who, by His very nature, is connection. We bear the image of our Creator. Through this lens, every aspect of intimacy within the covenant of marriage and every dimension of human sexuality we have been gifted is intended to be the goodness of God revealed in us.
DISINTEGRATED LIVING
AND THE DISTORTION
OF THE GIFT

While there is intrinsic goodness within the gift of sexuality that we have been created with, we need not look far in our fallen world to find a number of ways in which the gift has been distorted. Pornography, sexual trauma, early sexualization, infidelity, and sexual addiction serve as primary indicators that a great fragmentation has occurred, leaving us in a state of disintegrate living. Though it would be easy for us to assume that these distortions exist exclusively outside of the safe confines of our seat in a Sunday morning pew, a brief self-reflection among the faithful would suggest that these behaviors are as common among God’s people as they are among the world we are called to evangelize. At times our best efforts to live in the world have softened us to the temptations of the world. Evidence of the fragmenting effect of sexual sin is seen in the church among clergy and laity alike.

One primary example of disintegrated living is the disconnection between the mind and the body while watching pornography. The mind is consuming images that have nothing to do with the physical reality of the individual, while the body responds as if it is the individual participating in the act that the mind is perceiving. This leads to a distorted manifestation of sexuality and divorce from reality. Individuals continue to do things that fragment the connection of their body, mind, and soul, and separate them from what God intended.

The distortion of the good gift of sexuality often results in the fracturing of relationships and the destruction of family systems. As a church, we have been here before (Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6).

In many ways, our well-intended (albeit somewhat misguided) attempts as a church to navigate the many cultural distortions of sexuality have contributed more to the perpetuation of the problem than to the restoration of sexuality to its place of goodness within God’s design. The veil of secrecy and silence in the church about the various facets of human sexuality have left an indelible sense of shame in our Christian imaginations. Our shame-based sexual ethic has come to emulate the same covering and hiding that occurred the moment sin entered the world (Gen. 3). Yet, in the darkness that grows in a culture of sexual distortion, we have a hope to cling to: “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25).

THE REINTEGRATIVE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

One primary theme throughout the Gospels and in Paul’s epistles is the idea of reintegration. This is the process by which the things that have been torn asunder through the consequences of sin are restored to wholeness by the transforming power of grace. We see this call to reintegration in Christ’s answer to the question about the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30-31; Matt. 22:37-40). We are created for a wholeness that gives us the ability to love others like Jesus, which begins with consecration of all of our body, mind, and soul to Him. This model of reintegration extends into the pair-bonding and procreative dimensions of God’s design for sexuality.

In Scripture, Jesus emphasized His interest in reintegrating us to wholeness. He engaged those who lived in a distorted narrative of sexual sin. Regarding the pair-bonding nature of human sexuality, we see Christ encounter the Samaritan
woman at the well in John 4. Her story is a common one for many men and women in the modern world: a history of failed relationships, an apathy about commitment, an unwillingness to entrust herself to anyone completely, and a broken sense of self-worth. It is in this place of personal shame and social disconnection that Jesus offers her a chance to drink from the living water and to have her deepest desires all fulfilled in Him. He restores her from a place of disordered relationality and impaired capacity to bond with others to the full measure of being known, affirmed, included, and chosen. This is the gospel we are invited to enter into, experience, and proclaim.

Alongside this unitive dynamic of the sexual system, we see Jesus also restoring the procreative dynamic. The bleeding woman who touches the hem of His cloak was subjected to a condition for 12 years that rendered her unclean and forced her to the fringes of Jewish society (Mark 5). The nature of her bleeding may indicate a concern emerging from her reproductive system, but the restoration she experienced was far more than just biological; it was also a significant social and spiritual restoration, which serves as an important example for the church today.

We must examine the notion of procreation through a more intentionally Christian lens. Maternity and paternity cannot be used as the benchmark for biological procreativity, for there are many whose roles and responsibilities will never involve bringing physical life into existence. Rather, the idea of procreative reintegration within the church should instead focus on the exertion of energy by all parties toward nurturing those who are young, those who are vulnerable, those who are weak, the orphan and the widow, and any who are in need of the unconditional love emanating from the heart of the Father. In this paradigm, the reproductive health of the church, namely evangelization and discipleship, invites all persons to co-labor in the effort to raise mature followers of Jesus, regardless of age or ability.

