

Wellspring

**An Archive of Main Articles
By Bob Van Domelen**

1992 – 2013

This document contains the main articles from editions of *Wellspring*, a newsletter written for those with unwanted same-gender attractions. Bear in mind that some of the concepts shared (especially in the 90s) have shifted somewhat but the overall belief system that served as their foundation remains constant.

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1992

Is Anyone There?

June 1992

This issue will focus on a very important topic, church support for ex-gays (people seeking freedom from homosexuality). For those of you who have been receiving *WELLSPRING* for some time, you will recognize some of what I will share as having been written before. That's okay because I was always taught that anything worth remembering is worth repeating. So here goes.

As a struggling teenager I did try to find answers to my questions about homosexuality from priests and teachers. My questions probably sounded a lot like "I have a friend who..." when I asked them, but the sincerity in my eyes must have spoken volumes. The answers I received, however, did not. "Pray for the strength to resist temptation" or "If you continue to do those things you will go to hell" were the most repeated offerings. At the time, I think that I was frustrated with the lack of direction but I did understand finally that my confusion was no less than their own. And here it is, over 30 years later, and many in the church are still just as confused and afraid.

Those who come to Broken Yoke Ministries seeking answers invariably ask the same question, "Is there a church I can join where I will find Christian support and love even if someone finds out about my struggle?" What they hope for is a faith community where they can worship, study Scripture, fellowship, and grow in their choice to be free from homosexuality. Some pastors have encouraged them to attend services but at the same time to refrain from any disclosure. In other words, the closet recently cast off as stifling is to be replaced with a newer version.

I am not at all suggesting that individuals stand at the church door following services announcing to all who pass, "I am a person who struggles with homosexuality. Help me!" What I am suggesting is that many who do come from homosexual backgrounds have experienced rejection most of their lives. This rejection is often the same type non-homosexuals face but there *is* a difference. The person who struggles with homosexuality often stepped into behaviors as solutions to this rejection, behaviors others would not have seen as acceptable.

I am also not suggesting that the one who struggles with homosexuality should receive more attention in the church than anyone else, just that they receive attention. It has often been said by those I meet, "At least the gay community is willing to accept me and make me feel important." Unfortunately, only a handful have shared with me that a church in the area did the same.

A major objective of Broken Yoke Ministries is the development of a source list containing the names of churches and ministers willing to become part of the ex-gay's healing process. To this end, there is a single page questionnaire included with this newsletter that we would like completed and returned. Our focus is on churches but if yours is an organization in some ministerial capacity, please take the time to complete the questionnaire. In our board discussions, it was pointed out that this database would have three divisions: (1) ministers who wish to continue receiving *WELLSPRING*, are willing to pray for Broken Yoke's mission, but cannot risk that support openly, (2) ministers who wish to serve the homosexual struggler as a spiritual director, are open about their belief in the possibility of change, but who see their congregations as not yet ready for a more active involvement, and (3) those ministers who not only feel able to counsel and encourage the struggler but who believe that their congregations (or individual members) have a similar belief and ability.

I am not asking anyone to profess to have all the answers because we believe that Jesus is the answer. Nor am I asking that homosexuality suddenly jump to the top of some priority list (all sin is death). Quite frankly, there are far too many churches today willing to stand up and acknowledge that people are born homosexual and that that is God's will. If such a statement shocks, then perhaps you need to start asking some questions.

No Thanks, I'm in Training

August 1992

I'm sure that there are people who find working out alone to be a highpoint of the day, but I am not one of those. I need to be fueled by the encouragement of others just as they need my encouragement. Support groups are effective because members care about each other -- especially in maintaining a focus on Christ. People who come expecting others to assume the burdens they carry are soon frustrated and stop coming. But those who "work their programs" alongside others who struggle will begin to see change.

Have you ever noticed the determination behind the words, "No thanks, I'm in training"? It makes little difference that most who say this will never really see athletics as a lifetime career. Yet athletes who wear their training as a badge of honor do look to some attainable goal, some reason which justifies their continual self-discipline.

Paul writes, "It is not that I have reached it yet (the goal of resurrection), or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ. My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me -- life on high in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.12, 14 NAB)."

In the past, I know that I focused too much attention on what I was wearing or what brand of equipment I used. In other words, it was difficult for me to get beyond the image I had of myself in training, and that made it all the more difficult to focus on the goal I set.

My struggle with homosexual issues sometimes reminds me of an inability to focus on the real goal, "life on high in Christ Jesus." It is very easy, I was told at the recent Exodus 17 Conference, to see my entire being wrapped up in the single issue of homosexuality. Developing an "If only I were free of this" attitude effectively creates barriers to the many areas Christ wishes to heal in me.

All of us deal with one issue or another in our lives. All of us tend to focus too much energy on that issue alone when what we really need is a more intimate relationship with Christ. And I believe many of us have our secret "training" routines we hope will bring us freedom.

Support groups like Broken Yoke Ministries are increasing in number, but they should never be seen as taking the place of the church. At the same time, churches need to recognize how Christ uses countless wounded healers in their midst.

Many of us are a little out of shape in our commitment to serve as Christ's hands, eyes, and feet in this world. Maybe we need to look around, shake someone's hand, and get started again in the business of that race in which we all participate. Then, when temptation steps in our path, we can look straight ahead and say, "No thanks, I'm in training!"

Once Upon A Time

October 1992

I'd like to tell you a story about a special child. Maybe there are parts of my story that will sound familiar to you. My story is about a little boy, but it could just as easily be about a little girl.

The little boy wasn't unlike the other boys in the neighborhood. He liked baseball, climbing trees, eating green apples, and racing down the sidewalk on his bicycle. School was okay except for those times when the teacher passed out tests. Recess was great -- especially in nice weather when the boy could be outside!

One day, the little boy realized that he wasn't always included in pickup games of baseball after school. He also realized that if he sat down first at a table in the lunch room, those he thought his friends often sat at another table even though his was empty. The more he tried to understand, the less he understood.

There was one place where the boy found happiness -- in church. Jesus was incredible, he thought, and just being where Jesus lived brought him immense peace not to mention a tingling sensation up and down his back. It was easy for the boy to talk to Jesus in his heart. He was never lonely during these conversations with his friend, but it still hurt him not to have friends like he did when he was much smaller.

There came a day, however, when the boy knew that some of the things he was doing were very wrong. Visiting his friend meant owning up to things he was very ashamed to admit. Jesus still reached out and spoke love words to the boy, but the boy had trouble believing the words. More and more, the boy wished for those days, so long ago it seemed, when nothing separated him from his friend.

As he grew older, the boy heard those around him saying that what he did really wasn't wrong. They told the boy he was different from others, but it was okay to be different. After all, they insisted, God created him and loved him just as he was. The boy smiled weakly and for a time believed the words others shared. Still, there was a loneliness unlike the other kinds of being lonely that he had known as a child. No matter how hard he tried, he could not quiet the voice within him that disagreed with the things he did.

Church was still a special place, but things were different for the boy now becoming a young man. He couldn't talk to Jesus without feeling the shame of his actions, so he busied himself with church activities hoping that his friend might someday invite him to visit again. Rather than improving, things worsened for the young man until one day. It was a day when he knew he could take no more, and in his frustration, he screamed out, "Why have you left me, Jesus?"

Jesus answered the young man with loving silence, and the young man knew that Jesus had not left him. Deep inside, he saw a young boy -- a boy who liked baseball, climbing trees, eating green apples, and racing down the sidewalk on his bicycle. He knew at that moment that it was okay to visit his friend again. More importantly, he knew that Jesus would not ask him to leave if what he shared was a confession of sinful behavior.

The boy is a man now, but he remembers the little boy he once was. There are still people trying to convince him that he is being untrue to his natural self. Sometimes he gets angry at their unwillingness to believe him when he describes the man he feels called to be. It saddens him to see others choose what the world sees as good -- especially if their choice means setting aside their friend, Jesus.

Stories should have happy endings and this one will. The man, the child within, and Jesus walk together every day. The man and the child share many things in their private conversations, and one day they both know that they'll spend the rest of eternity speaking of the love they have for Jesus, their friend.

Why Didn't He Believe Me?

December 1992

Recently, I received a letter from a friend telling me of the suicide of a man I had spoken to in a phone counseling situation. His background was not significantly different from my own but with that touch of individuality that makes problems unique. I do remember feeling humbled by his honest and the pain he expressed. At the same, I was inwardly rejoicing because he told me he believed in one day being free from his past bondage.

A day or so after receiving the announcement of his death, I wrote my friend and expressed some of the things I was feeling. There seemed to be a mixture of anger and sadness, and I wondered why this man's act stirred up such a strong reaction within me. Writing helped to define my response, and talking to members of our support group also brought understanding.

Anyone who struggles with homosexuality or other behavior disorders initially fights against disclosure of the problem. Acknowledgment is often self-interpreted as being weak or unable to live up to the dictum "stand on your own two feet." For some, others involved were seriously harmed, and the burden of feeling unworthy of healing is added to their sense of despair. Sometimes it seems like the only people who listen to me without condemnation to my hopes as well as hurts are professional therapists or ministers -- and I'm not too sure about them at times. They are, after all, being asked to believe in something that does not carry the weight of the medical world behind it. Clinically, the majority of professionals see homosexuality as unchangeable. Is it any wonder that skepticism greets a struggler before optimism does?

I am saddened that the man who chose suicide could not have "hung in there" a little longer because I and others have seen some of his darkness and now see light. I could not have pulled him out of his despair, but I could have been among those willing to sit beside him when he needed that.

Anger emerges within me because his choice only verified what others thought -- there is no hope for one like him to change. He had a chance to stand next to me and others, and together our lives would be reshaping attitudes and beliefs. Instead, his pain was too great to allow for that possibility.

I cannot retain the feelings of anger to-ward this individual because I have no way of knowing all that he was experiencing. His absence should be seen as a void within all of our social and faith communities. Perhaps a year from now only a few will remember him or reflect on his struggles. The shame is that in our focusing only on him we fail to see the healing process of many who are next to us in our churches or at desks across from us in our workplaces. We need to recognize how God heals. We need to look beyond what we can imagine possible and see with our hearts the miracles occurring everyday all around us.

Therapists might well tell me that I am in denial of the obvious, but I cannot set limits on what the Lord can or can't do simply because what is happening is not in some textbook or taught in one of our prestigious colleges. In Mark 9.22ff, the father of the possessed boy asks Jesus, "'If out of the kindness of your heart *you can do anything* to help us, please do!' Jesus said, '*If you can? Everything is possible to a man who trusts.*'"

1993

When the Vision Gets Cloudy

February 1993

There have been some days when everything seemed to go far better than I could have ever imagined possible. A major project came together with surprising ease; the boss was in a great mood and even complimented something I thought he didn't even care about; and people all around me seemed open to the smile I offered them and smiled back.

On such days I can feel the truth of Jesus' presence and believe more fully the faithfulness of His promise to heal me. Staring at the sentence I have just written, I begin to wonder if my relationship with the Lord might not be a little like a yo-yo. On good days, Jesus is there -- on bad days, He isn't.

It wasn't all that long ago that I believed myself to be too far gone even for Jesus. My sins overwhelmed me and the darkness of the needed secrecy to allow those sins to exist made vision beyond immediate moments impossible. One day everything around me collapsed as my secrets were announced. Naked and exposed like the woman caught in sin and brought to Jesus, my eyes were fixed on the ground. And like that woman, I heard deep within some hidden part of me a voice that spoke of hope and healing. It was voice that shattered all my secrets and provided me with a vision, a vision of the man God created -- not what I had become.

In the years that followed, I held that vision in front me as the light it was meant to be. Some people tried to tell me that the vision was false. Others held up the vision of today's world, a whatever-you-want-is-okay image that set no boundaries. Those who really loved me, listened to me describe the vision and encouraged me to be faithful to it. On the bright days where everything goes right, I can see the vision clearly and renew my commitment to it.

But there are difficult and dark days as well. In the past eight years, there were a number of times when that darkness brought me to wonder whether the vision truly existed. Temptations and difficult situations have a way of clouding the eye of the soul and creating doubt. More often than not, these difficult times occur when we are alone and vulnerable.

On one of those bright days I might find myself sharing with someone whose day has been darkened. I hear the words of encouragement coming from my mouth but I can also see the struggle to believe that is consuming the other person. If dark days came only once a year and with advance notice, the vision we carry would withstand that time of tempting toward the "You'll never change" chasm awaiting. But Satan knows that discouragement is one of his strongest weapons, and he uses it freely and often.

It occurred to me recently that many people live in areas where a commute on congested freeways is a daily nuisance. Car-pooling solves some environmental questions but there is still the annoyance that must be faced. It is the *goal* of getting to work that makes the trip tolerable. We don't see people quitting their jobs.

I realize that there might be many, many difficult days ahead in this walk I have begun. And I know that Satan will come at me with some of the same old arguments cleverly packaged in new words. Those are the times when the vision might become a little cloudy. But my goal is a deeper relationship with Jesus, a goal that I keep in front of me despite the quality of day. It matters little that the vision He has given me is seen as confusing or "incorrect" to the rest of the world. What matters is that He has given me that vision. My prayers are for the obedience to follow it.

Was I Born Homosexual?

April 1993

Back in my school days, I remember enjoying science classes -- especially the experiments I got to do that were meant to prove a point. Under careful supervision, I walked through the required steps given me by the instructor and more often than not met the expected results with a small degree of satisfaction. I did wonder sometimes, however, what the teacher would say if my results proved different from those pre-determined. My grades clearly told me that science was not a area of consideration in my vocational choice, but that simple question I raised still causes me to think.

Since the decision in late 1973 to remove homosexuality from the *Manual of Psychiatric Disorders*, there have been several studies done to prove homosexuality a result of genetics. There aren't many people who collect such studies and compare the results. As a matter of fact, most of us wouldn't know of the studies at all were it not for the media announcements. Unless an individual is personally interested, such articles are usually "skimmed over" and only highlights such as the heading or largely printed boxed text are retained.

Most of us miss sentences such as "Biology is clearly not destiny, and this shouldn't be taken to mean that you're automatically homosexual." Or "Social conditioning still may be very important." Or in a more recent article, "The fact that not all the identical twins were gay indicates that environment also plays a role." We miss these sentences or assign less importance to them because they are far less newsworthy. What I find most interesting is the fact that percentages listed are never even close to 100 percent. The study of identical female twins where one was gay showed that in 48% of the cases the other twin was also gay. Yet in this same article I read "if female homosexuality has a genetic basis, many of the second twins should also be gay."

I have been told that statisticians use a bell curve in projecting their findings to a national scale. Even if the study were numerically accurate, my elementary understanding of genetics tells me that it is difficult to ignore environmental conditioning when the resulting percent is less than 50. Yet we are being encouraged to agree with the concept that these results are *proving* a genetic link.

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of all these studies is the burden they lay on the shoulders of someone seeking freedom from homosexuality. How long will it be before people such as myself are told that the true illness lies in not accepting the reality of this situation, the proof of my innate homosexual condition? Will future scientific studies demand that editions of the Bible expunge any trace of anti-homosexual attitude? Will those of us seeking freedom from homosexuality hear God admit that there are some things He just can't change?

These questions might elicit a sense of anger that I should even ask them. But there will be others who not only agree with the above series of questions but might state that I don't go far enough. It isn't a matter of whose study proves what. Homosexuality is not MY choice for healthy living and I don't believe I was born that way. In 1985, I finally surrendered the battle I was waging with my own efforts and strategies and accepted the love Jesus held out to me. At first I believed that I was being affirmed as a homosexual because I heard no condemnation or threats. His love is infinitely more encouraging than that. Time and a daily commitment to walk a path leading to the Lord gradually brought me to understand that homosexuality was not what God wanted for me.

Some would limit God in what He can or cannot do. Some would rather rely on a percentage to verify what they do with their lives. Those who believe in God and in the Word might face serious opposition to what they believe, as science "perfects" its testing methods for human behavior. Those of us who believe in freedom from homosexuality are still in the minority -- even within church communities. But I pray that I will always walk with Him because God is far more than a percentage.

Would You Hold the Target Still, Please?

June 1993

I remember as a young boy reading stories of that legendary hero, Robin Hood, and of his archery skills. More than one neighborhood tree bore scars where I lopped off a bow or an arrow as needed for my role-playing.

When I joined the Boy Scouts and went to summer camp, it seemed as though my dreams were being met as I looked over the camp's archery range. I couldn't wait to put my many talents as a bowman on display.

The instructor showed each of us the "correct" method of drawing the bowstring--a feeling totally alien to the thumb-index finger system I had used with some degree of satisfaction. When I was sure he wasn't looking, my fingers did what they knew so well, and I pulled the string back as far as I could.

The target, a mere 20-30 feet away, danced as I tried to find its center in a line with the point of my arrow. When finally I released the string, the arrow flew over the intended target and landed some distance beyond where my eye said it should have landed. Not only was there the shame of missing by such a margin, but my forearm bore the start of a mean looking welt where the string had slapped at me. I eventually hit an occasional bulls-eye but I went home with my mirror image of Robin Hood fading.

Homosexuality is often seen by strugglers and opponents of homosexuality alike as the center of a target. All gays have to do, they feel, is "stop thinking" about people of the same sex in a sexual manner. Once this is accomplished, they should be able to live their lives in a "normal" manner. The sexuality part of homosexuality is the bulls-eye.

Those who are strugglers find themselves looking at a target that often dances. In order to hit the bulls-eye, they focus on their sexual behavior patterns. Abstaining from same-sex behaviors for a period of time, they grow increasingly confused by what they often feel. There is victory as days pass into weeks, but they also quietly acknowledge some of the same feelings from the past--sometimes very intense feelings. Confession to another is to admit failure, and, in doing so, they feel that they might once again be standing alone.

I feel the reason the target dances so much lies with the idea that there is no *single* cause for homosexuality, no "H" in the center. Instead, what I think faces us might be a target bearing words such as "anger, disappointment, self-worth, love, joy, sadness, childhood, freedom, physical health, mourning, and peace." The list will be as long as the imagination allows, and bearing good and bad words. The "H" word most likely will still be found on this new target, but it won't be any more important than any of the other words.

Because God wanted His children to be free, He sent His son to die on a cross that this freedom would become reality. The struggling would-be archer can now draw the string back knowing that God is teaching him or her safe ways to do so. His instruction is loving and gentle but firm. His presence helps us to steady our aim and to have confidence in the knowledge that regardless of where the arrow strikes, God continues to call us into His presence.

Perhaps we focus too much on healing as the end in and of itself. The more we learn of ourselves from past or present, the larger the target gets that we attempt to hit. In fact, our most often used arrow might be labeled "introspection," an arrow that could cause us to overlook a far better goal--our relationship with God.

"I shot an arrow in the air...."

Obedience Comes at a Cost, But it's Still the Best Deal You'll Get *August 1993*

Paul wrote to the Romans, "You must realize that, when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves to the one you obey, whether yours is the slavery of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to justice (Romans 6.16 NAB)."

The Exodus 18 Conference in Wilmore, Kentucky, was a week of sharing, learning, and trusting. It was also one of the more difficult weeks I have experienced in years. Getting my little red Escort ready for the trip eventually meant new bearings front and rear, new tie-rod, and a new transmission as well--all for just under \$1,000.

The morning of the first day, I received news of my stepfather's death, and immediately faced the question of returning for the funeral (9+ hours one way) or staying at the conference and presenting the workshop I was scheduled to co-teach. In obedience, I read the Scripture given me (Mt.8.21-22) and found myself forced to the floor, crying, "Your word is so hard, Lord!" The decision to stay was reinforced by my family as they reaffirmed the purpose for my being at this conference.

Throughout the first half of the week, "Father" was everywhere--in presentations, songs, and workshops. When I awoke from restless sleep, the chorus of "Abba Father" was on my lips and in my heart.

My portion of the workshop, *The Christian Response to the Child Molester*, was, for me, a mixture of inner pain and firm conviction that the Lord wanted to heal those such as myself. God blessed me richly with those who sought me out with their questions about this issue. He also allowed me to be a vessel for those seeking to forgive their unnamed or unknown abusers. I am deeply humbled by the memories of those times even as I write.

Our rest and relaxation day, Thursday, was anything but that as the timing belt on my newly repaired car simply died on Main Street, Danville, Kentucky. One negative thing after another seemed to leap out at me despite almost constant prayer that Jesus step in and "make things better." He answered my prayers, but not with the answers I expected.

The two friends accompanying me on this misadventure encouraged me to keep looking for Jesus, to keep handing everything over to Him. Though my heart spoke the words, I confess that something inside wondered if Jesus heard.

It would take several pages to relate all of what followed in this saga, but there is a more important point that I need to make. Everything did, however, work out in the best manner possible--especially when I considered what *could* have happened. Jesus *was* there. His angels *were* watching over me.

The point. Through everything during the week, I knew that the Lord was asking me a very simple question, "Will you obey me?" Obeying meant not only becoming His slave--that's the obvious part--but also understanding that my will had to blend with God's will regardless of what was asked. It meant being a "nothing," a lump of clay without form until His hands began their gentle, yet firm, shaping.

I seek healing in my life and have a library filled with books on homosexuality, inner healing, and sexual abuse issues. While I've learned much from those books, the greatest healing I have occurs at such times when I allow the Lord access to my woundedness. With loving tenderness, He breaks the sediment of old habit and thought, and replaces it with healthiness and hope. The cost of obeying Him, of letting Him do this is high, but there is no better deal.

I Used to Sound Like Eeyore

October 1993

Alan Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* contains more than one memorable character. Christopher Robin, Pooh, Piglet, and Tigger literally leap off the pages during story-telling time. For me, there is one character who not only comes to mind more than the rest, but a stuffed version of him sits atop the monitor of my computer. The character is Eeyore.

More often than not, his character in the stories was an example of isolation and low self-esteem.

Even now, I can hear his deep, drawling voice as he speaks to no one in particular, yet everyone in general, "Nobody likes me; everybody hates me." In one of the stories, Christopher Robin's "Good morning, Eeyore" is met with "If it is a good morning, which I doubt."

So what has Eeyore to do with homosexuality or those who struggle for freedom?

Last evening during a phone conversation with a friend in Des Moines, I began to consider the manner in which I often prayed years ago. I would say "Dear Lord, I hate where I'm at. Help me! No one understands my problems or even wants to try."

