

# Reaching Out to Homosexuals



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



# Reaching Out to Homosexuals

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# The Church's Response to Homosexuality

*Four ways to relate pastorally to homosexuals.*

by Thomas E. Schmidt

In *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), Thomas E. Schmidt has made it abundantly clear—against some revisionist interpreters—that the Bible does not warrant homosexual behavior. He has also marshaled disturbing and seldom admitted medical evidence that AIDS is only one of many serious health risks for practicing homosexuals. But Schmidt also provides wise advice to the church on how to relate pastorally to homosexuals. The following points are taken from his “final words.”

## **1. We must express our disapproval of homosexual practice in the context of our own sexual fallenness.**

Unless we acknowledge that we are *all* in need of God's grace and healing in our sexuality, we will continue to prevent homosexuals and others from listening to us. They will hear only our fear and revulsion, not our love and similar need of grace. We should always draw a connection between homosexuality and the inappropriate desires and actions of the heterosexual majority. This approach kicks the legs out from under the reaction that we are simply homophobic, but more important, it is the right thing to do. Only when we show that we have a greater concern about our own sin will we have a right to confront sin in others. This is not tolerance. It is justice.

Our heterosexual sin includes hatred toward homosexuals. Whenever we initiate or tolerate slang terms, demeaning jokes, or derogatory offhand comments, we send a strong message that these people for whom Jesus died are, in civil-rights terms, *niggers*; or in biblical terms, *Samaritans*. In so doing we make a lie of the slogan “Hate the sin and love the sinner.” That slogan, known and despised by homosexuals, is tired and needs to be replaced. A more appropriate motto would be “Look in the mirror before looking out the window.”

Christians who cannot deal with the issues of homosexuality calmly and compassionately should keep their mouths shut; they should stay away from the front lines of ministry and public-policy debate, not to mention radio and TV talk shows. The people we are trying to reach must be convinced that the way of Jesus is the way of the Wounded Healer, not the Holy Terror.

## **2. We must find avenues of ministry consistent with our moral stance.**

Churches face an awkward dilemma. Excluding practicing homosexuals from worship and ministry may push them away from Christianity; but including them in every aspect of church life may send a message that we approve of homosexual behavior. The morally

ambiguous “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which satisfies neither side in the military, is downright cowardly in a church. The better course is for church leaders periodically to make it clear from the pulpit (and privately in specific cases of concern) that the church represents forgiveness and power to change as well as redemptive discipline in all cases of sexual disobedience, including homosexual acts.

Education in the church is imperative. Our members need to know what they are up against. Even more critically, they need to know what we stand for. Churches should make available to their members annotated reading lists; names of local counseling agencies and reputable Christian ministries; and information about the resources of the local church itself, including support groups and counseling opportunities. Such information should be as widely distributed in the church and as readily available as condoms are outside the church.

The body of Christ is not just a mouth. Christians should be known for the kind of hands-on help that characterized the ministry of our Lord. People with AIDS are often viewed as lepers today. They lose jobs, insurance, and the ability to care for themselves, all before they are sick enough to require hospitalization. They need help in running errands, basic housekeeping, and fixing meals. In areas where no hospice care is available, they may need money or a place to stay. More than anything, they need human companionship. As relationships of trust develop, they may open up to spiritual help. But we should not make spiritual openness a condition of service.

We may view many homosexuals as enemies, and the feeling is often mutual. But in a war, we would not leave our enemies to die alone on the battlefield, reasoning that they deserve their fate and should not be helped. I submit that those who applaud the death of homosexuals are thereby proclaiming that they are on the side of Satan, not Jesus. To them, Jesus says, “It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for those people” (see Luke 10:12).

### **3. We must understand the relation between morality and truth.**

Our culture is rapidly moving away from the notion of absolute truth. People see truth and morality as subject to the changing whims of those in power. Accusations of relativism fail to sting because people think that’s the way truth and morality work. The clearest indication of this is that most Americans value tolerance more highly than truth.

If Christians are convinced that God has revealed himself and his way in his Word, we must place limits on our tolerance in the interest of truth. Instead of shaking our heads and lamenting the sorry state of the world, we should recognize that truth is not meant to be applauded but to be nailed to crosses. And we had better know the truth. That means, first of all, knowing Jesus. It also means knowing the Bible backwards and forwards and far more deeply than most churches currently require. Finally, it means knowing well the larger ideas competing for the minds and hearts of people.

#### **4. We must bring the gospel to individual people.**

When it comes to moral issues, many believers find it difficult to distinguish their responsibility as believers from their responsibility as American citizens. Too many confuse the *cause* of Christ with the *way* of Christ. In practical terms, Christians should be wary of public-policy debates are issue-oriented rather than people-oriented. In my observation, those who get caught up in the political aspect of a moral issue often adopt a simplistic we-they attitude and a set of tactics based on the acquisition of power. They may succeed, but the price of that may be the loss of humility, tenderness, and integrity. I do not oppose working through the political process to legislate morality; that is the democratic way. I simply warn that it is a limited goal. The gospel is ultimately not about changing laws but about changing lives.

Recently I heard a powerful testimony from an elderly woman who had joined her psychiatrist husband in a lifetime of service to his clients by opening their home to them. "The kitchen must be the center of love," she said, "for Jesus is known in the breaking of the bread." Those are true and convicting words for those of us who perceive open homes, unhurried conversation, and table fellowship as nostalgic elements of another generation of Christians. They're also true and convicting words for those of us who would march off to fight in the culture war past Lazarus at our gate.

The call is clear. If we are to walk in the way of Jesus, it is not the nuclear family that we need to promote but the hospitable family. We do not need people who love family values nearly as much as we need families who value people.

