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## The Homosexual Dilemma

How can we uphold God's  
Truth while embodying his  
love and grace?



## The Homosexual Dilemma

How can we uphold God's Truth while embodying his love and grace?



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Introduction

## Love Without Compromise

*By Kelli B. Trujillo*



**B**ack in my college days, the notorious anti-gay group from Westboro Baptist Church came to my university campus to protest. Their supposedly "Christian" message included holding up signs filled with hateful profanity against homosexuals, shouting various slogans about AIDS being a punishment from God, and loudly damning others to hell. The main gay and lesbian student group on campus organized a counter-protest: a silent vigil of students and faculty who'd stand, holding hands, across the street from the awful demonstration by this bizarre group.



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As the day of the two protests approached, I felt extremely conflicted. I was deeply ashamed of the claims of these "Christian" protestors—I felt very angry about their distorted and sick presentation of God's Word. I wanted to shout at them: You don't represent me! You don't represent Christianity! You don't represent Jesus!

At the same time, though, I felt very uncomfortable with the idea of participating in the counter protest. As a leader of a Christian organization on campus, I didn't want to directly align myself with the gay and lesbian student group; though I was friends with some of the group members, I didn't want to appear to be compromising my values by seeming to support their cause.

Unsure of what to do, I ended up doing nothing. On that day, I sat in my dorm room feeling conflicted, miserable, and sad.

Today, over and over again, we each face a similar dilemma. We often find ourselves pitted between two cultural messages about homosexuality that both camp under the umbrella of Christianity: an extreme, fire-and-brimstone, uncompassionate response focused on condemnation versus a very loose interpretation of Scripture that embraces homosexuality. What are we to do? How are we to simultaneously uphold biblical truth in the public square while maintaining compassion, understanding, sensitivity, love, and Christ-like friendship toward the homosexual community? On a personal level, how are we to interact with the neighbors, friends, or family members in our lives who are gay or who have very different views on sexuality than we do?





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We at Kyria have created this download to help you thoughtfully and prayerfully explore these complex questions on a deeper level. In this download, you'll look first at how this issue can affect us personally as you read about how Marlo Schalesky, Shirley Rorvik, and Caryn Rivadeneira have each navigated the difficult and sometimes painful challenges of relationships with gay or lesbian friends and loved ones. Next you'll dive into one of the hot-button topics of the past few years—gay marriage—in an insightful article by Mark Galli. Finally, you'll end with the hope of redemption as you read about how God is at work in the lives of homosexuals who are seeking to leave the gay lifestyle and embark on a chaste or heterosexual life. None of these articles provide easy, pat answers—nor should they. But they do point us toward a Christian response that balances truth and grace, honesty and love.

As I look back on that day in college and those awful few hours I spent in my dorm room wishing the situation would have simply gone away, I now feel that I made the wrong choice. I should have gone to the counter-protest.

Why? Because simply not participating in anti-gay hatred really wasn't enough. My absence did little to show my gay and lesbian classmates that God definitely did not hate them (as the church group's signs proclaimed). My absence did nothing to communicate how utterly wrong that church group's supposedly "biblical" message was. And though it's possible that my presence at the protest could have been misinterpreted by some as support for homosexuality in general, it may have also given me





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opportunities to strengthen the friendships I had with some of the gay and lesbian students on campus; it may have provided opportunities in the future to talk together on a deeper level about what I believe God's Word says on the issue.

I can't go back and do it over again, but we're each faced with this complex and difficult issue regularly. If we seek to impact our culture—and the people we love—with the light of Christ, we must learn to face this tough issue with both love and truth. My hope is that through this exploration of this difficult topic, you'll feel empowered by God's Spirit to address this issue in both the public sphere and in the relationships in your life.

Grace,

*Kelli B. Trujillo*

Managing Editor, KYRIA downloads,  
Christianity Today International



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Leader's Guide

## How to use “The Homosexual Dilemma” for a group study



“The Homosexual Dilemma” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
5. When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
6. End the session in prayer.



## When a Friend Comes Out

She's a lesbian—now what?

*By Marlo M. Schalesky*

It started out like every other lunch I'd had with my friend Ann: I ordered mu shu pork; she ordered beef in oyster sauce. I asked for fried rice; she wanted white. Then with chopsticks in hand, we dug into our food. Nothing unusual, nothing surprising ... that is, until we were halfway through the meal.

I'd just lifted my little round teacup to my lips when Ann looked me straight in the eye and said, "There's something I need to tell you about me."





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"Sure. Shoot," I said, shrugging. What could she tell me I didn't already know? After all, we'd been good friends since high school, more than a decade ago. I remembered those days of boy-watching, deciding which guys were "hunks" and which were "nerds" while we munched matching cones of Baskin-Robbins ice cream. We talked about God, too. Or at least I talked about him. Usually Ann gave me her "that's nice for you" look, then suggested a trip to the mall. I'd gotten used to her disinterest in Christ, just as she'd become accustomed to my "guess what I learned at Bible study" stories. Maybe we'd grown older in the several years, but our friendship hadn't changed, had it?

Ann's gaze didn't waver as I set down my teacup and leaned forward expectantly. Then she dropped the bomb. "Marlo," she stated, her voice shaking a little, "I'm a lesbian." Boom. Just like that.

"Um, uh, you're a ... (gulp!)," was my oh-so-articulate response. Then, as I sat and stared at her, dumbstruck, the words of an old memory verse flitted through my mind: "Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). In truth, I was anything but prepared, so I simply said "Oh," then stuffed another bite of mu shu pork in my mouth.

After Ann's startling revelation, I had no clue what to say next. Should I blast her with my convictions? Tell her the gay lifestyle is sinful? Or nod and say, "Gee, that's great," even though such words would be a lie? How would Jesus want me to respond? What would he say if he were in my place?





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#### **So she's a lesbian ... now what?**

According to Kate, a spokesperson for Grace Unlimited (a ministry that helps homosexuals leave the gay lifestyle), it's important to remember that God condemns homosexual behavior, not homosexual people. Because of his love for us, he prohibits behaviors he knows will harm us. So, instead of responding with disgust or condemnation, suggests Linda Schultz, who ministers to many lesbian friends, we need to exemplify God's love for the person.

But how can you show God's love without approving of your friend's choice? It starts with considering your friend's needs before your own. What is she feeling? What is she going through?

Today, Ann can tell me how she felt when she dropped her bombshell over mu shu pork and beef in oyster sauce. "I was so nervous about telling you because I knew you were involved in Christian groups," she says. "Coming out to a friend can be frightening. It means exposing your deep feelings and risking rejection. You didn't say very much, so I wondered if you were thinking, 'You're going to go to hell,' but didn't say it because you were being polite."

According to Ann, the worst response is to say nothing. "That makes the person feel as though she has to come out again and again and again."

So instead of saying something such as, "How could you?" or "That's a sin," it's best to let the person who's coming out simply talk. She may not have had a chance to talk about this to anyone yet.





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### When a Friend Comes Out

Rather than give Ann the dumbstruck look, I should have asked questions: "How long have you been thinking about this?" "Have you told your family?" "How long have you considered yourself a lesbian?" "What factors led you to think about homosexuality?" By responding with questions and being a caring listener, I not only could have exemplified God's love, but earned the right to share more deeply about my relationship with Christ.

After I'd gotten over my initial shock, I began wondering how far I should go in arguing my beliefs with Ann.

According to Anita Worthen and Bob Davies, authors of *Someone I Love Is Gay* (IVP), "Sometimes the best argument is a loving action done in silence." And Linda Schultz of Grace Unlimited insists we don't have to compromise our belief in Scripture's stance on the subject of homosexuality. Rather, we can simply agree to disagree. She suggests saying, "One of us is wrong. So why not let the Holy Spirit be the one to let us know who is right?"

