

LOOK WHAT'S INSIDE:

RETHINKING PAIN & SUFFERING

LAST LAUGH

MENTAL HEALTH NEWS

NCF IN ACTION

Romancing The Fearful Heart

by Linda Harris

Self-confidence. I've struggled with it my whole life. My school years included rejection, teasing, and exclusion: no dates, no proms, and no close friends.

As I matured, I realized how much my fears crippled my life. I forced myself to speak up in social situations instead of avoiding people, but I didn't understand how much my feelings of inferiority affected my relationship with God. My childhood predisposed me to a distorted view of God. For years, I was afraid to draw near to Him. I imagined God must be disappointed in me.

The Roots of Spiritual Fearfulness

My mother struggled with fears of persecution and often thought people intended to hurt her. After church she'd often complain, "She didn't even say hello to me. She must be mad at me."

I tried to reason with her: "Maybe she was preoccupied. Did you make an effort to speak to her?"

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Giving Your Kids The "No" Advantage



by Sandy Mayle

Ihate to say "no" to my kids. I don't like to be the unpleasant voice of reason. And I dread the prospect of the battle. I don't think I'm alone. Few parents enjoy opposing their kids or denying their desires. I once heard a well-known radio Bible teacher speaking on legalism and oppres-

sive rules, "My wife and I determined that we were never going to tell our daughters 'no' unless it was absolutely necessary." It seemed like a good plan, but when I mentally applied it to our family, there were many times when saying "no" seemed absolutely necessary! And now that our boys are teens, we've had to draw the line

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ADVANTAGE, continued from cover

on a whole new host of issues—media, dating, friends, curfews, to name a few.

As difficult as it can be to say no to my sons, I know that it's often the Biblical way to parent them. In *Hebrews 12:11* we read, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (*NIV*). The "later on" harvest explains why my

husband and I no longer consider "no" to be an entirely negative pronouncement.

We've discovered a few guidelines that help us when we must "bless" our sons with a denial of their wants.

Be Slow to Speak

Many years ago, I was talking to a friend outside of church when my toddler son, out of my reach, suddenly began trotting toward the street.

"Jamie!" I called sharply. Immediately, he changed course. Our

pastor witnessed my son's response and remarked, "Kids need to learn to obey right away like that, because in a life-or-death situation, there's no time to explain."

When my sons were toddlers, "no" was short, firm, and non-negotiable. Only the most basic explanation or justification was necessary. But as our sons have grown older, we seldom say "no" in the hard-nosed way I did that Sunday with Jamie.

I'm certainly tempted to respond that way. But when one son brings me a Christian review of the latest secular movie and asks, "Mom, will you read this and see if I can go?" or another says, "Mom, I want to ask you something, and I don't want you to say anything until I'm all the way through this," I try to choke back the too-ready answer on my lips. Their requests usually aren't unreasonable, so I need to hear them out so that my "no"—if that's my answer—comes, not out of irritation, selfishness or stubborn close-mindedness, but out of a real desire to protect my sons and guide them to make sound decisions.

Be Flexible but Firm

My youngest son drools over cable TV. "If we had cable, I could watch all the NASCAR races, not just the ones on the major channels," he laments. But the cable hookup lies disconnected because, at least in our area, that hookup would also include programs that are far less desirable.

"Can I get on Instant Messenger later tonight? Nobody's on this early," another son used to plead. But we'd had enough problems with questionable material on the Internet that my husband and I held firm on time restrictions.

We've found that we need to shift gears on these issues periodically. At one time we used filtering software on our computer, but now we use a program that records and rates Internet activity for regular third-party (in this case, parental) review. We feel comfortable giving our boys a little more responsibility, with the understanding that we will be checking up on them now and then, and becoming more flexible as they get older and show us they can be trusted with more responsibility.

Do my kids protest the constraints?



