

“Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace.” (Third Prayer for Mission, American 1979 Prayer Book, p. 101) The universal outreach of Jesus Christ alluded to in this prayer includes men and women with homosexual attractions. In light of St. John Chrysostom’s clear sighted application of redemption to all people, I wonder if the question, ‘How the Church should engage in mission to and with gay and lesbian people?’ is appropriate? Why should the mission of the Church be specialized for a specific group? The concept of identifying people according to their sexual attractions (i.e. gay, lesbian, transgender, straight, etc.) is not found in the Holy Scripture. The Bible divides people into two groups, male and female (Genesis 1:27) with redemption offered equally to each. Perhaps the question should be, ‘How should the Church engage in mission to and with male and female people who have homosexual attractions?’

The concept of homosexuality as an orientation is a relatively new idea, one born in the last fifty years. Currently, ‘homosexual orientation’ may be defined in at least four different ways. First, biologically understood, homosexual orientation is understood as an innate genetically determined essential part of personhood, although there is no scientific evidence proving this. Second, psychologically understood, homosexual orientation is a combination of thoughts and feelings leading to behaviors. Third, sociologically understood, homosexual orientation is a category akin to race or sex with little concern for causation. Fourth, Biblically, homosexuality is never understood as an orientation, but as a behavior.

Scientific research has yet to prove that homosexuality is an innate biologically based orientation. Dr. Jeffery Satinover’s book, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*ⁱ shows how the goal of scientific studies attempting to find a single biological feature to account for homosexuality, such as a gay gene, are quickly brought into question by other scientists. Most researchers agree that human sexual behavior with its many expressions is complex and multiply determined. They stress that a single biological feature cannot determine or cause sexual behavior of any sort.ⁱⁱ Psychological research seems to point clearly in the direction of a common history of relational patterns found in all persons with homosexual attractions. One pattern is a sense of detachment early in life from members of the same-sex resulting in an unmet need to attach, which becomes eroticized.ⁱⁱⁱ (Moberly, 1983). Another is a feeling of inferiority regarding one’s manliness or womanliness^{iv} (van den Aardweg, 1986). Yet, *all psychoanalytical theories assume that adult homosexuality is psychopathologic and assign differing weights to constitutional and experiential determinants*^v (Bieber, 1988).

The Bible identifies at least four expressions of homosexuality. First, there is homosexual practice associated with cultic pagan religions mentioned in the Old Testament (Deut. 23:17-18, 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12, 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14). Second, there is the exchange of heterosexual behavior for homosexual behavior

Pastoral Considerations For Homosexuality

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(Romans 1:27). Third and fourth, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV), St. Paul gives a catalogue list of sins common to the human condition including two forms of homosexual behavior listed in verse 9, *malakoi* (μαλακοί) translated *male prostitutes* and *arsenokoitai* (ἀρσενικοῖται) translated *homosexual offenders*. For a full treatment of the Biblical texts about homosexuality, see Robert Gagnon's, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*^{vi} (Abingdon Press, 2001).

Pastorally, homosexuality may be understood as the result of our fallen nature, which may include a lust wherein *natural relations are exchanged for unnatural ones* (Romans 1:27); a reaction to sins done against us^{vii} (Payne, 1981); anger and envy, which may generate into homosexual feelings^{viii} (Bergner, 1995); and demonic influences on the soul^{ix} (Payne, Bergner and Comiskey 1989). However, in 1 Corinthians 6:11 St. Paul wrote these encouraging words to a Christian community whose sins included homosexual practices, “*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*. St. Paul is clearly stating that some of the Corinthians (mentioned earlier in verse 9) came free from homosexuality by a five-fold process. First, through being *washed*--baptismal imagery implying the forgiveness of sins. Second, through being *justified*--being declared not guilty of our sin before God through the atoning work of Christ. Third, through *sanctification*--the ongoing gracious work of the Holy Spirit to grow us in holiness). Fourth, in the Name of Jesus. Fifth, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This five-fold process, coupled with sound psychological insights, is integrated into the *Living Waters* pastoral course and the *Redeemed Lives* pastoral course, both of which are used to help people overcome homosexual attractions as well as other sexual and relational issues.

