

Spiritual Self-Defense

For Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Christians



The Fine Print

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Whosoever



An Online Magazine for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
and Transgender Christians

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About the Author and TeleSeminar Presenter



Candace Chellew-Hodge is a recovering Southern Baptist. Born in 1965 as the grand finale of five children to a Southern Baptist minister and his wife, she comes by her need for recovery honestly.

Chellew-Hodge literally grew up in the church, playing with her G.I. Joe dolls and Tonka trucks in the sanctuary aisles. Her family was still shocked when she came out as a lesbian years later, despite the obvious clues.

She gave up her faith at age 17, about the same time she entered a career in journalism that would span some 25 years, but despite the allegations of some conservative pundits, the media was not to blame for making her Godless for a brief few years. Instead, Chellew-Hodge

fell prey to the trap so many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people find themselves stuck in. She believed the lie that she couldn't be both a lesbian and a Christian.

She returned to the church in her early 20s, kicking and screaming, at the insistence of her first girlfriend. She describes her first service at a Metropolitan Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia as "coming home." Thus began a journey that has culminated in this booklet.

Chellew-Hodge entered seminary in 1998, a couple of years after she founded *Whosoever: An Online Magazine for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Christians*. The magazine had drawn the attention of many in opposition to GLBT equality in church and society and Chellew-Hodge sought the tools to answer her critics. What she discovered in seminary was a whole new way to approach the question of homosexuality, gender identity and spirituality and a new way to answer critics that was a lot less stressful (which is addressed in the TeleSeminar).

Chellew-Hodge graduated from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia in 2002 with a Master of Theological Studies degree. She was ordained in 2003 by Gentle Spirit Christian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. In July 2004, she became assistant pastor at Garden of Grace United Church of Christ in Columbia, South Carolina (what was then MCC Columbia). In 2007 she was licensed as a United Church of Christ minister and made associate pastor at Garden of Grace.

Chellew-Hodge's first book, *Bulletproof Faith: A Spiritual Survival Guide for Gay and Lesbian Christians*, will be published September 2008 by Jossey-Bass.

Chellew-Hodge lives in Camden, South Carolina, with her partner Wanda, their dogs, Sadie, Loki and Bandit and their cats, George and Xena. They are currently enjoying a new sun room and hot tub that they can barely afford.

1 Resurrecting Our Immortal Spirit

What would it take for me to convince you to commit suicide? What could I possibly say or do to make you want to take your own life? Anything? Insult you? Tell you you're no good? Tell you God doesn't love you?

You probably wouldn't be convinced if it were just me telling you that you're worthless. If anything, you'd write me off as some kook.

But, how much would it take to convince you to commit suicide if society was saturated with the message that you're no good, that you're hated by God and that you have no worth? What if that message came at you daily from your family, your friends, your church and your government? What if you were told over and over again how much of an abomination your life is to God and every other decent person on earth?

That's a whole other matter. Then it would be easy to convince you to pick up the gun, swallow the pills, or put a knife to your own wrist. Sadly, that's the plight of many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in our society.

We're constantly bombarded by messages that we are no good. We are told God hates us. Our families abandon us when the truth about our lives comes out. Our churches kick us out, or if they let us stay we're barred from serving in leadership positions or working with youth.

Many of us may not feel led to commit physical suicide. Many of us, however, have given

up on religion. We've given up on the hope of ever reconciling our spirituality and our sexuality. We've walked away from the church - and from God - figuring that if they don't want us, we didn't need them anyway. In short, we've committed spiritual suicide.

Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard wrote in *Works of Love* that "no violent assaulter can murder an immortal spirit. Spiritually, suicide is the only possible death."

GLBT Christians have so internalized the homophobia of the church and society that we have put the gun to the head of our own spirituality and pulled the trigger. No one took it from us. No one killed it for us. We took the life of our own spirituality because we believed the lies told repeatedly by the church and society that GLBT people are hated by God and can never be acceptable to God without changing, or denying, their sexual orientation or gender identity.

This is the Good News: Our spirit is immortal. While no one can murder it, in the end, even spiritual suicide is a temporary condition. We can reclaim and revive our immortal spirit and learn how to effectively defend it against attacks so that we are never tempted to commit spiritual suicide again.

This TeleSeminar is designed to give you the tools you need to revive your immortal spirit and defend it from any attacker - even if it is yourself.