Thus, the making of Christlike disciples in the nations becomes dependent on the Body of Christ reintegrating its procreative potential, primarily the fervent proclamation of the gospel and the sharing of God’s love for those who bear the scars of existing in a sexually distorted world.

Perhaps the best model for us to draw on in thinking about the reintegration of goodness into God’s design for sexuality is a stained-glass window. For centuries, small pieces of glass, by themselves insignificant, have been brought together and crafted into beautiful mosaics that often depict the story of God’s love for His creation. Light shines through, and out of the collection of fragments, a story of redemption emerges. These bits of glass tend to resemble the fragmented moments from our own sexual pasts: the mistakes we have made, the struggles we have secretly carried, the shame that has suffocated us, and the failures we have buried deep inside. When surrendered to Christ, His light can shine through, transforming and redeeming us. Through His power, we can use our past as a witness to those in our midst who need God’s holy love. In a broken world where sin has left many of us sifting through the shards of past sexual mistakes, shame, struggles, and failures, may we come to know intimately and declare boldly the wholeness and redemption that we find only in our Creator.

Todd Bowman is associate professor of counseling at Indiana Wesleyan University.
SEXUAL VIOLENCE
AN INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA SUKANEN
HT: The Nazarene Manual speaks out against sexual violence in many forms (including rape, sexual assault, sexual bullying, hateful speech, marital abuse, incest, sex trafficking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, bestiality, sexual harassment, and the abuse of minors and other vulnerable populations). How has your work encountered these sad realities in our world?

RS: I worked in Moldova for four and a half years as Director of the Moldova Mobile Medical Intervention Clinic in the red-light district in one of the major cities. I worked with those who were sexually exploited: sex-trafficking victims, prostitutes, and those who were at high risk of being trafficked.

Through that work, I saw victims of physical abuse, stabbings, and those who had been raped. We received calls from women locked in apartments by their “boyfriends” (pimps) and individuals who had been through so much sexual trauma that they became incontinent. I witnessed doctors turn people away because of their conditions (syphilis, in one case), and we had to advocate for them to get the care they needed.
One woman, a wife and mother of five children, had been working the streets for years and ended up dying from cancer. Our group of ministers went to the funeral and were able to help the father of the children with legal advice for custody of the children.

This organization has been there for those who have tested positive for HIV and supported them through the process of finding resources in the community to help.

**HT:** In what ways does sexual sin have both personal and social implications?

**RS:** Sexual sin, to me, is hard to define, because it may include what is done to you and what you engage in by your own free will. The question of choice was often very convoluted with the women I worked with.

Sexual exploitation itself leads to sickness and death for the person being exploited, often in a slow way. The societal consequence of sexual sin is that it devalues relationships. Instead of asking “How can I commit to having a bonded, loving relationship in which I can rear my children up in a healthy way?”, sexual sin turns the question into “what satisfaction can I get out of this?”

Women we worked with had little opportunity to escape their situations. We verified this through our research. Those lacking choices, education, and support are the most vulnerable. We must understand that there are no easy answers. Sexual violence corrupts at such a deep level that women caught in this system feel they have no other options that would keep them and their children alive. It is not difficult to see the rationale of these survival-based choices.

The breakdown at the family level is a significant root cause of these problems. We need to focus our attention as a faith-based organization on building strong, healthy families that support females and males equally.

**HT:** What systems allow for sexual violence to spread and what systems fight against or prevent this evil?

**RS:** The systems that allow for sexual violence to spread are those that tend to have power imbalances. These corrupted systems, in many cases, exhibit signs of hatred, dislike, mistrust, and mistreatment of women. Corruption can occur in any institution of influence, including church, government, education, family, and business.

They tend to hush those who are victimized—men, boys, women and girls—and often tell them it’s their fault they’ve been victimized. These systems protect the person who inflicts the abuse by introducing shame and secrecy to the victim’s life.

