



harvestusa

2022 MAGAZINE

Ministering the Truth

AND MERCY OF THE GOSPEL TO A SEXUALLY
HURTING, BROKEN, AND CONFUSED WORLD

PRAISE FOR *Jesus and Your Unwanted Journey*



PAUL E. MILLER

Author of *J-Curve: Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life*

What a wonderful resource to help the multitude of women who are experiencing betrayal with the epidemic of sexual brokenness among men. When you are suffering it's so, so important to be grounded in the comfort and wisdom of Scripture. Thank you, Ellen, for helping the church with this guide to sanity and wisdom!



JEN OSHMAN

Author and Women's Ministry Director

This workbook, and the opportunity it presents for women to pursue healing in a group, is a needed resource for the church—one that fills a glaring void in most of our ministry offerings. *Jesus and Your Unwanted Journey* is both theologically rich and immediately practical. The readings, exercises, and group discussion questions draw the participant into the healing presence of Jesus over and over. The format is accessible and can be used right away by any group leader who wants to help women heal. Participants will be nourished.



PAUL DAVID TRIPP

Pastor, Counselor, and Author of *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional*; *Sex in a Broken World: How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts*; and *Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make*.

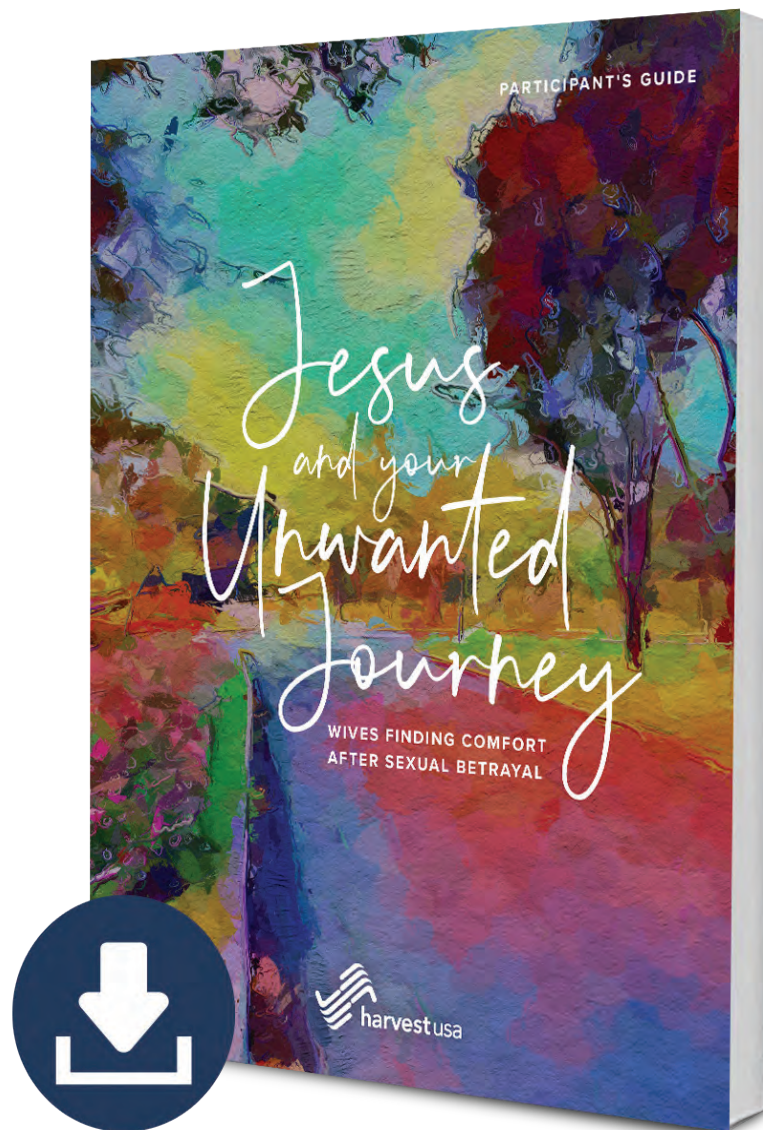
I cannot recommend *Jesus and Your Unwanted Journey* highly enough. I know of no other resource that does what this one does. It brings concrete and practical gospel wisdom, comfort, direction, and hope to women going through one of the most challenging, heartbreaking, and hard-to-share life experiences. The beauty of *Jesus and Your Unwanted Journey* is that the content of this resource is anything but general. It is wisely designed to reach into each woman's individual experience with gospel help that is formfitted for her particular struggle. It is my prayer that this wonderful gospel tool will receive wide recognition and use.



MICHAEL R. EMLET

Dean of Faculty and Counselor, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation; Author of *Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners: Loving Others as God Loves Us*

Flowing from years of ministry experience, Ellen Mary Dykas has written a biblically saturated, Christ-centered curriculum that provides a wise, compassionate, and hopeful path forward for wives suffering from the pain of their husbands' sexual infidelity. Full of guided engagement with Scripture and thought-provoking questions for self-reflection and discussion, this is an ideal resource to promote healing for women in a group setting within a local church.