*—Thomas E. Schmidt is a New Testament scholar  
in Santa Barbara, California.*

"A Pastoral Manifesto," CHRISTIANITY TODAY, November 11, 1996, Vol. 40, No. 13, Page 38

## **Connecting in Our Differences**

*A gay journalist and evangelical pastor correct their mutual misperceptions.*

by Wendy Murray Zoba

CT senior writer Wendy Murray Zoba and Salon.com journalist Dave Cullen were both covering the Columbine story when they went head to head over Cassie Bernall. Cullen broke the story that introduced doubt about whether Cassie's killer asked her if she believed in God ("Behind the Littleton Investigation," Salon.com, Sept 23, 1999). Zoba challenged Cullen's reporting, citing multiple witnesses who heard the exchange and stood behind their account ("Cassie Said Yes, They Say No," CT, Dec. 6, 1999). In the story's aftermath, they began a dialogue that has resulted in camaraderie united by the intensity and complexity of covering Columbine.

While Zoba and Cullen intersected over Cassie Bernall, Cullen and pastor Bill Oudemolen of Foothills Bible Church outside Littleton intersected over the role of the Devil. In another Salon.com article, "I Smell the Presence of Satan" (May 15, 1999), Cullen expressed his surprise at the emphasis evangelicals placed on the role of Satan in the Columbine shootings (the article's title came from one of Oudemolen's sermons).

Cullen, who is gay and a former Catholic, segued into the world of evangelicals with reticence. He was prepared to despise them. Instead, he was surprised; he liked them, and they liked him.

Cullen, Oudemolen, and Zoba have all been challenged by what they discovered about each other and their differing worlds. The three met in Littleton in April and talked about how evangelicals and gays perceive one another—and how they can move toward greater understanding.

### **Zoba: Dave, as a member of the gay community and—as you put it—a lapsed Catholic, what were your thoughts as you began covering evangelicals for *Salon*?**

**Cullen:** I didn't know how to approach this because I didn't know who these people were. People outside that world, like me, tend to view them all as Tammy Faye Bakker types. In the religious world I come from, the Catholic tradition, they're all singing from the same sheet of music. So when I see a couple of evangelicals on TV, I'm thinking, *OK, that's who evangelicals are*. It never occurred to me that they're coming from different places and that you—Bill or Wendy—are not responsible, for example, for what Jim Bakker said or did.

### **Isn't that a form of stereotyping—the type of thing gays criticize evangelicals for doing to them?**

**Cullen:** You're right. I've come to see that.

**Oudemolen:** When you wrote your article for *Salon*, I thought it was critical. But for some reason, I wasn't offended. As you know, there were six or seven things I thought weren't right. But you laid out a challenge, saying something like, "If the evangelicals who accepted me so warmly during my Columbine research knew who I *really* was [gay], I'm not sure I would have had the same response from them." I remember thinking, *He's got to give us a chance.*

**Cullen:** I would write it a bit differently now, by the way.

**Do you think, Bill, the image projected to those outside the evangelical subculture, rightly or wrongly, is that of an exclusive club with certain rules, and if you want to join the club you have to obey the rules?**

**Oudemolen:** The challenge in Dave's piece was clear: Can evangelicals love someone they disagree with? Jesus said the way the world will know we are his disciples is to love each other. That's the number-one thing that's supposed to mark us. My perspective on the gay lifestyle and my theology on homosexuality have not changed since Dave and I met. But now I can look at him and say that I love him and value him as a human being.

**Did Jerry Falwell's attempt to reach out to gays seem encouraging to people in the gay community?**

**Cullen:** By and large, very much so. Some people wondered about his sincerity, though I think that's a pretty weak response. He had nothing to gain. Plus, the way he talked about it seemed sincere. I've always had a real problem with evangelicals who have said, "Love the sinner, hate the sin," because they would then say horrible things about gays. I was only seeing the "Hate the sin" part. Falwell used that quote too, but he added, "We've been saying 'Love the sinner,' but we need to really mean that." He was saying that he had to *live* it. To the degree there was negativity about Falwell's gesture, it was either by people who didn't believe his sincerity or who thought, *Well, that's one guy. What about the rest?* If we can get that kind of gesture from other evangelicals, we'll be getting somewhere.

**What do you think we could do to communicate, "Love the sinner" more effectively?**

**Cullen:** In an op-ed piece about Matthew Shepard, I said that if pastors don't say anything positive about gays, that sends a message to their communities that it's OK to hate gays. If some people have hateful feelings toward gays and the pulpit fails to challenge that, it's easy to think, *My preacher feels the same way.*

I was moved by a pastor here who made statements at Bible studies and at church against Fred Phelps, stating that what he stands for isn't right (see "Called to Hate?" CT, Oct. 25, 1999). Life is precious and it is inexcusable to beat someone to death. We each have our own mission that God, our Creator—or whoever made us—put us here to do. We have no right to take that from someone else by killing him. A congregation hearing

the minister saying that it's not OK to beat up or mistreat gay people will bring more balance.

**Oudemolen:** I'd say it's wrong because there's an objective standard outside of me, God's law, that says this is wrong. It is the same objective standard that compels me to conclude that homosexuality is wrong and to talk about faith in exclusive terms that might offend. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me." In this culture, that message can come across as threatening. I don't want to threaten you. I want to accept and love and touch you with the love of Christ. But you have to understand that while you may disagree with my message, you can still be OK with me.

**We also need to ask, what compelled Matthew Shepard's killers to do what they did? Maybe evangelicals could lend something to the cultural conversation that asks haunting questions about the nature of evil.**

**Oudemolen:** I hope this doesn't sound whiny, but this culture is not going to turn to theologians or pastors for answers. You read the print coverage on Columbine and look at the things in the national media, and it's all about peripheral issues—gun control, where the memorial is going to be built, and so on. These are legitimate things. But a year later, I'm still asking, *Why wasn't this a wake-up call? We've got to face the fact that there's a spiritual reality out here.*

**Cullen:** I wish we had more open discussion about theological issues in this culture. But the public isn't doing that because it's afraid of the theological community. This helped me see why a lot of evangelicals are afraid of the so-called "gay agenda." I roll my eyes at that phrase because I don't have any agenda except not wanting to get beaten up. But I am able to see more and more that what most evangelicals think about gays is "OK, if we give these people an inch they're going to want to go all the way." Some probably think, "It's reasonable to let gay partners have health insurance, but then what will they ask for next?"