The important thing, asserts Kate of Grace Unlimited, is to maintain an open dialogue in which both parties feel respected. "Many lesbians who've been condemned, ridiculed, or rejected by Christians turn to homosexual organizations for the support they feel they need, thus becoming more entrenched in their beliefs and behavior," she says.

Eventually, I learned I could accept Ann's choice of lifestyle without condoning it. To do that, I had to see past the "gay" label to the real person.





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To be honest, at first I found my relationship with Ann uncomfortable. There we'd be, picking at our Chinese food, sitting in a movie theater, or hanging out at the coffee shop while I wondered how to act, what to say. Should I mention her homosexuality? Should I ask about her social life? How should I treat her girlfriend? Could I discuss what I was learning in my Bible study without her feeling as though I was condemning her?

Meeting her girlfriend, Sue, was the most difficult. They held hands. I fidgeted. They talked about a recent trip to the West Coast. I stared at my hands, the ground—anything but Sue and Ann. But as the evening progressed, I discovered that even Sue was just another person with likes and dislikes, hobbies, hopes, and pet peeves. Being a lesbian was part of her life, not all of it. She was simply a woman who needed Christ. Just like Ann.

As Ann continued to see the importance of Christ and Scripture in my life, the issues of the Bible and homosexuality came up naturally, without me having to force the subject.

One day, while we sat and stirred coffee, Ann looked straight at me and said, "Marlo, why are Christians so judgmental about homosexuality?"

Unlike when she first dropped the "I'm a lesbian" bomb, this time I was prepared. "It's not being judgmental," I replied. "It's having integrity. If I say I believe what the Bible says, I have to believe all of it, not just the parts I like or the parts that are convenient to believe. So when I read passages like Leviticus 18:22 and especially Romans





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1:26–27, I have to believe the homosexual lifestyle is wrong. If I were to say 'it's okay,' then I'd be a hypocrite, wouldn't I?"

Ann nodded. "I guess so. So, you really think being a lesbian is a sin?"

"I believe that engaging in the lesbian lifestyle is a sin, yes. But I also think that committing adultery is a sin, lusting is a sin, getting drunk is a sin, and hating someone else is a sin. In fact, we're all sinners. If we say we're not, then we're liars. But through Christ, God can forgive us. It's as simple as that."

Ann lifted her coffee cup. "Guess I hadn't thought of it quite that way," she murmured and took a sip.

As time has passed, the answer I've found to all my questions turns out to be a simple one—just be honest. As Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud."

Today, Ann and I both know we can share openly with each other. Sure, she knows I don't approve of her lifestyle, but she also knows I love her anyway. And though our jobs have taken us to different cities and we don't get together as often as we once did, I still haven't given up hope that Ann will accept Christ someday, too.

I continue to show Ann God's love and pray that one day she'll choose to give her life to him. And on that day, I'll be rejoicing with the angels in heaven.





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### When a Friend Comes Out

#### HOW TO BE THE KIND OF FRIEND SHE NEEDS

*Here are 8 tips to help you maintain a healthy relationship with your lesbian (or gay) friend and steer clear of trouble:*

- Don't become your friend's exclusive source of support. Instead, introduce her to other Christian friends.
- Continue to pray for your friend but don't tell her, "I'm praying for you not to be a lesbian." Say instead, "I'm praying God will show you his best for your life." Also pray for God's guidance in your friendship.
- Avoid arguing over political issues regarding homosexuality or making unkind remarks or jokes that involve lesbianism—whether or not your friend's present. Keep your conversation focused on personal matters.
- Be open about your personal relationship with Christ. Create an atmosphere where you both feel free to share what's on your heart.
- Make sure your friend clearly understands your stance regarding homosexuality and your unconditional love for her. She needs to know that even though you disagree with her lifestyle, you still care for her.
- Be honest about your own struggles. Don't feel as if your life needs to appear "perfect" in order to attract your friend to Christ.
- Don't make homosexuality the primary point of your conversations, but don't avoid the subject if it comes up.
- Educate yourself regarding homosexuality. (See the Additional Resources section on p. 63 for more info!)

*Marlo Schalesky, a freelance writer, lives in California. This article was first published in the September/October 1999 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





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### Reflect

- *Have you ever been in a situation like Marlo's when a friend or family member told you he or she was gay? If so, how did you handle it? If not, how do you think you'd respond in that situation?*
- *Throughout the course of her friendship with Ann, what impression do you think Marlo gave her friend about Christianity? About Jesus?*
- *Though an issue like homosexuality can seem like daunting terrain to overcome in a friendship, it can be done. Consider these two questions: In what specific ways would a friend's sexuality challenge or strain a friendship? What specific aspects of a friendship would not be affected by it?*



## When Homosexuality Hits Home



I was devastated by the news my son is gay. But God isn't finished with him—or me—yet.

*By Shirley A. Rorvik*

I first became aware of how much I despised homosexuality when I worked at a savings and loan in 1981. Don [not his real name], referred to as a "queer" in our small town, shoved his savings passbook across the counter for a large cash withdrawal. He glanced over his shoulder and spoke to his companion, a good-looking boy of about eighteen. The boy laughed and his eyes met mine, full of mockery and challenge. I swallowed hard and shuddered, then handed Don the wad of bills, and they walked out arm-in-arm.



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At home that night, I described the incident to my family in a voice tinged with disgust. "Thank God there's none of that in our family." In fact, people thought our family had it all—good marriage, comfortable home, successful careers. Our oldest son, Rick, was happily married with three children. Tim, our younger son, sang with his girlfriend in the high school choir. Few people knew of my husband's chameleon-like personality.

But one night seven years later, I feared for my life in the throes of my husband's drunken rage. The next day I confronted him. I couldn't live with his drinking problem any longer, and I urged him to seek help. Instead, he moved out. Several months later, he divorced me. To pay off our debts, I sold our home, moved into an apartment, and started rebuilding my life. I'd been through hell and survived. Nothing would ever again shake me like that.

The end of our 30-year marriage created an upheaval in my sons' lives. Rick and his wife divorced about a year later. Tim abandoned college and joined the U.S. Marine Corps, going first to San Diego, then to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during the Persian Gulf War. I prayed for his safety, not knowing a greater battle in spiritual warfare awaited his return. After his discharge, Tim remained in San Diego.

Then, five months later, an emotional earthquake shattered my world. The pages of Tim's letter trembled in my hand as I read: "My sexual orientation has bothered me since I was twelve. Please, Mom, listen to me. I feel a strong attraction for men. I understand how you must feel ..."





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Coffee splashed as I slammed my cup on the table and threw down the letter. No, Tim couldn't possibly understand or he'd never have written this. I lurched up from the sofa, his words scorching my mind.

" ... I am who I am, and it's taken me 13 years to be able to accept this ..."

Thirteen years? No. No, I'd have known. What about his girlfriends in high school and college? How could he be gay? What happened? Where had I failed?

I fell to my knees sobbing. Then pulling myself off the floor, I grabbed my keys, snatched up Tim's letter, and ran to my car, taking off in the winter night.

As the speedometer reached 80 mph, a snow-covered guardrail suddenly rushed toward me. Terrified, I twisted the steering wheel. The car skidded, then held on the graveled shoulder. Peering into the darkness, I searched for familiar landmarks. Finally, I recognized a farmhouse. I'd gone more than 50 miles from home.

I pulled off the deserted highway onto a side road and stopped the car. Punching open the car's moon roof, I tilted the seat back and gulped clean, cold air. After a long while, I sighed. Okay, Lord, I give up. What do you want me to do? Switching on the map light, I picked up Tim's letter. This time I heard his pain: "I feel alone. I'm so afraid of my family rejecting me. ... You're still my mom, and I still love you. I always will."





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I had to hear Tim's voice, so I drove back to my apartment and dialed his number. When Tim answered, tears flooded my eyes. I told him I loved him, no matter what. But, I said, homosexuality is a sin. "You're not alone, Tim. I'm here and Jesus is too. God loves you. Remember Romans 8:38–39? Nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ Jesus. But you must renounce this lifestyle."