God answered those prayers, but I was too steeped in the mire of my own inner turmoil to acknowledge that He did. I looked at His gifts with eyes that almost spoke "Are you sure You can't do better?" My attitude, like Eeyore's, was born out of my inability to see past the negative world I envisioned was mine.

In some ways, I am reminded of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But instead of a portrait sitting in the attic which aged while its subject never did, my portrait was filled with hurts, angers, and a host of other blemishes, each anchoring me within the confines of a rigid, yet ugly frame. Ironically, instead of throwing that canvas out, it was all too easy to grow accustomed to it. When that happened, everything I felt, said, or did, was filtered through a soul that saw darkness rather than light.

So where did my Eeyore go? Well, he sits atop my monitor—remember?—not as a symbol of who I am but of the person I once was. His saddened eyes help me remember lots of things, not the least of which is how much I wanted to be loved but didn't know how to accept it.

My friend in Des Moines trusts me when I start to ramble, because he knows that sooner or later an idea will come out that makes sense. Wading among images of Eeyore and portraits sitting in attics, I concluded that for things to change, we have to start with a fresh canvas.

Because I'm no more artistic than most people, the big question becomes "What to draw in place of the old?"

The answer can only be found when I try to see myself as God sees me—not only as He sees me now but also in the future. This is where I let the brushes flow in broad, sweepingly positive motions. Lots of bright, "I want to smile from the inside-out" colors mixed with deep, "I am loved and contented, yet waiting" tones.

Filling every other part of the canvas is the presence of God's love. It is an ever-changing portrait that keeps getting better and better, not a collector's edition destined to sit in some gallery. It changes because I change, and colors I've never seen take their place as I make space available on the canvas. There can be nothing new until I am ready to give up the old.

There are times I still behave like Eeyore, but those are becoming less frequent. There are still times when I sound like my stuffed friend. But, with God's grace and love, the canvas I call my life is getting better every day.

Things Sure Have Changed

December 1993

At one time or another, everyone hears the phrase, “When I was young...” usually followed by almost wistful descriptions of how life was so different years ago. At the risk of boring you, let me spend a moment or two looking back at things connected with the Christmas season.

I remember feeling the excitement as the world around me literally changed. Familiar rooms in our home showed evidence of the approaching holiday. A tree, decorated with the history of my family, stood proudly in a space set aside for it.

The parochial school I attended seemed different, too. Our music classes focused on Christmas songs to be presented at the annual Christmas concert. The boys' choir rehearsed diligently in anticipation of the midnight service. Mangers appeared in classrooms, on the church lawn, and even on municipal properties.

“Don we now our gay apparel” was not sung with a snicker or the thought that it might be considered an incorrect political statement. When I was a boy, “gay” meant happy—not a reference to homosexuality.

In our family, Christmas day meant visiting as many of the relatives as could be managed within reasonable hours. There were times, I admit, that I would have preferred being home with some new toy. But, this was a time of connecting with cousins I saw only once or twice a year, so the visits weren't all that bad.

Some would say that Christmas is wasted on adults. They say that children in their innocence see the fullness of the birth of Jesus, the celebration of family, and the sharing of happiness. Growing older, however, seems to be a little like the year I accidentally broke an ornament I particularly liked. Try as I may, each subsequent decorating of the tree was a reminder of the absence of that ornament.

The other day, my wife handed me an article cut from our local paper that dealt with factors affecting people during the holiday season. At end of the article, there was an announcement for a special program offered by our local hospital titled, “Managing Stress During the Holidays.” The more I stared at this article, the more obvious it was to me that things have indeed changed. Perhaps the tensions were always around me, waiting only for the maturing process to overcome my naiveté.

As one in a recovery process, I have the choice of projecting good OR bad images and memories into this Christmas season. More than anything, I want things to be “right” with my family—my mother, my brothers and sister, and other relatives. Sometimes therapy encourages us to see those we love more in terms of being part of the “problem” or reason we struggle. It's no wonder, then, that holidays become uncomfortable.

I believe that homosexuality develops because not everything is as it should be in that intended close circle of love called family. Legitimate but unmet needs are often met more frequently by strangers outside the this circle of intimacy. Even though a family might be very broken or perceived as such, one who struggles with homosexuality still feels that the homosexual choice is not one that would find family approval. As a result, a secret is created that grows and continues to tear apart at the family fabric. Having been where I've been in my life, having done the things I've done, holiday visits are still difficult.

One lesson I am learning is that I cannot “fix” the brokenness which might exist in the lives of those I care about. The best I can do is love them and let them know that I love them. They may not be able to love me back just as I would like, but their love must be as *they* define it.

As I seek God's presence in my life and open some of my hiding places to His healing love, I know that Bob is seeing the return in his mind's eye of the magnificence of this holy season. Not everything will be like the scenes and verses found on greeting cards. Certainly not all my fears will disappear, but those remaining are not insurmountable. As Jesus walks with me, He is reminding me of the beauty of that ornament that had slipped from my hands, not its brokenness.

1994

Who Gets the Glory?

April 1994

The next time you're at the grocery store, the mall, or in church, ask a number of people if they believe it possible for someone who struggles with homosexuality to change? The responses might prove both interesting and eye-opening.

Those of us who are involved in ministries helping those who seek freedom from homosexual behaviors believe the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" We know the road to such freedom is difficult and not always accomplished within short periods of time, but we encourage the process and stand by those who travel that road.

Recently, I read an excerpt from an article published in the Jan./Feb. 1994 *PsychoHeresy Awareness Letter* and reproduced in a newsletter available at one of the churches where Broken Yoke meets. The author considered 12-Step programs to be 'counterfeit' and implied that those who attended made the program something of a god. As I read that brief article, I asked myself, "How is Broken Yoke viewed by those who attend this church?" That question led to a more basic one, "Who gets the glory for lives being changed?"

The first time I read of someone who had been free of homosexuality (and for eight years at that), I really wanted to believe, but my own experiences taught me to be skeptical of such claims. That skepticism, however, did not keep me from seeking more information.

It didn't help matters when I learned that the individual claiming freedom later experienced some major falls. I felt betrayed by God - as though God was teasing me with the carrot of another's life dangling before me but always out of reach. This thought no sooner found expression than God spoke to some place deep within me. His words were simple, "Who are you going to trust? A man who can fall? Or me?"

His words weren't a promise. They weren't even an answer. But they *did* take root within me.

Once I accepted the fact that God wanted me to be whole, there developed in me a hunger for direction, a hunger no different in sensation than that of craving food. I began to reach out beyond the solitary nature of my secrets, writing to organizations and individuals listed in the back pages of books or at the ends of articles. My simple prayer was "If you want me changed, show me how and place people in my life who can help make this possible."

The listening for God's presence brought me face to face with the love of Jesus. I had heard people speak of their personal relationship with Jesus, but I had no idea as to the depth of reality in such a relationship. The more I sought intimacy and practiced the Presence, the more my eyes were opened to His presence in those around me.

Initially, we may seek to have what others have in terms of their relationships with Jesus or the level of healing they seem to have achieved. I believe that one of the strengths of prayer groups or support groups is the clear message of hope that prevails. "I want what they have" is often the internal motivating message.

Such a motivation must remain only a temporary one, because to have another's relationship with God is, in a way, to deny the special one waiting for each individual who seeks the Lord.

Two verses from the New Testament clearly define what a support group should be. The first states, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Col.3:16)"

The second is like it: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1Thes. 5:11)" Inside these two verses is a foundation that, if followed, will keep any support group from becoming a 'god' and sole source of healing.

A support group rooted in Christ *will* allow the word of Christ to dwell in each one present. More than that, the Word will help us face those truths about ourselves that hold us back and will encourage the creation of a new heart based on repentance.

I find each meeting of Broken Yoke to be a lesson in listening for the Master's voice as we share together through our prayers, our situations, and the tools found in the gifted writings of other wounded healers.

Through resource centers like Exodus International, we have access to tapes, videos, and book listings all with a Christ-centered approach to freedom for the homosexual struggler.

From our experience, the most important part of every meeting is the singing of psalms and spiritual songs with a gratitude based on faith for things seen and unseen. A group that does not seek first to praise God runs the risk of forgetting God inside its own self-inflated image.

Remembering the article I read which inspired these words, I still have to ask, "Is Broken Yoke in any way guilty of those things which are counterfeit to the will of God?" Deep in my heart, I believe the answer to be "No," but I recognize that there are situations that could easily help promote the false image of support group 'god.'

As I facilitate meetings, I pray that I am not using my position as a platform for power, as a dominating and controlling force seeking always to end discussions on issues with MY thoughts. The words offered might be good, but if the end result is not God-centered, whatever said would be unworthy of importance.

Clear understandings about relationship issues within the group need to be made. Potential dangers definitely include co-dependency, errant or improper intimacy, and manipulation. A group can be a place of tremendous healing, but it can just as easily become an arena where individual weaknesses will find fertile ground in the susceptibility of others looking for support.

A danger that has always concerned me is one which I call conversational transference - big words that mean something simple: verbal pornography. Some of our strugglers have never acted out or had all of the experiences related to homosexual behavior that a 'more experienced' struggler might have had. To allow conversation that would stimulate fantasy is unhealthy for both parties, yet some speak of happenings with a clinical air so as to give the illusion of detachment.

If the potential for difficulties is the reason for not having a support group, nothing will ever be done. But if prayerful consideration, planning, and accountability are the foundation of the group's structure, then the healing process will be successful. The initial question raised in the title of this article still stands, "Who gets the glory?"

All we do and all we are remain nothing unless we are bound to God; our freedom and salvation linked forever to the cross of Jesus. Scripture says, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (1Cor 15:17)" But Christ WAS raised from the dead through the glory of the Father so that we too may have new life. Amen and Alleluia!

Am I Really Changed, Lord?

June 1994

The other day, as I stood in front of a large mirror, it was painfully obvious that I was not looking at the same physique so proudly carried in my youth. Not that my body was particularly well-defined, mind you, but I was satisfied.

These days, I lean forward a little to check my shoelaces or read the bathroom scale. I also play the game called "Hiking up one's pants" after getting up from a chair because my belt slides south at such moments. And friends who have not seen me in a number of years greet me with the words, "Boy, have you changed!"

I confess that some days I reminisce about wearing a pair of size 32 pants, or a shirt that doesn't look like a ski slope on me. The reality of my self-image, however, is focused more on the inside of me than on my outside.

If tomorrow my body were returned to its earlier state, others would have no difficulty in recognizing the change. They might even ask, "What sort of diet were you on?" or "What kind of exercises did you do?"

Change. That's what seems to be at the core of my struggle with negative behaviors. Change. How do I find it? How do I recognize it if and when it occurs?

Not all my behaviors are obvious to others or even to myself, although a cause and effect relationship can be found in most situations if I probe deep enough. Being overweight, for example, is recognized externally, but the reasons I am overweight might not be so easily detected.

The verse in Scripture that says, "I thank you, Lord, that I am fearfully, wonderfully made" (Ps. 139.14) flies in the face of my struggles, because from where I stand, my failings and weaknesses seem such a contradiction to that verse. The first step in change must, therefore, be to allow God the freedom to work on me in the areas of my life GOD chooses and in GOD's timing. Wow! That means I have to be flexible—not one of my stronger points.

I remember back in 1983 being forced to seek therapy because parts of my life were running amok. In the beginning, my days were filled with prayers that God would change me, but not much happened—at least as far as I could see. I had asked God for help but refused to give over my desire to be the one in charge. Sound familiar?

Being in charge, I brought intensity and focus to the sessions that might have impressed the therapist, but that did little to promote change. I simply became better at hiding my behaviors from the world and myself, while convincing myself that progress was being made. Three years later, I surrendered for real and let God take charge. Life hasn't been the same since.

Someone once told me that true surrender is not unlike a person hanging on to the controls of a boat out of control in turbulent waters. The most difficult thing is to let go of the wheel and to trust.

Believing that God knows my needs better than I, the process of change will not be the straight line I would choose left to my own devices. Some of the issues I face daily appear to be unrelated to what I *think* my main issues to be. But God knows that one of those "unrelated" issues might be a major obstacle in the path of my healing.

I try to apply the phrase "Stop and smell the flowers" almost daily in my healing journey. In the morning, I thank the Lord for the gifts of life yet to be experienced. During the day, the Lord encourages me to see evidence of His presence that previously might have been ignored. And in the evening, recalling the events of the day, I thank God for the healing events I did not see, asking for more awareness in the coming day.

Over a period of time, I have come to see that negative behaviors once dominating my life have diminished or even disappeared completely. "Wait a minute!" my mind shouts. "We didn't cover that in therapy yet!" "Not fair!" another part of me hints. "I was going to concentrate on *that* issue at next week's meeting."

Some changes sneak up on me without asking my permission and only become obvious in retrospect or in another's observations of my behavior. Some changes ARE obvious AND planned (to stop smoking, for example), but most are part of a broader picture. The biggest change, of course, will be when I enter paradise to spend eternity praising God.

The kind of commitment required is one which seeks God in all things *and* practices the Presence. "And Jesus said, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Lord,' they told him, 'Open our eyes.'" And Jesus did.

Some Days Are Better Than Others

August 1994

"How are things going these days?" a good friend asked me recently.

"Well," I answered, "they've been better than I could have ever hoped for, and I'm excited with the direction my life is now taking." The sound of my voice, however, did not match the content of my statement, so my friend just waited.

"Actually," I continued, "it's a bit frustrating for me lately. Just when I think that I am making good choices in my life, something happens that makes me feel as if I just took ten steps backward. The worst part, though, is that it doesn't feel like God is there when I'm down . . . at least nothing like it used to feel. What am I doing wrong?"

A necessary step in the healing process is the willingness to share with another by admitting the need for prayer and support. Announcing a struggle with homosexuality, for example, no matter how private the moment in sharing, is difficult. "You? A problem with homosexuality? Not you!" or "I thought something was wrong with you lately, but I was afraid to say anything in case I was wrong."

My friend's question, "How are things going these days?" made me feel a little uneasy, because some days had not been as good as others. To be honest without hesitation and admit that I was having trouble might have been seen as a definite lack of progress. My fragile self-image wanted to share only successes, not failures.

The real problem, I have decided, is that at times I just don't understand the reality of healing. It is NOT the absence of temptation or some spiritual hideaway where life is one continual smile. There ARE days like that, but there are just as many filled with struggle.

If my friend is to be used as a vessel of God, I need to prayerfully give him the opportunity. Saying "Fine" or "Great" when that isn't true promotes the secrecy needed by Satan to maintain a hold on my life. In sane moments, I would never deliberately choose to help Satan out, but I know that such logic often escapes me when I am struggling.

My relationship with Jesus CANNOT depend on whether I *feel* His presence in all situations. Feelings are emotions, and God is not merely an emotion. Warm fuzzies are good; being bathed in the Holy Spirit is great; but the reality of God is that God does not need me to exist. Yet God loves me so much that He sent His son to die for my sins. Wow! It doesn't get better than that.

So what should I do in those not-so-good times? How can I come to believe that God truly is present? The answer: I must get to know the God I love so that my relationship does not depend upon how I *feel* but what I *know*. This means seeking God in His Word *and* in the manner in which He manifests His presence in the lives of all His servants.

If a smooth journey through life is the measuring device for a successful walk with God, then the lives of King David, Job, Jonah, Peter, and Paul should be considered failures. Recognizing how God worked through them reminds me that I hold no exclusive contract on struggling through life and its problems because homosexuality is only one type of brokenness.

Reading the parable of the lost sheep in Luke's gospel, we find that Jesus did not define the color or shape of the one sheep that was lost or even the reason that particular sheep strayed, only that He left the other 99 to find it. "And when he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders in jubilation." (Lk.15.5)

Just knowing that I have a Savior who seeks me out, who reaches out to pull me from the briar of my sinfulness, fills me with great joy! Some days ARE better than others, but "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Ps.118.24)

Life Has Meaning and Purpose

October 1994

The other day, I was reflecting on how busy things have gotten, how much there was to be done, and how just being alone with myself without a "To do" list might be a dream. It was, I'll admit, a "Woe is me!" party for one, but it did make me think.

Some time back, I purchased a fancy leather-bound appointment book with the thought that organization creates success. Meetings and responsibilities started to fill the columns; the monthly calendar told me that I could see you a week from next Thursday; and those occasional empty spaces (or pages when I forgot to plan ahead) stared back at me in condemnation.

Planning and priorities are necessary, but they only represent what we see as important, or what we think others wish us to see as important.

My life took a drastic turn in 1985 when I was arrested for sexual assault. It was difficult to think of all the pain I had caused my victims, their families and my family as well, but the roller coaster ride I was on had suddenly come to an end. New labels of identification spoke ominously to all who thought they knew me but didn't. The voice I heard in my heart, however, was the voice of a loving Father reminding me that I was His. I didn't know in 1985 how God would change me, but I knew He would.

Much has happened over the past nine years. Faithful in the promise of His presence, God walks daily with me in my valley of healing. Sometimes, He takes me to the mountain and gives me a glimpse of His plan for my life. There are few details in the vision. God knows me. Given the opportunity, I might turn His vision into just another project for my organizational skills. It wouldn't take long for me to lose sight of the Master Designer as schedules and meeting times melded in a blur of appointment book entries.

A friend from Montana recently sent me a copy of Dr. Viktor Frankl's "The Doctor and the Soul." The reading is slow because there is much to absorb, digest, and place in the context of my own understanding. The role of the therapist, according to Frankl, is to help the client discover purpose in life. Without purpose, the world of darkness gains a foothold.

Being busy might be the by-product of having purpose, and purpose does provide meaning, but it is important to find nobility in what motivates the purpose. I am not speaking of grandiose plans on a global scale, but of the simpler variety which find their source in Jesus. "Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus." (Heb.3.1 NIV)

Some see the purpose in their lives as one of removing the negative labels they wear and replacing them with positive ones. Sadly, I have worn the labels "Homosexual," "Molester," and "Unfaithful." I don't believe, however, that Jesus is encouraging me to set as goals new labels just because they are good. I believe that He calls me to a deeper relationship with Him, and through that relationship, the choices I make in my behaviors are becoming more in line with His will. Those choices, while simple and commonplace, are noble choices, and I feel great peace in having made them.

The true beauty of seeking the Lord in all I do lies in the fact that I am asking Jesus to become part of my entire existence. That includes a workplace not always filled with peace and harmony; a marriage that requires commitment with mutual love and respect; a financial situation that threatens our security; and a past where the choices I made sometimes proved devastating.

There are still occasional temptations and images from the past that provoke me. There are still times when my response to the tensions around me do nothing to improve matters. But my goal is not to be a crusader for others as much as it is to allow God continual access to my life, and thereby help to change the lives of others simply by being a witness of what God's love can do. This IS meaning and purpose, and I pray that the Lord will fill my life with it.

"And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." (1 Pet.5.10)

What a Gift!

December 1994

The other evening, the group was seated around the table. We had sung a number of praise songs with considerable energy for a small group of eight; preliminary announcements had been made; and it was time to get into our discussion.

There was a new face at our meeting. I turned to him and asked if he would share a little of himself with the group. Like a swimmer about to jump into deep water, he took a deep breath and began to quietly tell us his story.

Looking around the table, I could see that each man there was listening intently, nodding now and again as the words mirrored his own experiences.

He had really tried to find a way in his life where his homosexuality could be expressed in a caring and loving way, but the Lord kept nudging him with reminders that the life he sought was not the best life. It had finally become very obvious to him that he had to make a decision. His choice was to leave the man currently in his life.

Tears crept into the corners of his eyes as he tried to describe how much he felt loved by Jesus. He knew that there would be times of frustration ahead, but he believed in the calling heard by his heart.

The Lord used this man as a gift to each of us at the meeting. It was more than the strength of his commitment to follow Jesus, although that was a reminder of our own commitments. It was more than a "See, change IS possible," because change involves struggle and some pain. The gift was the presence of Jesus.

Sounds almost too obvious, doesn't it, because His presence is everything we might ever need or want. Yet I am ashamed to admit that all too often I place more focus on my goals than I do on Jesus. I don't mean to do that, I just do it.

As a child, I remember looking forward to our Advent calendar. Each day was represented by a door which opened to display some symbol of the coming of Christ's birthday. It didn't really make any difference to me if the same calendar was used from year to year, because it was the final day, the last door opened that I awaited. And once it was opened, the other doors really didn't seem to matter anymore.

Some might say the best way to prepare for Christ is to start with an empty slate—erasing the mind as it were of things that could distract them. Others feel that Christ has no problem with the chaotic state in which they live—He understands the messy conditions. I have met people who have found Christ not only in these opposites but in just about everything in between as well.

What is homosexuality other than a solution to personal brokenness? What is any sin I commit other than the acted out proof of my weakness apart from God? In my prayers I cry out, "Be with me, Lord!" yet like the Samaritan woman I miss the point. Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. (John 4.13 NIV)"

The woman wanted the water so that she would never have to come to the well again. I think that what I sometimes ask is for a solution to one of my problems so that I won't ever have to deal with it again. But Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks *you* for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. (v.10) [italics mine]." God not only provides me with the perfect and everlasting gift, he *asks* if I want it.

When Jesus met the blind man on the road, he *asked* the man what he wanted, and then gave his sight to him. There is a tendency to see the return of the man's sight as the gift, but in reality, Christ Himself is the gift. What He offers to those who seek is only a small portion of Himself. But those who receive often gaze upon the portion as though it *were* the whole.

My prayer each day should be to know and accept the gift my heavenly Father has given me without limiting the gift itself in any way. Who I am and what I am becoming must be a reflection of the Presence, an encouragement to those who also seek. It can and should be nothing less.

The gift is the presence of Jesus. "Every good and *perfect* gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1.17 NIV)" What a gift!

1995

No Turning Back, No Turning Back

February 1995

The other evening, I watched the closing 30 minutes of "Philadelphia," a very moving and significant film dealing with AIDS. Something deep inside me stirred as characters allowed themselves to openly show affection and support for another human being.

There might be many who would say I'd be missing the point were I to suggest that there was more to the movie than the need for sensitivity to those who have AIDS or are HIV+, but if I'm to trust my inner self, I would offer such a hypothesis. While not a major theme, the movie *does* have to deal with homosexuality. It not only encourages a willingness to accept being gay as a viable life but also quietly implies that we should celebrate a person being homosexual.