Our most commonly asked question at Redeemed Life Ministries is, ‘How can I help someone who is struggling with homosexuality?’ My first response is to ask a few questions: ‘Is the person struggling a Christian? Has he or she been baptized, regenerated and converted in Jesus Christ?’ If the answer is, ‘No, they are not a Christian’, then the primary need is not to address their homosexuality, but to introduce them to the Great Physician himself, Jesus. The message of the Gospel is *not*, ‘Jesus loves you and wants to change your homosexuality.’ It is John 3:16, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’ If available, I suggest they attend the nearest Alpha course or I evangelize them myself. If the answer is, ‘Yes, they are a Christian’, then I ask, ‘Do they *want* to change their homosexuality?’ They may have wanted to change their homosexuality, but searched for help, found none and lost hope. Others may want to change their homosexuality, but have not bothered looking for help because they did not know such help is available. Still others do not want to change their same-sex attractions and believe they can marry homosexuality with Christianity

Our starting point at Redeemed Lives for helping people overcome same-sex attractions is to ascertain the unique construction of their homosexuality. Answers to

certain questions help understand what unmet need their homosexual attractions is attempting to fill. These questions include: Are they over-identified with the other-sex? Are they under-identified with the same-sex? Were they abuse in the home environment or the school environment? Was there an early pattern of gender non-conformity? Additionally, there are at least five features about the individual's life that will influence the course their journey out of homosexuality will take.

1. Have they crossed the moral boundary of acting out?
2. How do they identify their homosexual attractions?
3. What is their age?
4. Are they part of a supportive local church?
5. Would they benefit from professional psychological or psychiatric care?

Have they crossed the moral boundary of acting out?

Someone who has never acted out homosexually does not have to deal with the added issues of processing past homosexual experiences. Nor do they need to rebuild the moral boundary line they crossed in order to act out that first time. I have known many men and women who never acted on their homosexual thoughts and feelings because they were raised in Christian homes resulting in strong moral boundaries against homosexual activity. However, if someone seeks help after acting out, then rebuilding the moral boundary against future homosexual activity is greatly aided by confession, repentance, reception of forgiveness and empowerment from the Holy Spirit.

How do they identify their homosexual attractions?

For the person seeking help, how they identify their homosexual attractions is central to their finding freedom. Are their same-sex attractions simply the bothersome content of their temptations, but otherwise they identify as heterosexual? Do they identify themselves as gay? Are they somewhere in between, having times of self-identification as gay, and other times as straight? If they self-identify as gay, they usually employ the terminology of orientation to describe their same-sex attractions. Do they understand their orientation as biological or psychological or neither? Do they not want to put a label on their homosexuality? A growing number of teenagers choose to self-identify as gay because they are exploring all sexual attractions. Plus in some circles being gay is cool. Here the declaration of being gay is a sociological statement and sometimes a way of stating solidarity with a minority. In such cases, same-sex attractions are not the primary content of their sexual attractions. However, if they should enter into a same-sex relationship the content of their sexuality can become primarily homo-erotic. I have come to call this *transitional* homosexuality, because the majority of young people in this situation eventually partner with members of the other-sex. This is not bi-sexuality, since once they are out of their same-sex partnership, the content of their sexual behavior and desire is exclusively heterosexual.

What is their age?

Those seeking help from homosexuality by their early twenties seem to progress quicker out of homoeroticism and toward heterosexual relating. One reason for this may be that

puberty seems to extend into the early twenties these days, which allows for more plasticity in sexual desire and formation. I began seeking help for changing homosexuality at age twenty-four. Surprisingly, within months I experienced the first sparks of sexual attraction for women. Those seeking help between their late-twenties and mid-thirties often do so only after they have come to some dissatisfaction with homosexuality. Until then, people in this age range seem to have a determination to make homosexuality work for them. For some this means searching for a homosexual partner. But by their mid- to late-thirties many have lost hope of finding a long-term homosexual partner. Consequently, they are open to the possibility of leaving homosexuality. Sometimes they reason, "I am still young enough that I could meet the right person, get married and have a family." For some, the possibility of marriage and family is a strong motivation for change. Still, many people come for help well after the age of having a family is probable. Many of these folks have been involved in homosexuality for decades. They desire freedom from immoral sexual activity and freedom for holy living expressed in holy celibacy. One such man came to Redeemed Lives (RL) when he was fifty-eight years old. He was quite successful in his profession and accepted by most of his colleagues as a confirmed bachelor. No one knew he was living a double life. By day he was "Joe Professional" but on the nights and weekends he was the model of the well-adjusted successful gay man. Then he met the Lord Jesus through the friendship evangelism of one of his co-workers. As his desire to follow the Lord Jesus grew, he noticed a growing dissatisfaction with the gay community of Chicago. He joined a supportive church, entered into the RL program and happily settled into a celibate life. While it is possible he could marry, he has no desire for marriage.

Are they 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 overcoming homosexuality. This is not to say that everyone in the church needs to be informed of the ones who struggle with homosexual attractions. But a supportive environment with plenty of outwardly directed opportunities for fellowship such as Bible studies, small groups and a shared common life is necessary to healthy growth. Some churches actually 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 through integrating into a loving church family and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Would they benefit from professional psychological or psychiatric care?