10-Session Workbook (with companion Leader's Guide) for Women Facing the Pain of Sexual Infidelity

**A FREE Downloadable Resource at:
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MISSION

Harvest USA brings the truth and mercy of Jesus Christ by:

- Helping individuals and families affected by sexual struggles
- Providing resources that address biblical sexuality to individuals and churches

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FROM THE FOUNDER

A Little Old... A Little New

Our 2022 magazine is a unique combination of several important topics crucial to Christian families and the church today. In our continued commitment to provide biblical support for parents of an LGBTQ+ identifying teen or adult child and to help people better understand the transgender issue and those who struggle, we have reprinted two articles from previous magazines that address these situations.

Finding Support in the Middle: Parent Testimony, originally published on the Harvest USA blog, is an important article written by parents to parents. It navigates the tension of remaining faithful to biblical views about sexuality while pursuing relationships with and better loving their sons, daughters, or grandchildren embracing an LGBTQ+ identity and life. As the article explains, it's critical to find peer and targeted support on this daunting road. The authors talk about their journey and how they found the Harvest USA parents' support group a safe place for them to get biblical encouragement and help. This attests to what one parent, who was initially hesitant to join a group, recently shared with me. After a few monthly meetings, she went from thinking, "I don't think I need a group like that," to, "I can't wait for the next meeting; it's become an oasis in the desert for me."

Gender Confusion: What Do We Say? addresses how we can approach speaking with someone experiencing gender dysphoria or transgender struggles. While not exhaustive, it covers general biblical principles for initial conversations. Transgender issues continue to affect more Christian families than ever before, especially impacting adolescent girls. The number of parents contacting our ministry with a teenage daughter declaring a "trans" identity has markedly increased in the past six months. It's the right time to reprint this article that appeared six years ago on the Harvest USA blog.

Related to this dilemma many families are facing, you will want to read my review in Book Review Corner on ***Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters***. Author Abigail Shrier has done important, eye-opening research into the phenomena of Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD) among adolescent girls.

We've got a new article by Ellen Mary Dykas on providing biblical support for wives who have experienced sexual betrayal. ***Markers on an Unwanted Journey: Wives Facing Sexual Betrayal*** outlines the steps a wife often experiences, including facing shattered dreams, working through her powerful emotions of shock, grief, and shame (among others), and meeting her sympathetic high priest in the valley of suffering.

You'll also find an uplifting testimony from a woman who went through one of our women's groups for sexual strugglers. She shares how the gospel became more powerful to her by breaking habits of sexual sin and pornography use.


As we strive to produce new resources that address biblical sexuality and offer solid, helpful guidance, we hope this edition both blesses and enlightens you.

John Freeman

FOUNDER



JOHN FREEMAN is the Founder at Harvest USA. His calling is to see those who struggle with pornography, homosexuality, and other sexual addictions experience changed lives through Jesus Christ.



When sexual sin intrudes upon the marriage covenant, it's more than a physical act of betrayal. Spouses experience covenant treason from the one they promised to love, cherish, and faithfully honor, and from whom they were promised the same.

Three Markers on an Unwanted Journey: Wives Facing Sexual Betrayal

BY ELLEN MARY DYKAS, DIRECTOR OF WOMEN'S MINISTRY

Marriage creates a powerful opportunity for a husband and wife, in covenant before God and witnesses, to enter into a oneness-of-life relationship. The marriage covenant is unique, in part, because it's the only God-blessed context for sharing sexual intimacy. The lifelong, exclusive, loving relationship provides a protected context for spouses to share themselves completely with one another. Both spouses commit to this *in dependence upon and out of love for Christ*. When experienced according to God's design and intent, shared sexual love is indeed a beautiful gift that keeps on giving.

What happens, then, when sexual sin intrudes upon the marriage covenant? It's more than a physical act of betrayal. Spouses experience covenant treason from the one they promised to love, cherish, and faithfully honor, and from whom they were promised the same. The impact of sexual betrayal forces a spouse onto an unwanted journey that is excruciating, yet is within the reach of the healing, redemptive hand of God.

Let's consider three markers of this unwanted journey from the view of a wife. These common experiences of suffering will help you not only understand what wives face, but also how to compassionately engage and walk with them.

I. Shattered Dreams: A Fractured Marriage Is Revealed

When my husband's sexual sin was revealed to me, it was like peeling the layers off an onion. As each layer of truth was revealed, more tears flowed. He had lived in a lie for 30 years! How could I have been so blind? I suddenly felt like I was living with a stranger. I walked around in a daze, with a hurt inside of me that I never could have imagined. My shock soon gave way to anger and then grief. I felt a livid, raging anger—an ungodly anger. It was directed not only at my husband, but also at God. I was overwhelmed with grief over the “loss” of the perfect marriage I thought we had.

