

*“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*  
~ Matthew 5:44, 45



## The Prison of Self-Protection

By Alan Medinger

They can't hurt me. Nobody can hurt me." I don't know how old I was when I spoke those words to myself—maybe five or six—but they were powerful words, ones that would guide my life for the next thirty years. Partly reacting to my father's ongoing battle with deep depression, I spoke those words one night as I listened to my parents fight verbally with each other.

The words reflected a decision I had made, a decision that would protect me from much hurt for years to come. But the decision did a couple of other things I never could have anticipated. I believe making that decision also cut me off from being able to truly give or receive love. And I believe it lay at the root of my developing homosexuality. I had erected a wall of self-protection that would not only cut me off from pain, but that would also cut me off from normal development and life-giving relationships.

We don't choose homosexuality, but I am convinced that most of us made wrong decisions—often sinful decisions—that set us on the path towards developing same-sex attractions. This was one of mine.

Self-protection is surely one of the most common roots of homosexuality in both men and women. In women, we see it in the hard “masculine” woman who seems to be daring anyone, especially a man, to come near her. We see it in the manipulations of lesbian women in their dependency, co-dependency and in their need to be in control.

With men, it can show up as an overwrought fear of being hurt physically—the stereotypical sissy boy. But it is probably far more likely to show up in a man's determination to never get into a position where he might be humiliated. As a boy, I went to extremes to do things

that would make me look and feel brave, things that could have hurt me physically or gotten me in trouble with the law. But I avoided team sports at all costs. I felt I could not bear looking like an inept klutz on the ball field.

With few exceptions, we became self-protective in response to having been hurt at some point early in life, and we vowed to never let ourselves be hurt in the same way again. Most of the women to whom we minister were significantly hurt by men at some point in their lives. Most of the men to whom we minister suffered from rejection by peers because they didn't measure up in those certain arenas in which manhood is measured.

So there were reasons why we became self-protective. But reasons are not justifications. And a life lived in response to past hurts is a crippled one.

### What's Wrong with Protecting Oneself?

A certain amount of self-protection is normal and healthy, but where walls of self-protection become too high and too thick, they become prison walls. We see this all the time with same-sex attracted people. Here are some of the problems that come with living a life focused on self-protection:

1. People are walled out. There can be no real love without vulnerability. Friendships require give and take, and our giving often involves the giving of control to the other person. If we are trying to protect our feelings, we can be in a constant state of hurt, anger and victimhood. Such attitudes do not nurture good friendships. We may have learned that the best defense is a good offense, and so we are literally offensive towards other people.

2. Growth is blocked. Coming out from behind our walls of self-protection is always risky. Sometimes we will get hurt. But growth comes with taking risks. The old saying

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“No pain, no gain” is so true. The alternative to taking risks is to live in perpetual fear of those abuses, rejections, humiliations, or whatever else led to our self-protective attitudes.

3. Self-protection is self-centered. To live constantly having to protect ourselves from possible hurts is to lead a terribly self-centered life, and this is sinful.

4. It is futile. I would even say it is stupid. We can't *really* protect ourselves from many things. My experience has been the worst things that have happened to me came totally out of left field. They could not have been anticipated or prevented by any action I might reasonably have expected to take. Our limited ability to control both nature and other people means that we can't really assure our own safety. It is a conceit of mankind that we can ultimately be our own protectors. The most troubled people I know are the most self-protective.

Worse than futile, self-protection is often counter-productive. I used to fret about not getting enough rest. Whenever someone or something intruded on my “down time” I got angry or anxious. But in spending my energy worrying about getting the sleep I needed, I became more worn out. After I stopped worrying about it, I found I did well on six or seven hours of sleep a night.

5. It offends God. I believe that there is nothing God wants more from us than for us to trust Him. When we

trust Him, we show that we know His character. He is altogether trustworthy. And when we are stepping out and trusting God, not ourselves, our eyes are turned toward Him, not so much towards ourselves. Isn't this what the Christian life is supposed to be all about? Excessive self-protection not only walls out other people, it walls out the experience of God's grace and mercy in our lives.

Start to consciously enjoy the openness, the looseness, and the freedom that comes from no longer having to pour so much energy into self-protection.

### Isn't It Ever Good to Protect Ourselves?

Isn't some self-protection simply good sense? Some Christian books tell us we should have boundaries—aren't these a *legitimate* form of self-protection?

Of course, God gave us certain instincts of self-preservation, and He does not ask us to abandon good sense. It is not wise or profitable to walk alone through a dangerous neighborhood at night. We don't trust our life savings to someone we have never met because he promises us a huge return on our money. If someone abused you in your youth, it might be wise to cut off contact with them as an adult. We may need to avoid certain places or activities where we have a history of risking sexual sin. So yes, some self-protection is truly appropriate.