Proper diagnosis of psychological disorders can be a critical factor influencing change from homosexuality and other sexual struggles. Over the last twenty years, I have observed how clinical psychological and psychiatric needs can interlock with a sexual struggle. Once these are properly treated, healing is greatly advanced. Until these are properly treated there may be a discouraging pattern of reverting into sinful behavior in an attempt to medicate untreated psychological disorders. The successful treatment of depression, anxiety, bi-polar, obsessive-compulsive disorders, paranoia and substance

abuse is central to recovery for people with homosexual attractions who also suffer from these disorders.

The first time my eyes were opened to see the benefits of psychological and psychiatric care for people overcoming homosexual attractions was fifteen years ago. At the time I was studying diagnosis of psychological disorders as a graduate student in professional psychology. Johan (not his real name), a Lutheran pastor, came to me for help at the recommendation of his superintendent. Johan was married and the father of three teenage sons. For the duration of his twenty-year marriage he had been involved in anonymous homosexual encounters. Early on, in the late 1960's, he was so desperate for help he moved his entire family to New York City, stating he wanted to earn a PhD at a theological college there. But, his real motivation for the move was to receive help from a psychoanalyst in Manhattan well known for his successful treatment of homosexuality. Through this doctor's care, Johan came alive to his sexual need for his wife, and although sexual attraction toward men lessened, he still acted out homosexually several times each year. He told me it was as if he were under an uncontrollable sexual compulsion. After we met several times, I thought he might be a good candidate for a psychiatric evaluation. So I asked him if he would consider seeing a psychiatrist. He was hesitant to do this, as he had traveled the road of professional care before. But I assured him of the considerable advancement in psychiatry in the ten years since he had been in psychoanalysis. Johan was not aware that only recently had psychologists and psychiatrists begun working together to help their shared clients. He agreed to be evaluated and saw a good psychiatrist who diagnosed him with depression, anxiety and a form of clinical paranoia responsive to medication. This psychiatrist was also a psychologist and Johan entered into a second round of therapy with this skilled doctor. Within a few months I witnessed one of the most remarkable transformations I have ever seen. He reported that the love he had long held for his dear wife was continually on the surface of his heart. Moreover, his homosexual struggle was now nothing more than occasional bothersome thoughts that eventually went away if he did not pay them too much attention. Eventually, he went off the medication for the anxiety and the paranoia but remained on a low dosage of an antidepressant. For five years we remained in contact. He never acted out homosexually again and his marriage grew stronger and stronger.

Psychology provides us with a variety of models for the understanding and treatment of homosexuality. In 1996, Baker Book House published Dr. Jeffrey Satinover's book, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, which documents the various degrees of success psychoanalysts and psychiatrists have had in treating people seeking to change their homosexual attractions. According to Satinover, most therapists report a success rate of between 50% and 70% "where success is defined as considerable to complete change (p. 186)." Satinover also examines the scientific studies seeking to find a biological basis for homosexuality. He shows these studies are not only methodologically flawed (they have had no control groups and when replicated come up with divergent results), but more importantly are bad science. According to Satinover,

these studies attempt the impossible: to attribute human sexuality with all its complexities and multiple influencing factors to a singular determining biological factor.

However, pastoral care for homosexuality can utilize science and psychology. Both scientific research and treatment have provided encouragement for people seeking to change their homosexuality. Recent scientific research shows homosexuality can be changed. In May 2001, at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, Dr. Robert Spitzer, of Columbia University in New York City, announced the findings of his study of over 200 people who had successfully overcome homosexuality. In an article posted on the website for the National Association for the Research and Treatment of Homosexuality, he is quoted, 'Like most psychiatrists, I thought that homosexual behaviour could be resisted, but sexual orientation could not be changed. I now believe that's untrue. Some people can and do change.'^x Back in 1973, Dr. Spitzer was an instrumental figure in removing homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual of mental disorders. Thirty years later he changed his viewpoint.

The Church Can Help and Has Helped People Overcome Homosexuality

The Church can effectively minister to the person struggling with homosexual attractions through preaching, teaching and healing. The Bible attests to 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.*" This verse bridges the first and second halves of Matthew's Gospel. The first half is about Jesus *teaching, preaching, and healing*. The second half is about Jesus' disciples teaching, preaching and healing.

As the Church we are to *teach* and practice a moral and pastoral theology that actually believes living abstinence, holy celibacy and change leading to heterosexual marriage are viable options for Christians struggling with homosexual attractions. Our message about homosexuality needs to state it is but one of the many sins Jesus died to redeem us from and that in the majority of cases homosexual attractions can be changed. As the Church we are to evangelistically *preach* the Good News leading to regeneration through baptism and deeper conversion to Jesus Christ. As the Church we are to equip pastoral leaders to minister sexual redemption in Christ to all people, not only to those with same-sex attractions.