— *Former member of Harvest USA wives' group*

Like the pastor's wife above, most wives experience a

shattering of dreams—of reality as they understood it to be—when a husband's sexual sin comes into the light. Some women may have known going into marriage that he had a problem with pornography, but assumed that, once married, his lust issue would fade away. Some men choose not to disclose the whole truth about their battles with sexual sin to their wife. Their intentions may seem noble in not wanting to hurt or overwhelm them with the depth of their struggle. However, the impact of hiding the real deal generally compounds a wife's hurt and broken trust as it serves to ‘teach’ her that her husband isn't telling the whole truth. This is exacerbated each time he is caught, rather than taking the initiative to confess on his own.

II. Painful Emotions Explode in Radically Different Directions

I've rarely met a couple facing sexual infidelity who were at the exact same place in the timetable of emotional response. Actually, I've never met a couple in the exact same place!

Consider the husband caught in a duplicitous life of adultery and porn usage. This man may be respected in his church and perhaps his family has been perceived to be a model of faithful engagement in the gospel of Christ. Then, the truth comes out when his wife discovers secret accounts and messages on the family computer.

The husband may initially blame shift, erupt in anger that she “thinks she's so much better than me,” then collapse in shame, feeling some sense of relief that the hiding, lying, and covering his tracks can stop now. He's exhausted from it all.

While the guilt is heavy, he's glad to have it off his chest. He may also respond with godly sorrow and have a broken heart over his sin, hoping his wife will be able to forgive him.

The wife, however, faces a shattered reality, which results in shock, profound grief, shame, fear, rage—all within minutes or hours or days of the initial exposure of sin.

She may feel and try to explain to others, “I feel like I’m going crazy!” She’s been tossed into a stormy ocean of pain and unbelievable, yet real, circumstances.

Her heart screams out:

*Save me, O God!
For the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
I am weary with my crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.
More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
mighty are those who would destroy me,
those who attack me with lies.
What I did not steal
must I now restore?
— Psalm 69: 1–4*

I’ve found that even the most well-intentioned helpers wound wives further if they mistake a wife’s initial raw emotional response for something it isn’t. She may be told she is unsubmissive or being overly sensitive because, after all, so many Christian men struggle with lust, or that she is just being too emotional. Remember, sexual betrayal is treason to the marriage covenant. It is normal and to be expected that a wife’s emotions may be all over the place.

III. A Sympathetic High Priest in the Valley of Suffering

God, in eternal compassion, included the painful wrestling of Jesus in the Scriptures so we have an example to follow as those called to die to self. All four Gospels give details of what Jesus experienced in the hours immediately before his arrest:

- He faced his closest friends falling asleep on him, then all his followers running away.
- He agonized alone in pain and fear, crying out to God for help.
- He cried out to God for rescue from the cross.
- He submitted to his Father, saying, “Not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:42).
- He rose up and went forward by faith to endure the cross, death, and resurrection.

Praise be to God that hurting wives can heal. They can rise

up and move forward in a costly, painful journey. Helpers will patiently hold this amazing gospel promise of life after death in their hearts, not rushing past a wife’s traumatic pain or urging her prematurely to say she forgives him.

Wise helpers will pray she’ll grow to believe that, regardless of how her husband responds to the disclosure of his sin, she can find the deep comfort of Christ in the pain of sexual betrayal.

This journey will, however, lead her through a valley of questioning, grief and suffering. Eventually, she will need to trust God to carry her through an excruciating death of what ‘was’ and embrace his strength, compassion, and wisdom for the journey in front of her. She has been forced onto an unwanted journey that can lead her to know Christ as her true eternal husband more deeply and intimately than ever before, understanding his love, care, and protection for her (see Hosea 2:19–20; Phil. 3:10).

After I found evidence of my husband’s affair, I took off my wedding ring and told my husband in anger and pain, “You left me, and God is my husband now.” Then, [as I read] through Hosea, I realized I had something “special” in common with God; we are both betrayed spouses!

Then my mind quickly went to the realization: I have also been unfaithful; not with my husband, but with God. Throughout our eight-month separation and long, bumpy road toward marriage reconciliation, I found great comfort in picturing Christ as my Bridegroom, who loves me with an everlasting, perfect love. Who comforts me when I’m down, always listens to me, and cares for me deeply. And will never betray me.

— *Former member of Harvest USA wives’ group*

These markers are important to understand if you want to really love a hurting wife with the comfort of Christ. Her healing, growth in Christ, and the possible restoration of her marriage cannot be rushed; this is not a linear process!

For further guidance, please check out the workbook that I wrote after years of journeying with wives and marveling as so many clung to Christ, finding his comfort, and growing more and more into his likeness.