Tim sobbed, unable to speak. After a few moments I said, "I'll call you tomorrow. I love you, Tim." Sorrow filled my heart as I hung up.

Over the next few weeks, we talked on the phone or through letters. I needed answers. "Tim, why? Was it the war? Did something happen over there? Or when you were little?"

Eventually, he opened up. "Remember the older boy in my third grade class? The bully?" Tim said. "Well, he cornered me one day after school ..." his voice broke. "After that, he told everyone I was a fag. Nobody wanted to be around me."

He told me of a couple more childhood incidents when older boys had threatened or bribed him into cooperating with their sexual indulgences. Then came another shock.

"Did I ever tell you about the time Dad took me to a gay community in Massachusetts right before I joined the Marines?"

The phone turned to lead in my hand. "No," I whispered.





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"It was a business trip. When the business was done, that's where we went, to a town on Cape Cod. It's a gay community." He paused. "Well, maybe you didn't know. You guys weren't divorced yet, but Dad had moved out."

As Tim described the incident, it became clear his father had been to this place before. My heart raced. "Did anything happen? I mean ... "

"No, Mom, nothing happened. Dad wanted to go to this gay bar. He laughed and joked with these guys. I kept my eyes glued to the TV and didn't talk to anybody. I didn't know what to do. I just wanted to die." Bitterness laced his words. "I don't think I've ever come so close to hating him."

I recalled other business trips when Tim was nine or ten. At the time, I was pleased my husband was spending time with this younger son. Did something happen then? I tried to question Tim, but he refused to talk about it. He didn't remember. He thought he'd had a happy childhood. I let it go.

As the weeks went by, I felt ashamed and afraid. My prayers seemed inadequate. Desperate, I called my dear friend Dory, a nurse. Her nonjudgmental, no-nonsense voice offered strength. She told me about Barbara Johnson's book, *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* I read it and called Barbara. This dynamic woman shared hope, encouragement, and the names of two other women in similar circumstances. I wasn't alone.





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I learned about Exodus International, a worldwide Christian ministry dedicated to helping men and women who want to overcome homosexuality and turn to Christ. From Exodus, I received the names of two Christian men in San Diego who had renounced homosexuality and were available to counsel others. Excited, I called Tim with the good news, convinced he would grab this opportunity to be free from bondage. I was wrong. He said he wasn't in bondage. He didn't want to be free from homosexuality. He said he was born this way, and Jesus knew.

How could he be so deceived? From the beginning, I'd taught him about Jesus, whom he had invited into his life at the age of five.

Through the years, I'd had no inkling something was wrong. Did Tim ever hint at trouble? Did I really listen? Were there dark secrets in our household? I don't know.

After Tim's initial letter about his sexuality, I began regarding my adult son as a victim. "They" had caught and trapped him. "They" were faceless, nameless, evil people. Homosexuals. Enemies.

But God wasn't finished with me yet. A few months after Tim's revelation, he brought a friend home—a homosexual. The enemy had arrived on my doorstep. I was tense but quickly realized Tim's friend was even more nervous. I sensed his fear of rejection. Mothering instincts surged, and my heart reached out to him. He wasn't an enemy—he was a wounded soul.





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My quiet times with the Lord changed from selfish pain and anger to genuine grief for Tim and others like him. Satan blinds them to the truth and deceives them.

The change in my attitude toward homosexuals was tested in my workplace where some of my colleagues are gay or bisexual; I no longer avoid them. They're real people, just like me. The Lord's softened my heart, and I've learned to hate the sin while I love, or at least care for, the sinner.

Tim often brings homosexual friends when he comes to visit me and my new husband, Chuck. He once told me, "You guys are living proof to my friends that heterosexual marriage can work." Perhaps he, too, is seeking proof—and hope—for himself.

When Chuck proposed a few years ago, I told him about Tim and about my commitment to the Lord to be available to Tim and his friends. Chuck regards Tim as his own son and together we've opened our home to these wounded souls, many of whom have been rejected by parents and siblings. Tim never asks to stay overnight when he has a companion. Their conduct is above reproach in our home. Often an arrogant attitude masks their pain, but it soon dissolves. Some of them jokingly call me Mom.

If the opportunity arrives to present the gospel, I do, usually in the form of my own testimony. This opens the door for them to express their views of Christianity. I hear anger. These young men say they've been rejected by their own churches and therefore, they imply, by God. They've turned their backs and buried themselves in resentment and fear.





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How can we reach these hardened hearts? For me, evangelism begins with friendship. I am one small part of God's whole plan—perhaps I can plant one tiny seed, and the next one will plant the garden, and others will nourish it. As I write, Tim seems resigned to being homosexual, but he gives clues that he's not a practicing homosexual. It's a fine line of distinction, perhaps even a rationalization. Only God knows the heart (1 Kings 8:39). Jesus, Tim says, is his best friend. I believe him. But I also know Jesus is more than a friend—he is the Savior and Lord. God heard that five-year-old's prayer inviting Jesus into his life. Even if Tim has strayed away, God hasn't moved. He'll be there when Tim chooses to resist the devil and listen to the Holy Spirit.

My heart still hurts. My son's life is far from happy, his future uncertain. The New King James version of Psalm 56:8 says God puts my tears in his bottle. My hope rests with the Lord. "They will return from the land of the enemy [Satan] . ...Your children will return to their own land" (Jer. 31:16–17). In the meantime, God has called me to pray for and love Tim, and to be available.

*Shirley A. Rorvik is a freelance writer living in Montana. This article was first published in the November/December 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Reflect

- *Shirley's response to her son's declaration of homosexuality was rather different than Marlo's in the previous article. Shirley spoke with love while immediately presenting the Bible's stance against homosexual activity. Marlo waited to discuss biblical teaching on the topic until it came up naturally in a later conversation. Which response best fits your personality? Would you be more likely to directly address what the Bible says on the subject or would you wait until the topic came up on its own? What do you see as the pros and cons of each response? How might your response be different if the person was a family member instead of a friend?*
- *It's easy to talk about the idea of speaking the truth in love (see **Ephesians 4:15**), but it can be very difficult to know exactly how to go about striking that balance. What do you think it means to do this when it comes to homosexuality, especially in relationships with friends or family members?*
- *Is it ever okay to purposefully not talk to a gay or lesbian loved one about what the Bible says about homosexuality? Explain.*



## Angry at the Wrong People

Facing Anti-Christian anger in the gay community.

*By Caryn Rivadeneira*

**D**uring the 2008 election, a former colleague from my first job out of college (I'll call him Bob) found me on Facebook. Within moments of accepting his friend request, we were leaving jokey notes on each others' pictures and status updates. It was so fun to reconnect with someone I had once shared so many laughs at work.





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But then he noticed a picture of my husband standing next to one of those life-sized cut-outs of Sarah Palin and John McCain. Bob wrote on my wall: "Is your husband really standing next to Palin/McCain? If so, why?" So I sent back a jokey note explaining the picture. Apparently, I wasn't so amusing since Bob immediately sent me a message saying I had to tell him right then if my husband supported Republicans or if I, in fact, had ever voted Republican. He said in no uncertain terms that he could not be my friend if either of us had.

Still hoping he was kidding, I made light. The tone and content of his email meant business. He was dead serious. It was bad enough I was a Christian. He wanted nothing doing with someone who might share the "vile beliefs" of Christians and/or conservatives.

Here's the deal: My friend Bob is gay.

In particular, he's a gay man who hasn't encountered many friendly Christians or conservatives in his life. So now that he no longer saw me as his former funny friend from work, but instead as a Christian, possibly conservative, suburban mom, he apparently imagined me marching with a "God Hates Gays" placard shouting venom about where homosexuals will burn.