We must be honest that the church can cover up or condone this pattern of behavior. At times, leaders have been protected so as to squelch the rumors and issues of sexual abuse and avoid having to deal with the hard issues at hand. In addition, the watching of pornography (including child pornography) has desensitized and
THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS THE ANSWER FOR A BROKEN WORLD.

HT: How do we, as Christians, talk about and bring awareness to the issue of sexual violence?

RS: We have seen women leave the streets for new professions. We have seen women purchase sewing machines and start businesses from home. We have seen others take small steps by reaching out to a community of hope, such as the church, in order to get care and resources for themselves and their children, so they will not have to use their bodies as commodities for income.

One woman we served had just had a C-section when we found her in the red-light district. We were able to help pay her bills and get her reconnected with her mother; here, she was safe, she and her child were cared for, and she did not have to sell herself.

HT: What message of hope can we offer to a world marked by sin?

RS: We can offer the world hope through showing mercy and justice to both victims and abusers. Sin grows in the dark. We can be honest about sin and its destructive nature for individuals, society, and the church. We can act, without hypocrisy, in a holy light and bring a message of hope to the nations. By doing these things, the Church of the Nazarene can proclaim truthfully what we are fighting for and what we are fighting against to those who have been abused, mistreated, and violated.

HT: How do we, as Christians, talk about and bring awareness to the issue of sexual violence?

RS: We condemn it and prosecute it where and when we can. We do not silence the victims and protect the guilty and accused. We must support justice at all levels. The mistrust people have with authority structures can be at times validated when they have experienced corruption. Leaders must be transparent, innocent, and honest in both their intentions and actions. The church of Christ is the answer for a broken world.

HT: How can we participate in God’s healing of brokenness?

RS: We can participate with God by bringing brokenness out into the open for all to see. We must surround those who have been in this situation and help bring healing through long-term, relational support. We need people who are willing to become trained, trauma-informed caregivers and ministers, so we can provide the care that these individuals need and help them find new avenues to commit to the goal of lifelong restoration.

HT: What victories have you witnessed among those who have suffered from sexual violence?
Michelangelo, the master artist, was a teacher with lofty goals. He corrected the work of his students by sketching the scene a pupil was trying to portray. His skillful work was placed beside that of the learner. This special touch was a standard and an example of fine art principles. The student could follow the pattern and please the master.

Our Heavenly Father has used this method to teach His children a holy standard. When God said, “Be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44), He put His will for humanity within reach. He issued the law and the sacrificial system as a “schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24). Obedience and consecration were required from Moses and the chosen people of Israel.

In time, God produced the image of His holiness on a canvas of human flesh. The perfect life of His only begotten Son entered our faulty mural as a babe. Jesus’ obedience and devotion to the Father revealed, in complete likeness, the holy life He expects from redeemed humanity.

With His own touch, the Heavenly Father gave a perfect example to live among us. Truly God and truly man, Jesus was sent to put holy living within the grasp of every believer. He always did the will of the Father. He poured out His life as a sacrifice for our sins. Through faith in Him we may receive divine forgiveness and cleansing.

All our efforts to meet God’s holy standard fail without faith in Him. If any of Michelangelo’s pupils shunned his model, they missed what they should have learned. If we ignore the example of Christ, we wrongly assume that God’s standard of holy living is too high.

But holiness is within our grasp when faith claims the transforming power of Jesus’ shed blood. We receive divine strength to live a holy life. We cannot reform ourselves. The bent to sinning is too great; the selfish bias is too overwhelming. We must plead Christ’s blood applied to our lives to be made holy.

The cross of Jesus calls us to seek forgiveness and cleansing for our sins. If we confess, He is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse us from all evil (1 John 1:9). This is holy living begun. As we repent, our faith that God forgives banks on His faithfulness. Christ proves God’s triumph over sin and death. Despite all evil powers, Jesus died a holy sacrifice and arose from the dead. Because He lives, we receive new life through His Spirit.