You may download Harvest USA’s new curriculum for wives, *Jesus and Your Unwanted Journey*.

www.harvestusa.org





Finding Support

A Family Talks about Harvest USA's Parent Support Group

We were directed to the ministry of HarvestUSA from a counselor shortly after finding out about our child's struggle with same-sex attraction. Like many parents hearing such news for the first time, we were confused and shocked. We felt like our lives had been turned upside down. We didn't know where we should turn for help, or what we should do. The Harvest USA Parents' Support Group has helped us navigate this challenging situation in light of God's Word.

What do we *get and give* as members of this group?

We've learned a great deal about God, about ourselves, and about what our children are going through. It was so hard at first to comprehend that one of our children could be struggling with their sexuality. We wished that our child's sexual identity could change with counseling or reasoning from God's Word.

We now understand that simple or easy changes are not going to happen, but the fellowship of the group reminds us that God is sovereign over us and our child, that he is in control, and that our world is not collapsing around us. God is our deep comfort, and one way he provides this

comfort is through our brothers and sisters in the group.

We feel connected—no longer alone. We are able to talk with other parents as well as get God's perspective as we look into his Word. To be hurting in isolation is terribly painful. To have other brothers and sisters in Christ come alongside and share their stories and experiences gave us hope and strength during a difficult time.

We feel safe. The group is a safe place to cry, to be able to release our feelings, and to not feel like we're the only ones dealing with such feelings.

We pray and are prayed for. It feels good to know that others are praying for us and our child, and that we can pray for them, too. Praying for others in the group and coming alongside them helps us get our attention off of our own child and engage with others who need prayer and support, too.

In the entire group experience, but especially during prayer, we come to live out what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of comfort, who comforts us in all our

troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

We learn how to love with Christ’s love. The staff at Harvest USA has helped us see how God wants us to respond to our children, and how we should engage the culture on this issue with compassion and truth. We’ve gained new insight into how to demonstrate God’s grace and love to our children.

We are changed. God has used this group to change us as parents. Scripture teaches us that God uses everything that happens to a believer for his or her good. Our struggle with our child’s same-sex attraction has deepened our love for our children, and has made us more sensitive to this issue that is so much a part of our culture today.

We have learned we all struggle with sin and that sin originates from idols we hold dear. Homosexuality is no different from any other sin; it originates in our hearts. Understanding the frailties of our own hearts and also our child’s heart helps us respond to our children and our culture as Christ would.

***We are reminded that God
is sovereign over us and our
child . . . that our world is
not collapsing around us.***

We find God to be a deep refuge. The Parents’ Support Group at Harvest USA is a refuge, a conduit of God’s grace in a culture struggling to understand and deal with sexual identity as God intended it to be. As it says in Nahum 1:7: “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; He cares for those who trust in him.”

For more information about Parents’ Ministry at Harvest USA, contact our Parents and Family Ministry staff member Joy Worrell at joy@harvestusa.org.

Will You Make an Impact... For Eternity?

Culture, society, and the church are changing—we see that here at Harvest USA every day. Just a few years ago, a faithful ministry donor said to me, “What Harvest USA does will be more crucial and needed in the future than ever before. But you will encounter more hostility and aggression towards your ministry than you’ve ever known.”

We’re seeing the truth of this every day. In recent months, our office building has twice been the target of vandalism. Graffiti sprayed on our building reminds us that we are “the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 2:15). We’ve been dropped from the missions giving of several churches due to our commitment to biblical authority. Also, a community foundation that previously included Harvest USA in their one-day giving campaign has excluded us—all because of our views of biblical sexuality.

That’s why we’re asking faithful ministry partners to consider including Harvest USA in your will or planned and estate giving. We want to see Harvest USA flourish—not only now, but well into the future via our Legacy Fund.

If you want to learn how to make an impact for the gospel into the future, please contact Scott Pickering (scott@harvestusa.org) for information about planned and estate giving. Thank you for your kind generosity.

***“The only money we really have is that which we wisely give away, and, in fact,
it’s the only way we take our riches and possessions with us into eternity.”***

— Loraine Boettner, *Immortality*



MEET THE STAFF

Bob Heywood



NAME

Bob Heywood

HOMETOWN

Philadelphia, PA

POSITION AT HARVEST USA

Men's Ministry Staff

DESCRIPTION OF WORK AT HARVEST USA

I facilitate biblical support groups for men and engage in initial visit appointments with men who reach out to us for help. These appointments allow me the privilege to speak into the lives of people from all over the country and world!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SCRIPTURE?

Anybody who knows me knows that my favorite book of the Bible is 2 Corinthians. There's a lot going on in that book, but one highlight for me is chapter five, verse twenty-one: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." A clearer gospel statement can't be found. I love it.

HOW DID YOU GET TO HARVEST USA?

I came to Harvest USA around 24 years ago because of my own personal struggle with pornography. After a few years of involvement with the groups, volunteering with facilitating groups, and then losing my job as an offset pressman, my pastor suggested I inquire whether Harvest USA could take me on as an employee. John Freeman graciously accepted me—if I could raise support. In six months, I raised enough support to start working part-time, and I've been working part-time ever since. I've been working here for 18 years now.