Sometimes. But turning them loose on the Web or TV is the equivalent of waving at little Jamie as he toddles toward the busy street, "Be careful, honey. I'll be done talking soon."

Someday they will be loose in all the traffic of modern life. We want them to know how to protect themselves, and those they love, even when it's not appreciated.

Know to Whom You're Accountable

"Mom, it's PG-13. I'm 14. Kids laugh at me because I'm not allowed to go." In my son's mind, the ratings, filters, and other media "guidelines" are perfectly trustworthy. But after one or two rentals of PG-13 movies, it became painfully obvious to me that the industry's rating system couldn't be relied upon as our ultimate authority on acceptable content. What our culture - and sometimes even other Christian families - deems acceptable for a 13-year-old can be very different from what we want our young teenagers to view. After a long period of conflict, it was a watershed moment when we sat around in the master bedroom discussing the various negative elements of movies and establishing where and why the lines would be drawn.

That was well over a year ago. I

recently came across our written guidelines in a dresser drawer and reread them. We've been holding pretty close. Those guidelines haven't solved everything, but they've kept us from rehashing many of the same issues.

Sometimes circumstances pressure us to soften our stance. Sometimes our sons' arguments threaten to wear away at our resolve. But the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (*Romans 12:2 NIV*). We must not let the world do our thinking—and parenting—for us.

It hasn't happened often, but I have been challenged to the point where I finally say, "No, just no." It would be a lot easier to say yes, but it's really not up to me. I'm going to have to answer to God someday for my decisions, and I don't believe that's what He wants.

God's word says, "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (*Romans 14:12 NIV*). I want my kids to learn that we try not to base our restrictions on our own opinions or preferences. Although we won't always get it right we carefully pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance to apply God's Word to our children's lives in a wise and caring manner. They're birthed out of prayer and meditation, listening to God's voice, and reflecting on our own life experiences and the culture around us.

On my dresser lies a worn index card, a reminder of a conflict-ridden season in our family. When I was overwhelmed by regular confrontations with angry, strong-willed children, these verses gave me tremendous comfort:

"Do not be dismayed and break down at the sight of their faces, lest I confound you before them and permit you to be overcome. ... I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar and bronze walls ... and they shall fight against you, but they shall not finally prevail, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you" (*Jeremiah 1:17-19 AMP*).

It's been said that parents who love each other give their children a sense of security and a wholesome pattern for the future. Certainly that's true. But an awareness that parents are acting under the ultimate authority of a loving, protective God really completes the picture. †

Sandy Mayle is a freelance writer who lives in Erie, Pennsylvania. She and husband Dave have three sons: Jamie, Ryan and Greg. Sandy writes frequently for *Pray! Magazine*, and *Discipleship Journal*, creates Day of Prayer materials for local prayer events, and maintains a website of her devotional writings at www.sandymayle.com.

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LAST LAUGH



"Honey, When you say we can't communicate... what exactly do you mean?"

Rethinking Pain & Su

by Karin Becker

When I was in sixth grade I developed mystery headaches—headaches that no doctor or specialist could figure out. My nickname in school was “80%” because I missed at least one day of school a week due to chronic sinusitis and bouts of bronchitis. My siblings stopped believing me when I complained of not feeling well, saying I had no proof that anything was wrong with me, and my parents were deeply concerned and frustrated with my health.

In junior high school when I went to an allergist and learned that I was severely allergic to almost everything, the various jigsaw pieces of my health puzzle came together. After years of receiving allergy injections, trying various elimination food diets, limiting my exposure to environmental factors (including getting rid of my beloved dog and my exposure to the outdoors), I was still faced with continual pain and infections.

Almost twenty years later, I am still dealing with these same health issues that all stem from my acute allergies, but my approach to treating my allergies has changed from trying to eradicate allergies to learning how to live with them. Through my health struggle, my perspective on pain has developed and matured. Instead of looking at my suffering as something I don't deserve or want, I ask, “What can I gain from it?”