My own struggles with homosexuality left me feeling very isolated for most of my life. Growing up in the fifties and sixties, I didn't find groups such as Broken Yoke Ministries reaching out to help me understand, although I did look.

As early as grade school, I felt different from the other boys in my class, yet I wanted desperately to be like them. Years later, I came to the self-diagnosis that I could hang around the social edges of any given circle of male friends, but I couldn't step inside. The ones who understood and sought me out were those with similar needs. Their affirmation, however, only confirmed a growing belief that I *was* what I never wanted to be, a homosexual.

For a long time, I believed that my prayers for change went unanswered, and God seemed more distant despite my pleading. He refused to "zap" me into the image of manhood I had created based on observing other males, and that made me angry with God. Even my marriage was initially an attempt to seal my manhood with legitimacy. I thank God, however, for the woman He placed in my life, because she now celebrates being with me as much as I do being with her.

If I believe so firmly in what God has done for me, why is it that memories of homosexual bonding are bittersweet? Why do thoughts and images linger and suggest a moral correctness based only on the premise that being in love makes everything right? Why do others I know who find their homosexuality repugnant still give in and participate in behaviors they believe to be morally wrong?

The answer to all of the questions raised has a common thread - there is something not only legitimate but also critical to a sense of personal well-being present that lends at least a hint of virtue to the not quite so virtuous.

The choices I have made were all based on the premise of filling or satisfying a need with a legitimate solution. There were times, however, when those choices were not as simple to make as I would have liked. The first times that my choices involved behaviors I felt wrong, I knew they were wrong. The drive to satisfy the specific need, however, overwhelmed whatever moral objections I may have had to the behavior considered. With time and repetition, the behavior became the solution to similar needs, even to the point of becoming part of who I was as a person.

God is teaching me that I *am* a friend to many men; that I don't have to become something I'm not to deserve their friendship; and that intimate friendship is not synonymous with a sexual relationship (nor need it become so). The friendships I now consider important took time to develop and are still growing. They are God's grace being shed on me.

It's not easy to tell someone who is truly hurting that he or she need only "hang in there" and remain faithful to God. The words sound shallow to one who is battle scarred and weary of the fight, but I offer the

words anyway. And I try to tell them how important it is for me to be able to walk alongside as one who cares. I cannot fix all of the problems or sometimes any of them, but I can point them in the direction of the One who loves deeply - Jesus.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you.” (Mt.11.28) In the quiet of His presence, I know more than ever that there can be no turning back. It is not the world I fear or the opinions of others who might think me foolish that count. Such things change all too quickly and are without deep roots. ^AHe put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and trust in the Lord.[@] (Ps.40.4)

We Hung Our Harps on Willow Trees

April 1995

Beside the rivers of Babylon we thought about Jerusalem, and we sat down and cried. We hung our harps on the willow trees. Psalm 137.1-2 CEV

With these words, the psalmist provided a most powerful image when describing the exile of the Jewish people, an image of pain and separation that cannot be ignored. So great was their despair that an instrument of praise was not hidden but displayed openly hanging from a willow tree.

Being a musician, this symbolism reminded me of a time ten years ago when I stared at the piano in my home wondering if I would ever feel able to play again. There was no spirit of joy to prompt any playing, and somewhere within myself I think I wondered if God would even accept what I offered. My sin was too great, I thought, and the pain I had caused so many others prompted a silence as a substitute for words I couldn't find to express remorse.

One day, a friend asked me to make her a copy of a cassette containing songs I had written. As I listened to the music and adjusted sound levels, I started to cry because the songs I thought written for others were just as healing for me.

A few days later, words linked to a simple melody became the encouragement to take up a guitar, manuscript paper, and a pencil. Within an hour, *Come, Share My Love* was complete. I don't sing it often, but each time I do I remember that the Lord wants to bless me despite times when I have hung my harp.

Many who struggle with homosexual issues experience the feeling of exile. They face a world that either tells them it is perfectly "normal" to be gay or one which demands change with a simple formula of words. The reality of the struggle most overcomers face is that it is process. And while they are in that process, they may have to deal with the isolation experienced by the polarized views of others.

An overcomer might find that support groups can be extremely valuable as places where they can be affirmed in their decisions by those not quite so far on their journey or encouraged by those who might be farther along in the process. The group structure can also be a relatively safe sounding board for the expression of feelings previously unspoken.

Healing for any person begins with an internal belief that changes are possible, and that God's grace is at the core of those changes. People can and do offer a contribution of support to the wounded who stand with outstretched arms. The support they offer is critical, but the healing changes originate, proceed and find completion in the wounded themselves.

I have experienced times of intense praise and joy, times when my conversations with Jesus flowed with love. He instilled in me a passionate belief that I was His and that my hope for healing was not an idle thought. It saddens me when I think of the times I have hung my harp of praise on a willow tree, silent because of feelings of isolation or separation while in the presence of others.

We fail each other on a daily basis, not because we intend to let others down but because our own needs sometimes cloud our vision. If our relationships with others sit on one side of a scale and our needs on the other with God as the fulcrum, there will be times when the weight shifts. When it does, are we still able to focus on the fulcrum?

Relationships and needs will always be intertwined. The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 reminds us that we have a responsibility to one another, to serve and reach out as well as to be served in our own needs. We are to act as a witness of the Lord and as one who seeks the Lord in others.

Mario Bergner, in his book *Setting Love in Order* (Baker Books), relates an incident in which he and a friend were drawn inside a church one evening by the sound of praise and worship. They stayed a while but left before the service was over. Once outside, his friend said, "This lesbian Jewish girl just felt the presence of Jesus in that church back there." Jesus calls each of us to be with Him for eternity. What an awesome invitation! May our harps never, ever be silent.

And I May Live In Them

June 1995

On Mother's Day, my wife and I were honored by a friend with second-from-the-front row seats for a liturgical celebration honoring a visit by Desmond Tutu. Because of our proximity to Archbishop Tutu's physical presence, I managed to shake his hand as well as receive communion from him. Such a humble, unassuming, yet powerfully charismatic man!

Despite attempts at being blasé in the presence of a world-known person, I *could* feel something electric about him. Looking in his eyes was to experience swimming in a pool of tenderness and loving compassion. Such would not be possible were it not for the Presence within Desmond Tutu, a Presence that had been given free access to every fiber of the man.

So often I encourage people to look for Christ in those they meet; that we are called to be witnesses and therefore conduits of the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Should we really be surprised when we are able to see evidence of such presence? Yet, I think that we tend to back away with feelings of unworthiness. "Jesus must *really* love that person. I sure wish Jesus would love *me* like that." The fact is, He DOES. We don't, however, come to a spiritual and day-to-day relationship with the One who loves us without *practicing* that Presence.

The other morning, I paid a visit to a man I respect, love, and consider one of the most influential people in my life. As a senior in college, I was honored by his insistence that I consider teaching here and, because of his insistence, signed a contract. Today he is dying, having lived with multiple sclerosis for many years. A recent examination showed cancer, thought eliminated in an operation over a year ago, now occupying most of his body. His mind and speech betray no hint of his condition, but his body, weighing less than 100 pounds, is fragile. Despite whatever pain he may have been in, he did not fail to thank those who attended to his needs during my visit.

Until this particular time together, my friend and I never really talked about his relationship with God, but we did during this visit. I learned that his theology was simple - maintain a correct relationship with God and the rest of his life would be as it should be.

He and I have never talked about homosexuality. There just wasn't a need to do so. I always felt good being with my friend because he *made* me feel welcome and secure in the person I was.

You might be asking, "What do the Archbishop of Capetown and my friend have in common?" A focus, no, a friendship with the Lord who is the center of their lives. Theirs is a relationship and experience of God based on love, trust and hope. Both men have tremendous compassion for others because they are secure in the knowledge that God is aware of their personal needs and will satisfy those needs. Saints? Scripturally speaking yes, but still men not unlike other men in many respects.

I have been told by some that freedom from homosexuality or any other dark, pain-filled secret is not as easy as simply inviting Christ into their lives. Things, they claimed, didn't get better just because they turned problems over to the Lord. In a few cases, life was worse. Some of my most intimate prayer requests have yet to be answered; some situations in my life have yet to find resolution; but all my prayers have been heard by my heavenly Father, and I am *convinced* that they will be answered.

My mind reels when I think of the power of God to change the unchangeable, to heal those deemed beyond healing. How humbling, then, to know that Jesus has promised to be with us, each one of us, until the end of the world.

On Mother's Day, I could feel the Presence in Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The other day, I felt it in my friend. At times I can even feel Christ within me, encouraging me to serve as witness to others. And when I am aware of that Presence and actively seek Jesus, nothing in my life seems too impossible to change. Jesus said "Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you." (Matthew 11:28 NAB)

Whose Plan Is It Anyway?

August 1995

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts. (Isaiah 58.8-9)

One of the great difficulties of my healing process lies with these verses from Isaiah. It isn't that I somehow doubt the truth implied but that I tend to get too wrapped up in myself. When that happens (fortunately not as often as it once did), I become like the little child running ahead of his father despite the father's warnings to stay close at hand.

This morning, for example, I was at a conference as a panel member called upon to share my story as it related to homosexuality. An outline prayerfully constructed was spread out before me and I would look at it periodically as one of the other speakers who preceded me made a specific point.

Patting first my shirt pocket and then my pants pockets, I could sense that the Lord didn't want me to have a pen handy. My job was not refute the points I heard, nor even to challenge everything to which I disagreed. My responsibility this morning was to share as openly and honestly as I could of the miracles God had worked and was working in my life.

Finally my turn came and, in spite of the voice within, I began with comments related to the other presenters. Despite the outline in front of me, it didn't take long for me to recognize that what I was saying bore little resemblance to the outline. Within minutes, there was a silence within me that reached my lips. All I could say was "I need to pray."

The surrender of my will took only a moment but it was sufficient. However disjointed the remainder of what I said might have been, I knew God was in control and His will would be accomplished.

I share this event with you because it is one example of the manner in which I fail to see that God's way is *always* above my ways. It was one more time when I ran ahead full of child-like enthusiasm despite the persistent, yet loving voice calling me into obedience.

Obedience. What an old-sounding word. It is, however, intimately connected with the plan God has for each of us in our lives. Obedience often means being quiet in order to hear the plan or to know when a step has been taken in the wrong direction. *Be still and know that I am God! (Ps.46.11)*

Obedience means trusting and having patience. For many of us, the pains we suffer are immediate in their persistence. We cry out to God for relief and then pause a moment for God to do what we have asked of Him. If the pain is still present, we rationalize that perhaps God has His hands full with more important things. We understand. We'll try again another time. . . just so long as there aren't too many of these delays.

On occasion, a solution that *feels* like a good choice because it relieves the pain is translated as having come from God despite the fact that quite the opposite might be true. After all, our God is a God of love. He would never deny us something we *felt* was good, especially if we do things just because "that's the way we are" or "It's who I am and how I express myself."

Taking a closer look at situations that are deceptions with negative consequences, some of them seem to have a common thread - there is no need to say "No" to one's self, and if that is the case, then my plan for the way in which I live is as good as anything God might choose to offer, especially when I add the words "God *created* me the way I am." I think, however, that such a thought ignores the fact that not everything I have done or have become is the way in which He intended.

To truly know the Lord's plan is to seek Him in ALL things. If we do that, we must be prepared for the reality of boundaries and of times when "No" is the proper response.

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not your woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope. When you call me, when you go to pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all of your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord, and I will change your lot. (Jer.29.11-14)

It'll Play in Peoria

October 1995

The other day I caught myself saying "It'll play in Peoria" after finishing a task where I sensed the quality of my work was acceptable but certainly not my best effort. I remember hearing that phrase as a young boy and always in the context of mediocrity.

On May 11, 1995, the board of directors for Broken Yoke Ministries unanimously agreed to accept a proposal aligning Reconstruction Ministries of Peoria, IL, to the Broken Yoke support system. It was a decision made after much prayer and discussion, but one that has proven to be a blessing for all involved.

Clichés are not dependent upon truth but on the willingness of great numbers of people willing to speak them. The men and women I met at a recent Peoria group meeting were impressive individuals, greatly in love with the Lord and desirous of being free of their homosexual behaviors and thoughts. There was nothing mediocre about them, and I left the meeting both encouraged and challenged.

Nationally recognized television and radio programs attempt to deal with the subject of homosexuality by presenting a forum in which both sides are presented at least that is the premise. Sandwiched between the pro-gay member of the panel who often loudly protests and a host who knows that an 'involved' audience brings better ratings, the truth that change is possible seems bland and unappetizing.

There is an absence in such programs of the other side of homosexuality, the side faced by the Peoria group. Newspapers do not write of the pain and circumstances involved in the formation of the homosexual condition, nor are they willing to admit that there even are people who would rather not be homosexual. Pro-gay theology advertises homosexuality as genetic in origin, beyond all possibility of choice, and part of God's creation plan. "Jesus loves me," one person shared, "and He doesn't ask me to change."

The person who spoke those words is a good person. Some might condemn him because he has failed to accept the truth of God's love, but this man *does* love God. At the same time, I cringed inwardly because his statement initially seemed an indictment of the position I hold. If he and I both love God and seek to follow Him, which of us is wrong?

If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:31-32 (NAB)

Ten years ago, I tried desperately to *live* according to His teaching but the effort was a contradiction to what I was 'feeling' inside. How could God love me so much and then tell me that my homosexual feelings were wrong? The conclusion, at least a temporary one for me, was that the flaw lay in my interpretation of God's will and His Word. All I had to do was reconstruct some passages of the Bible, label all anti-gay sentiment as archaic conservatism, and be willing to join others involved in the fight for gay rights. I might have done all that had it not been for God's love.

The shame of my arrest and prison pale in comparison to the gifts God has given me. I am not the same man people met ten years ago and homosexuality is no longer the unchangeable condition I once believed it to be. What happened to me?

If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. The truth is Jesus.

I loved Jesus ten years ago, but my love had conditions. It demanded that every feeling and desire I perceived as good should be met and in my timing. Most of all, I saw a love that had to be free of conflict. In other words, loving Jesus had to be a continual series of warm 'fuzzies.'

What Jesus demanded was a surrender, a willingness to let Him have control of my life. Repeatedly throughout each day, the Lord knocks and I give permission for Him to enter. Whenever I withhold that permission, however, I know that I am choosing less than the best for my life.

Our support groups, like the one in Peoria, provide real life witness and prayer-filled encouragement. As we become willing and able to look beyond our own situations, we come to see others in a healing process. The truth of Jesus does indeed set us free, and that plays well in Peoria, Milwaukee, Madison, Neenah, or wherever people are willing to listen.

A Gift Dedicated to God

December 1995

"My gift. . .my gift...open my gift next." A familiar sound to parents everywhere on Christmas morning or whenever family gifts are exchanged. The younger the child, the more excited the refrain. Eyes widen in expectancy as paper so carefully taped is pulled apart. Finally, "Do you like it? Do you *really* like it?" and, without hesitation, "Mom (or Dad) helped me pick it out for you. I sure hope you like it!"

With the passing of years, some of the excitement is dulled a bit as children grow. I used to think that the change was nothing more than an air of sophistication, but I'm not sure that there isn't more to it. The gifts are still purchased with some degree of enthusiasm, although the price tag for what is thought to be the ideal gift is often more than the money available at the time. And for many, there comes a Christmas when finding the right gift starts to become dutiful work, a chore rather than anticipation.

As we get older, there is a tendency within many of us to equate our acceptance (or lack of it) with that gift we hope will find pleasure in the eye and heart of the receiver. There are always those gifts we purchase that merely satisfy a tradition whether at home or work, but the gifts for those who occupy a meaningful place in our hearts are chosen with much care. Why? Is it merely love that motivates such concern? Or is the acceptance or possible rejection of our offering the measuring stick of the relationship?

Over the years, a number of people struggling with homosexuality have told me that Christmas is a very difficult and lonely day for them. It is not that they have no family or relatives offering invitations, but that the occasions of past visits proved too painful for repetition. In short, they gave up visits rather than face more rejection. For many, the emergence and definition of homosexual feelings had helped to create and sustain a spirit of isolation.

There were times in my own youth when I wrestled with the question of how honest I could be with those I loved. In the end, an expensive present became the token of reparation for feelings of guilt even though the receiver of a particular gift had no idea of the motivation behind that gift. Could they see how my attention toward other males was more energetic than toward females? Did they notice I only smiled after hearing a 'queer' or 'fag' joke? "Open my gift next. Do you like it? Do you *really* like it?"

Even today, such feelings of apprehension would be dismissed by those who love me as being unfounded, and they would be right. Back then I couldn't take the chance of being rejected any more than I was feeling within myself – that's right, self-rejected because I truly believed that homosexuality was not a cause for celebration. And year by year, Christmas to Christmas, the struggle intensified until even the night was not dark enough to hide.

I loved God with all my heart, sought Jesus in the midst of all my confusion, and offered myself as a willing recipient of the Holy Spirit. But the gifts I laid at the Lord's feet did nothing to change the double life I was leading. There was one gift I knew that Jesus wanted. He wanted me to give over to Him the very struggle. He wanted me lay the homosexual identity in His hands, but I didn't understand. So I held on to the pain and offered Him everything else I could think of to offer.

One day, torn by the thought of ultimate rejection, I said, "Take it, Lord! Take my homosexuality. If that's the gift you want me to offer, then I will give it to you. Will there be anything left of me without the label I have worn for so long? Maybe you ask too much of me, Lord. Maybe I can still offer you gifts like before and I won't feel hurt such as I feel now." But I gave to the Lord the gift He wanted most. He wanted that pain I lived with so I would not have to live with it anymore.

I have waited, waited for the Lord. And He stooped toward me and heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp; He set my feet upon a crag; He made firm my steps. And He put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and trust in the Lord. (Psalm 40.1-4) May my life and witness always remain a gift dedicated to God.

1996

But God Looks into the Heart

February 1996

Have you ever noticed how concerned we are about the perceptions others have of us? Sometimes that concern even overrides decisions that should be made in our own best interests.

We spend more than we should on clothes not needed so much as desired to keep current with fashion. We buy homes or rent apartments above our financial means. We join churches that present a good appearance or because our friends attend that church. We get involved in committees and organizations more as a means of extending the image we want to project than for the goals established. And we do what we can to prevent others from knowing too much about those places deep within ourselves - places where we hide our fears, hurts, and failings.

When Samuel was sent by God to Bethlehem to anoint a successor to Saul as king of Israel, Samuel's eyes settled first upon a son of Jesse whose height and manner of bearing fit Samuel's idea of what God wanted in the next king.

"Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance *but the Lord looks into the heart*. (1Sam.16.7)"

God looks into the heart of each of us and knows what we need. In the bad times, I have cried out to Him over and over, asking for freedom from this or that situation. In the good times, I have praised God and thanked Him for the blessings He bestowed on me and those I love. When I take inventory of my life, there seems to be a balance of the two types of prayer, yet this observation appears truer during the good times than the bad. "...*but the Lord looks into the heart*."

The struggle with homosexuality is primarily a struggle for completion in men and women, a struggle for appropriate bonding in same- and opposite-sex relationships. It is a struggle begun in the heart, filtered through layers of mental distortion until it surfaces and is fixed on someone outside of ourselves. The intention of Samuel was not to create a king but to recognize one. The intention of the homosexual struggler (deliberate or not) is not so much to recognize love as to create love. "...*but the Lord looks into the heart*."

Broken Yoke is one of a growing number of support group ministries offering encouragement to those seeking freedom from homosexuality. Not one of us in this type of ministry is the answer for the struggler, for that is God alone. But we are often mistaken for that and even elevated when we should not be.

I remember vividly how I felt the first time I read of a man who had lived eight years free of homosexual behavior. Eight years! I considered it a victory to go eight days without falling in some way. In my enthusiasm I wrote him a letter wanting to hear more about his life and the 'techniques' he used to remain free.

The return letter was not from him but from someone who wrote that the man had taken a sabbatical from his ministry. Weeks later when I learned that the sabbatical was a forced resignation due to sexual fall, I screamed at Jesus in my anger. His response was "Who will you rely upon? Me or the man who is capable of and will fall on his own? Rely on me alone."

The anger I felt 10 years ago has changed to joy as I acknowledge the Spirit of the Living God within me, a man most unworthy. He continues to look into my heart, and when I listen closely I can hear words of love encouraging me to let go of the fears, hurts and failings I have protectively clutched for so long.

I wish I could say I surrender eagerly, but I don't. Maybe it's mistrust or a distorted sense of control that makes the task difficult. The true irony is that I *have* been healed of so much already and recognize the source of my healing as well as the experience of His divine presence, yet continue to choose that which is less.

When all is said and done, I am so thankful that God knows me as He does, that He loves me enough to allow me the choices I make. The healing of my life is from within, a touch of His loving hand. The witness I bear is a simple sign of gratitude that will never speak as clearly as I'd like. "*But God looks into the heart*" and I am so grateful for that.

What Does Healing Feel Like?

April 1996

Having just taken a fresh dose of medication, things are better than they were a short time ago. I always thought it would be neat to be able to sing bass as well as tenor, and my dreams have been realized as the cold residing in my chest has also loosened my vocal cords. Carrying a tune, however, is another matter.

The other side of this cold business is the pain that accompanies the hacking sound of my cough, the growing mountain of discarded tissues, and the distance people give to anyone showing the symptoms I carry.

This cold will pass - eventually - and will become not much more than a distant memory if that. Lately, however, I have been dealing with lots of my own questions that relate to a different type of healing, the healing of a homosexual background.

Some who read this need only substitute the name of their own particular struggle for the word homosexual and it will apply.

I have counseled others that temptation is proof that they are still in the battle, that Satan has not won total victory. It is only when we have accepted sin as good that it ceases to be problem and feels, therefore, more 'natural' than not. If sin is the acceptable solution to the pain we carry, then we have learned to choose it over God.

Those words feel good and I can nod in agreement with them but I also know that learning to choose God is a process, a relationship in developmental stages ranging from an intense spiritual unity to feelings of agonizing aloneness. In times of temptation or despair, my heart is constantly asking, "Are you here with me, Lord, because I need you." With my cold, I take medication to relieve the symptoms, and from day to day there is some improvement. How do I know that? Because I *feel* it! I feel my body getting stronger, the coughing only an occasional annoyance, and people more relaxed in my presence. God IS healing me, but some days I guess I just don't *feel* it happening.