Many of those who come to Regeneration have histories in which they had very poor boundaries or in which others crossed their boundaries in abusive ways. These men and women may need help determining and upholding appropriate levels of self-protection. But just as some of us raised up walls of self-protection that were excessively high as children, men and women who are seeking to establish healthy boundaries as adults may fall into the same temptation of trying too hard to protect themselves. Each situation of risk has to be prayerfully considered on its own merits. But certain areas are especially prone to excessive self-protection, like those in which:

- We fear that our rights might be overridden.
- We fear that we might become exhausted, over-extended or burnt out.
- We think others will take advantage of us.

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## Please Pray With Us . . .

**Thanksgiving**—We thank God for our 25th Anniversary Conference and Banquet held in November. Joe Dallas shared powerfully on the role of the church as both a hospital and an army in dealing with sexual sin in the culture. Over 200 people attended the evening's banquet, which is what we had prayed for when we first began planning. We estimate that one half or more of those in attendance had never come to a Regeneration event before. Praise God!

**Petitions**—Please join us in praying for the children of our staff. As many of you know from your lives, it is often much easier for us to bear difficulty ourselves than it is to watch our sons or daughters suffer. Specifically, pray for Lani's two daughters (one with an illness in Haiti, one battling a chronic illness here in Baltimore), for Laura's daughter (recently diagnosed with Alopecia Areata), and for the other children and families of our staff.

Also, please remember the Jeff Johnston family in prayer as they move into this New Year and new phase of their lives.

\* For more in-depth monthly prayer requests, E-mail [josh@RegenerationMinistries.org](mailto:josh@RegenerationMinistries.org).

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Check yourself on these things. Are there things you “simply won’t do” because they would encroach on a part of your life? Are you hoarding something for yourself, like a miser hoards money? Are you regularly keeping score on who does the most among your family and friends? Are you frequently offended when slighted by other people? Do you screen all calls before you answer the phone?

Problems in these areas could come from many sources, but very often they come about because someone is encroaching on space that you are determined to control and protect.

I think a good attitude to have about boundaries is that they are not to be placed up as fortifications from the demands of other people, but they are limits that we are to apply in certain situations. For example, our home telephone number is listed and because of my writing and our years in ministry, my wife and I often get calls from strangers seeking help. We think making ours an unlisted phone number would be to set up a fortification, an excessively high boundary. However, if people call us at home during dinner, and I sense that they are not truly in a crisis, I will ask them to call me back later or at the office the next day.

Lowering our walls of self-protection does not mean giving up all control. Jesus rarely or never exercised self-protection, but with respect to other people, He was never *not* in control of himself or his own boundaries.

### **How Do We Overcome Excessive Self-Protection?**

If you see that you have been living a lifestyle of self-protection, how do you change? Like most foundational changes, this will be a spiritual endeavor. It starts with a look into our own hearts. Does my self-protection reflect my not truly trusting God? Does it get in the way of wholesome, life-giving friendships with other people? And is it keeping me locked in my fears and anxiety? If you answer yes to any of these questions, here’s what I suggest:

1. Seek to uncover your specific fears. What is it you are trying to protect yourself from?

2. Repent, and prayerfully yield those fears to God. Also, make a list of your “rights” and yield them all to God. In doing this, make the decision that you are willing to risk being hurt in the areas of your fears, and that you are willing to walk the extra mile—even unfairly—in order to learn to trust God more.

3. Stop anticipating problems and building up walls before problems come. Learn how to deal with being tired, unjustly imposed upon, unfairly treated, etc., rather than futilely trying to put defenses in place before these things occur.

4. In certain circumstances, be foolish—in the world’s terms. Do this as an exercise in learning to trust God more

fully as your ultimate protector. Most of the time you will find that, even when God doesn’t come through as you hoped He would, it is because He has a greater blessing for you in the long run.

5. Enjoy your freedom. Start to consciously enjoy the openness, the looseness, and the freedom that comes from no longer having to pour so much energy into self-protection.