The perception is the same when gays view evangelicals. Some people might have the inkling to go to church but are afraid they will feel under siege if they do. Or they imagine Christians want to set up a theocracy like the Puritan colonies in Massachusetts.

The larger question for evangelical churches is, how do they get their message out without coming across as threatening?

Still, when bad things happen, people want to know how to interpret spiritual activity in this world. It is especially disorienting for those who don't have the vocabulary or a category for these matters. I know that has been true about Columbine.

**Oudemolen:** Few people are clear about the seminal issues that bring about episodes like we saw with Matthew Shepard, at Columbine, and at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Ft. Worth.



When I was standing at the corner of Pierce and Bowles near Columbine High School right after the shooting, I was searching for a way to explain what was going on here. I've had all these years of theological training, my dad was a pastor, and I grew up in the church. Yet there was only one way I could explain it: I truly believe I smelled the presence of evil. My theological category for this evil is Satan--a personal spirit, a fallen angel, a being of light who falls in an act of rebellion and devises all kinds of evil.

**Cullen:** I reacted negatively to that statement because it seemed so ironic. I'm used to ministers saying we need to take responsibility for our actions. I felt you were taking responsibility away from the kids. I thought we should be blaming the kids more, and here was this minister blaming them less. What if there were horrible problems in this community or this school? If you put blamed an external force, then maybe nothing will be done in the community to address problems. That was how it struck me and, I think, a lot of other nonevangelicals.

**Oudemolen:** I think those two boys, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, spurred by hate and evil in their hearts, gave the devil a launching pad. They acted on what they were demonically inspired to do. That does not take away the blame I would place on them, because they made choices. Are they at fault? Yes. Is there a spiritual explanation for this? Yes. Is anybody in our culture paying attention to that? Not many.

### **How can the gay and evangelical communities take steps to understand each other better?**

**Oudemolen:** Jesus moved in and out of people's lives, went to their homes, went to their parties, observed them, and spent time with them, not because he wanted to do what they were doing but because he wanted to be where they were. He spent time with people on the street, not the religious people. He didn't mince words about their forsaking sin, but at the same time I believe they felt his acceptance and warmth and love.

That's how I want people to experience me as pastor. We have a guy, Dave, who goes to church on Sunday mornings and sees me in the visitor room. People look at him because he has piercings and wears a neck thing that looks like a dog collar with spikes. My goal is to give him a hug and tell him it's good to see him.

**Cullen:** Even more than symbolic gestures, like what Falwell did, would be for a pastor to interact with those people in some way, maybe just taking someone out for coffee.

**Oudemolen:** The gay community could look at evangelicals and say, "This is the enemy," while evangelicals can look over there and say, "They are the enemy." But instead we have each walked across the bridge. We've met each other in the middle, and we have established a dialogue and a relationship that I value.

—*Wendy Murray Zoba is a senior writer for CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

"Building a Bridge," CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 10, 2000, Vol. 44, No. 8, Page 54

## **Did God Make Me Gay?**

*I hadn't planned to become a lesbian. So how in the world did I end up this way?*

by Christine Sneeringer

“Don't you know that Kim is gay?”

My friend's words stunned me, because I didn't have a clue. Kim and I were both athletes, and we had a lot in common. As we got to know each other, we became really close. So when Kim told me one day, “I want to be more than friends,” I naively thought she meant she just wanted us to be even tighter than we already were.

Then my friend dropped the bomb about Kim being gay.

I was confused. At first, I was upset that Kim liked me that way. But after I thought about it, I figured that nothing could be wrong between two people as long as they loved each other. And Kim and I certainly loved each other.

Once I realized that, I was freed from my inhibitions. Soon Kim and I began a sexual relationship. I was 15 and she was 17. It was exciting to have someone care so deeply about me. We'd see each other at school all day, then spend hours on the phone together at night. We always checked with each other before we made plans with other friends.

When Kim graduated a few months later, she turned down several athletic scholarships from out-of-state colleges. She wanted stay in town because we couldn't bear to be apart. We were totally consumed with each other.

I hadn't planned to become a lesbian. So how in the world did I end up this way?

### **More Than a Tomboy**

When I was young, I learned that being a girl was not a good thing. My alcoholic father had a violent temper, and he would often hit my mother. Because my mom was a victim, I figured it wasn't safe to be female. I looked up to my older brother and wanted to be just like him.

I preferred sports over playing with dolls. I grew up on the tennis court, playing in my first tournament when I was age 6. I played Little League baseball when I was 10 and tackle football with the neighborhood boys.

I was seen as one of the guys because I was as strong and tough as they were. “Tomboy” didn't begin to describe me—I walked like a boy, dressed like a boy, talked like a boy, even spit like a boy. Most adults thought I *was* a boy and often called me “son” or “young man.”

I hated my name, Christine, because it was a girl's name. I told people to call me “Chris,” since that could be either male or female.

My parents divorced when I was 12. They sent me away to live with relatives. I was molested by an older cousin before moving back in with my mom. Like most children who have been sexually abused, somehow I thought I was to blame. I thought, *If only guys didn't find me attractive, things like this wouldn't happen to me.* From then on I wanted to conceal whatever shred of femininity I had, believing that all guys were sex-crazed monsters.

That's the mentality I had when I started high school. I was often mistaken for a guy because of my masculine appearance and mannerisms.

## **Mom Finds Out**

My relationship with Kim lasted a year and a half, until my mom found out. She found a love note I had written to Kim.

"Do you want to tell me about this?" she asked, dropping the card on the table.

I continued to eat in awkward silence. Mom opened the card and began to read my words aloud: "My dearest Kimbo. I'm so glad you are in my life. You make it worth living. I want to spend the rest of my life with you because I love you more than anything. When we get older, I can't wait to get married."

My mom demanded that our relationship end. She called Kim's mom, and together they worked to end our love affair. Eventually they were successful.