John Donne, dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London in the early seventeenth century, while afflicted with a plague-like disease, wrote the book *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. In his book, Donne wrestles with the questions that strike most sufferers, that of the reason for pain, why me, and where is God through all of this? Through writing his book, twenty-three devotions in all, his perspective changes as well as the questions he asks. Instead of focusing on the cause of his pain, he gradually moves toward focusing on his response to the pain. He confronts the tough question of “Will I trust God with my pain and the fear it provokes or will I turn away from God in bitterness and anger?” The source



of pain, Donne realized, was not important. Trusting God, through all things, is what matters for trust represents the proper fear of the Lord.

Creating an interdependent relationship between fear and trust allowed me to see how my fear of pain brings about an opportunity to show my deep trust in God. The more I fear illness, pain and infection, the more I can trust God and his sovereignty that he is present beside me, seeing me through it, allowing it to happen for some unknown reason. I can trust that this experience, this sickness, in spite of the pain, will bring me closer to God.

In fact, historically, sickness and suffering have caused many to express their dependence on God. Early 18th century Irish minister Henry Lytle suffered childhood illness and penned a poem entitled “Praise the Lord, O My Soul” which is influenced from Psalm 103. In it he praises God for all the good things God has given him, including being “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.”

I don't know much about the personal life surrounding one of my favorite poets,

Emily Dickinson, but I do know that she experienced much suffering and loneliness. Reading her poetry, expressive and raw, provides me with another lens to view pain. In “To Learn the Transport by the Pain” she writes,

*To learn the Transport by the Pain—
As Blind Men learn the sun!
To die of thirst—suspecting
That Brooks in Meadows run!*

*To stay the homesick—homesick feet
Upon a foreign shore—
Haunted by native lands, the while—
And blue—beloved air!*

*This is the Sovereign Anguish!
This—the signal woe!
These are the patient “Laureates”
Whose voices—trained—below—*

*Ascend in ceaseless Carol—
Inaudible, indeed,
To us—the duller scholars
Of the Mysterious Bard!*

In this poem Dickinson reminds me

f e r i n g

that experiential pain and suffering are our earthly teachers, the patient Laureates, the poets who sing to us of a higher life. If we were content on this earth we would not desire a different life. Pain and suffering instill in our souls a "homesick" longing to be transported to a world free of pain. They remind us of the promised room God has gone and prepared ahead of us. Dickinson alludes that pain and suffering are part of God's supreme plan to make us yearn for his heavenly paradise.

In another one of Dickinson's poems, "I Shall Know Why" she expresses her belief that one day she will learn why she suffered so much while on earth.

"Christ will explain each separate anguish in the fair schoolroom of the sky."

I like the notion of equating heaven with a schoolroom, a place of knowledge and inquiry, a place where we are free to search the volumes of God's superior wisdom. In the second stanza of her poem, Dickinson concludes by acknowledging that her sufferings were nothing compared to those of Christ's. Her attitude of humility and sense of perspective are things I need to emulate. However immediate and intense it seems, I know that this pain, shall too come to pass. For soon, like Dickinson, my pain will be but a blink of an eyelid, a fleeting moment in the annals of time, a forgotten memory.

"I shall forget the drop of Anguish

That scalds me now—that scalds me now!"

Through looking at pain as a way to deepen my dependence on God, my focus has changed from trying to eradicate allergies to learning to live with them. †

Karin L. Becker is a freelance writer and teacher of Writing at Fort Lewis College in Durango, CO. She is finishing up her first book "PinPricks: An Allergic look at Pain, Spirituality and Suffering", of which this is a chapter. When not writing, she loves to hike and photograph the San Juan mountains. She is eagerly anticipating the birth of her first child this spring.

How Prevalent Is Mental Illness?