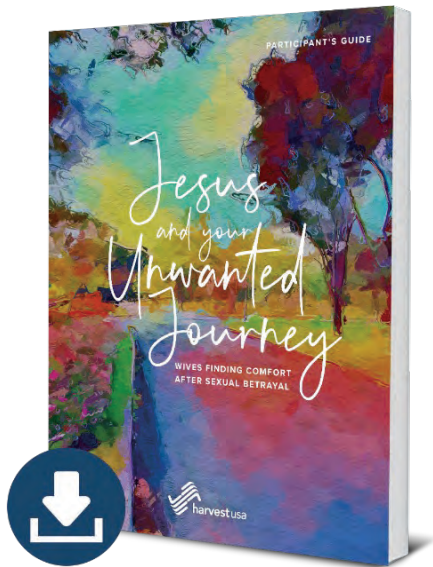
WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT LIVING IN PHILADELPHIA?

I used to work in Old City Philadelphia at 2nd and Chestnut. I love that area and always enjoy going there for a visit. I also love the Roxborough area, where I was born and raised; it's home to me. I'm also an avid Philadelphia sports enthusiast. But I have to admit, that has been a rough experience over the years.

CAN YOU TELL US AN INTERESTING FACT ABOUT YOURSELF?

I've been married to my high school sweetheart for 49 years. I've also been going to the same church for 48 years. We've changed denominations twice, but in the same congregation! I worked for the federal government for 28 years and was in the United States Air Force for four years. I came to Christ when I was in the Air Force in July 1971. My highest degree of education is Roxborough High, class of '69.

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Learning How God Meets Our Needs

One Woman's Story



The following story was written for us by a woman who received discipleship from our Women's Ministry team.

I've been on a journey toward healing and holiness for a while now. One night, I found myself struggling. I'd been masturbating since I could remember and began engaging with pornography in my late 20s. After walking with Harvest USA for a few months and with 150 days of victory under my belt, I was in a battle to indulge my flesh or engage in warfare.

When I started working with a counselor at Harvest, I didn't think I had a problem. *I'm doing this because of the abuse I went through*, I told myself. I blamed my dad for my sexual behaviors of masturbating and pornography. Early in my walk with Harvest, I struggled when my counselor and I talked about my actions being a mirror of what was in my heart. "That's because of my abuse. These things aren't in my heart," I argued.

However, on my way to church one Sunday, it clicked. The desires I had weren't sinful in and of themselves. They were God-given desires. The problem was how I was going about getting them met. I was looking to myself and others to get my desires met, rather than to the One who gave them to me. Life had taught me that I needed to take care of things myself, because no one else was going to. However, that was a huge foundational lie I discovered through counseling with Harvest.

I uncovered many other foundational lies while working through *Sexual Sanity for Women*. I also discovered that I did indeed have a problem. I saw myself in the cycle of addiction. I finally understood the driving force behind my chronic masturbation and pornography use: my heart. My desires for control, security, connection, power, and comfort, the drive to avoid pain, powerlessness, and loneliness, and the fact that I (rather than God) was sitting on the throne of my heart all had me trapped in an addictive cycle.

I always struggled with going to God about my chronic masturbation. Every time I engaged in it, I believed he must be so disappointed with me. Every single time I asked for forgiveness, I worried that his forgiveness had run out. It was amazing to me when I read in *Sexual Sanity* that God meets me in my temptation. *He doesn't think I'm disgusting? He doesn't abandon me, or run away from me, in my temptation? He's with me?*

When I first read that my temptation helps me know God better, I didn't understand. Then it hit me: *In my*

temptation, he offers himself to me to be what I need.

I had turned to masturbation for comfort, connection, stress relief, power over the things that had been done to me, and to avoid loneliness and pain. I believed masturbation and pornography could meet those needs.

However, I learned—and am still in the process of understanding—that only God can meet my deepest needs. For far too long, I believed the lie that sex could give me what I needed. I believed it could satisfy. The problem was that it was temporary, keeping me in a cycle of repeatedly giving in.

Every single time I asked for forgiveness, I worried that God's forgiveness had run out.