After Kim and I broke up, I began to experiment sexually with guys to find out if I was really gay or not. But each time I felt used and degraded because the guys didn't care about me at all; they only wanted sex.

As a result, I knew I preferred being with a girl. It felt natural to me. While in college, I fell in love with Sue, a married woman seven years older than I. Her husband worked long hours, leaving Sue emotionally needy and looking outside her marriage for ways to meet those needs. I was there for her.

Sue regularly attended church. She felt guilty about our relationship because she believed homosexuality was a sin, and guilty because she was being unfaithful to her marriage. That relationship ended in divorce while we were together.

I was dealing with guilt, too, over being a home wrecker. For a year and a half, Sue and I remained lovers anyway.

## **Finding God's Love**

One day I told Sue I'd like to join her church's women's softball team. I met with the coach and joined the team. I didn't know it then, but that was the best move of my life. Joining that softball team was my first step to freedom from being gay.

In the three seasons that I played on that team, something stirred in my heart. I was drawn by the love that my teammates had for each other and for me. I don't mean romantic love, but a love that was pure and right.

My teammates knew I was gay, but they never treated me like an outsider. I later found out that they were regularly praying for me.

I wanted to experience what they had, so I started going to church. I never dreamed that after all I'd done, God could still love me. But I was glad to find out I was wrong. God did love me, completely and without reservation. I couldn't resist that kind of love so I became a Christian and gave him my life. He forgave my sins and wiped the slate clean.

Sue and I soon broke up, but I still had homosexual desires. I wondered if God could truly deliver me from the gay lifestyle. I was also angry at God because I thought he had made me gay. I didn't understand that wasn't God's doing but my own. I eventually realized that I had chosen this path for myself because I was trying to protect myself against further hurt from men. I also believe I had been looking for my mother's love in the arms of another woman.

## **A Call to Change**

Not long after I became a Christian, I was listening to a call-in show on the radio. The man on the show, Sy Rogers, seemed to understand the struggles I was dealing with. He was a former homosexual and was now the president of Exodus International, an organization that helps people who want to break free from the gay lifestyle. He mentioned an upcoming seminar in Orlando, just a couple of hours from my home in Tampa. I made plans to attend.

The seminar changed my life. Sy shared his story of overcoming a lifetime of homosexuality, and I was filled with hope that I could, too.

I found out about an Exodus ministry in Tampa, called Straight Ahead. I began to attend weekly support group meetings. I also got more involved at my church and started making new friends. However, I was very uncomfortable trying to fit in with straight girls because I was still so masculine. But even that was beginning to change.

For the first time since I had been sexually abused as a child, I wanted to be attractive like the other girls at church. All my life I had been one of the guys, but now I wanted to be one of the girls. I wanted to be more feminine. But I didn't know how.

Later that year, I attended an Exodus conference in San Antonio. There I participated in a makeover session. As I walked back to my room after the makeover, I felt like God was saying, "You know those girls at church you envy because they're beautiful? You're no different. You are beautiful, too, just like them."

Stunned, I continued walking as tears rolled down my cheeks. My roommate was ironing her dress before the evening banquet when I walked in. She looked at me, confused. "You look great," she said. "Why are you crying?"

"I'm *pretty*," I stammered, surprised at this new revelation. All my life I had struggled with feelings of inadequacy about being a girl. Suddenly for the first time, I saw myself as "just like them."

When I returned to my church in Tampa, I asked people to call me Christine. I wanted people to know I was a girl. I met godly, mature women who helped me see that being female wasn't so bad. I also came to realize that straight girls have the same insecurities that I was dealing with. I was more like them than I ever thought.

I also saw guys in a different light. They could be true friends who were interested in *me*, not sex. For the first time, I began to feel safe as a girl. Gradually I became comfortable and secure in my new role.

The key to my healing was developing healthy same-sex friendships. As I did this, my sexual attractions for girls diminished. I also met with a counselor to help me deal with sexual abuse and family issues. Meantime, I continued my involvement in church and Exodus.

With God's help and the support of caring people, I now walk in freedom from lesbianism. Homosexuality doesn't cast a shadow on my life any more.

*—Christine Sneeringer is the director of a Christian outreach to homosexuals, a member ministry of Exodus International. She lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.*

"Did God Make Me Gay?" CAMPUS LIFE, September/October 2000, Vol. 59, No. 2, Page 60

## Help for Homosexuals

*If you or someone you know is struggling with homosexuality, here are some things to keep in mind:*

**People are not born gay.** Many people think there is a so-called gay gene. Research has been done to find a genetic link to homosexuality, but some research has proved just the opposite—that homosexuality is not inborn. Its causes are varied but often include childhood trauma such as sexual or emotional abuse, early exposure to pornography, unmet emotional needs, and a breakdown in the relationship with the same sex parent.

**God loves the homosexual struggler.** Though the Bible clearly condemns homosexual behavior (Lev. 18:22, Lev. 20:13, Rom. 1:26–27), God does not reject the homosexual. He loves gays as much as he loves straight people. God sees us all as sinners in need of a savior. The gospel is for everyone, including the homosexual.

**There is hope for change.** Gay people don't have to stay that way. A homosexual orientation is not a life sentence. There is even biblical evidence that homosexuals can change (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). With God's help and the loving support of others, many people have given up the homosexual lifestyle.

Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes or easy answers for gays who wish to change. That's why it's helpful to talk with someone who has struggled with homosexuality. Many of the folks at Exodus International Ministries, like me, have been set free from the gay lifestyle.

The people at Exodus are willing to assist anyone struggling with homosexuality. For more information, contact Exodus at (888) 264-0877, or check out [www.exodusintl.org](http://www.exodusintl.org). They can point you to an Exodus ministry in your area.

—Christine Sneeringer

## **An Uneasy Victory**

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

by 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—I'm also 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 looked and acted like a normal heterosexual male.