In this time when every branch of Christianity is being rocked by sexual scandals, it is essential to equip both lay and ordained pastoral caregivers to minister effectively to all people in their sexuality. Teaching and equipping on a mature use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the practice of pastoral care is key. Living Waters Trainings and Redeemed Lives Equipping Seminars (RLES) exist to equip lay and professional pastoral workers in this ministry. Log on to the Desert Stream web page www.desertstream.org

for more information about the next LWT. For information about the next RLES log on to the RLM web page at www.redeemedlives.org.

Finally, as the Church we need to be encouraged, strengthened and empowered with the truth that we have had success in ministering to people with homosexual attractions since the days of the Apostles. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, St. Paul gives a catalogue list of sins common to the human fallen condition including two forms of homosexual behavior. But in verse 11 these encouraging words are given, “*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*. St. Paul is clearly stating that some of the Corinthians came free from life-controlling sins including homosexuality through being washed (baptism), being justified (the forgiveness of sins through the work of Jesus on the Cross) and sanctification (the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to grow us in holiness over the lifespan). When properly equipped, we too can extend the same process of washing, justification and sanctification to all who come to the Church for healing in their sexuality, including those struggling with homosexuality.

SOME OF MY JOURNEY OUT OF HOMOSEXUALITY

My own journey out of homosexuality and into heterosexuality included addressing both spiritual dynamics and psychological issues. Spiritually, my healing from homosexuality came as my conversion to Jesus deepened and I learned to repent of my sin. I first met the love of Jesus at age six in the care of Roman Catholic nuns who lived in my neighbourhood. When I met Jesus personally at age 14 through the evangelical preaching of Leighton Ford, I was also experiencing the emergence of homosexual attraction. I searched for help for overcoming homosexuality, but was unsuccessful. By the time I was eighteen, I lost all hope of finding help for healing, went to university and entered into the gay lifestyle in New York City.

In my early twenties, I had several immunity breakdowns and landed in a hospital room in Boston with the possible diagnosis of AIDS looming over my head. While on my hospital bed in fear and despair, I prayed to the Lord Jesus. He appeared to me saying, ‘I want to heal your whole person, not just your sexuality. Choose.’ In response to his initiative, I chose him. I recovered fully from my symptoms and was never diagnosed with AIDS and later tested HIV negative. The turning point in my life came when, a few months later, I repented of homosexuality and received the forgiveness of sins. My spiritual healing from homosexuality continued as I learned to forgive others and resist temptation. I needed to forgive others for how their sins had negatively shaped me. Additionally, I had to learn how to suffer like a Christian in order to resist the temptations to take back homosexual sin.

The Lord used psychological insights to address my lack of affirmation in my identity as a man and fears related to men and women. I came to see how I misperceived manhood in myself. I grew to accept the unique ways God has created me to be a man and masculine. Through healthy friendships with men, I began to accept myself as a man among men. I had to press through my fear of relating to both men and women. The many godly men and women I met in my local church showed me a new model for male and female relationships. Also helpful was the love and acceptance of fellow students, faculty and staff at Trinity Episcopal School For Ministry in Pennsylvania where I studied for the priesthood. Of special help was the prayerful counsel of Leanne Payne and the many Christian leaders who have served on her team.

As I continued growing in the Lord so did my desire for marriage and family. Concurrently, so did my attraction to women. I was abstinent for twelve years before I married. In 1996 I married Nancy and since then we have had five children. Today, my growth into manhood includes growing as a husband and father. Through the Lord's grace and the loving input of faithful Christians, I have learned of the areas of weakness in my soul that continually requires his healing presence. Along with St. Paul, I have had to face a thorn in my flesh. Although he asked the Lord to remove it three times, three times the Lord refused to remove it. Instead the Lord said to St. Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' (2 Corinthians 12:9). I may always be weak and vulnerable in my sexuality. But through his power working in me, I can be obedient.

ⁱ Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, Baker, Michigan: 1996.

ⁱⁱ Dr. W. Byne and Dr. B. Parsons. 1993. Human sexual orientation: the biological theories reappraised. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 50:228-259.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moberly, Elizabeth R., *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co, Ltd., 1983.

^{iv} van denAardweg, Gerard, *On the Origins and Treatments of Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytical Reinterpretation*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986.

^v Bieber, Irving, *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study*, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc, 1988, p. 18.

^{vi} Gagnon, Robert, J., *The Bible And Homosexual Practice*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.

^{vii} Payne, Leanne, *The Broken Image*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1981, 1996.

^{viii} Bergner, Mario, *Setting Love In Order*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995.

^{ix} Comiskey, Andrew, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness*, Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989.

^x <http://narth.com/doc/spitzer2.html>