Though Jesus died for our sins, He Himself was sinless. His perfect offering for sin makes it both needless and shameful for His followers to continue sinning. After His resurrection and ascension, He poured out the promised Holy Spirit on His followers. They received Him in a mighty, cleansing baptism.

The cross of Jesus calls believers to total consecration. Christ “suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood” (Heb. 13:12). Only as we “walk in the light, as he is in the light,” do we have fellowship with one another, “and the blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The Spirit of Christ purges and fills every consecrated heart with love for God and humanity. His Spirit enables us to obey God daily despite the tempt-
A HIGH STANDARD FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

ing pressure to join the selfish revolt of this depraved world. Only He can make us holy without and within.

Christ has overcome Satan's power in the world, not only for Himself but for all believers. Through His cleansing, indwelling Spirit we can live a holy life here and now. We ought not try to hide our sins as one might sweep dirt under a rug. Nor should we suppose Christ's “robe of righteousness” covers our inner evil disposition. God has not lowered His holy standard to compromise with our wicked surroundings. Rather, He lifts us in love to engage His holiness, to respond in love with every aspect of our humanity.

Too often we measure our lives with standards set by other people, with the rules of the church, or according to selfish goals. Such self-righteousness is as a soiled line in our lives, marking where we shun God's holy will. The purity of heart and life that God wants has no “high water” mark, showing the limits of devotion.

The total commitment God demands of His people is what Christ, our example, provides. There should be no mistake as to what the Father expects from us, His children. Jesus’ atoning sacrifice reconciles us, and the gift of His Spirit empowers us to do the Father’s will. We must by faith seek unto His holy standard. The law of perfect love fulfills all other divine precepts.

Only the Master can approve the likeness of a faithful pupil compared to His perfect model. “Students” are unqualified to judge how well others are following the standard given. But Christ's Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are His children. We know whether we have confessed all sins to be covered by His blood. We know when we have surrendered all to Him. We know to what extent we have followed the Master in obedience.

God’s standard for holy living is high. But it is within reach of our faith, through the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith, we are made strong in weakness. By faith, our feeble attempts to conform to His image are transformed when we submit to His holy work in our lives. We display God’s holiness as we follow the example the Master has given us.

Ivan A. Beals (1927-1997) was an office editor of the Herald of Holiness.

Every miracle of Jesus had a spiritual, emotional, and physical effect. In some cases, people came to the Lord for healing from diseases, and He proclaimed salvation upon them. In other cases, people came with spiritual needs, and He restored them spiritually, emotionally, and physically. In all cases, Jesus restored the person completely after their encounter with Him. In Christ, all things are made new—always!

One such story is the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, as narrated in the Gospel of John (5:1-15). This healing event helps us understand the process and depth of a theology of wholeness in the midst of brokenness.

**Brokenness Interrupts Worship**

In this story, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals (v.1). As a good rabbi, the Lord was faithful to the religious rigors of the law. As He journeyed to the temple to worship on a Sabbath, He was interrupted by the reality of a place full of broken people. Brokenness is a fallen state that impedes our worship of God. Brokenness is the consequence of sin, whether personal or original, and needs the healing work of Christ.

I remember being in Haiti preaching a message on the power of worship. After nearly one hour of beautiful worship and praise, I was distracted by a mother with her dying child who was suffering from malnutrition and gastrointestinal disease. I had to stop preaching and attend to the woman as the rest of the congregation was also distracted. It was there I learned a Haitian proverb: “Sak vide pa kanpe” (an empty sack cannot stand). My Haitian brethren told me that there would be times when the noise of famine and brokenness could be louder than the words of the preacher.

The massive prevalence of brokenness around us may be overwhelming. On Jesus’ way to the temple, He passed by the Bethesda pool, where a great number of disabled people used to lay helpless—the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed (v.4). In this pool surrounding, brokenness was not only loud, it was overwhelming. The massive and pervasive nature of brokenness around us may at times force us to think that these situations are normal. We may get used to sin and brokenness because of their sheer numbers. This was not the case with Jesus. He saw beyond the surface and got to the root of the problem.