I was raised Conservative Baptist (emphasis on *conservative*). From as early as I can remember, I knew right from wrong, white from black, good from evil, righteousness from sin. 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 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The message of grace alone 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 9 or 10 years old, at church summer camp. At that time, I had no idea what sex was. I was nonetheless aware of the overwhelming emotional attraction I had to another boy my age. It was an experience that would repeat itself over and over. 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 were simply teenage friendships, but in a couple of instances, they included some physical expression. The physiological and emotional drive to be intimate with another person of my own sex became almost overwhelming. So was the guilt associated with succumbing to this drive.

While my high school buddies were bragging about their heterosexual exploits, I was trying desperately not to have the homosexual encounters I so desired. For all of us, adolescence includes some alienation from others and from self, but for me the sense of aloneness and self-loathing was more than I could bear. I developed a variety of coping mechanisms, including alcohol, drug abuse, heavy smoking, and forced heterosexual encounters, but they proved ineffective in distracting me from my homosexual urges. By the time I was a high school senior, I was frequently depressed and seriously thinking about suicide.

## **Strangely Normal**

In the summer between my first and second year of college, I became a Christian. Given my church background, I had known about Christ 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. At age 19, when I found myself in the throes of suicidal depression, Christ was my 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, and straightened out my sexual life enough to begin a healthy relationship with a wonderful woman. In time this led to marrying a person who truly knows me 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, a normal heterosexual male.

I wish I could be normal. I've tried just about *everything* to become that—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. In his grace, God has given me the power to live a fulfilling heterosexual life, together with the grace to live with knowing 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. At times that has torn away at my insides and eroded my confidence in myself and in God. I continue to struggle 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 this victory has required a daily battle that comes at considerable psychological cost to me and to my family.

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

## **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 my perspective, I cannot help but conclude that both positions are naïve.

My position on homosexuality—while grounded in 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 liberals who think I should accept and live out my



supposedly God-given sexual nature. At the same time, my experience that grace abounds but doesn't make it easy for me to live the straight life offends 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 real. I believe it is 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. Perhaps I'm hypersensitive in not trusting, but I've overheard too many jokes and 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 special dispensation? Why is their giving in to urges so understandable while my giving in to mine would be an abomination?

The debate on homosexuality is tearing at the fiber of almost every mainline Christian denomination while 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 homosexuality but to simply acknowledge the reality of my condition. I acknowledge my homosexuality as a manifestation of my 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 are all like me in this brokenness.

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.*

"No Easy Victory," CHRISTIANITY TODAY, March 11, 2002, Vol. 46, No. 3, Page 50

## **Straight Talk with Your Spouse**

*When your past haunts you, should you tell your spouse? Dennis Jernigan tried it both ways and knows what works best.*

by Ingrid Ramos

Dennis Jernigan was a man with a past. He knew it. A few Christian counselors knew it. A couple of old friends knew it. Trouble was, Melinda, his wife-to-be, didn't know it. And she wouldn't until five years and three kids into their marriage.

Though part of him wanted to come clean with his fiancée, Dennis didn't share his secret for two reasons. First, well-intentioned friends convinced him that since God had forgiven and forgotten his sin, he should do the same. They suggested he never bring up his past to anyone, not even his wife. And second, Dennis and Melinda had agreed not to talk about the past, acknowledging they both had done regrettable things.

But Dennis's secret wasn't the kind of past indiscretion that a wife might expect. His past would haunt him for years. Even though he had turned his back on his former homosexual lifestyle, he still was bombarded by fear. What would Melinda, their children, and his church do if they ever found out?

### **Growing Up Different**

Today, Dennis is a well-known singer and composer of praise and worship music. His songs are used in Sunday-morning services across the country. But he says that from the time he was age 4 or 5, he felt different from other boys. He was a sensitive, gifted pianist, whose skill wasn't considered manly in the rough-and-tumble world of rural Oklahoma where he grew up. Real men went fishing and hunting; they didn't tickle the ivories for Auntie Beth in the parlor, as Dennis was regularly asked to do.

"I never got to do boy stuff," he says now of his frustrating childhood.

The other boys noticed that Dennis was different. They called him "sissy" and other demeaning names. Dennis says, "This just confirmed to me that I didn't belong with other little boys."

Throughout childhood, Dennis struggled in two areas that he now says led to his sexual-identity confusion: feeling like a freak and failing to gain his dad's approval. Throughout school, Dennis excelled at many things. In addition to his obvious musical gifts, he was a star basketball player and valedictorian of his high school class. But none of his accomplishments won his father's respect, which he desperately sought.

"I became even more convinced that I was a mistake somehow," Dennis says.

## Leaving Home

Having been raised in a strict Baptist family, Dennis tried to stifle his homosexual feelings. After graduating from high school, he headed off to Oklahoma Baptist University to study music. In sophomore music theory class, he met Melinda Hewitt.

“I thought she was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen,” Dennis says. “I asked her out because I thought, *Maybe I’m not doing what I need to do to [be straight].*”

For the next two years, Dennis and Melinda dated off and on. Though she noticed that something wasn’t quite right about Dennis, she never suspected he was gay. “I could never commit to anything,” Dennis says. “I was just so confused—it whacked her out.”

Dennis’s confusion manifested itself not only in the form of homosexual urges but also in knowing whom to trust. Dennis grew up thinking Christians were the last people he could talk to about his identity crisis—his own church background had exposed him to more than his share of gay bashing. But when he befriended an older, married Christian man during his senior year of college, he thought he’d ask for some guidance.

As Dennis spilled his guts, the man admitted that’s the way he was too. Then he seduced Dennis. Afterward Dennis was so disgusted with himself that he went home, turned on the gas in his space heater, and lay on the floor to die. While imagining the peace that awaited him in death, he realized he didn’t want to die. He turned off the gas jet, but instead of turning his back on homosexuality, he decided to embrace the sexual tendency that he had been fighting. Far from bringing him the peace that eluded him, a full-fledged homosexual lifestyle only made him more miserable.