Goals of Spiritual Self-Defense:

- ◆ Identify and develop tools needed to defend your spirit
- ◆ Understand you already know how to answer attacks
- ◆ Learning how to shift your focus from “defense” to “self”
- ◆ Understanding that your “self” is the authentic self where God resides in you
- ◆ Knowing that your immortal spirit - your authentic self - is worthy and worth defending



You've Got Hate Mail

One of the joys of being the editor of a magazine that caters to GLBT Christians is receiving mail from those who disagree with the goals and philosophy of our publication. I get tons of what can only be termed “hate mail” by many people professing to be loving, compassionate and “just concerned” Christians. Here are a couple of representative samples (with grammatical and spelling errors preserved):

From: Lois@xxx.com

Subject: God's Not Mine

I did not make up the rules, but, in the Bible, God clearly tells us that man should not lie down with man, or woman with woman. God created Man & Woman, to come together as one flesh and procreate.

I am not biggoted against gays, lesbians, transgenders, or bi*s, but, I must in all honesty tell you, that, to be saved, you have to NOT be gay or any of the above. You can be healed and delivered and set free. I know you won't believe me, and my daughter has a dearest friend - guy, whom is gay. I love him dearly, and he loves me like a second mom. I pray almost daily for him. I don't want anyone to go to hell.

I love the sinners and hate the sin. God did NOT create you gay, or any of the above. These are lies from the enemy, straight from the pit of hell. I am not being mean to you, I am trying to tell you that you must not live these life styles, and you must be set free. with love,

Lois

Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away ALL of Ours ' sins, and set you free from any maladies, so you can go to heaven when you die, for all eternity.

Are you feeling the love from Lois? I certainly am.

But, turn the page for one of my favorites.

From: John A. <beefeater17@xxxx.com>

Subject: Your Efforts

You are SO going straight to Hell, you ignorant, misguided, perverted misfit! Not only for choosing this abomination of a lifestyle for yourself, but for trying to promote it through the very book it flies in the face of. You make me and God want to vomit!

AIDS IS A CURE!

Exercises:

1. How many anti-gay, cliched phrases that you've heard many times before can you pick out of these two emails? List them here or underline them in the emails.
2. How do these emails make you feel? Describe your feelings (for example: angry, anxious, sad, etc.):
3. Use this space to answer the email from John. (We'll come back to your answer later.)

Core Bible Verse For Spiritual Self-Defense

“Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is within you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

1 Peter 3:15



When we are called to account for the hope that is within us, we must not shy away from contending with those who have challenged us.

Spiritual self-defense can best be compared to the martial art of Aikido. You cannot attack anyone with Aikido - there are no kicks or punches. In Aikido, you only act when you are attacked, by deflecting and redirecting the momentum of your attacker. You literally use the momentum of your attacker to defeat them.

Aikido teaches you how to remain still and centered - like a rock. You treat each of your opponents with respect, gently turning aside their attack. Their landing may not be so gentle, but your response has been to gently move them out of your way. Where they land is their business, not yours. That's what makes Aikido a lethal martial art. If your attacker continues to come at you, they may land so hard that they die - but you have done nothing but fail to be present when their blow arrived.

This is the heart of our art of spiritual self-defense. We must be as solid as a rock - centered, unmovable and strong. Our opponents can hurl themselves at us all they want, but we gently and reverently sweep aside their words, neutralizing the intended harm. We let the attacker's words fall where they may, but they do not touch us. We remain calm, centered, gentle and reverent.

We challenge no one to a fight to the death, but we are always prepared to give a gentle and reverent response when we are challenged. We are centered on God - our "chi" - the essence, the spirit, the centralized energy which animates our very being.

We must train ourselves to meet our enemies, not to defeat them - but to learn the secret to spiritual self-defense:

We train so we don't have to fight.

2 The Outward Moves

Simply because we are training not to fight does not mean that we do not need to train. In the Karate Kid, Daniel learned his training was valuable because it would give him the confidence and knowledge he needed to actually avoid fights. He still had to learn the art of Karate. We, too, must take the time to learn the outward moves of spiritual self-defense or we will find ourselves embroiled over and over again in fights we could have avoided if we had trained properly.