I can't say I blame him for his hurt and anger—I too shudder at the placards and taunts that have come from "Christians" toward the homosexual community. But the trouble was, Bob was angry at me personally for views he supposed I held, choices he imagined I made,





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and actions he assumed I took to "oppress" gay people, to keep them out of churches, the public square, and maybe even heaven!

His anger was misguided. If he had taken the time to ask, to listen, to share, to question, if he had taken the time to know me and not the stereotype, he'd have heard a different story than the one he'd conjured up. We probably would have continued to disagree on many areas, but not in the ways he thought.

I have to tell you: I'm surprised by how much this episode has saddened and hurt me. But it's opened my eyes to a hurting person and community, and also to my own behavior and the way I often I lash out—at the wrong people—when I'm hurt and angry and feel victimized or oppressed.

Certainly, we Christian women have felt these emotions. But what a great reminder it is to not "shoot the messenger" as they say. To not let our anger and hurt get in the way of open dialogue and making room for understanding and sharing. To not let differing views hinder friendships and working relationships—even when it's hard.

Recently someone told me to remember the words of Ephesians 6:12 when we're dealing with people with whom we disagree: "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."





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Bob and I are no longer Facebook friends. He unfriended me (which is no easy task on Facebook!). And it's actually okay. Especially after Bob called me a Nazi and made racial slurs against my husband, I realized that Bob wasn't the same person I remembered either. But it's got me praying more—that Bob finds peace and love in this world. That he sees Jesus in someone, somehow, and can accept the loving grace that he offers. And that all of us, when we feel kicked to the curb, don't lash out at the first person walking by.

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### Angry at the Wrong People

## Reflect

- *Have you ever felt stereotyped by a non-Christian who thought you were a hateful extremist or bigot simply because you were a Christian? If so, describe your experience. Why do you think that person had such a negative stereotype of Christians?*
- *Caryn writes that her friend Bob is "a gay man who hasn't encountered many friendly Christians or conservatives in his life." What are some examples of insensitive, hurtful, or even hateful things you've heard Christians (or those claiming to be Christians) say or do in reference to homosexuals? What impact do you think these types of behaviors or attitudes have on homosexuals and their perception of Jesus or the church?*
- *How do you usually respond to anti-Christian anger or stereotyping? Do you let it slide in order to avoid conflict? Do you confront it with debate or argument? Do you avoid people who hold anti-Christian stereotypes? Explain.*
- *When it comes to relationships with homosexual friends or family members, how can you most powerfully break through stereotypes they might have about what Christians are like and what we believe? If you can, share some specific ideas and examples.*



## The Gay Marriage Debate

What the battle for traditional marriage means for Americans—and evangelicals.

*By Mark Galli*

One could become wistful about the time in history when marriage was a settled affair, when everyone agreed on what it was, when no nation on the planet would have entertained the idea of legalizing same-sex marriage. But wistfulness is usually reserved for times long ago and places far away—not for a state of affairs that existed less than a decade ago.





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In December 2000, the Dutch parliament became the first to pass legislation that gave same-sex couples the right to marry, divorce, and adopt children. On April 1 of the following year, the mayor of Amsterdam officiated, for the first time in human history, at the ceremonies of the first four gay couples. In the ensuing eight years, Belgium (2003), Spain (2005), Canada (2005), South Africa (2006), and Norway (2008) followed the Netherlands' lead, and Sweden may now not be far behind.

While we shake our heads at those libertine Dutch, traditional marriage was challenged in the U.S. even earlier, in 1993, when the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that the state's prohibition of same-sex marriages amounted to discrimination on the basis of sex. For the first time in U.S. history, a state supreme-court ruling suggested that gay couples may have the right to marry.

Social conservatives were galvanized into action and enacted a series of protective measures. Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act ("DOMA") in 1996. Three states soon adopted constitutional same-sex marriage bans: Alaska (1998), Nebraska (2000), and Nevada (2000). And in a few years, 42 states enacted statutes similar to DOMA (although three of those bans have since been overturned).

Gay marriage advocacy was given new life with Massachusetts's historic 2003 high court ruling, which said that it was unconstitutional to deny same-sex couples the right to marry. It became clear that statutory bans were not enough; judges could throw out the laws if they felt the bans violated state constitutional rights.





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Over the next three years, voters in 23 states immediately amended their constitutions to limit marriage to heterosexuals.

Since then, the issue has ebbed and flowed, like trench warfare, with each side gaining only yards of territory with each new legislative or judicial assault. When the battle of Election 2008 had ended, it appeared that social conservatives had the momentum when constitutional amendments banning gay marriages passed in three more states.

But seemingly out of nowhere, gay marriage advocates have won stunning judicial, legislative, and social victories. Connecticut began granting marriage certificates to spouses of the same gender in November 2008. In April 2009, Iowa's high court ruled that banning gay marriages was unconstitutional, and gay couples began lining up at Iowa court houses. The Vermont legislature legalized gay marriage that same month, while Maine and New Hampshire legalized gay marriage in May.

All the while, Rick Warren and Miss USA contestant Carrie Prejean were hit hard for their public statements against gay marriage. To be against gay marriage now carries a social stigma. A recent poll of Massachusetts residents revealed that 36 percent of voters who oppose gay marriage agreed with the statement, "If you speak out against gay marriage in Massachusetts you really have to watch your back because some people may try to hurt you."





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In short, traditional Christians feel like the armored tank of history is rolling over them, crushing traditional marriage under its iron treads, impervious to argument, the ballot box, or judicial logic. Even more disheartening has been to witness how, in each mainline denomination, and even in some evangelical seminaries, fellow Christians lobby hard for gay marriage.

The depressing feeling of inevitability is precisely what advocates of gay marriage want to instill in their opponents. But relying as many do on historical determinism—"Side with us because we're going to win"—suggests that gay marriage advocates have run out of arguments. It also demonstrates historical amnesia. Arguments from historical inevitability have often been assumed by millions—to take two examples, the inevitability of Communism and the death of religion—and yet have proven to be wrong.

Still, we are at our wits' ends about what to say next, impervious as the gay marriage juggernaut is. We know biblically and instinctively that "male and female he created them," and that these complementary sexual beings are designed to become one flesh. We know that this spiritual instinct and biblical argument will not make much headway in the public square. So what do we say?

We can make secular arguments, of course, but the more we look at the strongest secular arguments we can muster, the more those arguments cut two ways. And one of the edges of those arguments will make evangelicals bleed, I'm afraid.





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#### The Nonreligious Case

One way to get at the heart of an argument is to listen to allies who take the opposite view on this issue. There are some social conservatives, for example, who argue for gay marriage on conservative grounds.

Take The Atlantic's foremost blogger, Andrew Sullivan, a Roman Catholic. He also happens to be gay, but his argument does not rest on his sexual preference. His case, as he asserted in a 2003 Time essay, is "an eminently conservative one—in fact, almost an emblem of 'compassionate conservatism.'" He says the institution of marriage fosters responsibility, commitment, and the domestication of unruly men. Thus, "bringing gay men and women into this institution will surely change the gay subculture in subtle but profoundly conservative ways." Growing up gay, he realized he would never have a family, and that it's "the weddings and relationships and holidays that give families structure and meaning." And thus, "when I looked forward, I saw nothing but emptiness and loneliness. No wonder it was hard to connect sex with love and commitment," Sullivan wrote.

Or take the argument from the street, so to speak, from a common blogger in Algonquin, Illinois. He is a heterosexual who lives with a woman, and a political conservative who supports legalizing gay marriage. He says we must accept the fact that American society has moved on and "embraced different ways people choose to live and love." And "when you take away all the legalisms, the moral quotient, the religious implications, and the needs of society," he writes, "what we are left with is nothing more than how people choose to define their relationships where they feel love for another human being."