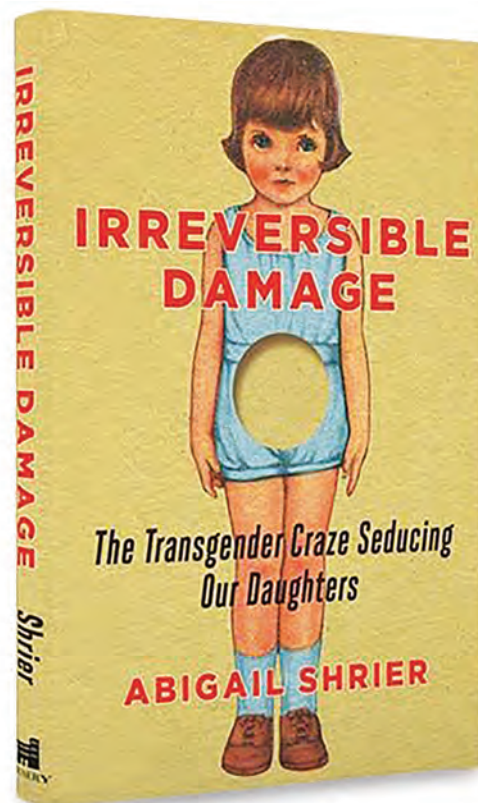
I came face to face with this lie the night I was struggling, and ended up sending an email to the counselor I was working with:

It's so tempting to just give in and believe the lie that masturbating will make the feelings go away. I know that trick, and I know it doesn't work. I'm asking God for help. It's also tempting to look things up I know would lead me down a path that would have me looking at things I shouldn't. So, I'm not going there. I feel like this is the real living-out of the lyrics of a song I've often sung *Lord, I Need You*: "So teach my song to rise to you / When temptation comes my way / And when I cannot stand, I'll fall on You / Jesus, you're my hope and stay." May my song rise to him in this temptation, and may I fall on him. He is my hope, and He is my stay. He keeps me. I think I'm going to go play my guitar.

And I did. I played my guitar. I reached out to my accountability group. I worshiped. I allowed the Lover of my soul to comfort me, to provide connection and rest. I'm learning that he alone can meet my needs. Sex can't. Pornography can't. I can't. Only Jesus can.

And he truly satisfies.

Matt Maher, *Lord, I Need You*, (All the People Said Amen, 2013) www.lyrics.com/track/29106932/Matt+Maher/Lord%2C+I+Need+You accessed 9/6/22.



Irreversible Damage

The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters

BOOK CORNER: A REVIEW BY HARVEST USA FOUNDER JOHN FREEMAN

We don't often recommend resources that are not distinctively Christian. However, Abigail Shrier has written a bold and courageous book in *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*. It could not be timelier and more crucial for today's families. For this, she has been vilified by the LGBTQ+ community, other academics, and the medical community. A writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, she holds degrees from Columbia College, Oxford University, and Yale Law School. *Irreversible Damage* was voted one of the best books of 2021 by both the *Economist* and *The London Times*.

I'll give a disclaimer up front: this is a hard book to read.

It contains heartbreaking and shocking stories of teen girls who have transitioned to boys (including realistic descriptions) with language that can be crude and even offensive. As a believer, gird up your loins and take a deep breath. However, it's a gem of a resource and, I believe, a "must read" for anyone involved in youth ministry in their churches. The benefits of learning what's often going on in the hearts of teen girls regarding their hidden confusion about gender and sexuality far outweigh this book's negative aspects.

Who Is Influencing Our Daughters?

Shrier conducts an extensive survey of adolescent girls aged 13 to 17 who, seemingly overnight, begin to believe

they're gender dysphoric and need to transition to become male. She examines the phenomenon of Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD), where these girls had no prior desire for this—even just a few months before their declarations. For these girls, it is discovered “out of the blue, after a period of prolonged social media immersion,” Shrier writes. ^[1] She therefore distinguishes between traditional gender dysphoria that typically begins at the age of two to four (by the way, nearly 70 percent of childhood gender dysphoria self-resolves), and the explosion of ROGD in teen girls in the past ten years. Traditional gender dysphoria begins in childhood and is marked by persistent, insistent, and consistent gender distress. It's not something that suddenly comes upon a teen at 13 or 14 years old.

Through hundreds of interviews with young women who have transitioned and their parents, Shrier sees a common-denominator pattern: immersion in social media. She coined the phrase “social contagion” to describe the source of this amazing increase in the number of adolescent girls seeking puberty blockers, hormone treatment, and even radical surgeries. She concludes that most of these girls are being persuaded by their social network (which consists of many like-minded gender dysphoric-identifying peers), including their school peers, teachers, counselors—and even physicians. Shrier explains, “Transgender influencers coach other adolescents on how to wheedle a testosterone prescription from even a skeptical clinician. These influencers advise teens to study the DSM diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria and prepare a pat story about how they ‘always

knew’ they were ‘trans’ in order to assure getting the medical interventions they want.” ^[2]

“Affirmation” Is Not the Answer

One of the most helpful things about this book is that it addresses the common misconception that drastic and medically invasive steps bring resolution to the mental pain, despair, depression, and (sometimes) suicidal ideations of these young girls. Shrier believes that “affirming” those teens who experience ROGD does not cure their depression or suicidal fantasies. She references many studies showing that rates of mental health, self-harm, and suicidality do not decrease even after the use of puberty suppressants and other hormonal interventions to retard estrogen. In fact, she shares the terrible physical dangers associated with these—including impaired cognition, diminished bone density, permanent infertility—as well as the ongoing mental struggles in these young girls' lives. According to Shrier, these interventions do nothing to ease the loneliness, social struggles, and anxieties that often push teen girls into desiring a trans life and identity as an attempted solution—aided and abetted by everyone around them.