Maybe what needs to happen is for my mind to have a serious talk with my heart because the two aren't always in agreement. And were I to have such a talk, what would I say to myself?

Life is a series of choices. Sounds pretty obvious to me but maybe there are some things to learn from that simplicity.

Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud, anointed the blind man, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Aside from the fact that there was now mud on his face, the man could have just as easily wiped it off. But he *chose* to obey and his blindness was healed.

When asked by the Pharisees how he had received his sight, the man didn't say "Jesus did it" because he had not seen Jesus. Yet there was knowledge within the man that gave witness to what he had not seen as he pronounced Jesus a prophet. Jesus heard that the man had been cast out by the Pharisees and *sought* the man out. Having found him, Jesus offered the man another choice to believe in the One sent from God. The man chose to believe.

Having his sight restored to him was a small matter compared to the gift he was given by Jesus, the gift of faith. It is that same gift that the Lord gives all of us who seek Him. Having the gift does not minimize the day-to-day life we are called to lead, a life demanding easy choices and difficult choices.

"Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? The Lord answered me: If you repent, so that I restore you, in my presence you shall stand. For I am with you, to deliver and rescue you, says the Lord. I will free you from the hand of the wicked, and rescue you from the grasp of the violent" (Jer. 15.18-21) A choice - to repent.

I stand on the promises of the Lord despite my human weaknesses, fears and anxieties. I come before the Lord in all my brokenness and with my hands outstretched. He IS my salvation. He IS my healing.

Please Help Me . . . I Want Freedom

June 1996

The phone rang. A voice quietly, perhaps timidly asks, "Is this the ministry where people 'get cured' of their homosexual problems?" There is no excited "Yes" to that question because experience has taught that the healing process for a person struggling with homosexuality is not simple.

Instead, a quick servant's prayer is silently offered asking for a heart of compassion and patience. A wounded soul has courageously outstretched a hand hoping that it will be gently taken. Whatever the initial answer, the power of the Holy Spirit becomes evident as caller and counselor share whatever they are prompted to share.

I am reminded of Peter's response to the cripple at the temple gate in Acts 3.6 where he says, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you! In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazorean, walk!" In my own life I have waited for someone to say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, be freed of your homosexuality!" Standing tall, my emotionally crippled spirit would disappear and that would be that. But that was not that.

Eleven years ago, I begged God one more time to grant me that freedom, to completely take away the struggle. The response was different. No, it wasn't "Yes, Bob, I'll do what you want" but more of a quiet assurance that such a freedom would be found. And maybe what was different in me from the many other prayers I had offered was a willingness to believe in faith that it would be so.

"I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you!" What Peter really had was Jesus, and giving Jesus to the cripple did not mean losing the presence of the Lord within himself. The cripple could have been healed on his prayers alone or the anxious prayers of his parents, but I suspect that they might have all given up on that idea by the time Peter had come into this man's life. After all, Scripture says the man had been crippled from birth.

"Then Peter took him by the right hand and pulled him up. (Acts 3.7)" My own plea for freedom and healing was made directly to God, but His response was through servants chosen to take my outstretched hands. No single person was called upon to walk every step with me or make sure that I stayed on healthy paths. As I look back over the years, there are simply too many such servants to count. Each person did something simple or profound. Each tried to share the love of Jesus, not with mere admonition or threats of condemnation but with words of encouragement. And each servant knew that my healing depended upon my willingness to receive Jesus completely as my Lord and Savior. This conviction was not 'preached' to me so much as shown and proven to me by the strength of their lives.

Sometimes in my ministry I have to remind myself to take care of my own relationship with Jesus because it's all too easy to get wrapped up helping everyone else. I am a servant like all of His servants, and that means that my willingness to serve will be honored in His time and in His way.

Being wounded is not a badge of special recognition for we are all wounded to one degree or another. Being wounded should open our eyes to the woundedness and needs of others - to take the outstretched hand. Being wounded ultimately means looking to and sometimes leading others toward the healing power of Jesus Christ. We might immediately throw away our crutches, but, if not, we *will* know that we are never alone.

Christ calls me and you to be a witness, to be His hands, feet, and voice here on this earth. I can echo Paul's plea that the thorn be removed completely, but I can also understand how in my weakness I must turn to the One who is all strength. His strength IS sufficient. . .no, it is MORE than sufficient for it allows me to experience His love not only in my life but in the lives of others equally or more wounded than I.

"By the might of His glory you will be endowed with the strength needed to stand fast, even to endure joyfully whatever may come, giving thanks to the Father for having made you worthy to share the lot of the saints in light." (Col.1.11-12) May peace be yours.

What's the Missing Ingredient?

August 1996

It was not all that long ago that I could sum up my prayers with *How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?* (Ps.13.1 NIV). For many who struggle with homosexuality the question is raised daily. What they want to know, what all who struggle with some major issue in their lives want to know is when will things get better? Will they change? Can they change?

Hindsight is a remarkable gift if used sparingly for it allows us to see much of our past lives like so many colors on a canvas. Sometimes the tensions in our pasts were unbelievable, despair far easier to understand than any form of hope. But we survived the moments if only on a day-to-day basis up to the present moment. The fact is. . .we survived, and the irony is that some of the situations outside of ourselves we face really haven't change at all. But we have - if only for moments at a time.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me (Ps.51.12). Another translation more simply states *Give me back the joy of your salvation* (New Jerusalem). Give it back? That must mean at some point or another I had joy in all its fullness. When? What did that feel like? Did someone take it while I wasn't looking or did I give it away because I was bored with having it?

The truth of the matter is that joy in itself is fleeting. We can spend a life searching to duplicate the feeling of joy without being able to say "Yes! That=s it!" In *The Joyful Christian*, C. S. Lewis wrote that joy is a desire turned not to itself but to its object and that the object is God. He also wrote that by the time we recognize the joy we are feeling all that remains are the traces of its presence. A footprint.

Yet I have noticed that so many of the good times or moments (loosely defined as the absence of chaos, frustration, or other negative qualities) all seem to have His fingerprint on them. Acknowledging His presence reminds me that God is completely aware of the struggles I face each and every day.

So often my prayers are for a freedom from this or that, a successful conclusion to a project, or the request for His presence in the lives of others. At a recent meeting, I asked those present what they would think if after offering their petitions God was to say, "So?" Would that be callous of God, a contradiction to Christian beliefs? I am not saying that we should stop asking God, only that we look at things from God's position a bit.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on the shore of Tiberias (John 21), He asked Peter "Do you love me?" three times. Theologians draw the parallel of that scene by a charcoal fire to a similar fire in the courtyard the evening Peter denied knowing Jesus. It is, they offer, a healing of memories and a forgiveness Peter needed.

Could not Jesus have just as easily asked Peter, "Hey, I thought you were my strongest ally. Why did you deny me?" But He didn't. Instead He asked, "Do you love me?" And He asked three times!

Something in my heart responds strongly to the thought that Jesus wants me to love Him. That's not conditional upon the outcome of so many of my prayers. It's supposed to be *first* in the order of things. And if my prayer requests are not answered in the fashion I had hoped, loving God is still the most important thing in my life.

I may have strayed some from the original focus of this article, but I don't think too much. The good times *are* times when I am linked with God's will. His presence means that I am more apt to make a choice that fits His plan even if the choice fails to bring the relief for which I had hoped.

Peter loved Jesus, but he denied knowing Jesus. He wept bitterly over his denial. Jesus simply asked, "Do you love me?" and then told him "Feed my sheep." We all struggle with something. We all ask God for freedom and victory.

Is it okay to be angry, Lord?

October 1996

A lot was happening in my life back in the sixties. I went from being a soprano in our church's boys' choir to a tenor in the mens' choir. With learning that extended beyond books and lectures, high school and college days passed quickly - at least my memories of today say so. My father died and a part of me has been looking to connect with him ever since. And I got married and started a family. That, you might say, is rather normal for most people.

But the sixties were also days consumed with an internal battle raging over my sexual identity. Visits to our public library always included a secretive moment or two with any book that mentioned homosexuality. I didn't know what homosexuality was or if what I felt toward others of my gender fit the definitions found in those books. All I knew was that I wanted the desires to disappear so that I could be 'normal.'

A lot has happened since then, some things wonderful and some things as black and foreboding as any nightmare could be. I've grown and I've changed. My life is not without conflicts or stress but whose life is? The miracle is that I am alive, no, thriving in the nature of manhood that has been emerging within me! It is not a sense of masculinity that once drove me to futile relationships but one which sees my masculinity at unique and blessed by God. And in the final analysis, my self-image has been designed by God the Father, saved by the love of Jesus, and renewed daily by the presence of the Holy Spirit!

That should be the end of this article because God IS the answer and changes ARE possible. And if I were living in some secluded place free of any other contact with the world, it would be. But the truth of the matter is that the changes I described above are being minimized and even totally discounted by many members of the American Psychological Association (APA).

In that organization's September issue of *Monitor*, there is an article titled "Can sexual orientation change with therapy?" by Randall Edwards. The article is meant as attempt to come to some sort of 'universal' opinion on homosexuality as defined by current medical thought. To do so, however, the APA must deal with what might be a thorn in the paw of their organization - NARTH.

NARTH (the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) has a membership of 500 mental health professionals, educators and public health officials. Joseph Nicolosi, PhD, the executive director of that organization, was indirectly quoted as saying "The mental health profession has abandoned the treatment of men and women who are attracted to the same sex and are made unhappy by that attraction. When these people enter therapy, they are told to blame their unhappiness on society's homophobia, not on their homosexuality."

Nicolosi goes on to state "If these people (those who claim change in their lives) are happily married with a wife and kids and they don't feel any conflict with their homosexuality, you (the APA) may call it repression, I want to call it a healthy adaptation to a heterosexual world."

The APA, on the other hand, offers comments such as describing NARTH and all ministries which believe in change as "a coming together of conservative religious perspective with a 50s and 60s psychoanalytical perspective." "These people are still practicing with the theory that homosexuality is a disorder, and it's not," said Clinton Anderson, staff liaison for APA's Committee on Gay and Lesbian Affairs.

The internal war in both the medical field and in recent years churches of different denominations is very real. I was tempted to choose a softer word like conflict but conflicts often end in a meeting of the minds in some compromise that is mutually acceptable to all parties. But this is a war because it is being fought with the ultimate goal of one side winning and the other losing. In some ways, the battle reminds me in an unsettling fashion of the Crusades, because both sides have God on ~~at~~their side. So what's my point and why the title of this article?

I'm angry because others are trying to tell me that what God has done in my life really is nothing more than a short-term thing or that I never really struggled with homosexuality at all. I'm angry because good Christian people assume the role of God in condemning the homosexual. Were I 21 today and struggling as I did then, some very sincere people would be condemning me because I was sexually involved with other men. They might simply tell me to set aside those behaviors and be more concerned with my eternal salvation. But self-determination eventually needs an understanding partnership with people willing to help in the process of setting aside sinful behavior. For whatever reason, the majority of the church body today is more than willing to step aside in favor of opinions such as those offered by the APA.

The article closes with a quote by Dean Klinkenberg, PhD, a post-doctoral fellow in clinical psychology at the Missouri Institute of Mental Health. "Nobody has ever had any real success in changing sexual identity," he said. "Is it *ethical* [italics mine] to offer therapy that has a long history of being ineffective?"

Instead of simply disagreeing with Nicolosi (and by extension all of us who believe change is possible), the issue of ethical behavior is raised. Not only does this member of the APA feel homosexuality is unchangeable, but he advances the notion that for any therapist to work with a homosexual struggler wishing such change is grounds for official sanction or censure. In my opinion that's a rather effective way of stifling research. Isn't research the foundation of science?

By extension, then, whatever science deigns unchangeable is unchangeable. Those who cross the line of their authoritative guidance are unethical and should be cast out of the organization - or sent to sensitivity classes until they see the errors of their ways and repent. God, too?

The Old Testament is filled with stories of God doing the impossible. The New Testament accounts of the life of Jesus is an almost unending list of people healed and transformed because of His love. By extension, all who believed in Christ found not only their own lives changed but the lives of those who accepted the witness of that change and turned in like manner to Christ. Unethical? Worthy of censure?

The anger which surfaces from time to time eventually is tempered by the knowledge that God is in control of all things. It is also tempered by His gentle reminder that the changes I and countless others have experienced are the result of a process based on His timing and not ours.

Always be humble and gentle. Patiently put up with each other and love each other. (Eph.4.2 CEV)

I have only to spend a few moments in reflection to know that others loved me in my process and continue in that love as they support me now. It's often easy when I find myself standing at a temporary destination to turn and beginning shouting at those who have yet to arrive or who have decided to stay in one place for a while. My shouting can be an encouragement for them to see the good things that lie ahead or it can be an anger-based condemnation because *Athere@* is wrong and *Ahere@* is right. However I might look at it, the distance between two points cannot be ignored as inconsequential, the steps between the points must be individual choice.

Am I angry now? No, because it passes in the peace the Lord gives my soul. Is it okay to be angry? Yes, because it IS an honest reaction, a strong statement in the face of opposites. Should I stay angry? No, because anger focuses on other than God, and I would far rather focus on God.

And In Secret You Teach Me Wisdom

December 96

For the past several years, I have found that my quiet time with God usually occurs in the early morning hours while sitting at the kitchen table. There are few sounds to break my concentration except perhaps those which are present all day without my being consciously aware of them.

Next to my Bible are three devotional booklets I use as starting points for meditations that often resurface at varying times during the day. But I always start the morning by reading Psalm 51, called by many a prayer of contrition. The psalm allows me to ask forgiveness, to recognize the One to whom I am always accountable, and to set before the Lord the desire of my heart to be all the Lord would have me be.

"For I am well aware of my offenses, my sin is constantly in mind. (Ps.51.3)" We all have our weaknesses - one might loom greater in our consciousness than others - and some days it is hard to see beyond a given sin. Those who *struggle* with homosexuality are constantly being encouraged to accept the condition as being 'just the way things are.' The problem is not, strugglers are told, with homosexuality but with their inability to accept themselves as 'gay' people.

At one point in my life I wanted to believe there was nothing I could do other than give in because acceptance of my homosexuality was a surrender and that meant the end of struggle. A small voice within, the whisper of God, said "No, the surrender you consider is not the answer. I am."

The majority of people do not read books and magazine articles on homosexuality. Men and women with homosexual issues do. If book knowledge were the sole answer, then thousands of men and women might be making different choices. Past issues in my own life often surfaced like intellectual lights being turned on, sparking a joy within me similar to that of the woman in Scripture who lost a coin, searched and finally found it, and then celebrated. For me, something previously unclear had been made clear.

Such revelations, however, are not the *end* of the journey for truth and change but the *beginning*. At a recent meeting I asked those present why there are so many setbacks in the walk we are making toward the Lord. If we finally see an answer to a question which had alluded us for so long, why then doesn't everything become different? Why do we continue to sin with such flagrant disregard for the freedom we had been shown in that moment of truth?

"Renew within me a resolute spirit (Ps.51.10)" takes on significant meaning when balanced against the vulnerability we feel giving up sinful solutions (behavioral responses) to basic needs. The specific needs we have might last a lifetime. It is ours to find healthy, God-centered responses.

People often speak of the light at the end of the tunnel. I would suggest that we remember the light at the beginning of the tunnel - the one sparked by the truth given us by God - and take hope in the wisdom we have received and will continue to receive.

250 years ago, Matthew Henry wrote "What God requires of us he himself works in us, and he works it in the regular way, enlightening the mind, and so gaining the will." Wisdom is the foundation upon which choices are made. If, however, wisdom is defined as the ability to understand the complex reasoning found in the books of scholars, many of us would despair. Fortunately, God knows precisely what each of us needs to understand as well as the chosen moment for that understanding.

Wisdom is as much knowing what we should do as it is what we should not do. It is the recognition within of the good *and* bad choices we have made and are making. Above all, however, pure wisdom is the desire of the heart to be united with God's desires.

I am not all that convinced that were I to know God's plans in every detail for my life that I would not try to step in and change those plans. My brokenness includes the need to be in control. God knows that. My brokenness includes wanting to 'make things happen' for others that they must do for themselves. God knows that. But by God's grace, my brokenness includes the knowledge that I *am* broken and that only God can heal such woundedness. And in the secret places of my heart, God IS teaching me wisdom. Praise God!

1997

So that we may serve the living God!

February 1997

This month we are celebrating one anniversary for certain and perhaps a second as well. It was on February 25, 1992, that I received the formal acknowledgment of Broken Yoke as a nonprofit corporation in the state of Wisconsin.

As I think about the start of my connection with this ministry in 1988 as a group member, it is clear to me that Broken Yoke, under the able direction of founder Bill Windel, had been in operation the previous year. This makes 1997 a year of thanksgiving and the celebration of both a five- and ten-year anniversary. Praise God for His faithfulness!

Ten years seems like a long time but it doesn't feel that way - especially in terms of what has happened and what we hope to have happen.

I believe that it takes a certain courage for people to contact a ministry like ours whether the caller is one who personally struggles with the issue of homosexuality or is related as a family member or friend. In the past five years this ministry has received almost 1,000 calls from people who prayerfully sought help. It is humbling.

From a single meeting site, Broken Yoke has expanded to five cities: Madison, Pewaukee, Neenah, Eau Claire, and Peoria, IL. Our support groups meet either weekly or biweekly depending upon the number of individuals who are coming or the availability of a facilitator.

Our meeting sites are the gift of Methodist, Lutheran, and Evangelical churches, and we are most grateful for the safety our members have felt in those settings.

Meetings begin with praise and worship: a loving invitation for evidence of the Lord's presence. Each group is free to choose a program of study material (books, videos, tapes, etc.) or open discussion to be used over a period of time. All meetings close with prayer for one another.

Broken Yoke has sponsored two weekend conferences at the Green Lake Conference Center and will again sponsor the Exodus International Regional Conference at that site this October 31-November 2, 1997.

Reconstruction Ministries-BYM, our Peoria branch, has sponsored four winter weekend retreats at The Stronghold, a retreat center located near Oregon, IL.

These retreats and conferences allow us to network with other ministries serving the Lord by witnessing to those who struggle with homosexuality and have resulted in deep friendships. Many of us feel pretty alone at times in this ministry, especially in a time when too many churches are both accepting and encouraging homosexuality as God-given and a blessing. Seeing one another if only once or twice a year reminds us that we are still on the path.

From time to time we are invited to speak to church groups either studying homosexuality or dealing with that specific topic in terms of a doctrinal position. I have yet to share with such a group and not have more than one person come up after the talk (usually when most have left). Some are devastated by the pain they carry and when they look at me I pray that God will offer them substance through what He would have me share. I cannot imagine anyone who ministers to another doing so with the belief that glib or pat answers will make a difference. God makes the difference and it is He that I must offer.

This newsletter was mailed to 49 individuals in 1990 and is now being sent to 991 individuals and/or churches within 34 states. Packets of ten newsletters are mailed to Wisconsin correctional centers as well as to the churches where Broken Yoke support groups meet. The content of the newsletter has remained basically the same but the format changed slightly with our December 1996 issue. We do ask that if you move, please notify us of your change of address or desire to be removed from our list. Bulk mail is generally not forwarded and copies that reach no one still cost to produce and mail.

Broken Yoke is blessed with a dedicated board of directors who meet semiannually to review what has been happening within the ministry as well as giving definition and direction. Our current board includes Ruth Cloninger, Tom Pugh, Mark Burns, Richard Gaul, and Pastors Phil Schrank, Bryan Peterson, Bob Groth, and Tom Lambrecht.

Dear Kevin

April 1997

This letter is a response to an inmate serving time in a Georgia prison. At its completion, I felt that God had shared some important thoughts, thoughts meant for all of us who struggle with homosexuality as well as other behaviors formed in darkness.

It's been a week since I received your letter and I praise God that He is doing such wonderful things for you in your life!

The letter from your aunt certainly made some of the things you suspected clear and gave definition to the reasons you may have responded as you did. I love it when the Lord clears up things like that. You might recall that the December issue of *WELLSPRING* dealt with some of the ways the Lord does teach us wisdom in secret. Some people freeze in time when they are given explanations for parts of their past. They don't see it as God giving them a springboard to move forward. Instead they 'drown' in the pain of the knowledge. From the manner in which you write, I have faith that it is forward motion that you seek.

You raise a very important question when you ask the Lord why He allowed you to be born when He knew your life would be difficult. The answer might be complex beyond our wildest imagining but I prefer to make the answer as simple as possible. From my perspective it is: **God created me to love and serve Him in a way that no one else could.** It sounds difficult to my ears but I think the Lord created you and me (and all the world) because of His infinite capacity to love and be loved.

We both have been terribly hurt and have hurt others in the same terrible ways. God didn't plan for us to be treated and/or abused the way we were. Those things happened because of the free will choices of others or as a result/consequence of their choices. We harmed others through our choices as well. We might have been incapacitated in our ability to make proper choices but we still made the choices.

Given all that, we are all called to a vocation of serving God and those He would place in our lives. We are also called to receive the blessings and love He has for US in this lifetime. Not every day is filled completely with darkness, Kevin. There is always a ray of light and that light IS His love. I think, however, that people tend to treat God in the same way, for example, as they purchase a house. When I was younger, it was common practice to think in terms of a *starter* home - one that would be fine for the moment but understood as not being where we would like to end up. Living in the starter home brought us some understanding as to what we really wanted or needed in the home that would be ours for most of our lives.

Today, young couples often seek to start where their parents left off. They must have the latest in appliances, home recreation equipment, clothing, etc. Everything must be just as good as or better than what they were accustomed to having in the home of their parents.

God is seen by too many in the same light. They conclude that if they accept God then the sign or fruit of that relationship should be 100% complete and filled with every blessing imaginable. The saints understand that their relationship with the Lord is complete and wholly satisfying simply because it IS a relationship with God. Many refuse, I think, to understand that darkness is still around them and that they must live amid some not-so-pretty things that will impact them directly. God doesn't whisk away the negative. He encourages us to see Him *despite* the negative.

Each day I question myself about my continual failure in this or that area of life. I ask God why I am not 'healed' of this or that particular weakness and the answer I get is that He loves me. I want to fix everything so that He will love me more, but that's not possible. God will never set a condition on loving me. . . I am the one who places barriers in the path of His love. Through everything, good or bad, I am called to seek Him, to return to a position of obedience and listening for His will. The finished product from God's viewpoint is eternity with Him. On earth I will never be finished.