## Seeking Escape

Dennis knew he needed a radical change, but he had dated women before without noticing any decrease in his homosexual yearnings. So when he renewed a relationship with Melinda, he still didn’t see a solution to his problem. Without him realizing it, the seeds of a true transformation in Christ had been planted two years earlier. Shortly after attending a Christian concert, someone lent Dennis a Second Chapter of Acts album. The music blew his mind. He didn’t know how anyone could be so passionate about Christ.

This curiosity continued to stir within him, but he didn’t find the answer until after his college graduation. He and Melinda broke up for what they thought would be forever. Then Dennis went to see Second Chapter of Acts in concert. It changed his life.

“Annie Herring [the group’s lead singer] stopped after singing ‘Mansion Builder’ and said, ‘God put on my heart that there’s somebody here tonight hiding something. You’d be devastated if you thought anyone knew about it.’ I thought, ‘This chick’s talking to me!’”

That night Dennis says he felt God telling him that he could be born again if he surrendered himself to Christ. And he did. “In an instant the power [of homosexuality]

was broken,” he says. “I got to the point of saying ‘I can’t,’ so I gave it up to the Lord, and he said I could.

“But it has been a process. It doesn’t mean the temptation stopped. It doesn’t mean that I forgot my past.” He did, however, have the strength to live as God wanted him to live. For the next several months, Dennis drove a city bus and wrote music. He began by singing his way through the Psalms, deepening his relationship with God. He didn’t think about contacting Melinda until one day when his parents mentioned her. Their comments made him miss her. He started by writing a letter. They got to know each other again. Two years later, they were married.

## **Truth Be Told**

Dennis followed his friends’ counsel to forget his past, thinking that would free him. Instead, each day wound him up tighter. After reading Psalm 107:1–2 (“Give thanks to the Lord; for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe ...”), he felt convicted to reveal his secret to his wife.

Dennis thought that would be the end of his marriage. Instead it marked the beginning of a deeper intimacy that he and his wife had never known. “That night I went to Melinda, and I said, ‘Here’s what I’ve been hiding from you. God’s healed me, but I should have told you sooner.’”

To his amazement, his wife seemed unfazed—even relieved. “It was not any huge big deal to me,” Melinda says. “We had three children by then. Our marriage was great. We didn’t have any problem sexually. I knew there was something [in his past]. And when he unloaded I was like, ‘Oh good. Now I can get rid of my junk and we can go on.’ It was freeing for us. It boosted our intimacy level out the roof.”

For Dennis, the weight was lifted. “I wanted to shout from the rooftop, ‘Hallelujah! Look what God has done!’” he says.

The next night he shared his past with the church where he worked. Then he told his parents, who also took the news with unexpected calmness. Dennis’s dad told him he loved him.

Melinda says the first time he told his story in public was really hard. “Now every time he shares [his testimony] it’s more healing, more uniting,” she says. “I am right there with him supporting him.”

The Jernigans have supported each other in helping their nine children understand why their father speaks publicly about a potentially embarrassing topic. And their kids seem to get it. “They know that what Dad did was bad,” Melinda says. “But look what God can do. They know that no sin is too big for God to take care of, and they’ve learned what healing means—we live it out every day of our marriage.”

“Our kids know that no sin is too big for God to take care of, and they’ve learned what healing means—we live it out every day of our marriage.”

—Melinda Jernigan

Melinda continues to be Dennis's main support in his ministry, which centers on the truth that God's mercy is for everyone, regardless of their past.

They feel confident that God has given their marriage strength to endure. As Dennis says, "Any strife that comes between us, we deal with. It's nothing compared to what we have already gone through."

*—Ingrid Ramos is a writer living in Palm Beach, Florida.*

"Straight Talk," MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, Summer 2000, Vol. 17, No. 2, Page 42

# The Not-So-Gay Lifestyle

*Pastoral care for homosexuals who want out.*

by Mario Bergner

As the young man stood in the hospital radiology room getting ready for a chest X-ray, the nurse spoke to him, “Please remove the metal you’re wearing around your neck.”

Actually, it was a uniquely shaped cross with the face of Jesus etched onto it. She must have seen the fear in his eyes as he gently rubbed this precious gift his parents had given him years ago. “If we wrap it in masking tape, you can keep it on during the X-ray,” she said.

“Thank you,” the young man replied. That symbol of Jesus around his neck was the last vestige of the Christian faith to which he’d once looked as a source of hope.

Later in his room, the young man lay on the hospital bed, feeling empty and afraid. His health over the previous 13 months had rapidly declined. From his first venereal disease in January of the previous year to his current admission to Boston City Hospital with thrush, he’d had 12 frightening symptoms—nearly one for each month.

In the young man’s mind, these health problems—all occurring within two years after he’d become sexually active in New York City—pointed in one direction: AIDS.

Five days of blood tests, all of which had returned negative, left only one option—a bone marrow biopsy. This was the only test left to find out why the young man’s T-cell count was so low. The doctor had suggested the test earlier, but the young man had refused it because he knew it was the final test used in diagnosing AIDS.

That evening while lying on his bed, he once again gently rubbed the cross that hung around his neck. The name formed on the young man’s lips. “Jesus ... oh, Jesus,” he prayed, “what have I done? I sought you out at age 14, and again at 18, but neither time did I receive the healing I needed to be free from homosexuality. Why, Lord? Why are some people able to come to you so easily and enter into the life of the church while others like myself, so clearly in need, fail to get any help at all?”

Unfortunately, this young man is not alone. I know that personally.

## My Friend Has a Problem

“How can I help someone who is struggling with homosexuality?” It’s the most commonly asked question asked of us at Redeemed Life Ministries. My response is to ask two key questions:

**1. *Is the struggling person a Christian?*** Has he or she been baptized, regenerated, and converted in Jesus Christ? If the answer is no, then the first step in the

healing process is not to address homosexuality, but to introduce them to the Great Physician, Jesus.