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These two writers—one from the center of American culture and the other from the heartland—summarize a privatized view of marriage. Marriage is about the fulfillment of the two people involved. It will help them to mature as human beings and to express more deeply their love for one another.

This, of course, strikes at the heart of how Christians have traditionally understood marriage. David Blankenhorn, president of the New York–based Institute for American Values and author of *The Future of Marriage*, argued this in a nonreligious way in a September 2008 *Los Angeles Times* op-ed. There is one constant in the constantly evolving understanding of marriage, he says: "In all societies, marriage shapes the rights and obligations of parenthood. Among us humans, the scholars report, marriage is not primarily a license to have sex. Nor is it primarily a license to receive benefits or social recognition. It is primarily a license to have children."

Further, he says, "Marriage says to a child: The man and the woman whose sexual union made you will also be there to love and raise you. Marriage says to society as a whole: For every child born, there is a recognized mother and a father, accountable to the child and to each other."

The argument is nuanced, and goes on to take into account heterosexual couples who will not or cannot have children. But he grounds marriage not in two people, but in two communities: the family and the state.

McGill University law professor Margaret Somerville, in a 2003 brief before Canada's Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, argued in much the same way. She says





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that to form a society, we must create "a societal-cultural paradigm." This is a constellation of "values, principles, attitudes, beliefs, and myths" by which a society finds value and meaning, both individually and collectively.

"Reproduction is the fundamental occurrence on which, ultimately, the future of human life depends," she says. "That is the primary reason why marriage is important to society." Thus, it is crucial that societies protect marriage as a fact and as a symbol, as that institution that fosters human life, doing so in the context of family and society. "Even if a particular man and woman cannot or do not want to have a child, their getting married does not damage this general symbolism."

Again, the argument is involved and nuanced. Both Blankenhorn and Somerville ground marriage in something larger than two selves who wish to find fulfillment. Marriage is inescapably connected to children and thus family, and family is inescapably connected to society.

In a highly individualistic culture, this argument swims upstream, but conservative Christians recognize that it corresponds to their basic theological instincts. The narcissism of mutual self-fulfillment will never be a solid foundation for a particular marriage, let alone for the most fundamental institution in society. This is an argument we can press publicly as the opportunity arises.

We'll have to press it humbly, however, because as it turns out, we are very much complicit in the unrighteousness we decry.





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#### Evangelical individualism

The thrust of the pro-gay-marriage argument rests on the assumption that the happiness of the individual is paramount, and that the state's responsibility is to protect the rights of individuals to pursue whatever they think will make them happy, as long as no one gets hurt. The irony of radical individualism is that it will eventually hurt somebody. In practice, the happiness of one individual always runs into the happiness of another, and then only the strong survive. The weaker individual is no longer treated as fully human, and thus his or her right to happiness is compromised. In our nation, we see this in the way we treat individuals at both ends of life, in how expendable they are if they interrupt the happiness of the fully functioning—take the increasing acceptance of euthanasia, and the on-the-ground fact of abortions in the thousands every day.

Evangelicals are sensitive to this reality, but are less aware of how much we proactively participate in the culture of individualism. While stopping short of abortion, we have not given much thought to our easy acceptance of artificial contraception. I'm not arguing for or against contraception here, only pointing to the reality that contraception has separated sex from procreation. That, in turn, has prompted most couples, evangelicals included, to think that sex is first and foremost a fulfilling psychological and physical experience, that a couple has a right to enjoy themselves for a few years before they settle down to family life.

In essence, we have already redefined marriage as an institution designed for personal happiness. We see ancillary evidence of this at the other end of marriage:





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Though it is a difficult thing to measure, the rate at which evangelicals divorce is hard to distinguish from the larger culture's, and the list of reasons for divorce seems no different: "We grew apart." "We no longer met each other's needs." "Irreconcilable differences." The language of divorce is usually about the lack of self-fulfillment.

Add to that our penchant for changing churches, usually because "I just wasn't being fed," as well as our need to test every church and pastor against our personal reading of the Bible—well, you can see why Protestants have managed in 500 years to create out of two traditions (Orthodox and Catholic) some 30,000 denominations. While the Baptists are known for their doctrine of "soul competency," a version of the doctrine is woven into the fabric of broader evangelicalism, though it has morphed into sole competency. Thus, the death of mutual accountability and church discipline in our movement. Thus, the exaltation of worship in which the personal experience of the worshiper so often becomes more important than the object of worship. Thus, the continual proliferation of churches, parachurches, and movements because the group we belong to just doesn't do it the way we think "the Lord is leading me" to do it.

We are, of all Christian traditions, the most individualistic. This individual emphasis has flourished in different ways and in different settings, and often for the good. It has challenged moribund religion (Reformation), prompted revival (Great Awakenings), ministered to the urban poor (Salvation Army), abolished slavery (William Wilberforce), and led to explosive worldwide church growth (Pentecostalism). But it is individualism





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nonetheless, and it cuts right to the heart of one of our best arguments against gay marriage.

We cannot very well argue for the sanctity of marriage as a crucial social institution while we blithely go about divorcing and approving of remarriage at a rate that destabilizes marriage. We cannot say that an institution, like the state, has a perfect right to insist on certain values and behavior from its citizens while we refuse to submit to denominational or local church authority. We cannot tell gay couples that marriage is about something much larger than self-fulfillment when we, like the rest of heterosexual culture, delay marriage until we can experience life, and delay having children until we can enjoy each other for a few years.

In short, we have been perfect hypocrites on this issue. Until we admit that, and take steps to amend our ways, our cries of alarm about gay marriage will echo off into oblivion.

#### **Witnesses to Another**

This does not mean we should stop fighting initiatives that would legalize gay marriage. Gay marriage is simply a bad idea, whether one is religious or not. But it's bad not only because of what it will do to the social fabric, but because of what it signals has already happened to our social fabric. We are a culture of radical individualists, and gay marriage does nothing but put an exclamation point on that fact. We should fight it, because it will only make a bad situation worse.





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That being said, we are as compromised as the next gay couple when it comes to radical individualism. This means that alongside our call to maintain traditional marriage, we should "bemoan our manifold sins and wickedness," as the Book of Common Prayer puts it. We should acknowledge how much Protestant culture has shaped American culture, how much we've collaborated in the flowering of individualism, and how we continue to do so even when the flower has become a weed that is choking off life.

We well may lose the marriage war. But we are called into the battle not because we are promised victory, but because we're called to be witnesses of a greater battle. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has famously said that "the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts." In our time and place, it is a battle with the original temptation: to imagine we are gods, captains of our own souls and masters of our fate—a habitual unwillingness to submit to anything bigger than the self.

As we contend with gay marriage proponents, then, we contend as both prophets and penitents. Like Isaiah, we can announce to our culture the poisonous fruit of immorality, while saying, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5, ESV). Like Paul, we can forthrightly warn others of the horrific consequences of sin, but in the next breath acknowledge that we must admit we are "the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).





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What we bring to the public table, then, is not our righteousness or even our humility. We come in the name of the One who came into the world to save sinners of all political and social persuasions. We raise our voices on behalf of righteousness not in a way calculated to win the culture—for sometimes we will, sometimes we won't—but as witnesses to the only Righteous One. We live in a culture that by all accounts is descending into darkness, and our job is to reflect the light of Christ. We speak for what he says is right, using the lingua franca of the culture to argue that as best we can, using the political and social instruments at our disposal to the best of our ability, acknowledging our own complicity in the sins we decry, and pointing to the One who must save us all.