Thanks for your encouragement and your honesty, Kevin. You *are* appreciated. Until I hear from you, take care and keep praising the Lord - He loves the sound of your voice.

In His love,
Bob

When will the people shout for joy?

June 1997

Sitting alone in the rear of the church was a young man listening intently to the sermon. A little further up and to his right two women sat expectantly. The church marquee announced that homosexuality was the sermon topic.

Certainly other church pastors had spoken about this issue in recent years. It was a topic that was hard to avoid with all the publicity pro and con being given to it by the media. Most people, however, preferred to avoid the confrontation of taking a stand because any stand would in fact be confrontational. It all depended upon the audience.

The young man paying such close attention was more interested in finding some peace - a freedom from the war waging within his spirit. Unwanted yet sometimes pleasurable feelings warring against a gnawing sense that hinted such pleasures were contrary to God. For a time, the young man thought that giving in to the pleasures of homosexuality would quiet the battle. After all, he reasoned to himself, his feelings were genetic and the uncomfortable response he felt nothing more than the result of a prevailing homophobic attitude so common in churches and conservative towns.

The older woman looked at her daughter as the pastor spoke of Jesus's love and his forgiveness. It had been a month since there had been any real communication in their house. The daughter had returned from her first year away at college with the announcement that she was a lesbian, had a lover, and would most likely move into the other woman's apartment sometime before the start of the next semester.

There had been many tears and more than a few words spoken in anger between the two. A psychologist had been contacted but the appointment set had been broken at the last minute. The girl's father responded by becoming silent. He refused to even acknowledge his daughter's presence in their home, and no amount of pleading by his wife changed that.

The pastor moved away from the pulpit and toward a man in the front row. As the man stood up, the pastor shared that his sermon might be heard like so many other sermons unless he could make his topic become real for his church. This man, he pointed out, had been struggling for several years with homosexuality and pornography and had come to the pastor for help.

The pastor's first inclination was to quote some Scripture and send the man to someone else, but he could see desperation in the man's eyes. Would Jesus have sent the man away? Would he have told this struggler that he need only get used to the idea of his homosexuality? The pastor knew that his training did not include much on this topic, and some of his pastor friends in other churches were telling him that he needed to come into the enlightened world which saw gay and lesbian as good. Even though he didn't know what his next step would be, the pastor agreed to help the man find freedom.

In halting phrases the man told his story to the congregation and they listened. He spoke of the process of healing and of his growing love of God. He spoke of sharing books with the pastor and of talks he had heard at a support group in their town. Most of all, he shared the joy he felt in his decision to follow that voice within himself that called to him so often.

When he finished speaking, there was a silence in the church. The pastor gently embraced him, turned to the congregation and said, "He and I have walked together in faith and hope, knowing that if we truly sought the will of God it would be shown to us. We have learned that the road of healing is often slow and painful but that the journey is much less so when shared with another. Neither of us has reached our destination for that will only happen when we are united for eternity with Jesus."

"There are others in this church who might be facing homosexual struggles. Certainly each one of you might even know someone like that. Are you content to agree with the views of the world which celebrate homosexual as being diverse or even that it is a gift from God? And what about joy? Do *you* feel any of the joy that he and I have come to feel in his new found freedom?"

Heads turned slightly, looking to see if the person to the left or right was prepared to acknowledge what each had just heard but nothing happened. That isn't quite true, though, because the young man had seen the banner of hope waved high. He nervously brushed away a tear lest someone nearby become suspicious of his emotional response.

After the final hymn, the people walked down the aisle toward the exits while three people moved slowly forward and in the direction to where the pastor now stood.

The story is fictitious in the broad sense but a scene I pray might become reality in churches all over the country soon. There *are* victories being won but *when will the people shout for joy?*

So that His tent will be rebuilt in you with joy!

August 1997

As a young boy, my dreams were focused on the future, dreams to be successful in both my professional and personal life. As I grew older the vision became more realistic, more in tune with what I saw as my strengths and weaknesses with just enough idealism to stretch beyond.

Then it happened. I was living my 'future' and it looked only a little like my boyhood dreams. The weaknesses became more pronounced in my own mind until the only way in which I could keep from deep depression was to create a second me. This was the secret Bob known only to a few and even sparingly to them.

This second person, something like a shadow which moved alongside instead of behind, struggled with many things—homosexuality, pornography, and a pride-filled nature just to name a few.

There was a spiritual side of me which sought God but too often I simply didn't have enough faith to believe the shadow life could be defeated. I prayed earnestly for change but saw the lack of significant change to be 'proof' that I had finally crossed too many lines, sinned too often for forgiveness.

In my thinking, I had used up my quota of second chances with God, so instead of knocking at God's door I stood quietly to the side hoping He would glance in my direction and remember me. My heart echoed the words of David:

I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings (Psalm 61.4).

You see, I saw God as 'out there' instead of dwelling within me. My body and my life were meant to be a tent in which God would reside, a place of worship and intimacy with Him who created all things, and a tent of refuge.

Recognizing this reality is one thing, surrendering as a sign of invitation yet another. Some people make the surrender without major conflict but that was not my way nor has it been that way for many of those I know through this ministry. Our surrender came while in the midst of crisis brought on by homosexuality or lesbianism. For others it might come because of alcoholism, anorexia, molestation and/or abuse, or some deep, deep depression which seeks to snuff out the light of hope. But surrender must come.

Christians who find comfort in the psalms of David know that he committed adultery and murder in order to satisfy his own selfish desires. The tent of his life had been destroyed, made dark when he turned his back on the light of God. Yet he repented and was restored.

Feeling that I had to make everything right within me before God would take up dwelling in my tent was one of the great stumbling blocks I encountered after my own surrender. As illustration, I still struggle with a feeling that my house must be clean before anyone is allowed to visit. A friend once told me that he didn't come to visit the house, he came to visit me.

Despite my struggles with temptation, I am learning that God *does* want to rebuild my tent. He *does* love me and desires to be intimately involved in all that I do. And He *IS* rebuilding my tent in joy because His focus is not on those things already forgiven but on me. It is our relationship which brings joy to *both* of us!

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (2Cor.5:4).

I have two friends who are both dying - one of AIDS and the other of cancer, both young men. Not many would understand how they are able to endure the constant pain in this journey of theirs, but these two men focus on the Lord despite that pain, not necessarily because of it. Both men acknowledge that they would love to be healed completely, but that is not a condition of their love for the Lord. As one said recently, "If I am healed, I know that God is with me. If I die, I am with God."

We were all "knit in our mother's womb" by God, each of us given a special tent in which to grow. Along the way some of us lost sight of that joy-filled tent but it is not impossible to rebuild the place where heaven and earth can come together. We need only give God permission.

Like Paul, we need to see that God is our strength in weakness, the goal for which we strive. And in the end, *Therefore, [we] are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over [us]* (Rev.7:15)

By paths unknown I will guide them

October 1997

I will lead the blind on their journey; by paths unknown I will guide them. I will turn darkness into light before them, and make crooked ways straight. These things I do for them, and I will not forsake them (Isaiah 42.16)

Every now and then, I have the opportunity to spend time with someone, to listen to his or her story, and at its conclusion be left without anything to say. It is a humbling experience but one which teaches me by a not so gentle reminder that it is not I who heals anyone.

People endure much that is not understood. They purchase self-help books, seek clinical advice, and storm heaven with their prayers. They do all these things so that the situation causing pain or confusion in their lives can be “fixed.” Somehow that seems to be the goal—to be “fixed.”

Two men I greatly respected have recently died. Both were young. Both loved the Lord with every fiber of their beings. And yet both died having suffered pain. They weren't fixed in the sense that prayers for wholeness of their bodies were answered, but they were both healed.

I will lead the blind on their journey; by paths unknown I will guide them.

Anyone who has struggled with homosexuality or some other in-your-face problem imagines what life would be like without that problem. As a teen, I recognized that I was “different” from other guys in school in terms of my sexual attractions. Too often I would hunger for the life they seemed to have, a life void of homosexuality, because anything had to be better than the life I was living.

As much as my heart sought God, Satan used my sins to convince me that I was too wicked. People often asked, “How could you ever believe that God would abandon you?” My lips said “He didn't” but my heart often felt otherwise.

Left on my own, I tried to learn everything I could about homosexuality from books and from people I considered wise and close-lipped. There was not much available, the road to change was a path at best.

Today my shelves are filled with Christian books on homosexuality, and Broken Yoke is but one of many ministries seeking to help people who struggle. We use books, videos, and other resources to help in our understanding, but it is becoming all too clear to me that such things are pointers, not miracles in themselves.

Resources are often at least partially successful because we see ourselves in them. Someone else has been where we are and is no longer there but in a better place. The danger comes in trying to copy the path of another because we are not exactly like others, nor are they exactly like us. That is why we can be referred to as “the blind.” That is why the paths are unknown.

I will turn darkness into light before them, and make crooked ways straight. These things I do for them, and I will not forsake them.

Flashbacks. Remembered conversations. That's where I have been lately. I wrote that my two friends died experiencing pain, and yet I said they were healed. To some that might sound like a contradiction, but it isn't.

My friends may have questioned God in their hearts but they both came to the same conclusion: God loved them and they loved God. Period. It was the daily relationship they had with Jesus, the manner in which they recognized the Holy Spirit within them that was the healing they sought. This is not to say that they prayed for the pain they endured, but that they prayed to endure the pain. God's presence and not the absence of pain had become the goal.

I recently wrote a friend that if I see the Apostle Paul's pain as a means of disciplining the body, of living and doing *despite* physical inconvenience, then God's refusal to change things might be seen as helping Paul to move *beyond* himself and closer to God. I think that's what I want in my life. I want to move beyond this shell which doesn't cooperate.

It concerns me how caught up in myself I tend to get. I want resolution to situations but in my design. I want to help everyone and end up being too busy to do what might really need doing. I want freedom from the temptations I hate but continue to believe that I am the one in control when I am not. I want to be close to God but find going to my knees difficult. Pride? Probably more than I want to admit. The bottom line is

that by myself I am nothing, yet even knowing that, I still elevate myself and become puffed beyond recognition. Forgive me, Lord, and help me to stay focused on you.

We are all human and therefore we all try to plan the course our lives take. That's natural. But it IS the Lord who directs our steps, and that is the truth behind healing. Change is not the absence of a problem like homosexuality. Change comes in understanding that no problem can separate us from the love of God. For where the light of God's love shines, there can be no darkness. *Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His face continually* (Ps.105.4)

It's All I Want, Lord

December 1997

Joe was at that awkward age as far as Christmas was concerned. He was an only child, too old to believe in Santa Claus yet not old enough that he sometimes didn't wish Santa Claus into reality.

His family was a good and loving family, a God-loving family, and therefore "Put Christ back into Christmas" or "Jesus is the reason for the season" were more than simple catch phrases to them. Because his father was very involved in community and church, the days of the week were often defined for Joe by what committee meeting his father had that evening.

His friends would occasionally kid him about the amount of time he himself spent at church, but behind the kidding there was a genuine respect.

He was about fourteen years old when the feelings started - feelings of attraction for his friends as well as men he'd seen on television or in movies. He knew about friendship but this was different. The feelings were sexual.

Joe wanted to tell someone if for no other reason than to have some of the weight removed from his shoulders. He could tell his parents most things, and they would listen with patience, offering advice only if he actually asked for it. Not many of his friends could say the same thing, and Joe knew it. In the end, his shame prevented him from saying anything to anyone. These feelings would go away. He hoped.

Prayer. That's what the pastor had always said. "When you really need something, ask Jesus and it will be given to you. That is," he would add, "provided that what you ask for would be in the will of God." Day after day, heaven heard Joe's fervent voice. "Please help me. Help me change. I don't want to be gay, Lord, but I have all these thoughts, and I don't know where they're coming from." And day after day it seemed to Joe that nothing changed.

"What would you like for Christmas, Joe?" To this question he'd answer, "How about a new car for when I turn 16? Or maybe some programs for the computer? Anything's okay, I guess."

In Joe's heart the answer to that question was a lot different. He wished he could say, "Make me normal. Please, make me normal." But those were words meant for the secrecy of his heart and not to be shared with others.

Then an idea came to him, an idea unlike any he had thought before. "I'll ask Jesus to change me. This Christmas the only gift that will matter to me will be that I will be changed." Joe's prayer of petition became a prayer of expectancy as well as one of joy. As Joe and his family sat in church during the midnight service, his eyes took in all of the special decorations - the trees, the crèche scene, the banners, and the area around the altar and pulpit highlighted by scores of poinsettia plants. He didn't mind going to church on Sundays but Christmas was special, and this Christmas, he knew, would be even more special. The pastor began.

"We have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. It was all given to us by God's own power, when we learned that He had invited us to share in His wonderful goodness. God made great and wonderful promises, so that His nature would become a part of us. Then we could escape our evil desires and the corrupt influences of this world."

"Do your best to improve your faith. You can do this by adding goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others, and love. (2Peter 1:3-7 CEV)." To the confusion of the congregation, the pastor merely stood there in silence, leaving everyone to question this strange approach to what should have been a revival of Christmas homilies from years past.

At first, Joe was as confused as everyone else. Then his focus was drawn to the crib and the outstretched arms of the Baby Jesus. His gift! The one thing he had asked for was there before him, and the realization sent a shiver up and down his spine and brought tears to his eyes.

His mind started to object, but a feeling inside of him overwhelmed the objection. Joe closed his eyes and let go.

When he opened them, his ears seemed to open as well. The pastor was saying, "We need only hear and accept the message of Christ's birth once. The story of Jesus is a journey to the cross because that was why He came to us. But He left each of us a gift, a special token of His love unique to each and every one of us throughout history past, present, or future."

"The gift we each have today is part of the goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others, and love that you heard in the reading. It's a long list but it doesn't come all at

once. It is, however, the journey each of us must make despite and perhaps because of the struggles we face.”

When they arrived home from church in the early morning hours, there was no car with a large, red ribbon wrapped around it and bearing an oversized card reading “For Joe” He did, however, receive some computer programs, a new shirt, and some underwear. As his head touched the pillow, Joe remembered the feelings and the encouragement his heart had received in church. Sometime in the morning, he would gather up this newfound courage, approach his parents, and ask “Mom? Dad? Can we talk?”

Joe is my father's name. . .he's with the Lord. . .and I wanted you to know that I chose his name to be that of the main character after searching my heart. I pray that you all will see the gift God has for you.
Love, Bob

1998

Watch Over This Vine

February 1998

God All-Powerful, please do something! Look down from heaven and see what's happening to this vine.
(Ps.80.14 CEV)

I sometimes have what might be called 'crazy' days - days when one activity relentlessly follows another - and on those days there is a feeling of being caught in a downward spiral. My hands can find little of substance with which to slow or stop the descent. My mind should be helping me balance the load but it wanders. Memories surface of slower, more tranquil times and I am tempted to think that those were 'the good old days.'

This is not to say that the activities are bad choices (some are required by my job description) but that such craziness often invites a lack of focus. And when that happens, well. . .

Not long ago I was talking to a man about intimacy with God. He and I both had truly felt the presence of the Lord in some powerful ways. Both of us recalled the feeling of never wanting that 'feeling' to end. Yet both of us felt that at times we were in a desert where the lifeless surroundings were only exceeded by a sense of absence – God's absence.

We agreed that God is *always* present, but we also considered the fact that perhaps we had turned from God or had muted the sound of His love. We had placed first one thing and then another on our list of things to do before each day's end to the point where eventually that check list didn't even include attention to God.

Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying that I rejected God as much as I am admitting to a lack of priority. Some of you are mentally pointing out that our focus needs to be 100% on our jobs when we are at work, and I could not disagree. But we can start and finish each task acknowledging His presence, giving glory to God for all that we do.

All of what I have written so far has purpose even if it has taken me a bit to get where I want to go.

When I stop seeing God, stop thanking Jesus for dying for my sins, stop surrendering to the Holy Spirit, all that is left to see is me. I am once more in control - or so I think.

Satan knows the truth. He knows that when I look more to myself to meet my needs than to God, I will choose poorly. I will choose whatever *looks* to be the most attractive solution to a need I may have. What I will not see, because I choose not to see it, is the ugliness of sin until I have sinned.

For the male homosexual, the sin of sexual intimacy is masked by dreams of a loving relationship. I still need and hunger for a bonding with other men but now see the boundaries which define what is an appropriate relationship from one which is inappropriate. I still need the intimacy of male touch but am learning by God's grace and faithfulness to recognize the falseness of sexual touch. God is also showing me how to love a man without that man having to be defined as a 'lover.'

[For the female homosexual, lesbianism is all too often a wall of protection from the physical, sexual, or emotional pain suffered at the hands of men. The exclusion of men is justified by statements such as "She understands me and knows my needs better than any man." It is the enmeshed co-dependency which on the surface answers independent needs that justifies all other aspects of the relationship.

In both male and female homosexuality, a 'committed' relationship sets aside the reality of sin. Many ministers condemn the promiscuity often found in homosexuality as sin yet endorse the same behaviors in those couples who have proclaimed themselves united.]

If there is one thing that is mentioned repeatedly by strugglers who come to our meetings, it would be that they want an end to homosexual temptations. Yet when we discuss the nature and timing of those temptations, we see stress, anxiety, anger, and a host of other emotions demanding attention.

It is the world outside that we cannot control, yet we really *want* to have that control. When I experience increased temptation, it is often because I see the world winning and me losing. Satan tries to encourage me to think that no one will really care if I sin. He even reminds me that God will forgive me *after* the sin has been committed. What a deal! Sin to my heart's content and eventually come back to the Lord on my knees asking forgiveness.

But in the midst of struggle and temptation, God IS loving me and wanting to show me a better solution, a better choice.

The image of thousands upon thousands of vines in one big mess comes to mind. My eye cannot distinguish one vine from another, where it starts or where it ends. Yet each vine is connected to a source, and that source knows instantly when even the smallest of vines is lacking in what it needs. God is the Source of all nourishment and growth, for apart from Him I will die.

Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love Him (Is.64.4). It is this confidence that supports my plea to the Lord in difficult times as well as my desire to remain fixed in my attention on Him.

I fail in some way each and every day by making choices I should not have made, but my spirit will continue to call upon the Lord. *God All-Powerful, please do something! Look down from heaven and see what's happening to this vine.*

Be Holy, For I Am Holy

April 1998

As obedient children, do not yield to the desires that once shaped you in your ignorance. Rather become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy One who called you; remember, Scripture says "Be holy, for I am holy." (1Peter 1.14)

As a young child, I remember being fascinated by the lives of saints, men and women who had lived as faithful servants of God, many giving their lives as witness of their faith. The idealistic boy in me often thought "What a noble thing--to give one's life for Jesus." But as a boy, I had little concept of the kind of pain that might accompany such a death, and the first time I had an allergic reaction to several bee stings I knew that any romantic hope of being a martyr (or a spy) was doomed.

But the idea of holiness drew me like a moth to a light on a summer evening. It's what I wanted to be, and church with its towering steeple reaching for the sky was a holy place where I felt a sense of belonging.

At age seven, I knew about sinning. Hadn't I told lies when confronted with the evidence of something I had done wrong? Hadn't I said words I wasn't supposed to say? What I had not counted on, however, was the manner in which things sexual would dominate my thoughts in the coming years. What I had not counted on was the sense of separation from God I felt when I gave in to those temptations.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to talk with a lot of men and women who shared similar feelings. We agreed that despite knowing of the power of the cross and the forgiveness won by the death of Jesus, each sin of the flesh was like a wedge being driven into our spiritual lives.

Instead of feeling closer to the Lord *because* of our struggles, we felt as though we were being dragged day by day in the opposite direction. And while the nature and number of our sins might have varied, homosexual behavior carried the most weight. It was a sin that *felt* right despite the guilt and despair that usually followed.

The question I hear quite often is "Why would God give me these feelings and then tell me they are wrong?" The whole issue, it would seem, hangs on whether or not homosexuality is a design of God or of humanity. Indeed, why would God do such a thing?

The answer - which I believe with all my heart - is that He didn't. Having said that in no way denies or minimizes the struggle.

It's not my intent in this column to write a thesis on the reasons for homosexuality. It is enough, I feel, to acknowledge the existence of feelings within myself that contradict the faith journey I want my life to be. It is enough to know that temptation is temptation in all its forms and sinful behavior is sinful behavior. *"Be holy, for I am holy."*

Wait a minute. Isn't sin the opposite of holiness? Doesn't holiness imply the absence of sin? And if the answer to both of those questions is "Yes," how can anyone become holy?

I have been thinking and writing about the apostle Peter lately, remembering how he not only denied knowing Jesus once but three times. He had seen Jesus transfigured. He had seen miracle after miracle and had even said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Mt. 16.16)." With all of that knowledge, how could he have denied knowing Christ?

In a breath, I saw the number of times that I chose sin over God - perhaps not always deliberately saying "I reject you, God," but certainly choosing something greatly inferior and often harmful to myself and others. Then I saw something else.

The label 'homosexual struggler' itself defined me as separated from God when I allowed it to be so. In my pride I proclaimed myself guilty of a sin beyond forgiveness and change and set myself apart from the rest of creation. Others didn't understand my struggle - even made fun of it - and God didn't seem to be listening to my prayer. If that sounds like extreme thinking, let me assure you that these thoughts are not uncommon.

Peter's despair over his denial of Christ must have been beyond belief, yet Jesus specifically sought him out so that Peter could be healed - not of his sin but of his feelings of separation. The sin had been forgiven and dealt with on the cross. It was the aftermath of pain-filled emotion that crippled Peter, and I think that I can understand a little of how that felt. So can you.

The Lord calls each of us to sit with Him at the charcoal fire. We hear Jesus ask us "Do you love me?" not three times but as many times as we feel we have separated ourselves from Him. There is,

perhaps, hesitation in the beginning. Does Jesus *really* love me that much? Despite my sins, He still calls me to serve Him.

At some point the tears begin to flow as the heart opens and accepts the love being offered. Over and over Jesus says "Come to me when you feel such burden. I'll take that weight from your shoulders. You don't have to carry it. Just remember that I see you as you are and as I created you to be. Alone your struggles will be too much, but I am with you always, and that means even in the times when you don't choose me. And because I *am* with you, you can be holy as I am holy."