We Must Be Prepared

There are two particularly helpful and informative chapters. “The Regret” highlights interviews with scores of young adult women who had the drastic medical interventions to become trans-males and now regret it. For many of them, there is no going back, even though they've abandoned a male persona.



Don't Be Afraid to Admit That It's Wonderful to Be a Girl.

These people are known as “de-transitioners.” Shrier shares, “each of these desisters and de-transitioners I talked with reported being 100 percent certain they were trans—until, suddenly, one day, they weren’t. Nearly all of them blame the adults in their lives, especially the medical professionals, for encouraging and facilitating their transitions.” [3]

As I think about these young adult women, I especially feel the church must be prepared for that avalanche of women like this, full of regret, who will respond to the gospel and come into our churches. We must be prepared.

The Way Back is a crucial chapter because it talks about how parents can help prevent their daughters from being seduced into this painful and dangerous path. Some of those steps include:

- Don’t get your kid a smartphone.
- Don’t relinquish your authority as a parent.
- Don’t support gender ideology in your child’s education.
- Reintroduce privacy into the home.
- Stop pathologizing girlhood.
- Don’t be afraid to admit that it’s wonderful to be a girl.

Shrier also talks about the dire need for parents of teens experiencing ROGD to get peer support from other parents experiencing the same thing. Of course, this is something we have realized since the inception of our ministry. The Harvest USA Parents’ Support Groups are places where parents can cry, talk, pray, and get needed biblical support about the heartache and challenges they face, not only with self-identified gay and lesbian children and grandchildren, but with those who are “trans” and “+” identifying.

Exposing a Destructive Movement and Helping Our Kids

Shrier is not a Christian; she’s an Orthodox Jew. Regarding the kinship that Christians and Orthodox Jews may share, however, she wrote, “For hundreds of years, Orthodox Jews and religious Christians have lived in proximity. Never before have they had such close ties and genuine fellowship. This strikes me as something to celebrate.” [4]

In some instances, Shrier takes an unbiblical stance on homosexuality and adults who decide they are gay or trans. However, this does not take away from her scholarly and academic work in *Irreversible Damage*. It’s an informative and gutsy approach to exposing a destructive movement. Pointing out the fact that we must do something to help these adolescents discover the real, often age-appropriate, causes of their hurt is important. Shrier is a voice in the wilderness of confusion and political correctness we see all around us when it comes to the push to assist teens to, borrowing an Army recruiting phrase, “be all that you can be” as teen trans. Her voice is refreshing and much needed. I think we, as Christians, need to pray for her and her impact in the spheres and halls of academia and medicine.

Finally, I’ve reviewed this because these are real, heart-breaking realities impacting Christian families and the local church—often fracturing both families and churches.

Just in the past month, I’ve had interviews with and ministered to over half a dozen Christian families whose teen daughters have announced their trans identity. I’ve worked with pastors whose elders and church leaders face similar challenges with their teens. I’ve done in-service training with youth leaders who didn’t have the foggiest idea what to do when trans teens began attending their youth group. I’ve included this book review so church ministry staff and parents might be better prepared to minister to hurting teens—image-bearers of God floundering in a confusing world.

I pray that *Irreversible Damage* equips you to respond to the challenges of our time and care well for the young people in your life. Let me know what you think.

– John Freeman, Founder
(john@harvestusa.org)



1. Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Regnery Publishing, 2021), 26

2. *Ibid.*, 34

3. *Ibid.*, 201

4. Abigail Shrier, “The New Jewish-Christian Amity,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 7, 2018. Accessed 9/30/22.
www.wsj.com/articles/the-new-jewish-christian-amity-1536356083



Gender Confusion

What Do We Say?

BY R. NICHOLAS BLACK

A pastor calls, wondering what he should do. A married woman in his church is beginning to look like a man. Over several months, her changed appearance has made it increasingly clear that a slow but significant transformation is happening. But neither the woman nor her husband has asked for help. No one in the congregation has said anything publicly, though people are beginning to take notice. What should this pastor do?

For a church to help someone with gender confusion, they must first see a real person in distress. When we get down to the level of the individual, this becomes not a cultural battleground but a person who is struggling. Yes, our culture has made transgenderism the issue du jour, but the person in front of you is like a lamb without a shepherd. In everything you do, help her come to the true Shepherd who will gently guide her.

So, if someone in your church is struggling with gender confusion, we need to do more than proclaim adherence to Genesis 1 and 2 to resolve his or her dilemma. Yes, good biblical teaching on sexuality is necessary. We must not

abandon the anchor position that Scripture gives us: God created humanity as male and female, and those two genders are who we are as unique individuals. Living out our given maleness and femaleness is an essential part of what it means to be human.