*Mark Galli is senior managing editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. He is author of A Great and Terrible Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Attributes of God (Baker). This article was first published in the July 2009 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*





## Reflect

- *Step into the other side of the debate for a moment: How would you summarize the main arguments in our culture in favor of gay marriage? Which aspects of these arguments seem valid to you? Which seem invalid? Why?*
- *Mark Galli zeroes in on the extremely detrimental effect our individualism has on our pro-traditional-marriage arguments, writing: "We cannot very well argue for the sanctity of marriage as a crucial social institution while we blithely go about divorcing and approving of remarriage at a rate that destabilizes marriage. ... In short, we have been perfect hypocrites on this issue. Until we admit that, and take steps to amend our ways, our cries of alarm about gay marriage will echo off into oblivion." What do you think about Galli's challenging words? Do you think he's right? Why or why not?*
- *Galli suggests that we must speak to our culture as prophets but also as penitents, readily admitting where the church has fallen short in the arena of marriage. Read **Isaiah 6:5** and **1 Timothy 1:15**. What might it look like to reflect this kind of attitude in your conversations with others about gay marriage?*



## An Older, Wiser Ex-Gay Movement



How Exodus International offers realistic hope for homosexuals.

*By Tim Stafford*

Since its beginnings in the 1970s, the ex-gay movement has engaged gay advocates in a battle of testimonies. Transformed ex-gay leaders are the best argument for their movement. Likewise, those who've left the ex-gay movement in despair and disgust are the best counterargument. The debate continued when Exodus International held its 32nd annual conference in Irvine, California, featuring dozens of speakers and seminar leaders who have quit homosexuality. Down the road outside the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, a news conference featured three former Exodus leaders saying "ex-gay" is a delusion.





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New research may change the terms of debate. Psychologists Stanton Jones of Wheaton College and Mark Yarhouse of Regent University released a book detailing their findings from the first three years of an ongoing study. They are investigating participants in 16 different ex-gay programs associated with Exodus, the largest ex-gay ministry group.

The results show that some participants experienced significant change, though the change was usually partial, not complete. Furthermore, participants showed no additional mental or spiritual distress as a result of their involvement in the ex-gay program. This study is the first to use multiple interviews and questionnaires over a period of years, assessing participants from near the beginning of their involvement in an ex-gay program.

Jones and Yarhouse launched the study to try to resolve differences between their professional community, which warns that "reparative therapy" for homosexuals is both impossible and dangerous, and testimonies they have heard from those involved in ex-gay movements. Though critics of ex-gay movements sometimes cite research findings in warning against reparative therapy, Jones and Yarhouse found that published research did not actually bear out their claims. The existing research about homosexual change, though mostly dated, indicated some possibility of change. New research meeting contemporary research standards was needed.





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Some of Jones and Yarhouse's key findings:

- By most measures, the average participant experienced statistically significant change in his or her sexual identity and sexual attractions.
- Such changes were generally modest, though, with decreasing homosexual attraction more significant than increasing heterosexual attraction.
- Exodus can describe 38 percent of its programs' participants as successes, changing to either a "meaningful but complicated" heterosexuality (15 percent) or a stable chastity (23 percent).
- Surprisingly, a "truly gay" subpopulation showed the clearest changes in sexual identity and attraction.
- No evidence of increased mental distress was found.

To read more about  
Jones and Yarhouse's  
research, check out  
"The Best Research Yet"  
by Tim Stafford.





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Jones and Yarhouse take pains to emphasize that their study does not clarify the likelihood of successful change for any particular individual. Participants were self-selected—a highly motivated, highly religious group working with Exodus. Still, the study marks a crucial point in the ongoing maturation of the ex-gay movement. Once a small experiment, the movement has endured growing pains, learned from setbacks, and achieved a stable pattern of ministry.

### Ex-Gay Comes of Age

The breadth of the ex-gay movement can be seen in PATH (Positive Alternatives to Homosexuality), which claims 13 groups from across the Judeo-Christian spectrum. PATH includes Courage (Roman Catholic, with an emphasis on chastity), Homosexuals Anonymous (modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous as a confidential lay organization), JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality), and NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a non-religious organization of mental health professionals). Largest of the groups is Exodus, a coalition comprising more than 100 local Christian ministries in the United States, linked to similar ministries overseas.

Exodus began in 1976. Frank Worthen, a San Francisco homosexual who found his life transformed by Christ in the early '70s, joined forces with Melodyland Church. The Southern California church had begun counseling homosexuals through two men in their early twenties, Michael Bussee and Jim Kaspar. Exodus was born at a weekend conference sponsored by the two groups. At a second conference a year later, Exodus attracted gay





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protestors. Within three years, Bussee had renounced the group's goals and recommenced a gay lifestyle, claiming that nobody ever really changes. Worthen, now in his seventies, has continued his ministry to homosexuals alongside his wife, Anita.

Exodus, at 31, has settled into adulthood. Its most prominent leaders—Alan Chambers, Joe Dallas, Sy Rogers, Andy Comiskey, and Alan Medinger, among others—have been out of homosexuality and engaged in ministry for decades. Most are married with grown children. Scandals among leaders are far less common than in the early days, probably due to increased organizational accountability and growing awareness that those ministering in their area of temptation are vulnerable.

Perhaps nothing has brought Exodus into the mainstream of evangelicalism more than its embrace by James Dobson's Focus on the Family. Alan Medinger, the semi-retired founder of Regeneration (a sexual freedom ministry in Baltimore), remembers calling on Focus early on and finding the door completely shut. "I still don't know why," Medinger says. "When they swung around and began the Love Won Out conferences, it made a huge difference. They're a tremendous support to us now."

Focus's endorsement is an important seal of approval for conservative churches. Focus sponsors regular conferences for church leaders, drawing pastors who might never attend an ex-gay event. Growing cultural acceptance of homosexuality has also, paradoxically, helped Exodus in its relations with churches. Joe Dallas, founder and director of Genesis Counseling, notes that ex-gay leaders help





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churches "articulate a response to pro-gay theology. ... People in most denominations never thought they would have to address a biblical view of homosexuality, just as many parents never thought they would have to respond to a daughter who came home and said, 'I'm a lesbian.'" Not only that, but "the prevalence of internet pornography has opened up an honest discussion [about many sexual issues] within the church," Dallas says. "More Christians are saying immorality is not just a cultural problem; we have a problem."

As churches and Christian colleges have opened their doors to ex-gay ministries, the ministries have in turn begun to rethink their approach. "We do need sexperts, counselors who can do things that small groups cannot," says Andy Comiskey of Desert Stream Ministries. "But for the church to say that help exists only outside our walls, that is not optimal. I think it has to be body life."

"If I were completely successful," says Exodus president Alan Chambers, "the church would take over. The traditional pattern within Exodus has been a stepping-stone or launching pad to leave the homosexual lifestyle or a life of secrecy, to find camaraderie with others facing the same struggles, and then to go on to embrace the church. What if a church was so dynamic that a Sunday school class could do the same thing? What if people in church could become transparent, and people in those Sunday school classes became comfortable to share their stuff as well?"





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### How Transformed?

An older, wiser ex-gay movement is certainly clearer about what it has to offer. Early hopes for instant healing have given way to belief that transformation occurs through a lifetime of discipleship.

Tanya Erzen, a professor at Ohio State University, spent 18 months studying New Hope Ministry, a live-in program led by the Worthens in San Rafael, California. Though unsympathetic to ex-gay goals, Erzen came to empathize with the people she met. In *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*, she describes their view of change:

Ex-gays undergo a conversion process that has no endpoint, and they acknowledge that change encompasses desires, behavior, and identities that do not always align neatly or remain fixed," she writes. "Ex-gay men and women are born-again religiously, and as part of that process, they consider themselves reconstituted sexually. ... In the words of Curtis [one of the program's participants], 'Heterosexuality isn't the goal; giving our hearts and being obedient to God is the goal.' ... Desires and attractions might linger for years, but they would emerge with new religious identities and the promise that faith and their relationships with one another and God would eventually transform them.