Like Peter, we have the choice of accepting the love Jesus offers or rejecting it. Peter accepted it and died suspended upside-down on a cross. Greater love than this. . .

When the Perfect Comes, the Imperfect Will Pass Away

October 1998

"Dear Lord, I want to love you and I want to feel your love. I try. . . I really do, but despite my best intentions I am always doing something that is not in your will. Please, Lord, please help me!"

My prayer reminds me of the day I looked down on the tie I was wearing (one of my favorites), and all I could see was a big stain from some meal I had finished. I had not noticed the stain before, and it could have been there for weeks, but the moment I saw the stain all I could think about was taking off the tie.

The analogy I am using is a simple one. My wife would say, "All analogies limp," because something in them falls short or misses the mark, and she's right. My tie isn't the same as some of the serious issues I face and have faced, but I can understand a stained tie far easier than some of the other issues.

This morning I had coffee with a man who is deeply in love with the Lord, so much so that his voice almost trembles when he says Jesus or God.

His life has become a commitment to telling the world that there can be freedom from homosexual behavior, yet he doesn't offer a specific treatment system, he offers Jesus.

When I consider what has happened in my life over the past tens years, I am overwhelmed by the presence of God. No matter where I was at any given point in time God was there loving me just as much then as He does now.

Every good and perfect gift comes from God above with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration (James 1.17).

When I pray to the Lord while wearing a stained tie around my soul, God doesn't stare at the stain tie and demand I take it off before we can continue. We both know the tie is stained, and I am embarrassed because I want to wear better things in God's presence. But the eyes of the Lord of lords and King of kings are fixed on mine, beckoning me to surrender more of myself in order to be more completely filled with His good and perfect gifts.

Some might think I have just made a point for the pro-gay position. "God loves all of His creation," they'd say, "and if two people of the same gender are committed to one another in love, then there God is, too."

I can't argue with that logic in so far as it goes because who am I to say that God restricts His presence? But there is still the issue of the stained tie to consider.

God loves me, yet I know that there are things I once wore in His presence that I no longer wear. I didn't change because I would have been denied access to God but because something stirred in my heart telling me I *could* change.

Why is it presumed that change demands some form of perfection? Why do people feel that God must take away a condition to prove His love? And if God doesn't completely remove every trace of a condition, is that a sign He approves of it?

When I look at someone I admire and respect, I often wonder if it's the *presence* or the *absence* of some quality in that individual that attracts me? Probably a combination of both. Whatever the quality might be, good or bad, it is worn in the presence of God.

Too many see their struggle with homosexual behavior as a barrier to the intimate relationship they want with Jesus. I suspect, however, that if all homosexual temptations were to vanish, the struggle with another sin would take its place. The issue is not one of sin getting in the way of the relationship but of an inability to see beyond sin.

We are called to walk in the light and not in the darkness. God knows every dark place within us, and He knows that left to our own choices we probably will choose something other than what would be God's will for us. We choose what we do because it *appears* to be the best choice.

Every parent knows the look on a child's face when he or she is told to go to bed and the child is not yet done playing. The choices for the child seem simple enough - to continue having a good time or set aside having a good time for a bed. Some children would call that decision a no-brainer despite the fact that other adults would see the wisdom of the parent's request.

How often do our spiritual faces look the same way as the child surrendering play for bed? How often does God patiently wait for us to set aside what we *think* is a good choice for one which will bear lasting fruit?

I have sinned exceedingly, my friends, and I am only beginning to learn that it is I and not God who holds my sins against me. I will not be free of human failing despite my best efforts, nor will I be able to determine the extent of temptation I may yet face.

When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away (1 Cor.13.10). Maranatha! Lord, come! And when Jesus comes again, I doubt that I will hear others say "See, I told you that you were wrong," for each one of us will see clearly what is imperfect in ourselves. And in acknowledgment of our human condition and in the presence of the Perfect One, we will bow our heads.

It's the Perfect Gift,

and It's Yours

December 1998

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14.27)

It had to be very early in the morning one Christmas long ago when I came down the stairs, hugging the wall to avoid putting all my weight on those steps that would surely give me away. Finally, the last step had been negotiated and all that remained was to crawl on my hands and knees toward the area under the tree reserved for me, my name printed on a card and tied to a low-hanging branch.

The pile of gifts was not all that high but it didn't matter. One box bore the magic words POOL TABLE and I knew that weeks of pleading had paid off. I had been willing to sacrifice all other potential gifts in exchange for this one item.

I must not have been as stealthy as I had thought because just as I was about to open the box I heard, "Get back to bed and let us sleep." Off to bed I went but not off to sleep.

There I was, pool cue in hand, eyeing the arrangement of balls on the table, knowing that I would make every shot. Somewhere in this fantasy reality broke in and posed a very simple question, "How could a pool table fit in such a small box?" The answer, of course, was that it could not.

When we were finally told it was okay to come and open presents, I saw the pool cue was approximately eight inches long and was something of a spring action battering ram. The 15 ivory balls and the creamy white cue ball were really marbles, and the slate top was a piece of cardboard covered with green felt material. It was a few days before I really spent time with the game because it took me that long to realize that it was just a game - not what I had imagined but not a bad gift either.

I know, a long story but you know there's a point to be made by telling it. You are, after all, an intelligent reader and you see through me without much difficulty. Okay, here it is.

Ask any struggler if he or she can identify with those who sought the healing touch of Jesus and the response will be no surprise. "Heal me, Lord! Free me from the bond of my homosexual struggle. I am so tired of this." It is the answer you would expect because it is the answer you would give yourself. If your struggle, by the way, is not with homosexuality, just substitute your struggle in the sentence above.

Some of us, however, might raise the following point: Those who sought healing from Jesus were *healed*. The blind saw; the lame walked; the possessed were released of their demons; and the dead were raised. By simple logic, we should expect the same results . . . but for most of us it just doesn't seem to happen that way.

I really did want a full-sized pool table when I was a boy, but it never happened. As an adult, I can now understand why my parents did not get the 'real thing.' We didn't have the room or the money - two major considerations in the real world.

If there is one desire that surfaces at meetings more than any other, it would be the desire for peace. The actual words come out "Just take this sin out of my life," but what all of us are really asking for is "the peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil.4.7)"

We often think that we do our best communication with God when our hearts are stilled, but more people call out to God during times of crisis than during times of quiet.

Jesus said, "*I do not give it [peace] to you as the world gives.*" We might see winning the lottery as a solution to all sorts of problems as well as an answer to dreams of the 'good' life, but we know that winners have often found life incredibly complicated because of their new-found wealth. Still, we respond by saying "I think I could live with those kinds of problems."

"*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" My heart would be a lot happier if I didn't have to face so many trials in my life. I love the Lord with all my heart yet at times I *am* afraid. Like so many others, I want these temptations to evaporate. I want to see clearly.

What did Paul have that gave him the strength to endure beatings, stoning, and eventually death? What made the race so important to him that he went on despite knowing that God would not remove the *athorn* in his life? The answer: *He had the peace of the presence of God.*

It wasn't the kind of peace which was dependent upon the absence of struggle but the kind which existed in the *midst* of struggle.

My expectations (and perhaps yours as well) often are so broad in scope that all I can see is the whole and not the parts. It *is* this moment, right now, that I have the peace of the Lord's presence. At this moment, right now, I am able to move forward with the day knowing that I am *never* alone. It isn't my sin that should be the focus of my attention *but my relationship with the Lord*.

We *do* have the perfect gift and it is "renewed every morning (Lam.3.23)." Perhaps it is we who need to let go of how we define the gift in order for the gift to be recognized.

If your response to all of this is "You are over-simplifying," I won't disagree. My choice does not have to be complicated to be right. Peace to you all.

1999

Sometimes It Hurts Too Much

February 1999

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11)

For a time, I was separated from those I loved, and visions of being reunited motivated most of my thinking. It's important for you to understand, however, that things had been pretty difficult for anyone who knew me and more so for those who tried to love me. Sounds confusing, doesn't it.

Yet I am not so unusual among those who struggle with homosexual issues. Somewhere along the way, things get messed up. Love, a difficult thing to define anyway, becomes first one thing and then another. While there is a small percentage of people who give up completely on ever receiving or giving love, most do not.

When we hear about a man doing something totally illogical, we often ask, "How could he do such a thing?" Yet in the moment of decision, the action the individual chose seemed perfectly logical - maybe not a good choice but the best alternative at the time.

What of the man who frequents parks hoping to meet someone with whom he might connect? What of the person who spends hours in adult book stores or theaters? What of the man (or woman) consumed by thoughts of someone else to the exclusion of their own needs? These are real situations for too many people and used to be for me as well.

I am not saying that because a choice is *thought* to be good in a given moment that it should be made, nor am I attempting to minimize the consequences of choice. The lenses of decision, however, were in most cases not appropriate to the decision-making process.

When pain is deep, the healing is slow, like having a good day followed by one not so good. A competent doctor doesn't ask if we *want* to follow directions but insists that we do. Giving ourselves over to the prescribed process is a form of discipline and we can take comfort in the words "No discipline seems pleasant at the time."

Looking over the past thirteen years, God has taught me discipline. I can't say that I have mastered everything He gives, but I can share some simple things with you.

God loves you

Words you hear all the time, but give yourself permission to really believe them and to accept His love.

God loves other people, too

It may be difficult to think of God loving the one person you really dislike or even hate, but He does. And why shouldn't God love that way? We are all wounded in one way or another, all seeking God's healing. . . even if we don't know it.

Relationship with God isn't a popularity contest

We are so conditioned to think that the one who comes in first in a race is the most loved, the most blessed. I shudder when I think of my envy over those who seemed to have their spiritual lives all together when mine seemed so chaotic. Being holy as the Lord is holy is not being better than someone, it's just being holy.

Be still and listen

Another one of those suggestions we often hear at church or read in Max Lucado books but forgotten in the rapid paced lives we live. God is. More importantly, God wants us to know He is.

Ask God and then give Him room

Why do people pray for things and then lay out the manner in which God should answer the prayer? The hardest thing I have ever done is to surrender my desires to God without assurance that I will even recognize His answer.

Don't fear honesty

The healing process often involves coming to that point in your life where you can see how far you have gone astray. It's so easy to make excuses for the manner in which we sin and often so difficult to say yes when confronted with the reality of our human nature.

Break mirrors

Maybe you are different, but I spent many years trying to see myself in other people or attempting to shape them into extensions of myself. For anyone so broken, meeting others is like looking in a mirror, a mirror which must be broken in order to see others as they are and to be gifted by the blessings others offer of themselves.

Pain is real

"Oh, it's nothing" is not a good thing to say when in pain. No one wishes to take on for themselves the pain you or I may feel, but healing means allowing others to be in your life, praying for you, loving you.

Tears speak volumes

I can't always explain why I cry but I always feel released having done so. Tears are not meant to be a form of manipulation, but rather a means to express what we cannot express. Jesus wept.

And all will be well

Some memories hurt too much for me to dwell on them for too long. In those moments I sometimes wonder about this thing called healing. For many, giving up is the solution. After all, why should they be so unhappy? They didn't choose to be gay. But their surrender isn't an answer, it's a choice in itself.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

One cannot seek the face of God without undergoing a process of purification. But with each unwanted layer stripped away, we will find our hearts more and more able to experience the joy and love of our Creator. May it be so for you. . .and me.

What's in a Name?

April 1999

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine. (Is.43.1)

I think that those who believe the old saying "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me" must have pretty tough skin. Names can and do hurt - especially when they are launched with anger, derision, or self-righteousness.

As a boy growing up, I heard jokes about fags and queers and laughed a nervous laugh. I didn't really understand what those words meant at the time, but my friends thought the remarks were funny, and I wanted to be like my friends.

As I grew older, I laughed for a different reason - protection. I knew that some of the things I felt and did fit their definition of fag and queer. If I hadn't laughed, my friends would have guessed that I might be 'one of those kinds of people.'

With each homosexual incident, I felt more and more separated, and the separation I felt was not just from family and friends but from myself and from God as well. Some might argue that it was the homophobic attitude of society toward homosexuality that fueled these feelings, but I can assure you that I felt separated before I had even attached the word homosexual to what I did or even knew what the word homophobic meant.

In my late teens I surrendered to the label 'homosexual' because I could no longer ignore the homosexual direction apparent in my fantasies and behaviors. I did not, however, surrender the desire to be free of the yoke that name had placed on me. The battle within me continued.

Today when I speak to groups or individuals on behalf of this ministry, I don't introduce myself as a homosexual or as an ex-gay man, but rather as a man who understands homosexual temptation and relies upon God's grace. I introduce myself as a man desiring God's strength and protection.

One of the more frightening arguments used in support of homosexuality is that God created homosexuals to be homosexuals. I can no more believe that God created me to be a homosexual than He chose to have children born into the world with terrible deformities. Why are we so afraid to say that such things are of our making? Planned or unplanned? Why are we so quick to set aside the consequences of the human condition by demanding that God be the originator of all conditions?

Every one of us has an article of clothing that we consider a favorite. It feels right, adjusts easily to our movements, makes a statement about us in a way words could not, and is tossed out only with regret. That piece of clothing, however, had *replaced* another.

The word homosexual was not in my vocabulary when I was little . . . it was put there as I grew older. My playmates were boys *and* girls, yet the older I got, the more alienated I felt in the presence of males, and because of the distorted desires I felt, it made sense to set aside any idea of being like them. I was homosexual and they were not.

Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother=s womb. I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works. (Psalm 139:13-14)

Talk about feelings of conflict. How could I be "fearfully, wonderfully made" with such a war going on inside of me? The answer is that the war *was* legitimate and the conflict *remains* real. If homosexuality is not God's design, then all homosexual fantasy and desire are contrary to that design. For me, the question is one of whether or not I will be faithful in seeking what I believe is God's design for my life.

The words 'homosexual' or 'gay' really get in the way, because words define us both to ourselves and to others. Words become names, and names can become like favorite pieces of clothing, comfortable and familiar.

There will be professionals reminding us of the reality of psychological conditions and the dangers of suppressing them. God doesn't promise freedom from same-gender attractions, so we must deal with them when they occur and believe in the words of Paul: *Therefore I am content with weakness. . .for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong. (2Cor.12.10)*

The vision God gives is beyond my human eyes to see, but the Holy Spirit within me prods me to believe that *God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.* (Eph.3.20)

I have a choice about the manner in which I face my woundedness. I can see my struggle as an imposing or even impenetrable wall hemming me in on all sides, or as an obstacle to be stepped around, a maze to be negotiated. I am not denying the struggle so much as making choices as to how it will affect me.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2Cor.4.18) When my eyes are fixed in this manner, the scales of confusion fall away and a narrow path opens before me.

When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned. Because you are precious in my eyes and glorious, and because I love you. (Is.43.2,5) I have been called by name. We have *all* been called.

I Can Relate

June 1999

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2Cor.3.18)

Sometimes the memories I carry of my growing up years tend to get a bit distorted. Not intentionally, mind you, but because the truth of what I experienced so many years ago has passed through all sorts of filters that gently shift emphasis here, perspective there.

When I listen to men and women who contact this ministry talk about the days of their youth, what they share rings a bell within my own memories. I lived on the outer edge of what I saw to be a circle of friends among my peers, despite the fact that hindsight would tell me that most of us did. Ironically, none of us talked much about that kind of insecurity, maybe we each felt we were the only ones. Life in those days seemed to have a lot of "If only. . ." feelings. If only I could master the art of telling jokes. If only I wouldn't be such a jerk around the 'cool' kids in class. If only. . .

There was one part of growing up that I wish would not have happened. I learned about false intimacy, believing it to be the real thing. I thought that being sexually intimate with someone was a mature expression of deep friendship, and it was friends I wanted, right?

The touches felt good, and the intimacy of those moments in secrecy was, I thought at the time, a bonding, and that was a lie. What I was doing, however, really turned out to be a chain that chafed and held me in place while the rest of the world seemed to move forward.

I'm an adult now and lots of things have happened since those days of "If only. . ." I still have moments when I feel like a jerk in the presence of people I think are 'cool' but I am getting better. Some pretty bad things did happen over the years, however, and in the process of finding God, I learned.

To seek God with all my heart is to set aside the veil I have worn and on occasion still wear. To desire the presence of the Lord demands vulnerability in that presence, a willingness to be seen just as I am—a sinful man. Setting aside the veil of secrecy, I allow myself to be transformed—not by my design but by God's. As the veil is slowly pulled aside, it is replaced by the radiance of freedom.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1Jn.3,2-3)

One cannot seek a relationship with the Lord without being transformed. Some days, though, it seems hard for me to believe that I am even seeking because I don't respond to others as I should. I get short-tempered, self-righteous, and wrapped up in what I am doing at the moment. I go to bed with a clear image of at least one person I offended in some way or another. So what's the difference then in my life?

For one thing, years ago I would not have even noticed that I had offended anyone. I was too busy wondering why no one liked me as much as I thought they should.

Something else has been happening in my life because of my desire for a deeper relationship with the Lord. I actually enjoy people. I like being with them, listening to them, sharing jokes with them as well as being a shoulder for someone to lean on when needed. And yes, I have friends, good friends. The false intimacy I learned as a boy is being replaced one day at a time.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its evil desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph.4.22-24)

I remember the days of telling myself "As soon as I can stop doing this evil thing, I will find the freedom I so desperately desire in my life." I equated holiness with the absence of sin and set about to 'stop doing' all those things I shouldn't be doing. The trouble with that approach is that no matter what I did, sin would always be as close as my next choice. In my arrogance, I was elevating my efforts above the atonement won for me by Christ on the cross.

Jesus IS relationship of the purest order. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to receive the love of Christ without realizing that the same love is offered to the person who made me angry at work. Wow! In

the eyes of Jesus we *are* all equal, and does that revelation shatter the idea of being on the outside looking in.

This knowledge isn't going to make my relationships with others any easier, but a world of possibilities does present itself. *In Him* I can receive as well as give love to another. *In Him* the pieces of myself that I thought were shattered can come together into the arrangement originally in His design. And *in Him* I can relate without fear of needing to say "If only. . ."

With Great Expectation

October 1999

Reunions can be traumatic events or blessed times and often both. . . especially if the reunion celebrates 35 years of distance from one's high school days. Naturally, we had all gotten older although some more gracefully than others.

I bought a new sport coat just for the event because I had expanded in life in more ways than one, and the ones I owned that fit were of a winter weight. The week or so before the actual reunion was spent looking at high school memorabilia, wondering whether or not this or that person would be there.

In those 35 years, my life certainly had not gone in the directions I had planned, and a few of the turns I had taken were of the "I hope no one knows" variety. I suspect, however, that I was not alone in my apprehension. One unexpected blessing, however, came in the form of a last minute invitation to lead the music for our time of worship together. I had been asked to do what I love doing - singing praise to God and encouraging others to do likewise.

The reunion was over before I knew it and the ride home was filled with sharing observations of the experience with my wife. Only one individual specifically had told me that he knew some of my feared background, but his acknowledgment was very gentle, shared with a "But I believe God has changed you" look. Maybe he didn't say it in so many words, but I knew it was truth within myself. I *had* changed. It took 35 years and the process continues but it *does* continue.

If you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2.1-5)

Recently, I met a young man who sees himself as gay but is open to change if that is what he truly believes the Lord desires for him in his life. As I listened to him share his feelings about the conflicts brought on by his homosexuality, I was almost overwhelmed by his simple goodness.

At some point in the conversation, however, my mind was drawn back to what I believed, what I shared with so many. Homosexuality is a condition born out of brokenness of one kind or another. Homosexuality is *not* God's design.

Had I let those beliefs remain unspoken, I would have been encouraging him to accept the way things were for him as being the best they could be. That would have been a lie.

I wish now that I could have given him the words of Proverbs 2.1-5 that evening, but they weren't there. They are now, and I believe that God will make sure he hears them.

The verses almost parallel the path most of us take in coming to a new intimacy with God. There is almost a casual nature found in verse one, "*If you accept my words and store up my commands within you. . .*" Not much commitment required here other than a willingness to listen and retain rather than reject.

" . . . turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding" moves us into active involvement with all that has been heard and retained. I don't see this as a point of surrendering those beliefs within ourselves that are in conflict with God as much as entering into a moral debate.

Remembering my own youth, there was a time of trying to reconcile what *I* wanted with what I was learning *God* wanted. My search for wisdom was really more of a search for a loophole in Scripture that would allow me to justify doing what I was doing.

" . . . and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding" is, I think, that point we reach born of frustration mixed with an honest desire to find resolution. It is the "Okay, maybe homosexuality is not what you want of me. Then *show me* how I get to the other side of this problem! Make it go away so that I can be what you want me to be!" No number of exclamation points can ever overstate the desire of the feelings I have shared. The words were mine in the dark hours when I felt no one was looking, and the words belong to countless men and women dealing with homosexuality.

" . . . and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure. . ." Ah, that's different than merely listening and retaining. The verse implies a real hunger within to allow God total control, total

presence in my life. The vision of a treasure demands a focus that is constant and a willingness to sacrifice whatever it takes to find that treasure. This is no mere scavenger hunt you and I are on, but a quest to take the narrow road in order to achieve the eternal reward.

“ . . . *then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.*” This treasure, which the apostle said we hold in earthen vessels, is not merely that we come to believe Jesus loves us, any more than it is permission to remain standing still in our relationship with God.

This relationship we seek is not about the absence of homosexual feelings but the willingness to be transformed. I don't know exactly what that looks like in my life, but I am encouraged that *Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* (1Cor.13.12) But this much I do know. I look forward to that coming time with great expectation and I hope you do as well. Praise God!

What if. . .

December 1999

"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Matthew 19:21-22)

What if the question the young man asked was "How can I be free of homosexuality?" and what if Jesus responded, "Let nothing separate your heart from my heart"? Would the young man have walked away saddened by what Jesus was really asking or would he have found himself filled with joy?

Those who believe that homosexuality is a gift from God would reject the question *and* the answer I have proposed, because in their minds there would be no reason to ask the question in the first place.

Those at the other end of the spectrum would acknowledge the answer Jesus gave to the young man with a "See, that's all there is to it" look. They might also be quick to point out that the failures, struggles, and doubts the young man might have along the way would be the result of *his* lack of faith and *his* lack of commitment. Some might even vote to expel him from their churches simply *because* he struggles.