One of the best things we can do to prepare ourselves is to learn our Scripture. That sounds like a simple, obvious thing, but this is where most GLBT people struggle. At Whosoever, the most visited page on our site is where we deal with what the Bible does and does not say about homosexuality. You can visit that page here:

<http://www.whosoever.org/bible/>

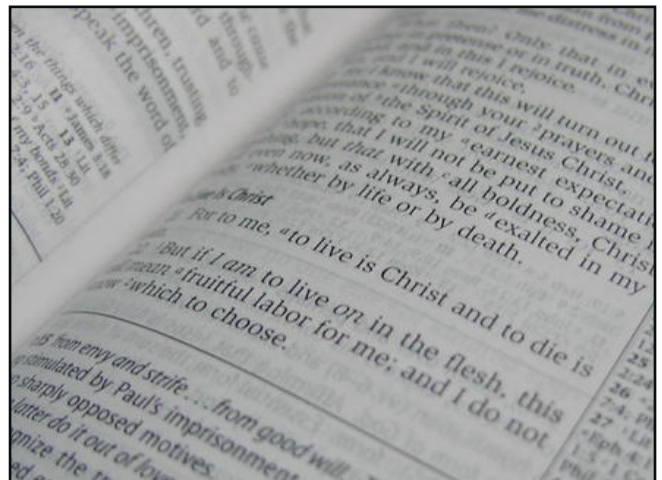
Whenever someone writes a book about the Bible and homosexuality it becomes an instant bestseller in the GLBT world. We want to know that we are right within the pages of Scripture. We want to know that God loves us and that the book we're told is inspired by God does not condemn us.

Before we can effectively defend ourselves, we must learn the weapons that are used against us. We must know our Bible better than any opponent that approaches us. If we don't we will constantly feel defeated or unsure about our own experiences of

God. Until we make peace with the Scriptures for ourselves, we will always feel at the mercy of those who attack us with the Bible.

Here is a short list of books that can help you begin your exploration of the Scriptures:

- What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality by Daniel Helminiak.
- The Children Are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-sex Relationships by Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connoley.
- Dirt, Greed, & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today by L. William Countryman.
- The New Testament and Homosexuality by Robin Scroggs.



The Discussion

- It's all been said before.
- All the responses are easily available via the Web or in books.
- Do not argue scriptures, religious traditions or doctrines.
- Be clear that you personally disagree with anti-gay interpretations, doctrines, institutions, etc.
- Maintain a consistent, clear response:
 - "No, I don't agree."
 - "I know people interpret the scripture that way, but I don't."
 - "No, I think that's wrong."
- Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Source: Dr. Robert Minor, The Fairness Project

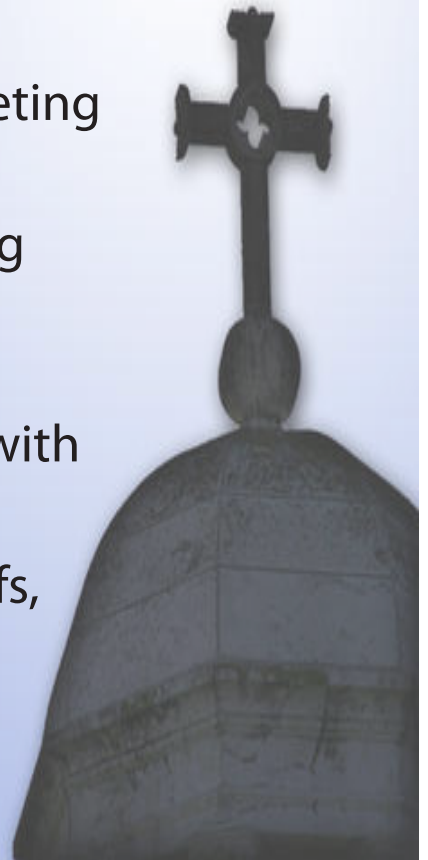


Personal Healing

When engaged in a religious argument/discussion keep these questions in mind. Often arguments that upset us are based on our “stuff” and not our opponent’s “stuff.”

- Why does this issue or this particular argument matter to me?
- What emotional need am I meeting by arguing about religion?
- What prevents me from walking away or ignoring the source?
- Why do I stay in a religious community that does not agree with me and wishes me to leave?
- Why do I care about their beliefs, particularly if I disagree?
- When do I know it’s time to leave?

Source: Dr. Robert Minor, The Fairness Project



Warning Signs

- Getting hooked into an argument
- Remember: “If I have stuff with someone else’s stuff, that’s my stuff.”
- Getting caught up in the need to “win” the argument.
- Ask, “Why is that important to me?”
- Never be afraid to walk away.
- You don’t have to answer to anyone for your beliefs.

Source: Dr. Robert Minor, The Fairness Project



Xena's Rules for Self-Defense: "Wisdom Before Weapons"

Xena: "Don't confuse defending yourself with using a weapon. When you pull a sword, you have to be ready to kill. People are too quick to go for their swords. It should always be the last resort."

Gabrielle: "I don't want to learn to kill, I want to learn to survive."