But we also live in a Genesis 3 world. Ours is a broken world, resembling God's original design but increasingly showing deep cracks in how God's image-bearers reflect his image. Men and women have struggled with sexuality and gender for countless ages, so this isn't anything new.

What is different now, however, is how the culture has turned reality upside-down, insisting that the individual decides what is real and true, rather than the individual conforming to reality. But those who wrestle with their gender identity don't think they are trying to be rebellious. Rather, they are confused, desperate, and fearful, trying to make sense of their pain. The distress they feel is real. The world's solution seems more hopeful, a better "fit" to their struggle, so they embrace the post-Christian script that gender is essentially pliable.

What is our advice on what this pastor could say to this woman? How might he speak a message that could give her hope—maybe enough hope to grasp why God has called her to live as a woman, maybe enough hope that she can begin to see herself living congruently with her femaleness, and maybe enough hope for a future that would help her choose to slow down and reverse the transition process she seems to be pursuing?

What do we say? Here are five broad principles this pastor and a church can pursue:

Affirm and recognize how hard this is.

Affirm the likelihood that this struggle has been going

you share a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality. Keep in mind that she has come to hate parts of herself, so communicate in a way that helps her question what she believes about gender rather than trying to convince her with an argument. *If God has designed every detail of your life from the beginning (Ps 139), how do you view God if you insist on transitioning? What makes you hate parts of your body when God loves the very body he gave you? What would need to change if you began to accept the body you were born with? Do you know what Scripture says about what it means to be a man or a woman? How is that different from what you believe?*

Understanding biblical truth and then applying it to our hearts is a journey, so expect this to take time. Good



Understanding biblical truth and then applying it to our hearts is a journey, so expect it to take time.

on for some time. Recognize that this is not a superficial battle and that she and others are trying to make sense of what they experience. Ask good questions so that you can begin to grasp what her life is like and why she feels so strongly that she needs to transition to the opposite gender. *When did you start feeling this way? When do you feel it most strongly? What makes you feel most desperate?* Get to know her; listen to her stories that are shaping her. Listen carefully.

Carefully teach and seek mutual involvement.

Communicate to her that deep, persistent struggles grow stronger when we contend with them in isolation. As someone who attends your church, ask if she would allow you to keep speaking into her life about this. You want to hear her thoughts but you also want her to listen as

teaching is rarely, if ever, the sole factor that encourages someone to move in the right direction. Our words, combined with our loving presence, are what people in pain need. Being involved also means connecting her to the body of Christ. You could assist her with Christian counseling, help her find an older and wiser woman as a mentor, involve her in appropriate ministry, pray with her, and so on. It's in the body of Christ that we grow. Here, among those who will encourage her, she will learn to accept and grow into the gendered body God gave her. Walk with her for as long as it takes, through all the successes and failures that will be part of her journey.

Help her to grasp that our life, which includes our body, first belongs to God.

Patently teach that believers in Christ have a deeper

foundation for their identity than those in the world. We do not have the right to be autonomous, self-determined individuals, creating identities and lives that fit our felt needs. We are unique individuals, but we first belong to the One who gave us life and redemption. Being made in the image of God includes our gendered body; who we are and how we relate to God and others flows through and is shaped by the body we are given at birth. The body is not like a piece of clothing we can change; we are “ensouled bodies,” bodies into which God breathes life. The body he has given us is essential to our identity.

An identity grounded in Christ seeks his purposes above all else. Orienting ourselves around Christ allows us to reflect on the secure identity that he offers, rather than frantically trying to discover or fashion an identity for ourselves. Grounding who we are in Christ gives us the means to fight and grow increasingly free of internal desires that first confuse and then enslave us.

Teach a biblical view of perseverance in the midst of suffering.

Acknowledge that some life-situations are chronic, persistent, and will not be completely resolved in this life, like many chronic disability circumstances. We are called to persevere faithfully in certain situations, to discover in

and through the struggle that God’s grace gives all of it meaning and purpose, and provides us daily strength to live, grow, and even prosper (2 Cor. 12:8–10).

Call her to bring God into the heart of the situation.

Bringing God into the heart of the situation is absolutely necessary because this is a spiritual issue, too. Her gender distress has another element of struggle, beyond what she or others think about this issue. And it is this: to go against God’s design and purpose (and reality itself) brings about increasing confusion and pain. Searching for healing is not necessarily wrong, but pursuing solutions that violate God’s intentional design and purpose is rebellion against him. Bringing God into the center is to move toward obeying him, even when it is difficult.

Obedience involves repentance, a daily practice that slowly brings about change and joy. This is accomplished not by focusing on behavior, but by helping her see her heart, the place where she still seeks to find her own solutions. Help her see that obedience is not just keeping a set of rules, but rather the means to experience following Christ as a life-affirming direction. We are calling her to live obediently in ways that honor God, and biblical obedience can look different from our preconceptions.



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