Would the response Jesus gave be easier had He said, "Sell your computer and spend more time with me"? A non-computer person would nod vigorously in agreement but not so for the person who has grown accustomed to all computers can do.

The point is not that Jesus wants us to reject all 'things' in our lives. Rather, we are not to make 'things' more important than God. The point is not that Jesus promises an absence of temptation. Rather, He promises to be with us through *all* temptation.

Sometimes I feel as if I am in a loop of logic. I see myself as the young man asking the question and expecting a list of things I can do to set aside the problem once and for all. What I hear from God is not a list of steps but a sense of His desire to have an even deeper relationship with me, and that appeals to me very much. I ride this crest until my humanness and my past failures rise up, reminders of the choices I had made which were not of God. Then I start to think "I must be doing something wrong. This is all my fault."

The walls of darkness are not as high as they once were, however, and I hear the voice of my Heavenly Father reminding me of our relationship more quickly than before. It is still a cycle but not the cycle of despair such as it had once been.

I will confess to you that I really like my computer, and I don't want to have to give it up. Maybe I have convinced myself that life would be almost impossible without it. I tell myself it is not an idol yet some days it comes close.

What if Jesus were to ask me to surrender this object of my affection? What would it cost me? What would I gain? Each of us needs only to look deep within to see that God is not first in all things.

One of the difficulties we all face is that our *Aidols*® often feel so right and answer so many needs that surely they must be of God. "He loves me and cares for me." "She understands me better than anyone I have ever known." "What we feel for one another is good and affirming. God cannot be against anything like *our* relationship."

It's reasonably easy to admonish a gay or lesbian from the platform of 'never been there, never done that.' Talk to a parent whose child is gay or lesbian and you'll begin to see the complexities involved. Talk to someone who is in a relationship that for the moment is the best thing that has happened in a long time and the whole issue takes on dimensions not imagined by someone looking in from the outside.

I would add, however, that any person who is compassionate will understand the difficulties I offer, but they will continue to encourage seeking freedom for someone dealing with homosexuality regardless of the difficulties. The difference between this kind of person and one who authoritatively points a finger of self-righteousness is that the compassionate person will not stop praying for the one in homosexuality.

The battle for one seeking freedom from homosexuality is not between the individual and God but between the individual and him- or herself. It is the realistic acknowledgment of needs that deserve to be met but met in a manner which is wholly pleasing to the Lord.

A friend wrote to tell me that in writing his testimony, he found his entire life in God's word. I can believe that. Many are the times most of us can identify with David's anger, his hopes, and his love of God. Who hasn't felt a little like Job when the car decides to stop running; when water invades the house after a rainy spell; when one promotion after another is given to someone else; and when friends are saying "Hey, do it. God won't mind."

Who hasn't felt the battle of doing the very things we know we shouldn't do? Who hasn't held back from God the first fruits and offered instead the leftovers? Who hasn't stood at the foot of the cross knowing that Jesus was dying for sins He did not commit.

The journey is not easy. Asking "What if. . ." is an interesting pastime, an intellectual pursuit, and even the groundwork of a worthy decision, but surrender to the heart of God is actually the first step, the second step, and each step beyond that.

2000

Who will cheer us on?

February 2000

Not long ago I received a letter from a man in prison, sharing with me that his struggle with homosexuality was difficult but not impossible. He was experiencing victory each day over temptations despite his prison environment.

At the same time, he had a very real concern about what would happen when he was finally released. From everything he had seen on television or read in papers and magazines, his desire for freedom from homosexual behavior was in contradiction to what he saw as the world's view. Why not, he wrote, give up and save himself the anxiety that was sure to be his?

All sorts of people should be saying to him, "No, no! Don't give up! We know that with God's help you can stand firm in your resolution!" But there are no crowds of well wishers in his life, the number willing to be vocal supporters dwindling in the face of a determined social movement.

Years ago, I looked for answers for my own life's struggle with homosexuality and found little that I understood or could apply. But at least the few who knew offered prayers of encouragement. I don't remember anyone cheering me on back then because those who knew didn't really understand much about homosexuality. Besides, when I was a boy, we didn't talk about this sort of thing. We whispered.

The Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery and reminded Him of the Mosaic law that such a woman was to be stoned. Jesus said, "If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8.7) No one did. When all had left, Jesus asked her, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (Vs.10)

Modern day Pharisees respond to the homosexual struggler with signs that say "God hates Fags." They are more concerned with open condemnation than they are with making any attempt to heal the wounds. They cast verbal stones and end up driving those seeking help deeper into the choices of their past. I must take care, however, that I don't condemn with the same self-righteous attitude.

Most people at both ends of the issue on homosexuality act with good intention and from a foundation of a strong belief system. There is, however, a really large group in the middle who don't see homosexuality as a viable alternative—certainly not an equal to heterosexuality.

These are the people who might admit their reservations to a very close friend but if called upon to take a stand, they would most probably shrug and say "As long as they don't bother me." Part of their nature is to find a place in the middle where no one "will get hurt," especially not someone who is known and loved.

These are also some of the people who deal with same-sex attraction in their own lives, would prefer not to have it, but consign themselves to getting by as best they can. It is not a life they choose but one to which they adapt.

The man who wrote from prison and the large group of people in the middle are being influenced in the same fashion. They hear and read, "Homosexuality is genetic. Those who disagree with homosexuality are hate-filled people. If they call themselves Christians, they certainly are not Christ-like in their attitude."

On another level, the entertainment media (especially sitcoms) almost heralds being gay as a positive, fun-loving option. Any problems gays have are shown to be directly related to societal homophobia or lack of support.

How then does one seeking help find it from people who are being taught no help is needed? How does one who believes that homosexual behavior is sin come to learn how they might help bring

someone out of that behavior if even our church leaders take a neutral or even pro-gay stance? The answer is quite simple—only with great difficulty or not at all.

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke **and encourage**—with great patience and careful instruction.” (2Tim.4.2 *Italics mine*)

One of the blessings of a support group is that individuals who struggle with an issue can meet others with similar struggles, all parties willing to help each other in prayer and encouragement. Another blessing is that each individual is able to speak of self-doubts and failings without the fear of being rejected or turned away.

When an individual not expected to win a competition begins to pass those who are the “favorites,” people cheer and find themselves caught up in support of the individual overcoming the odds. The victory is not as important as the process of moving toward the victory.

None of us wants our sins broadcast to the world, yet there are times when we all wish that more people would stand at the sidelines and cheer us on. We need, however, to remember that in the joy of seeing a child’s first steps we recognized that they were “baby steps” -- not always in a straight line nor without the inevitable fall. Ours is not to encourage the fall but the desire to get up and keep trying. For in our spiritual walk, those who cheer us on are pointing us to the outstretched hands of our Heavenly Father.

If Today You Hear His Voice

April 2000

If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me, tried Me, though they had seen My work. (Psalm 95.7-9)

Most of us have a certain verse which comes easily to mind, a passage from God's Word which provides strength in difficult times, and passages in which we find comfort, healing, and affirmation. We also have passages that have challenged us.

"If today" is a portion of Scripture that has confronted me repeatedly since the days of my youth. I want comfort, healing, and affirmation, not a challenge. "Please, God, do this" or "Dear Lord, if only you would. . ." are the kind of prayer uttered most often.

From the earliest times in my struggle with homosexuality, I'd beg God to take away everything that made me so unlike other boys and later unlike other men. The years passed and nothing seemed to change.

For a time, I was angry at God because He said that if I asked anything in His name it would be granted me. Well, I had asked for freedom from homosexual temptation and it had not happened. I had asked for the healing of my sexuality and my struggles remained. What kind of God, I wondered, would reject the desire of my heart?

If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Being an all-wise, stubborn teenager, I fully believed God was not listening to *me*, so why should I listen to Him? Besides, back then I didn't know the sound of His voice but I *did* know He was there. I didn't understand our relationship but there grew in me a desire for more of it.

The years passed and the problems remained and intensified. I really wanted one of two things from God—either God show me that I was created homosexual and it was okay, *or* God should work a miracle and remove all desires of a homosexual nature. He did neither.

If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Every time I whispered or thought those words, I wondered "How will I know it's God?" If God's voice was anything at all to me, it was a gnawing sense of discomfort. "Why are you doing that?" "Why do you turn from me?"

At first, the voice sounded so negative, a rebuke to my thoughts and actions. Now the voice asks the same questions, but I can hear the love behind the words. It's almost as if God is saying "When you choose that, you are rejecting something I have for you that is better."

Reality, however, has taught me that when I reject some thought or action because of the gnawing voice within, I am faced with a need that I am not answering. My choices are right in front of me—God's solution is often impossible to see at the moment. This makes me feel like I am giving up something without getting something in return, and on occasion I harden my heart and ignore the voice within.

. . .when your fathers tested Me, tried Me, though they had seen My work. As I look around the world in which I live, there is little doubt that we have become a stubborn people. Sitting in our pews on Sunday mornings, we listen to readings from the Old Testament. We hear over and over how God's people rejected Him in favor of the idols created by their own hands. We say in our hearts, "How could they do that? Don't they remember the covenant?" We even say, "I would never have done that."

I think the people of the Old Testament faced the same problem I face and they found their answer in making *their* choice be God's choice. After all, they may have reasoned, "If what we do is of God, how can it be wrong?" One person convinced another and together they convinced others. Before long, still others were saying, "If so many people believe this is of God, then it must be so."

With time, people learn to ignore the gnawing voice. I think they have hardened their hearts, not so much by rejecting God as by blaming the homophobic people of the world for any feelings of discomfort they might still have in making their choices.

There was time when I might have admitted to a certain amount of envy. After all, I saw those in committed relationships as having chosen what I once thought I wanted. "Gays love God, go to church, and are really good people," but this is the argument used to justify a choice I believe to be contrary to God's Word.

The focus of the pro-gay agenda is on good words like love and nurturing and on good people like those I know and respect. I am told that gay people are my neighbors. I am told they are just like me except that they are attracted to others of the same gender. In their argument, it makes no sense for anyone to be opposed to gay rights unless, of course, the one objecting is a bigot guilty of gross discrimination.

If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Everything I have written and believe has taken a journey of 38 years, and I am still growing, still changing, and still healing. My heart is still hardened, however, more than I want it to be, and I am certainly no better or worse than anyone else. I am learning, however, that God's voice is as loving as it is challenging.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. (Isaiah 55.8) God never told any of us following Him would be easy and it isn't.

A Road Less Taken?

June 2000

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 5-8)

I have shelves that are filled with books on homosexuality, several cassette cases of taped lectures, and more than a few computer disks containing literally thousands of letters or articles written over the years on this topic.

If the process of change, then, is the direct result of accumulating this kind of knowledge, why don't we just look for the perfect book, the most meaningful tape, or the personal reflection that will make it happen?

I think that too often we put the cart before the horse, so to speak, by intensely focusing our attention on what we wish to change. The *freedom* from a particular behavior then becomes the goal. With time (and given the absence of that specific behavior), we see something else in ourselves that needs changing, and we begin looking for yet another book, tape, or article.

This is not to say that the tools I have mentioned are not valuable, because they are. Nor am I suggesting that we sit back and wait for God to drop healing in our laps. I am suggesting, however, that the words in 2 Peter might be a better roadmap.

Add Goodness to Faith

If faith is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see," (Heb.11.1) we must start with a declaration. "God did not create homosexuality." Such a declaration will activate the prayers of those who struggle with same-sex attraction. Faith tells us that God will bring us to healing. Faith does not tell us *how* this healing will happen, only that it will. But the statement we have made is a critical part of the whole process.

Putting on goodness is an attitude of giving and receiving. It is reaching out beyond ourselves to bring someone else to a better place as well as giving ourselves permission to allow others to brighten our lives in whatever manner God should choose. In my experience, relationships centered on goodness are free of the distortions found so often in homosexuality.

Add Knowledge to Goodness

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." (Prov.1.7) With time and persistence, we can come to "know" God and to be in deeper relationship with the Lord of our lives. When you admit to one person that you "know" someone else, you imply that you can do more than recognize the person at sight. Such knowledge is only gained by an active involvement in the life of someone else.

To know another is to look into that person's heart while at the same time allowing your own heart to be viewed. When God is the source and foundation of the goodness you offer, the "me" attitude of one caught up in same-sex attractions has no foothold in the relationship.

Add Self-Control to Knowledge

Knowledge of the Lord provides us with a compass in our behavior choices, but it does not prevent storms or attempts to distract us. Scripture reminds us that we must exercise self-control when faced with decisions, but also points out that self-control is listed as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5.22).

It is ironic that we expect little children to respond to the adult "No" when we so often ignore the "No" in our own moral choices. Ironic, too, is our follow-up comment, "You should have known better" to a child who has ignored our "No" in order to satisfy a need which somehow backfired. If we ourselves truly know better, should we not also choose better?

Add Perseverance to Self-Control

Have you ever noticed that we don't talk about perseverance when what is happening to us is good? Perseverance occurs when we are between a rock and a hard place and the decision to do right doesn't

make us “feel” better. Perseverance is the grace God gives us to see the finish line despite Satan’s attempts to block the view.

Add Godliness to Perseverance

If a man is wearing a football uniform, we presume him to be a football player, as people in many occupations are identified by their uniform or manner of dress. One who wears the mantle of godliness is presumed to center life around the things of God in addition to whatever other uniform the person might wear. One must, however, be in relationship with God in order to know the things of God and live in a manner representing God’s presence.

Add Brotherly Kindness to Godliness

Some years ago, a man called me Brother Bob. Certainly not so strange in itself except that such a title was not common in my church or community. This same man called a woman we both knew, “Sister.”

Being in relationship with God produces an awareness of the Presence of God in us, in everything, and in everyone. If we look at others with eyes of spiritual recognition, we *are* related to one another and seek to give only our best to one another.

Add Love to Brotherly Kindness

This is where, for some, the process gets somewhat bogged down, because too many define the word “love” in purely emotional terms. This emotional love isn’t so much the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 as it is a self-centered, receiving love.

Years ago, I wrote in this newsletter one of the prevailing arguments used by those content, no, adamant that homosexuality was fine. The argument went something like this: God created love; I love ____; therefore, God created the love I have for ____ and it is blessed.

The fact is that God *did* create that love, but there are boundaries in all relationships that cannot be violated in God’s name.

I am not implying that I have the perfect definition of love, but I do maintain that love finds its definition because of our relationship with God. “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Vs.8)

As I grow in the Lord (admittedly by baby steps), same sex attraction is far less an issue for me than it once was. I don’t feel myself to be on the crusade toward freedom from same-sex attraction that almost consumed me years ago. And I am far more content to seek the Lord with all that is in me, knowing that He will resolve those things that I cannot. A road less taken? Yes. The right road? It is the one God has shown me and the one that I walk.

Are Homosexuals Born that Way?

August 2000

I graduated from college with visions of a successful career mixed with the realization that four years of study had not solved any of the personal issues in my life. If anything, the problems grew worse, and my separation from others only became more recognizable to me (although mostly hidden from them).

The attitude toward homosexuality back then was biased and often very hostile. The “closet” was a moveable wall of secrecy carried from one relationship into the next, being found out often meant derision and occasionally worse.

I knew that I was not alone as a young man looking for help with this issue, yet the hush-hush tones used to even mention the word “homosexual” almost guaranteed such feelings of loneliness.

In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its “Diagnostics & Statistical Manual,” a manual listing disorders. They maintained that homosexuality did not really qualify to be on this list for a number of reasons. The decision at the time by the APA, however, recognized that this condition was “not normal” and might be reason for treatment for some people. This fact has, in the past 26 years, been glossed over and eliminated as though never there in the first place.

I felt some relief at the announcement because the APA was telling me I was okay *just* the way I was. For the first time in my life, I seriously considered the question “Did God make me this way?” as well as the broader question, “Can I stop struggling and just learn to live with homosexuality?” My eventual answer to both was “No.”

Regardless of what the APA was saying, regardless of that part of me which wanted to embrace homosexuality, there was something deeper within me that rejected all that.

The APA decision also all but dried up whatever research was being done in terms of treatment with homosexuality until the mid-eighties. By the late eighties the attitude within much of the medical community had become “If it isn’t broken, why look for a fix?” For men and women such as myself, the silence was deafening, the isolation ever-increasing, and the hope for help dwindling.

In the mid-seventies, however, a small number of ministries with a specific focus on homosexuality had begun to appear. What was even more astounding to me when I heard of them was that these ministries believed it was possible to change homosexual thinking and behavior in ways I had always wanted but hadn’t found.

Community reaction to this ever-growing list of ministries was mixed. Most people did not understand homosexuality, believing instead that being homosexual was nothing more than loving someone of the same gender. And what, they asked, was so wrong with that?

As the years passed, the word homosexual was replaced with gay; the rainbow became the symbol of diversity, and the political and social climate began embracing what was formerly misunderstood without really having a better understanding of homosexuality at all.

Studies began appearing, some flawed and others not since duplicated, attempting to show a genetic cause and effect relationship in homosexuality. One common bond in each of the studies was that environment played a role in the formation of the homosexual condition.

The gay and lesbian community looks upon those who seek change from their homosexuality as being in a state of denial. Those who disagree with the gay agenda or seek to minister change are labeled homophobic. Therapists claim this is as detrimental to gays and lesbians as it is to the alleged homophobe. Like many others, I *have* experienced change in my life and it is not simply living in a state of constant repression. To have come this far only to be called homophobic truly baffles me.

What About God?

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (Matthew 7.13 NIV)

I have been describing a progression of events and attitudes as I have witnessed them without much reference to the most important element—God.

When I was young and struggling alone with homosexuality, there was little doubt in my mind that I was not being obedient to the will of God. Yet I continued to choose what seemed to answer legitimate needs in my life with what were, in fact, illegitimate solutions.

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb.13.5) and He doesn't. Eventually I reached the end of myself and my choices--all of which seemed to have begun innocently enough but which had flowered into weeds choking my spirit--and surrendered to God.

There was no instant liberation, no flash of spiritual lightning accompanying the surrender I made. As a matter of fact, instead of the wide road I had been on, what lay in front of me was a narrow path lined with hecklers on either side.

I could see others on the path ahead of me, some walking alongside, and still others just joining this narrow road. The air often seemed filled with the voices of therapists affirming homosexuality, politicians equating diversity with complete permissiveness, and clergy announcing that homosexuality was a *gift from God!*

Homosexuals can and do love God with the same and even greater intensity as heterosexuals. Christians who believe otherwise are ignoring a simple truth: God loves all His creation, not just those who are considered heterosexual. Additionally, we are *ALL* called to be witnesses of His word, and not only witnesses but followers as well.

I cannot speak for the heart of another person in terms of his or her relationship with God; therefore I cannot judge the heart of another person. What I can do is pray—for myself and my own continuing desire for obedience and for others seeking God in their lives.

A heart that buys into the rhetoric of social evolution on a topic such as homosexuality merely to be "correct" or to be seen as "loving and broad-minded" only encourages the construction of wider roads and gates. Eventually, the wider roads and gates lead to not merely an acceptance of man-determined morality but a belief that such a determination is both right and fitting. When humans think themselves God, God no longer exists.

The majority wins? Sometimes. But in the light of the spiritual journey we are all on, I sincerely pray that the majority are on the narrow road headed for the narrow gate.

Whose Sin is it?

October 2000

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (John 9.1-3)

There are not many discussions on homosexuality that do not include the question as to whether or not the homosexual condition is genetic. If it is, then the argument will be made by some that it is a person's "nature" to be either homosexual or heterosexual.

Further, those same people would argue that Scriptures describing homosexual behavior as an abomination were meant only for heterosexuals who "played at" homosexual behavior, not for those *born* as a homosexual. After all, the sin is in going against one's nature. . .not in being true to it.

In recent years, a number of studies boldly announced findings in headlines around the country which supported a genetic cause and effect to the homosexual condition. The fact that follow-up studies replicating the original studies did not produce the same results should have been a matter of concern, but this inconsistency was not seen that way by the media.

I do not personally believe in the genetic argument for homosexuality as too many who write describing their orientation point to their condition as being more a matter of environment.

If, however, I substitute the word "homosexual" for the word "blind" in the verses above, it would read, *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born homosexual?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."*

Jesus didn't directly address the genetic responsibility for the man's condition, but pointed instead to the larger picture—*so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*. I don't know about you, but I find the whole idea of God working through my life to be very exciting. What it says to me is that you and I are directly connected to God's purpose, and that God wills to become evident to others through you and me.

In Alan Medinger's excellent new book, *Growth into Manhood* (WaterBrook Press), he points to the importance of self-identity as a means of becoming the men and women we are called to become. He points out that behavior and attraction are much more difficult to change without a corresponding change in self-identity.

Why do we find it so difficult to believe that God has a divine purpose for our lives? Why are we so content to identify with our struggles rather than with becoming the vehicle for that work God wishes to display through our lives?

You might find yourself asking, "But whose fault is it, then, that I even struggle with homosexuality? What's so wrong with being homosexual if that's all I've ever felt myself to be? And if I'm content with my life, who are you to say that I am wrong?"

Homosexuality *does* come about because of environmental factors such as abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, or spiritual), being abandoned or rejected by those who were meant to nurture you, and peer rejection, as well as accepting a false intimacy rather than one free of distortion.

In other words, you and I could point a finger at some person, some particular event, or at a host of other possibilities, but doing so doesn't alter the reality of your current feelings. Assigning blame might make you feel more justified, but it changes little.

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with his saliva, and put it in the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam." So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (Vs.6-7)

Why did Jesus make mud? Why rub that mud in the man's eyes and then tell him to wash in the pool of Siloam? Why didn't Jesus do what he must have done repeatedly in other situations, and just healed the man with a word or two?

I think that there *is* a parallel between my life (our lives) and that of the blind man. In my search for answers over these many years, I have come to some conclusions about the source of some of my homosexual struggle, but not all. On occasion, the struggle has that "it seems like a lifetime" quality to it. . .like I was "born this way."

Like the disciples, the Church is trying to understand, trying to find out whose fault homosexuality is or if it's genetic, and trying in its awkward way to show Christian love. Maybe the Church is like the Pharisees, wanting to know whether or not they should assign sinful guilt so that they might wash their collective hands. And maybe the Church settles for open acceptance because of a lack of understanding in how to minister to the homosexual struggler.