Mental Health America recently compiled the following interesting facts on the frequency of various mental and emotional problems:

- ♦ More than 54 million Americans have a mental disorder in any given year, although less than eight million seek treatment.
- ♦ Up to one-half of all visits to primary care physicians are due to conditions that are caused by or exacerbated by mental or emotional problems.
- ♦ Approximately 12 million women in the U.S. experience depression every year. That is roughly twice the rate of men.
- ♦ People with depression are four times more likely to have a heart attack than those with no history of depression.
- ♦ One in five children have a

diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder.

- ♦ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder affects 3-5 percent of school-age children.
- ♦ Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds.
- ♦ Children of alcohol and drug-addicted parents are up to four times more likely to develop substance abuse and mental health problems than other children.
- ♦ At least 10-20 % of widows and widowers develop clinically significant depression within one year of their spouse's death. †

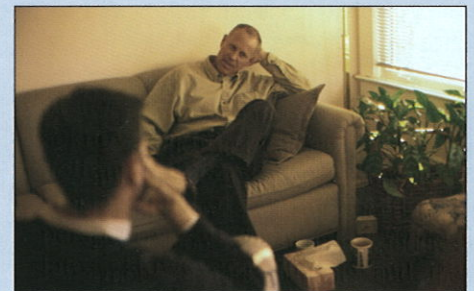
For further information on these statistics, contact:

Mental Health America
2000 N. Beauregard Street,
6th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22311

Tuning In

Research conducted by Dr. Carl Marci at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston examines how patients and psychologists react to each other during a therapy session. The findings validate that the "more in tune patients and therapists appeared to be emotionally, the more closely their physiological responses mirrored each other." In other words, we feel connected to someone who is empathically close to us because we are each feeling something similar in our body. We each feel the same thing physiologically. Dr. Marci used "skin conductivity" to measure the activity in each participant's autonomic nervous system. Electrodes were attached to both patient and therapist to record their responses. The readings obtained by the researchers, who observed 45-minute sessions, showed a high level of similarity between therapists' and patients' perceived moments of empathy and the arousal of their autonomic nervous system.

Jean Decety, a professor of Psychology at the University of Chicago, has findings of a similar nature. He has found that brain networks processing personal pain can be seen by brain imaging when another person's pain is recog-



nized. In other words, the same parts of the brain network light up when the pain of one person is closely felt by another person who is empathically attuned.

Therapists have long recognized empathic connections as fundamental to the therapy process. There is now physiological evidence of an emotional overlap between self and other. King David celebrated the wonderful experience of being known by another in Psalm 139 when he said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me." Believers have supreme blessings in being known by another, our Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 139 tells us He searches us, knows us, understands our thoughts from afar, and is intimately acquainted with all our ways. In the Marci research cited above, the therapists attained empathic connection approximately 50% of the time. Our Lord connects with us 100% of the time! †



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FEARFUL HEART, continued from cover

“Well, no ... but she should have come over to talk to me. She must be mad at me.”

My father unknowingly reinforced my doubts about myself. He seemed easy-going, even bashful. But then he could erupt like a geyser, scalding anyone near with his caustic words.

I subconsciously attributed my father’s actions to God. I knew God was more loving than my dad, but I believed God could get angry with me at any moment until God started taking me on a journey toward intimacy with Him.

Moving Toward Intimacy

During a meeting for women with chronic health problems, a friend’s mother prayed for me. She stopped in the middle of her prayer. “As I’ve been praying for you, two words keep coming to mind: fear and intimidation. I sense fear controls your life and keeps you from experiencing all God has for you.” She was right. I allowed my perceptions of what other people thought of me to rule my life. I hadn’t even begun to deal with my fear of what God thought of me.

A sermon finally helped me understand who I am in Christ. And for the first time in my life I really heard about the love of God. These truths began to penetrate my heart: God has not given me a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). God has redeemed me, forgiven me, and lavished His grace on me (Ephesians 1:7-9).