As Alan Chambers puts it, "In the early days [of ex-gay ministry], nobody knew what to expect. They were hoping for something, and some went back because what they were hoping for wasn't reality. Four decades into this ministry, people have a much better way to talk about





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change. I was once an immature person, and I responded immaturely. Now I've grown as a believer and as a mature man. It was inevitable that my feelings and outlook would change. When I set my goal not as being heterosexual but as being the best child of God I could be, accepting his grace, my identity changed."

Chambers is frank that change does not eradicate temptation. He wonders if change is ever 100 percent complete in this life. "One thing we can expect as Christians is a life of denial," he says. "I don't think we're afraid to tell people that they may have a lifetime of struggle. Freedom isn't the absence of struggle, but the life of struggle with joy in the process."

The ex-gay movement seeks to integrate the reality of same-sex attraction into a life of discipleship. In that lifelong journey, they expect many changes, including changes of feeling and attraction. But they emphasize that each person's experience is different and that instant transformation is extremely rare.

Not surprisingly then, ex-gay ministries appeal almost exclusively to Christians. Most participants come from evangelical backgrounds and can't resolve their Christian faith with a gay identity. Jones and Yarhouse's research found that many tenaciously seek help and invest years in the process.

The ex-gay movement does not speak with one voice on the causes of homosexuality, but most believe that early childhood deficits are crucial—often a poor or nonexistent relationship with a father, prepubescent sexual





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experiences, or sexual abuse, especially for women. Many believe that homosexuality is fundamentally a crisis of masculinity or femininity—a subconscious attempt to meet legitimate emotional needs for relationship and affirmation through sexual means. Ex-gay groups are usually single-sex, because supportive friendships within your own gender are believed to be an important component of repairing damaged sexual identity.

Given the uncertainty and difficulty of change, some like the Roman Catholic group Courage prefer to emphasize chastity over change. Exodus leaders speak positively about Courage and its goals. Nevertheless, Exodus leaders are reluctant to limit their hopes to a life of chaste celibacy. Andy Comiskey writes, "We must renounce the unbelief prevalent in certain evangelical circles that resigns homosexual strugglers to little if any release from their tendencies. That perception of God is too small!"

### Common Struggle

Those who attend the Exodus conference are mostly young, mostly white, two-thirds male, dressed in SoCal casual—they might be a crowd at an Angels game. It seems like any other Christian conference: hands raised for rock-and-roll worship, testimonies, prayer, speakers, seminars galore.

But this conference features little motivational hyperbole. Alan Chambers, the low-key opening-night speaker, emphasizes that there is no step-by-step formula for overcoming homosexuality. "Hear me loud and clear: You're not going to get cured this week. ... We don't choose our feelings, but we do choose how we are going to live. I choose every day to deny what comes naturally to me. ...





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I have to rely on Jesus Christ every day." In a hundred different ways, conference speakers and seminar leaders say that healing only comes through a life of obedience to Christ.

Cheers greet speaker Sy Rogers, who is extremely entertaining. But his rapid-fire staccato delivery communicates a serious message of Christian discipleship. "God didn't say, 'Stop being gay.' He said, 'Walk with me.'" Rogers talks with searing frankness of the contempt he has endured his whole life. His delivery is confident, almost aggressive, but his vulnerability is startling. Painful as this stuff may be, he seems to say, it is nothing more than what God knows about me—God who loves me and gives me life.

Which sums up much of ex-gay ministry today. No hype. Limited faith in techniques. No gay bashing. No detectable triumphalism, religious or political. Just serious discipleship. This may be the only group in America that realizes all the way to the bottom that when you decide to follow Jesus, you don't always get to do what you want to do.

The ex-gay movement runs against the cultural tide. Given adverse public opinion, the ambivalent support of conservative churches, and the common assertion that ex-gays condemn themselves to a life of frustration, you would think the movement would shrivel. Yet Exodus affiliates have doubled in number over the last 18 years. Many of its leaders have been in the public eye for 20 to 30 years. They show every sign of stability.





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They live by radical ideas about sexuality—that we are not, as our culture would have it, defined by our desires, heterosexual or homosexual. Rather, we are defined by our Creator and Savior. Our attractions, always disordered to some extent, must be submitted to Christ, who alone can redeem us. For those who feel strong same-sex attractions, that task is especially difficult. But it is the same basic struggle every Christian must face.

*Tim Stafford is an author and regular contributor to CHRISTIANITY TODAY. This article was first published in the October 2007 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*





## Reflect

- *Read **1 Corinthians 6:9–11**. Now zero in on verses **9–10** for a moment; Can you find yourself somewhere in this list of sinners? Do you think some of these patterns of behavior are easier to change than others? Why or why not?*
- *How does **1 Corinthians 6:9–11** describe the way Jesus changes people? How would you explain it in your own words?*
- *Every person on earth has certain sins we struggle with; in your own experience, how "complete" has change been in your life? In other words, are there sins or temptations you've fully overcome and no longer struggle with? Are there sins and temptations you expect to continue to struggle with throughout your life? What do you think change and redemption is meant to look like in the life of a Christian?*
- *We can sometimes speak flippantly about the idea of homosexual change, but as this article reveals, there are many homosexuals who desire to change but who continue to struggle intensely throughout their lives. What might it look like to speak more compassionately about change and what that may mean in the arena of sexual identity?*



## No Easy Victory



A plea from a Christian husband and father who, day by day, resists his homosexual desires.

—*Anonymous*

I am a business executive, congregation president, youth-group leader, athletic coach, happily married man for more than 25 years, and proud father of a couple of teenagers. Oh—and I'm gay. My admission requires some explanation, and perhaps some supporting evidence. You see, except for some experimentation during adolescence, I have not acted on my desires. From the outside I've usually looked and acted like a "normal" heterosexual male.



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### No Easy Victory

I was raised in an extremely conservative denomination. From as early as I can remember, I knew right from wrong, white from black, good from evil, righteousness from sinfulness. There was no moral gray, no ambiguity. I felt irreparably condemned by what I knew.

When my wife and I were ready to choose our own theological home, we became part of a Lutheran church. The message of grace alone was, and still is, what attracted me to Lutheranism. Unfortunately, we Lutherans are not all that good at living in and sharing that grace, and sometimes I still feel condemned by what should be good news.

On the inside—in my psyche, feelings, and attractions—I'm as certain of my gayness as I am of my sex. I first became aware of my sexual orientation when I was about 9 or 10 years old, at church summer camp. At that time, I had no idea what sex was, but I was nonetheless aware of an overwhelming emotional attraction I had developed to another boy of my age. It was an experience that would repeat itself over and over again. As I entered adolescence, it would take on a more sexual nature.

By the time I was in high school, I had experienced a number of serious crushes on other young men. Most of these came to nothing but teenage friendships, but in a couple of instances, they did take on some physical expression. The physiological and emotional drive to be intimate with another person of my own sex was almost overwhelming. So was the guilt associated with my succumbing to this drive.





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### No Easy Victory

While my high school peers were bragging about their heterosexual exploits, I was trying desperately not to have the homosexual encounters that my nature inexorably seemed to draw me toward. For all of us, admittedly, adolescence carries some degree of alienation (from others and from self), but for me the sense of aloneness and self-loathing was almost more than I could bear. I developed a variety of "coping mechanisms"—alcohol, drug abuse, heavy smoking, and forced heterosexual encounters—but they proved ineffective in distracting me from my urges. By the time I was a high school senior, I was frequently depressed and given to serious thoughts of suicide.

### A Strange Normality

At 19, in the summer between my first and second year of college, I became a Christian. Obviously, given my Christian family background, I had known about Christ and the offer of salvation for many years. Nonetheless, I had never been able to make a meaningful connection between the conservative theology of my family and my inner turmoil. But at 19, when I found myself in the throes of suicidal depression, Christ seemed to be my best choice of last resort.

