

## From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

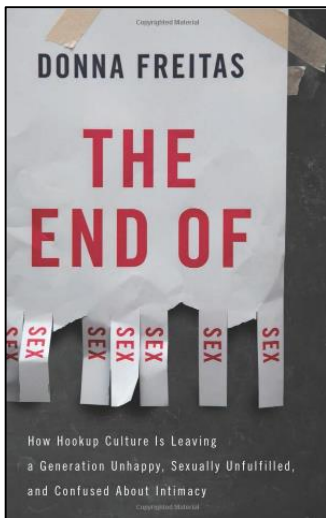
Thirty-three years ago this evening, I was ordained to the ministry of the Gospel by the Broadway Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas. The road since has wound its way from hospital chaplaincy at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, to pastoring the First Baptist Church of Carlisle, Kentucky, to being the Minister of Pastoral Counseling at Severns Valley Baptist in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, to being the Minister of Pastoral Care at St. Matthews Baptist in Louisville.

The winding road continued through teaching in the Psychology of Religion Department at Southern Seminary in Louisville, then back to St. Matthews as Associate Pastor “for everything,” then to pastoring the First Baptist Church of Bristol, Virginia, and now serving you as your pastor here at CBF. I thank God every single day—actually, it’s usually several times every day—for the privilege of serving our Lord in this place. I love you!



The news this week has included a distressing theme that I encountered repeatedly on NPR radio, in Internet news, and in *Christianity Today*. The occasion for the news was a legal battle over the availability of “the morning after” pill, euphemistically called “emergency contraception,” as an over-the-counter drug to young teenage girls.

The fact that we’re having such conversations at all demonstrates just how badly we have lost our way. Our culture—and most of humankind with us—continues to try to sever the relationship between intercourse and pregnancy, between sexuality and responsibility, between behaving as divine image-bearers and behaving as animals.



Just a month ago, Basic Books, a major publisher in the social sciences, published Donna Freitas’s work, *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused About Intimacy*. This research report, thus far warmly received by the secular press, reports that “students ‘pre-drink’ before going to parties because they want to be numb enough to do things that they would not do if sober. At some level they know that engaging in sexual behaviors of various sorts with strangers and casual acquaintances is demeaning.”

While Freitas argues for more responsible and less peer-driven sexual behavior, the only “menu option” she dismisses completely is that of saving sexual intimacy for marriage—what we might call “covenantal sexual expression.” Hold that thought.

I’m fairly adept at most of the Microsoft Office software, having used it almost every day for twenty-five years. Microsoft Access, however, the database component of Office, remains a mystery to me, and I’d like to learn how to use it to make some of my work more efficient.

I discovered today that one of the best-reviewed books on the subject is *Access 2013: the missing manual*. Access is a complicated program to learn, and I need help getting the big picture of how to make it my servant rather than my master.

Our sexuality is rather of the same sort. Human sexuality, dwelling as it does in that complex and poorly-understood liminal area between our physical and spiritual selves, is rather more complex than Microsoft Access. Yet we humans seem bound and determined (dare I say “hell-bent”?) to try to cope with this dimension of ourselves without any attempt to seek out “the missing manual,” which is the written Word of God.

God has graciously given us the Bible as a guide to keep us from running our lives aground on the rocky shoals of our impulses, but we seem to much prefer navigating blindly. Another sad example of the result of such efforts was reported in the secular press this week under the heading of “Why there are more walk-away moms.”



Using the example of one Brenda Heist, who eleven years ago dropped her young kids off at school and then never went back (she “surfaced” again last week), CNN opined that “our increasingly me-first world might have something to do with it. According to a study published in the journal *Social Psychology and Personality Science*, clinical narcissism—defined by heightened feelings of entitlement, decreased morality and a dog-eat-dog mentality—has increased by 30% over the past twenty years. Two out of every three people now measure high for the disorder.” Feeling better yet?

The problem, of course, is not new at all. “The Missing Manual” has this to say about the problem: “*The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?*” (Jeremiah 17:9).

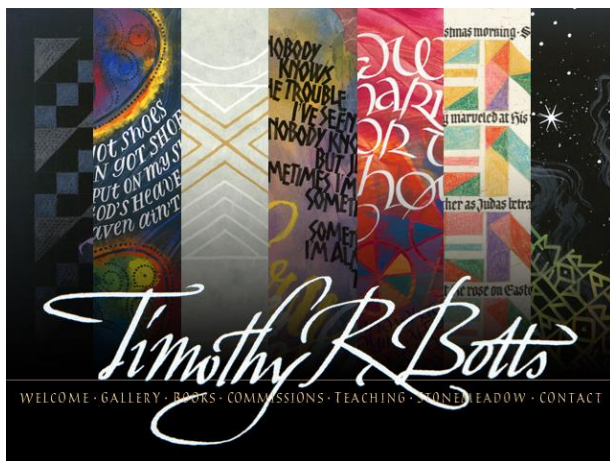
In this, as in most things, we can choose our response. Among other choices, we could sing another verse of “Ain’t It Awful” and simply go on our way, grateful for our own redemption while the world declines into Darkness. This has, unfortunately, often been the response of many in the Church.

Another approach would be to examine our own hearts, crying out, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Psalm 139:23-24). And were we to choose the latter option, its sequel might be to ask God to show us ways in which we might make a difference in at least a few lives, whether individually or together.

We could search out new ways to show God’s love in a practical way to our very confused friends and neighbors. Preaching at them—or even to them—is not likely to have much of an effect, but I’ll bet there are things that would . . . and discovering those things is a large part of the purpose of our Spiritual Strategic Journey currently underway.

And we need not “get up on our high horses” with respect to others’ neglect of “the Missing Manual” while we fail to study it ourselves. In addition to other means of Bible study, I’ve recently discovered one new to me that might encourage you as well.

One of the many ways in which Janet Davis has blessed me is by having introduced me to the artistic work of Timothy Botts, a painter who has done quite a few books of calligraphic renderings



of Scriptural texts. My own devotional reading does fairly well at the “breadth” of the text, since I read the Bible through each year; but I don’t always do so well at engaging the “depth” of the text.

One of the time-honored traditions of Christian Spirituality is a process known as “lectio divina,” or divine reading. You can learn more about that process at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio\\_Divina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina). I bought several of Tim Botts’s books of art last year, and I’ve discovered that it’s quite delightful to use a page from one of his books as the focus for *lectio divina* for each day. I commend such a practice to you as well.



I have more to say, but this is doubtless enough for the moment. May grace & peace abound in your hearts! Make a difference where you are!

Dave

P.S. We were all greatly encouraged by Charles Gaines’s decision to become a member of CBF last Sunday morning. Charles has been active in our congregation for years, and we rejoice to welcome him at an even deeper level of relationship! Please express your joy to him, and continue to pray for their family during this difficult time of Veeda’s illness.

P.P.S. Last week marked Janet Davis’s 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary as our organist. I hope you’ll find ways to convey your gladness to her as well!