Brokenness traps the broken in a spiral of hopelessness. In the midst of all the needs around him, the paralyzed man in John 5 had resigned himself to the idea that brokenness was his inescapable fate. Chronic brokenness is so disheartening an issue that it clouds people’s vision to the point of leading them to embrace their condition as part of their new reality.

The paralyzed man is a metaphor for those who have fallen prey to the downward and inward spiral of brokenness. Resignation to brokenness means deciding to live an empty and hopeless life. This condition stays until we choose Jesus.

**Wholeness and Holiness**

When Jesus saw the paralyzed man, He asked him, “Do you want to get well?” Other versions record the question as, “do you want to be made whole?” Jesus knew this man’s condition had affected all areas of his life and that physical healing was only part of the restoration process. He knew that this man needed to be restored completely, but his willingness to submit to the Lord and his desire to be made whole were necessary for healing to take place. When we accept Jesus’ intervention in the middle of our brokenness, He restores all things. He touches body, mind, and soul so that we can worship Him in wholeness.

While it would have been easier for Jesus to simply heal the man and keep on walking, He chose to ask the man for a response and require an action. “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” were clear instructions that demanded a response. If he would have chosen not to follow the instructions, he would have remained in his crippled condition. But the man picked up his mat and experienced restoration (v.8).

In their efforts to help the broken and oppressed, many well-intended min-
istries shift the levels of dependence from one addiction to another, almost encouraging dependence on handouts, assistance, and institutional care. Christ-centered wholeness results in freedom from dependency and the ability to journey with our heads up, looking to our Lord as the only source of joy and wholeness.

A biblical theology of wholeness must always be holistic and Christ-centered. It has to begin with God’s intentions for full restoration of all things to His image, and it has to be centered in the transformational power of Jesus Christ, through whom all things are restored.

**In Christ, all things are made new—always!**

Even well-intended ministries only scratch the surface if their efforts focus on the ministry itself and not on the person of Christ.

Many who come to Jesus for help do not realize the depth of their need. Jesus alone has the unique ability to restore all areas of our lives. The Lord’s question, “Do you want to be made whole?” is not rhetorical. He made us in His image, and brokenness does not reflect His image in us. When we set ourselves aside and surrender all to Jesus, He can make all things good, beautiful, and restored. **Gustavo Crocker** is a general superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene.

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**A CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITY**

has rewarding returns for both you and the Kingdom

With a Charitable Gift Annuity, you can benefit from income for life and leave a legacy of generosity.

**It’s simple:**

1. You make a gift of cash or appreciated stock to the Foundation.
2. In return, you’ll receive fixed annuity payments for the rest of your life.
3. Then, when you go to heaven, the remainder will be distributed to the ministry you choose—making your gift annuity an investment in the Kingdom.

Current one-life rates (two-life rates slightly lower):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Age</th>
<th>65</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>90+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Rate of Income</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, contact:

**Church of the Nazarene Foundation**

913.577.2983 | info@nazarenefoundation.org
Every month, almost 5,000 retired Nazarene ministers and widowed spouses receive a Basic Pension benefit from the Church of the Nazarene. In fact, last year we spent almost $15 million for this purpose. At the same time, we placed $9.5 million in the Basic Pension Trust to cover future obligations to these dedicated servants.

We also placed $1.8 million in Annual Pension Supplements (APS) in the Fidelity 403(b) accounts of eligible ministers and other church employees to help them to invest for the future when they are no longer in active ministry. We used another $1 million to underwrite basic life insurance for nearly 8,000 active and retired ministers and provide disability coverage for an additional 4,000 individuals. For those who faced medical assistance hardships, we were able to come alongside with $120,000 in benevolence assistance.

None of these benefits would be possible if not for the generous giving of Nazarene districts and churches—like yours—to the P&B Fund. The payment of your allocation allows us to assist almost 17,000 active and retired ministers and other church employees with benefits like these, as well as relevant information on taxes, compensation, and other financial matters that affect their lives.

On behalf of these men and women, active and retired, we express our deep thanks for expressing your love and appreciation in such a tangible way.

Our prayer is that God will bless you and yours during this holiday season and throughout the coming year!