I thank God that much about my life changed as a result of that choice. I recovered from my depression, got my drinking under control, quit smoking (eventually), and straightened out my sexual life enough to begin a healthy relationship with a wonderful woman. In time this led to my marriage to a person who knows and has supported me more than I could ever deserve. But, as great as all this was, my sexual orientation did not change; I still was not then, nor am I now, "normal."





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### No Easy Victory

And that's what I wish I could be: normal. I've tried to change, tried to become heterosexual, tried just about everything to do so! Counseling, therapy, prayer, healing—you name it. But for all my trying, all I've managed to do is control the behavioral manifestations of my sexual orientation. God has given me the power to live a fulfilling heterosexual life, together with the grace to live with the fact that I'm still homosexual. It hasn't been an easy victory. There are times when maintaining this dichotomous life is nearly overwhelming.

Over the years I've continued to struggle with emotional attractions and attachments to other men that have torn away at my insides and eroded my confidence in myself and in God. I continue to struggle from time to time with thoughts that my wife and sons would be better off if they didn't have to deal with such a moody husband and father—especially his recurring bouts of almost suicidal depression.

Yes, mine is a victory in the sense that I have managed to maintain life, love, and fidelity in my marriage, but it is a victory that has required almost daily battle, and one that comes at considerable psychological cost to me and to my family.

I have no regrets about my commitment to begin and maintain my faithfulness in heterosexual marriage. Nothing has taught me more, nothing has been a greater source of joy, than the relationships I have with my wife and sons. But I am sometimes angry about the effort required, and I am frequently angry that I have had to do this on my own, without the support of friends or of a caring Christian community.





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### No Easy Victory

#### The Shroud of Silence

Christian literature on homosexuality is full of polarizing rhetoric. One side says that we should welcome our gay brothers and sisters into Christian fellowship; that we should recognize this is how God made them and therefore it must be how God intends for them to live. The other side recites the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, uses words like abomination, and gives us anecdotal evidence of people being changed. From the perspective of my experience, I cannot help but conclude that both positions are naïve.

My position on homosexuality—while it may be realistic and grounded in true experience—seems to offend many and please almost no one. My fervent belief that God intends us to live in heterosexual and monogamous fidelity offends the liberals who think I should accept and live out my supposedly God-given sexual nature. At the same time, my experience that grace may abound but that it doesn't necessarily "fix" me or make it easy for me to live the "straight" life offends the conservatives who preach and demand a clearer "victory" over my sinful nature. Rhetoric seldom provides us with an accurate representation of reality. My story is a reality. I believe it is a reality shared by many more than just me, but disclosed by few.

Why haven't I told my story to my church friends? Why is my identity anonymous? Because, despite all the claims by my heterosexual friends to "love the sinner but hate the sin," I do not trust them. I do not believe that they could know this about me and still want me to be their congregational president, their youth-group leader, their sons' coach. I wish I could believe it, but I don't. Perhaps





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### No Easy Victory

I'm hypersensitive in not trusting, but I've overheard too many jokes, seen too many expressions of hate directed at homosexuals, to believe that these same people could be my friends if they knew.

To be honest, I myself sometimes have a hard time loving the sinner while hating the sin. Sometimes this takes the form of self-hate, but more often I struggle with hating promiscuous heterosexual men, because they seem so self-justifying and because some people—even some Christians—seem so accommodating of that sin while so condemning of mine. Just last week I was talking with a Christian friend about concerns I had for members of our youth group. His response was something like, "Well, you know, with all those hormones ... " I don't get it. Do young male heterosexuals benefit from some sort of special dispensation? Why is their giving in to their urges so understandable while my giving in to mine would be such an abomination?

The debate on homosexuality is tearing at the fiber of almost every mainline Christian denomination, while also leaving many of us who actually are homosexual feeling misunderstood, marginalized, and ignored by the "dialogue."

I am not trying to argue in favor of my homosexuality, but to simply acknowledge the reality of my condition. I am broken, and I acknowledge my homosexuality as a manifestation of this brokenness. But I do not believe I am any more broken than the person who sits in the pew next to me. The greedy, the liars, the drunkards, and the single yet sexually active heterosexuals—they all share in equal portion with me in this brokenness.





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### No Easy Victory

Sin is sin, and grace is grace. We are all sinners and we all—whether heterosexual or homosexual—are offered the same grace. Ours is no easy victory. It would be a whole lot easier if our churches would try to understand, and accept, those like me who claim victory nonetheless.

*The author lives in the western United States. This article was first published in the March 2002 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

## Reflect

- *What stands out to you from this man's honest story of his own struggle? Why?*
- *The author describes two predominant messages about homosexuality within the church: one, in more liberal churches, which affirms and accepts homosexuality as a God-given orientation; the other, in more conservative churches, which strongly emphasizes condemnation of homosexuality (and often of homosexuals themselves). When have you observed these various viewpoints expressed? The author concludes "that both positions are naïve." What do you think he means?*





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### No Easy Victory

- *The author has kept his struggle a secret from his Christian friends, he writes, "[b]ecause, despite all the claims by my heterosexual friends to 'love the sinner but hate the sin,' I do not trust them. I do not believe that they could know this about me and still want me to be their congregational president, their youth-group leader, their sons' coach. I wish I could believe it, but I don't." Do you think he's right? If he were a ministry leader in your church, how do you think your church would respond if he were completely honest about his struggles?*
- *The author writes, "I am broken, and I acknowledge my homosexuality as a manifestation of this brokenness. But I do not believe I am any more broken than the person who sits in the pew next to me. Sin is sin, and grace is grace." How does Scripture affirm this idea? What are some biblical passages that come to mind for you to support this view of God's grace for all forms of sin?*



## Additional Resources

Books, Bible studies, and articles to help you further.



### Books:

**The Broken Image** by Leanne Payne (Baker, 1996).

This book presents documented case studies of homosexuals and lesbians who have been reoriented to heterosexuality through applied healing prayer.

**Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation** by Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse (InterVarsity Press, 2007;

420 pages). Can persons who receive psychotherapy offered by religious groups experience a change in their sexual orientation? Is this type of therapy harmful? Jones and Yarhouse's scientifically rigorous and impartially presented study offers startling results that call for a re-examination of current thought that homosexuality is immutable.





## The Homosexual Dilemma

### Additional Resources

**Homosexual Struggle** by Nancy (Intervarsity Press, 1980; 27 pages). This book talks about the author's struggle with her feelings of being a lesbian, and how she worked through that struggle with God's help. There are many Christians with similar situations, and homosexuality is not as rare as one may think. This book shows what helped the author, and how she dealt with her feelings.

**Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would: A Fresh Christian Approach** by Chad W. Thompson (Baker, 2004; 192). In this book, Chad Thompson, a formerly gay man, calls Christians to disarm the gay community by "loving first." Drawing from the life and words of Jesus, Thompson teaches readers how to love and befriend homosexuals before they change—and even if they never change—their sexual orientation.

**Someone I Love is Gay** by Bob Davies and Anita Worthen (InterVarsity Press, 1996; 215 pages). After the shock wears off discover how to respond to a gay spouse, child, relative, or friend with the truth about homosexuality without being judgmental. In addition to helping you understand your own emotions, this essential book offers compassionate yet solid answers for both you and your loved one.





## Online Articles:

**“Just Saying ‘No’ Is Not Enough,”** a panel discussion on homosexuality from CHRISTIANITY TODAY.

**“Loving the Neighbors—How Do I Respond to the Lesbian Couple Next Door?,”** a TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN article by Dr. Bill Maier.

**“What God Hath Not Joined—Why Marriage Was Designed for Male and Female,”** a CHRISTIANITY TODAY article by Edith M. Humphrey.

## Bible Studies:

**“The Case Against Gay Marriage”** is a single-session study from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com).

**“Does the Bible Prohibit Gay Marriage?”** is a single-session study from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com).

**“Homosexuality”** is a five-week Bible study course from [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com), exploring gay marriage, the possibilities of change, and how the church should respond to the homosexual community.



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