My intimacy with God grew through a group Bible study. For one assignment, I read Romans 8 from the New Living Translation. I had read this passage numerous times in other translations during my Christian life, but I only knew it in my mind, and had not let it penetrate into my heart. My friend Elizabeth, who is a nurse, calls this situation “Spiritual Parkinson’s Disease.” Just as Parkinson’s Disease involves a dysfunction between the brain and the muscles, in “Spiritual Parkinson’s” our minds do not communicate with our hearts.

Romans 8:33-34 came alive for me: “Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own? Will God? No! He is the One who has given us right standing with Himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for He is the One who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God,

pleading for us.” I journaled, “How often do we view God as condemning and accusing, when He is the one who has done so much for us? He cannot both accept us and reject us.”

The Holy Spirit prompted me to modify verse 38: “Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, ... *even our own actions*, can’t keep God’s love away” (Romans 8:38, NLT—italicized words added by author). I realized God’s love doesn’t depend on how I act. Nothing I do will keep him from loving me with a completely pure, unconditional love.

That Bible study began a journey of healing for me. The group members accepted me as I was. They continually encouraged me to become the person God intended me to be. Mary, one of the group leaders told me, “The Bible study helped you overcome your fears and self doubts as you learned to trust others with the real you. I saw you leave a lot of your anger as you became more real. Now you are involved with things you enjoy. Your health is no longer the first thing you think of when asked how you are doing. The real Linda has surfaced.”

Romancing My Heart

As I read *Romancing Your Child’s Heart* by Monte Swan, God spoke: “You need to romance your own heart. Write your own story as a fairy tale.”

I started God’s assignment with excitement and trepidation. Overwhelmed by the painful memories of my relationship with my parents, it took several days to write just a few pages. When I wrote about my romance with the King, the words flowed easily from my pen. I imagined Him loving me the way my own father never could. The King encouraged my dreams and goals. We danced and sang. He let me glimpse into heaven to see my parents. Since that day, my desire to draw nearer to God has steadily increased.

The Reality of God’s Love

As God’s love trickled from my mind to my heart, I saw new truths in His Word—love notes He wrote especially to me. Isaiah 49:16 says He tattooed me on the palms of His hands. I imagine Him holding out His hand to the angels, like a picture album. “This is my daughter. Isn’t she lovely? I love her so much.”

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called

FEARFUL HEART, continued on back cover ►

First Filipino Doctoral Graduates Celebrate Awarding of Degrees

April 1st, 2007 was no joke for the first four students receiving their doctoral degrees in Christian counseling from the Asia Graduate School of Theology. It was their graduation day!

Dr. Bruce Narramore traveled to Manila to help the students celebrate this major milestone and to lead two half day seminars in counseling with another faculty member, Dr. William Kirwan. The celebration began on Saturday with a luncheon for the graduates and other students still working on their degrees. Saturday evening was a formal banquet honoring not only the counseling graduates, but all students completing doctoral studies in various disciplines at the Asia Graduate School of Theology. Dr. Narramore was presented a plaque of appreciation in recognition of the Narramore Christian Foundation's partnership in making the doctoral program in counseling possible.

The graduation ceremony was held on Sunday evening at a lovely church in downtown Manila. Also graduating were more than fifty students from Alliance Graduate School who celebrated the completion of their masters degrees in Bible, Theology, Christian Education, Leadership, and Missions.

All four of the doctoral graduates in Christian Counseling are now teaching and counseling in various seminaries in the Philippines. They are also offering family life seminars, counselor training for lay persons and Christian workers, and private counseling. The spiritual, emotional and family life needs in the Philippines are tremendous and these four graduates are already taking important leadership roles in the church in the Philippines.

Two other Christian counseling students successfully defended their doctoral dissertations the same weekend and will formally graduate next year. Five others have completed all of their coursework and are working on their dissertations.