Self-protection is a major root of homosexuality—and of a lot of other problems in life as well. Self-protection keeps you locked in old ways. Let go and be free. ■

### **Tentative Schedule of Regeneration Events**

#### **January ‘05 -**

Living Waters continues in Baltimore & NoVA  
New Beginnings Winter Session begins (Balto)  
Women’s CrossCurrent begins (NoVA)

#### **February ‘05 -**

Men’s Drop-In Group begins (NoVA)  
Men’s book study begins (Balto)  
Pastors Luncheon/Event (Balto)

#### **April ‘05 -**

Ministry Celebration Dessert (NoVA)  
New Beginnings Spring Session begins (Balto)  
Men’s Temptation Group (Balto)

#### **May ‘05 -**

Living Waters applications accepted (Balto/  
NoVA)

#### **June ‘05 -**

New Beginnings Summer Session begins  
(Balto)  
s.a.l.t. begins (NoVA)  
Summer group begins (Balto)

#### **July ‘05 -**

Exodus International Conference

#### **September ‘05 -**

Living Waters begins (NoVA & Balto)  
New Beginnings Fall Session begins (Balto)

#### **November ‘05 -**

Regeneration Banquet

# Ministry News

NEW GROUPS & PROGRAMS . . .

## IN BALTIMORE:

### New Beginnings

Baltimore's New Beginnings program for men dealing with lust, Internet pornography, and other forms of sexually compulsive behaviors begins its new session on January 4th. We are making some changes to the program this year, so come join us! For more information, call 410-661-0284, ext. 4.

### Baltimore Book Group

Utilizing one of the many wonderful books on overcoming homosexuality offered through Regeneration Books, Regeneration's Baltimore ministry will be running one or more 12-week groups in the Baltimore area for those new to recovery as well as those looking for additional support. The group will begin in January or early February. Contact Josh Glaser at 410-661-0284, ext. 4 to learn more.

## IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA:

### Women's CrossCurrent Group

Melissa Coffey, with Regeneration's Northern Virginia office, will be running a women's CrossCurrent program beginning in January. Developed by Andy Comiskey of Desert Stream, CrossCurrent is an 8-week program providing an introduction to healing from sexual sin and brokenness. Please contact Melissa at 703-591-4673 for more information.

### Men's Drop-In Group

Our Northern Virginia Director, Bob Ragan, will be running a men's "drop-in" group beginning in January or February. If you are a man struggling with sexual sin issues like homosexuality or sexual addiction, please contact 703-591-4673 for additional information. This is a great way to be introduced to Regeneration or to gain added support in your recovery!

## Regeneration Resources

Regeneration Books carries over 200 titles (books, audio tapes, CD's, videos, DVD's, and CD-Rom's) consistent with traditional Christianity that provide helpful information on dealing with homosexuality and sexual addiction. Resources for strugglers, loved ones, pastors, counselors, teachers, those involved in social issues, and others are available. Call 410-661-0284 to receive a free catalog, or visit Regeneration Books online at [www.regenbooks.org](http://www.regenbooks.org).

# Financial News

We wanted to give you an update on our Board-sponsored initiative, Project 25/25, which began at the end of 2004 in honor of Regeneration's 25th Anniversary. We've received many generous contributions so far, so thank you for your extra gifts! At the printing of this newsletter, \$22,500 has been given to this project, which means we are almost half way there! This is exciting news, but we still have a long way to go! Would you join us?

Remember, Project 25/25 aims to raise \$50,000 *above and beyond* regular donations—\$25,000 for current expenses and some long-deferred equipment; and \$25,000 for a reserve fund set aside to ensure staff and their families can be paid even during those times in Christian ministry when donations decline for a season.

As we've said before, Project 25/25 is unique in that it is primarily future-focused. What you give today can literally move Regeneration forward for years to come! Please pray about giving a generous gift today. ■

## Regeneration Is...

### Baltimore Office

**Alan Medinger**  
Executive Director  
**Lani Bersch**  
Director of  
Regeneration Books

**Karen Woollen**  
Baltimore Women's  
Ministry Director &  
Office Manager

**Joshua Glaser**  
Baltimore Director

**Laura Suffecool**  
Accountant

**Marcia Schuett**  
Office Assistant

### Northern Virginia Office

**Bob Ragan**  
Northern Virginia  
Director

**Melissa Coffey**  
Ministry Associate

### Group Meetings

**Baltimore, MD**  
•Living Waters  
•New Beginnings  
•Wives' Group  
•Drop-In Group

**Northern, VA**  
•Living Waters  
•Women's Group  
•Wives' Group  
•Men's Group  
•Parents' Group  
•s.a.l.t. (Sexual Addiction Group)

**Washington, D.C.**  
•Men's Drop-In Group

### Regeneration Books

Regeneration Books is the major distributor of books addressing homosexuality and related subjects from a Christian perspective. To receive a free catalog call us at (410) 661-0284 or visit us online at [www.regenbooks.org](http://www.regenbooks.org).