Sometimes we send people to the nearest Alpha course, where they can be introduced to Christianity and meet Jesus personally. If the person is a Christian, then my next question is:

**2. Does the person want help?** If someone does not think overcoming homosexuality is possible because he or she can't find help, then we need to walk alongside and offer hope. If the person does not believe what Scripture teaches about homosexuality, we do not go any further. Only if a person decides he or she wants to overcome homosexuality do we move forward.

This year thousands of men and women struggling with homosexuality will pass through church doors. Depending on the church's response, they will either be led closer to Christ or pushed farther away. For many, the homosexual in them seems to grow at a much faster rate than the Christian in them. This often leads to disillusionment, and they decide to stop attending church. The gay lifestyle is all too ready to whisper, "Yeah, you don't need that church influence. Welcome."

The young man at the beginning of this article had turned to the church twice before—and found no help. Who was that young man?

Me, Mario Bergner.

For several years I struggled silently with the tension between my homosexual feelings and my Christian faith. Deep inside, I feared that if the homosexual in me was stronger than my Christian faith, then surely Christianity was a religion of unrealistic expectations.

In many ways, I wanted help but didn't seem to find it. When I finally cried out to God while in the hospital, I didn't receive the audible reply from God I wanted or expected. Instead I saw a vision of two paths I could take—one leading to destruction, the other to healing. I sensed the Spirit of the Lord saying, "I want to heal your whole person, not just your body. Choose."

I chose. By his grace I was physically healed. I didn't have AIDS, and the doctors were able to offer no explanation for my symptoms or my cure.

Today, also by God's grace, I am married and the father of four children.

#### **4 Questions for Change**

Homosexuality is not a singular, monolithic condition shared by all people with same-sex attraction. There are many factors in a person's life that affect the course of healing. To chart the road ahead, ask the following:

**1. Has the person crossed the moral boundary of acting out?** Someone who has never had homosexual sex does not have to deal with added issues. Nor does he need to rebuild the moral boundary line he crossed when he first acted out. I have known

many men and women who never acted on their homosexual thoughts and feelings because they were raised with strong moral boundaries. However, if someone seeks help after acting out—as was true in my case—the difficulty is compounded but not impossible.

**2. What is their age?** Those seeking help by their early 20s seem to progress more quickly toward heterosexual relating. I began seeking help for changing my homosexuality at age 24. Within months I experienced the first sparks of sexual attraction for women.

Those seeking help between their late 20s and 30s often do so only after they have come to some dissatisfaction with homosexuality. By the time they're in their mid- to late 30s, many have lost hope of finding a long-term homosexual partner and are open to leaving homosexuality. The possibility of marriage and family is a strong motivation.

Some come for help after they can no longer hope to have a family. Many of these individuals have been involved in homosexuality for decades. But they still yearn for freedom and holy living. For example, Ron came to us when he was 58. He was quite successful in his profession and was accepted by most of his colleagues. By day he was a professional businessman, but on nights and weekends he was a well-adjusted gay man.

He met Jesus through the friendship of one of his coworkers. As his desire grew to follow Jesus, Ron became increasingly dissatisfied with the homosexual subculture. He joined a supportive church, entered into our Redeemed Lives program (eight months of pastoral care and discipleship for the cure and maturation of the soul), and happily settled into a celibate life.

**3. Is the person part of a supportive local church?** Integration into the body of Christ where we can know others and be known by others is key to healing. Not everyone in the church needs to be informed about the ones who struggle with homosexuality. But a supportive environment with fellowship opportunities such as Bible studies, small groups, and a shared common life is necessary to healthy growth.

Some churches have programs specifically aimed at helping people overcome sexual brokenness. While this is a great benefit, I have known many men and women who successfully came out of homosexuality simply by integrating into a loving church family where they could grow as disciples of Jesus.

**4. Would they benefit from professional counseling?** Proper diagnosis and treatment of psychological or psychiatric needs can be a critical factor affecting change from many sexual struggles. Some people in the church think a pastor shouldn't make such a recommendation, but certain psychological and psychiatric conditions can interlock with a sexual struggle. Until these are properly treated, there may be a discouraging pattern of reverting into old sexual patterns in an attempt to medicate an untreated condition.

I saw this clearly when John, another pastor, came to me for help at the recommendation of his superintendent. John was married and the father of three



teenage sons, but throughout his 20-year marriage, he had been involved in anonymous homosexual encounters.

Early on, he was so desperate for help that he moved his entire family to New York City, stating he wanted to earn a doctorate at a theological school there. But his real motivation was to receive help from a psychoanalyst in Manhattan known for his successful treatment of homosexuality. Through this doctor's care, John came alive to his sexual need for his wife. John told me that his sexual attraction toward men lessened, but he still acted out homosexually several times each year.

After we'd been meeting for a while, I asked John if he would consider seeing a psychiatrist. He was hesitant because he had already tried counseling. He did not understand the difference between psychiatric and psychological care. When he understood that, he agreed to be evaluated by a psychiatrist. The doctor's diagnosis was depression, anxiety, and a form of clinical paranoia. He prescribed medication.

Within a few months, I witnessed one of the most remarkable transformations I have ever seen. John reported that the love he had long held for his dear wife was continually on the surface of his heart. His homosexual struggle was reduced to only occasional thoughts. Eventually, he went off the medication for anxiety and paranoia but remained on a low dosage of an antidepressant. He never acted out homosexually again and his marriage grew stronger.

Certainly there are other factors that influence the course of healing from homosexuality. But the four I've just presented were the most critical in the healing journeys I have witnessed.

## **The Church's Role in Change**

There is no single process for persons trying to leave the homosexual lifestyle. There are, however, ways we in pastoral roles can help.

The church can effectively minister to people struggling with homosexuality through preaching, teaching, and healing. The Bible describes this three-fold order in Matthew 9:35: "Then Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness."

As the church, we are to teach and demonstrate that living in holy celibacy and healing are viable options for every Christian, even those struggling with homosexuality, which is but one of the many conditions Jesus died to redeem us from.