This, first of its kind, training program in the Philippines was a joint effort of the faculty and staff of the Asia Graduate School of Theology, the Alliance Graduate School and the Narramore Christian Foundation. NCF provided scholarships for several of the doctoral students and Dr. Bruce Narramore flew to Manila to teach several of the intensive courses, supervise students' counseling work, and consult with the program founder and director, Dr. Fred Gingrich.



Drs. Bruce Narramore (left) and Bill Kirwan (right) with Dr. and Mrs. Elson Lao at the conclusion of his doctoral graduation.

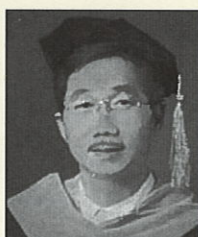


Drs. Fred and Heather Gingrich (left, back row), Bruce Narramore and Bill Kirwan (right, back row) with the first four doctoral Counseling graduates from Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). Also pictured is Dr. Theresa Lua (right, front row), Dean of AGST.

Please pray for the wonderful graduates of this program as they serve the Lord and their fellow countrymen in the months and years to come. †



Anna Liza T. Co



Elson T. Lao



Hannah O. Haskel



Linda M. Bubod

Doctoral Program in Christian Counseling to be Offered Again!

During the celebration weekend for the first graduates of the doctoral program in Christian counseling at Asia Graduate School of Theology, Dr. Bruce Narramore met with the program founder, Dr. Fred Gingrich, Dr. Bill Kirwan, and other faculty and administrators of the school. They agreed to offer this unique program to a second group of students beginning in late 2007

or early 2008. The school has already received a sizeable number of inquiries about when the program will be offered next. It is the hope of Dr. Narramore and the committee that, once the second class finishes this doctoral program, there will be sufficient leadership among the graduates to run the program in future years with very little assistance from Christians in the United States. †

children of God! And that is what we are!" (1John 3:1 NIV) I'm not an orphan God allows to live in the attic of His house; I'm a beloved daughter who has all the blessings He can give me.

God also likes to sing for me. "For the Lord your God . . . will rejoice over you with great gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will exult over you by singing a happy song" (Zephaniah 3:17, NLT). What sweeter ballad is there than the song a Father sings for His daughter? One of the songs He sings is, "You are precious to me. You are honored and I love you" (Isaiah 43:4 NLT).

Living Boldly in His Presence

God wants His children to run to Him eagerly, jump into His arms and cuddle in His lap. Fear and timidity are never to be a part of our relationship with God. "Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come fearlessly into God's presence, assured of his glad welcome" (Ephesians 3:12, NLT). God is more than a better version of our earthly father. God is completely loving and totally accepting.

Since realizing how much God loves me, I am a different person. No longer am I intimidated as I approach God. No longer am I bound by feelings of inferiority and fears of rejection. Longtime friends tell me I smile more and am less inhibited. I am involved in more activi-

ties. I discovered artistic gifts that had been latent since my childhood—painting, making art quilts and dancing. I joined an accountability group and have become a leader who takes initiative.

Completing the Picture

Closeness with God is often a consequence of how we view ourselves. Having relationship experiences that leave us feeling inferior and fearful of rejection and condemnation from others frequently hinders our intimacy with Him. Only a heart understanding of how much He and others love us will overcome this. He desires our love and us even more than we desire Him and His love. He does not want us to be fearful of Him but to approach him with boldness. If we take the initiative to draw near to Him, we find that He is already closer to us.

Though my parents' influence still affects me, it no longer hinders my relationship with God. I can move beyond the pain of my childhood and see my parents for who they were: loving, concerned, and doing the best they knew at the time. I'm just grateful my heavenly Father completed the picture for me. †

Linda Harris has been a freelance writer for over 25 years and has been published in *Home Life*, *Living with Preschoolers*, *Moody Monthly*, *Guideposts* and other magazines. Linda and her husband, Bob, have a host home for developmentally disabled adults in Colorado Springs.

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