Xena: "Alright, the rules of survival: #1 If you can run ... run. #2 If you can't run ... surrender ... then run. #3 If you're outnumbered, let them fight each other while you run. #4 ..."



Gabrielle: "Wait ... more running?"

Xena: "No, four is where you talk your way out of it, and I know you can do that. It's wisdom before weapons, Gabrielle. The moment you pick up a weapon you become a target."

From the Episode, "Dreamworker"

3

The Gift of the Enemy

Love your opponents. When I say love, I don't mean hand them the match. I mean contend with them to the death, the way a lion battles a bear, without mercy but with infinite respect. Never belittle an opponent in your mind, rather build him up, for on the plane of the Self there can be no distinction between your being and his. Be grateful for your opponents' excellence. Applaud their brilliance. For the greatness of the hero is measured by that of his adversaries. - Steven Pressfield, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*

We must be grateful for our enemies, because they teach us valuable lessons about ourselves. Remember, we've said that when we have stuff with other people's stuff, that's really our stuff. Our enemies, then, are there to remind us of our stuff. I believe that God continues to put infuriating people in my path not to test my faith, but to remind me that I have yet to master myself.

In *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, Steven Pressfield writes that if we view our opponents in this way we then "realize that the game is not against the foe" but against ourselves -- the "little self" that we possess. "The yammering fearful ever-resistant self that freezes, chokes, tops, nobbles, shanks, skulls, duffs, flubs. This is the self we must defeat."

Our attackers can serve as a constant reminder that we have yet to conquer that little, yammering self that wants to respond to attacks with the same vehemence with which they were delivered. Our first reaction to our attackers should not be sweaty palms and a sharp tongue. We've learned the power of words to either heal or harm.

We should always be mindful to choose healing, edifying words, delivered in a calm and controlled tone.

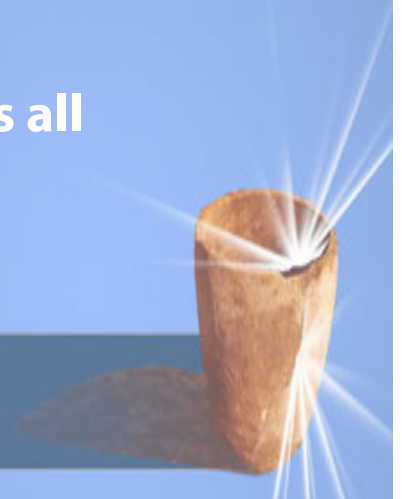
However, you must never belittle your opponent. Never think that they are less than you. Always build them up. Always speak words of edification, of love, of mercy, of grace. We may think our opponents do some despicable things, and they certainly do, but do not ever think less of them -- and do not ever be afraid to contend with them, but offer them infinite respect, even if you never receive any back.

We contend with our opponents "to the death" by calling them on the misinformation and often outright lies they tell about the lives of GLBT people. We refuse to "show them mercy" when we answer their arguments in a gentle and reverent manner - certain to measure our words and stay calm.

Often, the "death" of our opponent comes when they are no longer our enemy, but become our ally. Until then, be grateful for the gifts enemies bring.

Lessons from the Enemy

- **Self-Control**
- **What “Stuff” we still need to sort out**
- **How to treat enemies**
- **Seeing God in our opponent**
- **Contradictions are nothing to fear**
- **To laugh at ourselves**
- **Our experience of God trumps all arguments**



4 Inward Moves - The Jesus Prayer

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited it. -Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

You have inside of you something that makes you unique from everyone else – an “authentic swing” as Bagger Vance would tell Junah. We know it innately. We’ve probably felt it before but haven’t been able to recapture it.

The best way I’ve found to uncover this authentic swing is through a dedicated practice of meditation. Some people resist the idea of meditation because they believe it is either a waste of time just sitting around with your eyes closed for 20 minutes, or they believe that it is an Eastern practice and isn’t proper or necessary for Christians.

But, remember, the Bible tells us to “be still and know that I am God.” Being still is nothing more than the practice of meditation. On the bibliography, I have the address of a Web site dedicated to the practice of Christian meditation, and the meditation we are about to do has its roots in centuries of Christian prayer and meditation.

The benefits of meditation have been known for centuries, but science has recently proven that it has many benefits. An article in the New York Times in April 2003 reported on research at the University of Wisconsin into the benefits of the practice.

The article describes a monk the abbot of a monastery in India, who was tested using instruments to measure brain waves. According to the doctors, “the abbot had the highest amount of activity in the brain centers associated with positive emotions that had ever been measured by his laboratory.