In the October 2003 *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Dr. Robert Spitzer of Columbia University announced the results of his study of more than 200 people who had successfully overcome homosexuality. His scientific findings confirm the biblical promise: homosexuals can change.

We are to preach the Good News leading to regeneration and deeper growth in Jesus Christ. The pastor who ministered to me after I left the homosexual lifestyle showed me

that pastors don't have to pretend to know it all. He treated me with respect and love, while still challenging me and teaching me to pray with a depth I never had before.

Finally, we are to offer sexual redemption in Christ, not only for homosexuality, but for all sexual issues. I remember several unexpected encounters with Christians whose faith ministered to me, including some nuns with guitars who greeted me on the street. Their joy and warmth brought healing to my soul.

### **Always Hope**

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Paul gives a list of common sins, including two forms of homosexual behavior. In verse 11 he adds, “And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were justified, you were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Notice the use of the past tense, *were*. Paul is clearly stating that the Corinthians became free from homosexuality.

When properly equipped, we can be effective shepherds to those who come to church for healing in their sexuality, including those struggling with homosexuality.

Clearly, anyone can be forgiven of homosexual sin. Most people who want to change can successfully do so, and all who are in Christ can experience holy living.

*—Mario Bergner is an Episcopal priest and heads Redeemed Life Ministries in Wheaton, Illinois.*

“The Not-So-Gay Lifestyle,” LEADERSHIP, Winter 2004, Vol. XXV, No. 1, Page 42

## **“I’m gay. Can you help me?”**

*Resources to aid the sexually confused and those who reach out to them.*

### **Organizations:**

#### **Exodus International, North America**

P.O. Box 540119  
Orlando FL 32854  
888-264-0877  
www.exodusinternational.org

#### **Pastoral Care Ministries**

P.O. Box 1313  
Wheaton IL 61089  
www.leannepayne.org

#### **Desert Stream Ministries**

P.O. Box 17635  
Anaheim CA 92817  
714-779-68990  
www.desertstream.org

#### **Redeemed Life Ministries**

P.O. Box 1211  
Wheaton IL 60189  
630-668-0661  
www.redeemedlives.org

#### **Love Won Out**

Focus on the Family  
P.O. Box 35500  
Colorado Springs CO 80935  
800-232-6459  
www.family.org

### **Books:**

#### *Setting Love In Order*

Mario Bergner (Baker Books, 1995)

#### *Coming Out Straight*

Richard Cohen (Oakhill Press, 2000)

#### *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness*

Andy Comiskey (Creation House, 1990)

#### *A Strong Delusion*

Joe Dallas (Harvest House, 1996)

#### *The Broken Image*

Leanne Payne (Baker Books, 1996)

#### *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*

Jeffrey Satinover (Baker Books, 1996)

#### *The Same Sex Controversy*

James White and Jeffrey Niell (Bethany House, 2002)

—Mario Bergner

## **When Homosexuality Hits Home**

*I was devastated to learn my son is gay. But God isn't finished with us yet.*

by Shirley A. Rorvik

I first became aware of how much I despised homosexuality in 1981, when I worked at a savings and loan. 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 age 18. The boy laughed, his eyes full of mockery and challenge. I swallowed hard, then handed Don the wad of bills. He and his friend walked out arm-in-arm.

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,” I said. Our family seemingly 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. True, my husband had a chameleon-like personality, but few people knew about it

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, telling him I could no longer live with his drinking problem. 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 went through hell and survived. I thought nothing would ever again shake me like that again.

The end of our thirty-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 in May 1991, Tim remained in San Diego.

On January 3, 1992, another emotional earthquake shook my world. Tim’s letter trembled in my hand as I read: “My sexual orientation has bothered me since I was 12. Please, Mom, listen to me. I feel a strong attraction for men. I understand how you must feel...”

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. It has taken me thirteen years to be able to accept this...”

*Thirteen years? 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 loomed in front of me. Terrified, I twisted the steering wheel. The car skidded, then held on the gravel shoulder. Peering into the darkness, I searched for familiar landmarks. Finally, I recognized a farmhouse. I'd gone more than fifty miles from home.

I pulled off the deserted highway onto a side road and stopped the car. Opening 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 as I read, "I feel alone. I'm so afraid of my family rejecting me. You're my mom, and I love you. I always will."

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 about other 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.

"It was a business trip. When the business was done, 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?"

"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 9 or 10. At the time, I was pleased that 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 realized I wasn't alone.

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 had taught Tim 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 letter in 1992, I regarded 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. That spring, Tim 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 kicked in as my heart reached out to him. He wasn't an enemy; he was a wounded soul.

My quiet times with the Lord changed from selfish pain and anger to genuine grief for Tim and others like him. I realized how 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 found I could no longer avoid them. They're real people, just like Tim. The Lord has softened my heart so that I now care for them.

Tim often brings homosexual friends when he comes to visit me and my new husband, Chuck. "You guys are living proof to my friends that heterosexual marriage can work," Tim tells me. Perhaps he too is seeking proof 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. Together we've opened our home to these wounded souls, many of whom were rejected by parents and siblings. Tim never asks to stay overnight when he has a companion. His conduct is above reproach in our home. Often an arrogant attitude masks pain, but it soon dissolves. Some of his friends jokingly call me Mom.

If there is an opportunity to present the gospel, I do, usually in the form of my own testimony. This opens the door for Tim's friends to express their views of Christianity. I hear a lot of anger. These young men say they've been rejected by their own churches

and therefore by God. They've since turned their backs on the church and buried themselves in resentment and fear.

How can we reach these hardened hearts? 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). Tim says Jesus is his best friend. I believe him. But I also know that Jesus must be Savior and Lord of his life. God listened when my 5-year-old son prayed, inviting Jesus into his life. Tim may have strayed, but God hasn't moved. He'll be there when Tim chooses to resist the devil and listen to the Holy Spirit.

I still hurt. My son's life is far from happy, his future uncertain. The New King James version of Psalms 56:8 says that God puts my tears in his bottle and promises, "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 Tim, to love him and his friends, and to be available.

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