“Of course, the benefits of these practices are not just for monks who spend months at a time in meditation retreat. [Other research worked with people in highly stressful jobs.] These people — non-Buddhists — were taught mindfulness, a state of alertness in which the mind does not get caught up in thoughts or sensations, but lets them come and go, much like watching a river flow by. After eight weeks [doctors] found that in these people, the parts of their brains that help to form positive emotions became increasingly active.

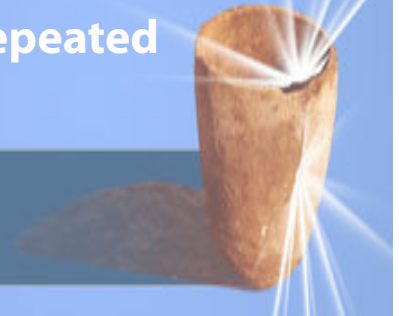
“The implications of all this are clear: the world today needs citizens and leaders who can work toward ensuring stability and engage in dialogue with the ‘enemy’ — no matter what kind of aggression or assault they may have endured.”

Meditation is a way to clear out all the junk so we can reach that authentic swing – that very ground of our being.

The Jesus Prayer

**“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
have mercy on me a sinner.”**

- **The words of the Jesus Prayer are based on Scriptural texts: the cry of the blind man sitting at the side of the road near Jericho, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 18:38); the ten lepers who “called to him, Jesus, Master, take pity on us” (Luke 17:13); and the cry for mercy of the publican, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:14).**
- **The prayer was first found in a sixth century book called The Life of Abba Philemon.**
- **It is a breath prayer. “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God,” is repeated silently as you inhale. “Have mercy on me, a sinner,” is repeated silently as you exhale.**



The Jesus Prayer - Revised

In order to identify our “authentic swing” we will modify the Jesus Prayer and use it to reveal the prayer that prays you.

- ◆ **Step 1:** The first part of the Jesus Prayer is the “address” or what name we use to identify God. Think of how you address God. Is God “Almighty,” “my Creator,” “my Father,” “my Mother”? What immediately comes to mind when you contemplate God and come to God in prayer? Whatever it is, this is the first part of your revised Jesus Prayer.
- ◆ **Step 2:** The second part of the Jesus Prayer is the “supplication” or our request of God. What we’re searching for here is the prayer so deep inside of you that you pray it unconsciously. This is the prayer that prays you - your “authentic swing.” As you consider your supplication, don’t give it too much thought and don’t reject the first thing that comes to mind. Sometimes your first thought is the most genuine thought!
- ◆ **Step 3:** Write down the address and the supplication that have come to you:



5

What's Your Answer Now?

When enemies challenge us we have many options. We can choose to:

- ◆ Engage them in an argument
- ◆ Insist that we are right and they are wrong and start a “prooftext” war over what the Bible teaches
- ◆ Call them names and give them back, in spades, all the disrespect they show us
- ◆ Respond in a gentle and reverent manner, no matter how they treat us
- ◆ Decide that we'd rather be happy than convince someone that we're right
- ◆ Walk away, secure in the knowledge that our experience of God is real and God loves us as we are

Earlier, we read a couple of hate mails that I had received, and you responded to John's email. Given all that you have heard in this TeleSeminar, what would your answer to John be now? Is it different? If so, how? Why did you change your response? If your response has not changed, why not?

Write your new response, or your reason for not responding, below:

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- * *Steps to Recovery from Bible Abuse* by Rembert Truluck
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- * *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* by Mel White

Web Sites

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<http://www.wccm.org/>
The World Community for Christian
Meditation

<http://christianmeditation.com/>
Christian Meditation

[http://www.meditationcenter.com/
connect/mind.html](http://www.meditationcenter.com/connect/mind.html)
Mindfulness Meditation

[http://www.contemplativemind.org/
practices/loving-kindness.html](http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/loving-kindness.html)
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[http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_
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<http://www.jeramyt.org/gay.html>
Homosexuality and Christianity by
Jeremy Townsley

[http://www.godmademegay.com/Letter.
htm](http://www.godmademegay.com/Letter.htm)

A Letter to Louise, By Bruce Lowe

<http://www.truthsetsfree.net>
Justin Cannon's excellent exegesis

Thank you for participating in this Whosoever TeleSeminar.

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We would love to hear from you!
Please tell us your thoughts about our TeleSeminars.
Email your feedback to *editor@whosoever.org*

Whosoever



An Online Magazine for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
and Transgender Christians