Jesus responded to the blind man by expecting obedience from the man as he placed the mud on his eyes, and obedience as he went to the Pool of Siloam to wash. Because of his obedience, the man could see! Because of his obedience, the work of God was displayed in his life!

For me, that time of accepting homosexual behavior in my life as being "just the way I was" eliminated much of the struggle. If it was my nature, then there was no sin. If there was no sin, then those who knew and loved me weren't faced with a struggle either.

We Have Been Called by Name

December 2000

But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not for I have redeemed you! I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” (Isaiah 43.1-2)

God’s People

Fear not for I have redeemed you! Led into the desert by Moses, the people of Israel had been redeemed from the yoke of slavery they had experienced under Egyptian rule. God came to them in a cloud and let His presence be seen by all. After passing them safely through the sea, He fed them, gave them drink, and disciplined them. As much as they angered Him with their obstinacy, He continued to love them. He never turned from them, but He did give them seasons of discipline.

And when the children of Israel chose not to live according to His commands, He sent them prophets to remind them of His love and to convict them of their sin. Finally, He sent the chosen one, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. God knew that only the Word made flesh would bring His people back to Him. Only His Son, Jesus Christ, could atone once and for all for the sins of *all* humanity. Only His Son, Jesus Christ, could open the gates of eternal life. What an awesome God we serve!

We Have Been Called

I have called you by name. “I have called *you* by name.” And the Lord our God doesn’t call us homosexual or lesbian. We are His children, created in His image and likeness. Each one of us is called to bring Him honor and glory. Each one of us is called to bring ourselves to His altar. Individually, we are each the gift He created to bring joy.

It is all too easy to reject the name we are given by the Lord, because we all feel at times like the struggles we face are simply too much. Many of us say, “I take 10 steps forward, fall, and feel as though I am starting all over.” Others might offer, “I have prayed and prayed for freedom but it doesn’t come.” Still others, “Why doesn’t God just come out and let the world know His will in light of what’s happening today?” “Give us a sign, Lord.” But then, Jesus already answered that last question, didn’t he. “This is a wicked generation,” He said. *It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will be the Son of Man to this generation..* (Luke 11.29-30)

God Knows Us

I have called you by name. It isn’t a name without struggles or temptations. Nor is it a name free of sin, free of falling, free of rejection. It is a name that tells an incredible story to anyone willing to listen. It is a name not unlike a well-worn tool with its scrapes, scratches, dents, and other imperfections, a name used willingly and lovingly, a name that is all we have when everything is said and done. And it is a name that has been given us by our loving Father in Heaven.

I think the thing that truly amazes me as a particularly sinful man, is the reality that I still have merit in the eyes of God. Nothing I have done has caused Him to reject me. But in my human way of thinking, anyone who had done what I have done deserves everything he or she gets. And as I say those words, my first inclination is to hear the words as many in the world would offer them—riddled with anger and rage. “No punishment is too great,” they protest, “no condemnation too trivial for the likes of you.”

And Loves Us

But Jeremiah 31:3 says, *Long ago the Lord said to Israel: Al have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.* “With unfailing love. . .not with the kind of love you and I have which can be fickle—here today, gone tomorrow.

I mention this because much of the healing process can be made more difficult when our perception of God’s response to our struggle is that He will eventually reject us no matter how hard we try to change. God IS on your side. He IS on my side. The only side He will NOT support is the sin itself. And most certainly, God does NOT support the efforts of the Prince of Darkness, the Great Deceiver.

The Labels We Wear

One of Satan's most insidious tools is despair. Haven't we all felt that "It's never going to get better" feeling every now and then? Certainly I know I have. But years ago during the lowest point of my despair, I heard God call. I couldn't recognize all of the words but I did recognize that they were directed at me. There is not a person reading this who has not felt the nudging of the Lord in his or her life. We *have* been called by name.

Some of the things we all struggle identify the struggle like a first or last name. AThere goes Overweight Bob," "Mike Alcoholic," "Stuck-up Sue," or "Gladys the gossip." Usually those names are given to us by others based on their observation of our behaviors. While these might be painful and highly reminiscent of childhood taunts, I think the more devastating names are the ones we assign ourselves without telling others. They are *secret* names and they are *rarely* good names.

The names that many of us include for ourselves have these labels: *homosexual, lesbian, compulsive/addictive*, and *co-dependently enmeshed*. The one name that should not hold any of us back, however, is *sinner*, because Jesus has taken our sins upon Himself to the cross. He has *not* taken away our passion for committing the sins, but He *has* taken away the eternal consequences of those sins when we repent of them.

And when we repent, we beg God for the grace to withstand temptation. Being tempted, I often tell people, is a sign that we are still in the battle, that Satan has not won the war. Sadly, too many see temptation as just another link in the chain of sinful behavior that binds us. They see temptation as confirmation of their worst opinion of themselves. And they see temptation as *confirmation* of the name they wear with shame.

The Right Name?

Is it, then, just a matter of identification? Of having the right name? No, because that would be too simplistic. A person who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior becomes a Christian, but becoming a Christian does not automatically change what happens in life. . .it means that the foundation for choice has been altered. Rather than filtering all choice through past personal experience, an individual now weighs his or her choice against God's word, remembers how past choices were less than acceptable, and seeks a choice that is compatible with his or her new name B Christian.

David wrote, *He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* (Ps.23.3)

God's Name

For HIS name's sake. . .God's name. What besides God is God's name? Well. . .Yahweh. Jehoveh. In Isaiah 9.6, we read, "and HIS name shall be called **Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.**"

In Matthew 1.23, we read, *Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

There is not a name given so far in my very short list that is commonplace. God is the epitome of any positive trait—He is the perfect counselor and Father. Yet somewhere in all those perfect qualities and states of being, I am reminded that *He restores my soul.* He *guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* For many of us, however, *to restore the soul* means only a temporary release from the weight of our human condition, perhaps particularly as it relates to homosexuality.

Difficult, for some reason, are the *paths of righteousness* -- those of safety, as directed by God, and pleasing to Him. Those paths are reminders to us that we do battle with the desires of our minds and bodies, and those desires are not always directed by God or pleasing to Him.

But now, this is what the Lord says, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not for I have redeemed you! I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters (those places where you might be unsure of yourself or your next step), I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers (caught up by the world in which you live), they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire (the world's choices you know to be sin and through the agony of temptation), you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." (Isaiah 43.1-2)

We have ALL been called by name. We have ALL be invited to His dance. I pray that this very day will be an experience of God, a taste of His presence, and a personal note of love from Him to you.

2001

What in the World is Happening?

February 2001

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15.19)

At some point in everyone's life, the words, "Things were much better years ago" usually find their way into some discussions. Comments about television and movies of the 50's and 60's, in particular, would include the idea that everything seemed more wholesome back then.

Good or bad, there was a censor inspecting every TV program or movie for objectionable material—especially in areas of sexual behavior (implied or otherwise) and language. It could be argued that the programs we watched didn't really reflect life as everyone lived it, but most of us could and did fill in the blanks on our own. We called it imagination.

Homosexuality certainly wasn't a new concept when I was a child, yet I felt as though I must be the only one who had an attraction to other guys. Interestingly, it didn't dawn on me that those with whom I had sexual contact were also in the same boat. Somehow I saw them as just agreeing to *my* fantasies, not that I might be a part of *theirs*.

Boys of my youth who were suspected of being homosexual were picked on, made fun of, and occasionally physically mistreated. There were times when I heard of girls being called names that I didn't understand, and as I grew older, I gradually understood the word lesbian.

Such mistreatment of homosexuals was just as wrong then as it is now, and there can be no excuse or justification for it. Ironically, many Christians then and now feel a self-righteousness and even a Biblical mandate to loudly condemn and harass homosexuals.

I have never read anything in Scripture, however, which would support their position of hatred or the rejection of redemptive healing. It doesn't surprise me, therefore, to see homosexuals reject the traditional church, especially if all that church does is reject the homosexual struggler.

Somewhere along the way, abhorrence for such bigotry mixed with sympathy. And for some reason, the solution to this hatred was not merely to condemn it, but to condemn it and at the same time elevate homosexuality to a place of acceptance as a healthy alternative to heterosexuality.

This attitude didn't surface over night, but came as the result of a very subtle agenda. When I think about homosexual characters I have seen in movies or on TV, it seems that they've either been portrayed as sad and withdrawn (seeking sympathy) or as outgoing and exaggerated caricatures (offering comedy).

I remember crying for the boy in *Tea and Sympathy* when I finally understood his isolation from the others in his class because of his sexual attractions. And I was very depressed the first time I saw *Boys in the Band* and understood the loneliness of growing older as a homosexual man.

More and more TV sitcoms include a homosexual person, and in many 30-minute weekly programs, this character is often someone who is very intelligent, witty, and more often than not good for a laugh.

I fully understand that not all homosexuals are characterized as I have described them, but there are sufficient examples to lend truth to what I am saying and to make my comments valid.

In the end, the homosexual character (male or female) is not a bad person. In fact, many of those characters are endearing—we *like* them. And because we like them, we find ourselves being encouraged to rethink our attitude toward homosexuality.

The position now becomes, "If I like a person, then it shouldn't make any difference if that person is homosexual or not, nor should what he or she does in private be of my concern."

But who ever said that homosexuals were "bad" people? Who ever said that we can't come to like a person who is homosexual? There are many individuals I like very much, yet I cannot endorse everything they do or say.

I went to a web site where I saw a listing of TV programs featuring homosexual characters. Not watching all that much TV these days, I was surprised at just how many programs did include an openly gay individual. It was, however, almost as if increased frequency of the appearance of gay characters was meant to lend validity to the equality of homosexual and heterosexual orientation.

Is there, by chance, a parallel between the use of street language in prime television with the indoctrination of our culture as to its acceptability, and the homosexual issue?

In the 50's and 60's, profanity in film found its way to the cutting floor. In the 70's and 80's, a few common words considered profane made their way into our homes, while others were "beeped" out. And now in the 21st century, we hear words that no parents would teach their child.

The argument for acceptance of the words is somewhat circular: "Why hide from our children what they are exposed to day after day?" Or, "Why not simply acknowledge that such words might not be the best, but they do express emotions?" My answer: "If we don't want our children to use such language, and we tell them the words are bad, hearing those words on TV sends a mixed message to the child. It tells children that the value system of their parents is not the same the value system of the world."

Finally, if parents object to a specific program because of the choice of words or the behavior of the characters, they have only to turn the channel.

At least that's the answer offered by proponents of current trends. But children have friends, friends whose parents might very well have a value system more in tune with television standards. So who dictates morality?

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Heb.3.13)

I would argue that casual acceptance of a behavior simply because someone we like engages in that behavior IS to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. I would further argue that the world today is seeing a subtle shift, and that values once held as valid might not be valid in the eyes of the today's world.

Many of those who argue in favor of homosexuality do so from a particular bias themselves. They see only the warmth of relational love, the fact that homosexual people are compatible with other homosexual people, and the inherent goodness evident as proof that homosexuality is in and of itself a good thing.

They refuse, however, to consider the side effects of sexual behaviors among homosexual males, or the emotional co-dependency issues among lesbians.

Today, our schools offer support systems for those confused about their sexuality at the *elementary* school level. These same schools teach diversity as a noble goal, yet reject the notion that a significant segment of society might disagree with homosexual behavior. Those who do disagree are labeled bigoted, biased, or homophobic. So much for diversity.

Today, too many of our churches have settled on the formula, "God is love; where love is, God is; and if two people love each other, God approves of that love." Some church leaders have even convinced their congregations that God created men and women to be homosexual or lesbian.

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Rather than offer only criticism in this article, I want to offer hope as well.

In my own healing process, God's word reminds me often that I am to love my neighbor as myself. Those who struggle with homosexuality might have trouble with this, because in the past their love became inappropriate behavior. But learning how to form a healthy relationship takes time and effort. .and it CAN BE DONE!

We are not called to love *anyone* less. We are called to love *everyone* more. There is a lot happening in the world today, and not everything is good. Just remember that we have been *chosen out of the world*, yet while we are a part of it, we should make a positive difference.

The Hunger of My Heart

April 2001

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Rom.8.5)

This morning, I awoke with a possible title for this article and shared it with my wife before she left for work. That first title wasn't "The Hunger of My Heart," it was "The *Desire* of My Heart." My wife smiled and asked, "Me?"

As I drove to work, I remembered some of the feelings I experienced as a teenager and then as a young adult. To describe the feelings as a "desire" fell short, and I realized that what I really felt was "hunger." In those moments, my whole body became involved—a union of the mental, the emotional, the physical, and often the spiritual as well.

One of the more difficult truths I have learned over the years is that I can experience this hunger in matters that are sinful as well as in those that are not.

This truth was difficult because I lived for a long time with an "If it feels right, it *is* right" attitude. After all, how could anything so intensely felt be contrary to what was good for me? My attraction to other males fit this category. Despite my belief that such behavior was wrong, at one time in my life I went from day to day not wondering *if* I would have another same gender physical encounter, but *when*.

It should be pointed out that to be homosexual in the sixties was a fairly secret thing to be—at least in my part of the country. The word "gay" had not been redefined, and rainbows were still a reminder of God's promise never again to destroy the world by flood.

Paul wrote, "But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." (Rom.7.23) The body *does* have a "mind" of its own, and over a period of time I conditioned my body by repetition to accept as good what my mind told me was not.

As the repeated behaviors became more compatible and frequent, I found myself becoming defined by those behaviors. I knew, however, that this was a battle being waged against the image I had of myself free of homosexual behavior and the image my behaviors and growing hunger demanded.

Despite the argument "for as long as I can remember I was attracted to other males," I knew there was a time when that attraction was healthy and free of sexual intimacy.

Paul recognized this confusion when he wrote, "I do not understand my own behavior; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things I hate." (Rom.7.15) What I learned from Paul was that instead of rejecting the Law which defined some behavior as sin, he acknowledged that the Law was good. He did not try to change the Law. . . he strove to live within its boundaries.

Paul also asked the critical question, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (v.24), and he answered it, "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord." (v.25)

The answers I hear most often *in the world today* include: 1) I need to shed feelings that homosexual behavior is a sin, 2) God loves me just as I am, 3) God did, after all, create me as a homosexual, and 4) if God is love, then the physical love between people of the same gender is blessed because it is of God. Of the answers I have listed, I agree with "God loves me just as I am."

If all behavior founded upon love is good, then the only sins we commit are those sins against love. At least that's the message I hear from those who call me a homophobe because I disagree with their reasoning about homosexuality.

Paul also taught me that I could have a hunger for the ways of the Lord, a hunger which recognized that during times of being tempted I could never step outside of the love of God. Should I fail in the face of some temptation, God will remind me that the death of Jesus on the cross has atoned for my failure.

"Do not model your behavior on the contemporary world, but let the renewing of your minds transform you, so that you may discern for yourselves what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and mature." (Rom.12.2)

Over the years, I have read many books on homosexuality and have gained at least a reasonable understanding of this issue. That understanding, as Alan Medinger suggested in *Growth into Manhood*, provided me with answers but not much in the way of practical application or steps to freedom.

At the center of my growth as a man is my relationship with the Lord. I wrote earlier that God loves me just as I am, and I stand by that statement. The added truth is that God doesn't let me do everything I want to do just because He *loves* me. Saying no to a hunger born of my body is not made any easier because I love the Lord and seek to obey His will. I still want, at times, *to do what I want to do*.

One critical element in my walk has been learning how to view myself as a man in the world of men. I found that by risking a little, I was able to relate with them on more levels than I thought possible. More importantly, the distorted notion that I needed to be sexual with men was exposed for what it was—a false intimacy.

God *is* the hunger of my heart. I know that sounds weak to anyone who seeks to satisfy the hungers of the body, but this hunger *does* answer my deepest needs. My wife doesn't mind being second in my life, because she knows that she is God's gift to me—and I to her.

Seek the Face of God

June 2001

Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. (Psalm 27:7-8)

There are times when reading the Word of the Lord that I experience what can only be called a "quickenings." Something inside me jumps at the recognition of and the truth in what I have just completed reading. In those moments, I feel something profound has been revealed, yet the words themselves are simple—oftentimes verses I have heard, read, or spoken on other occasions without this kind of reaction.

My initial thought when this quickening happened while reading Psalm 27 was that it was an obvious call to obedience. That in itself didn't strike me as unusual, but the moment I started to dismiss the significance of the verse, I knew that God was talking about more than obedience. He was talking about identity.

In Matthew Henry's Concise Bible Commentary, he writes, "When we are foolishly making court to lying vanities, God is, in love to us, calling us to seek our own mercies in him. The call is general, 'Seek ye my face; but we must apply it to ourselves, I will seek it.'"

Those who come to our support group meetings seek freedom from homosexual behaviors and fantasies. Each morning, however, they look in their spiritual mirrors with frustration, because the image they see is distorted. Despite their desire to be rid of that image, they have worn it for a long time, and in some ways, it has become a comfortable image.

At the recent American Psychiatric Association Convention in New Orleans, Dr. Robert Spitzer announced the results of a study of individuals who report a substantial change in sexual orientation. Spitzer was considered the "architect of the 1973 decision" which removed homosexuality from the list of disorders.

"I'm convinced from people I have interviewed," Spitzer said, "that for many of them, they have made substantial changes toward becoming heterosexual...I think that's news."

Opponents of the Spitzer study claimed that the study did not represent the gay community. They also discredited the study because most (if not all) of the participants in the study maintained a strong religious foundation in their lives.

Dr. Spitzer's rebuttal was that the study was not meant to represent the gay community, but a segment of that community who did not accept and wanted freedom from their same-sex attractions.

In large part, however, the "success" of an individual in this study depended upon an ongoing heterosexually intimate relationship. Single men and women, celibate in their relationships, were not considered in the final analysis of Dr. Spitzer's study.

If ten people randomly chosen at a mall were asked what factors might determine whether or not someone had changed from homosexual to heterosexual, at least nine of those people would suggest the same things. First, they would offer an absence of any homosexual feelings, and second, intercourse with the opposite sex on a regular basis. In short, the criteria people use to define either heterosexuality and homosexuality is based on what someone does or doesn't do.

It has been my experience personally and as a leader of support group meetings, that identity is too often determined by the same standard. "If I do something often enough, that must be who I *am*."

Men and women come to group meetings hoping to learn techniques that will help them stop thinking and/or doing things based on a same-sex attraction. They leave enthusiastic and encouraged. At the first sign of an old way of thinking or acting, however, they fall into a depression and wonder if perhaps change isn't possible after all.

People who consider themselves happily gay look in the mirror each morning without frustration, because they have accepted the wedding of their same-sex attractions with their identity. Those who don't accept their same-sex attractions continue to be frustrated. So which is right?

Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek. The image I am called to seek is not to be a mirror of my past choices. It is to be the face of the Lord, not the face of the man inside of myself.

That sounds confusing even to me, and I wrote it. But the issue, I think, comes down to the fact that I don't know the man I am to be yet. I recognize differences within myself from the man I was fifteen years ago, but the face I see now is still a face in transition. As the saying goes, "God isn't finished with me yet."

I rest, however, on a belief I have shared a number of times in past issues of *Wellspring*—I am created in the image and likeness of God, and He knew before my birth what the final image of Bob would look like. In my heart, I don't believe God's image included homosexuality, so how do I move closer to the face of God in my life?

Seek Him

If you've ever lost something of importance and spent hours looking in every possible nook and cranny for that item, just remember the intensity of your feelings during that search. When was the last time you sought the Lord with an equal intensity? God's word says, *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.* (Jeremiah 29.13)

Get to Know God

It is one thing to say I know *of* someone (i.e. "I know who Dr. Spitzer is") and another thing completely to say I *know* someone (i.e. "I know Dr. Spitzer well"). How can I say I *know* God unless I read and study His word, sing His praises from deep within my heart, or look for His presence in the lives of people around me?

Obey His Commands

I seek you with all of my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. (Psalm 119.10) We live in a world that seeks to fashion God in its own image and likeness. God is love, the world argues, and God would never tell me I couldn't do something I *felt* was good for me, especially if what I wanted was something I believed was love. After all, if God is love, all love is of God. At least that is the argument that the world uses.

But God's Word gives evidence that our God is a Holy God, a righteous God, and a just God. *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be called righteous.* (Romans 2.13) From my experience, this sometimes means saying "No" to myself, no matter how I argue my point before the throne of God.

Seeking God Takes a Lifetime

I believe that my entire life's purpose is to seek after God, to love God with every fiber of my being, and to listen to the ways in which God would have my life be different. And in this process, God blesses me and those I love with His immeasurable grace.

Seeking the face of God is ultimately to become the man I am meant to become, not the man I thought I was years ago. The mirror is less distorted these days, and tomorrow, with God's help, the image will be even clearer.

Change Happens

August 2001

So God created man in His own image, in the name of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in numbers." (Gen.1.27-28)

It's impossible to attend support group meetings on a weekly basis for twelve years and not learn something. One of those things I have learned is that some things change and some things don't. Pretty profound, wouldn't you say.

But the truth of the matter is that men and women come to support groups all over the country with a desire to be completely free of all homosexual attractions. They want an absolute alteration in their lives that demands the absence of homosexual thought or behavior. Many find success in that they no longer choose homosexual behavior, and a few no longer have homosexual thoughts or attractions. But for the majority, the behaviors change but the thoughts still invade their privacy in varying degrees of frequency.

"Aha!" say those who believe one cannot change orientation. "If change really was possible, there would be no more same sex attraction. The fact that you still are attracted only supports the truth that you were born a homosexual. The sooner you accept this simple truth, the happier you will be."

For the homosexual struggler, such logic is a little like having carpenter ants. Most of the time you don't see them, but they are there doing irreparable damage to the foundation of a home.

I don't believe that people choose to be gay in the simplistic manner in which they might choose a TV program to watch, and I do believe that most gay people do not "come out" without having finally arrived at a conclusion that being gay is who they are. As I have heard from pro-gay people quite often, "Who would choose to be gay? Who would choose to have to face the opposition we face?" The questions alone tend to promote a kind of validity that homosexuality is genetic in the minds of most people.

If I think back far enough, there was a time while growing up that I didn't feel attracted to other boys, and I suspect that the same could be said by most gay men. Those initial feelings, however, are nullified by the sweeping statement, "For as long as I can remember, I have been attracted to other guys." It's as though "For as long as I can remember" means there *never* were other feelings. The stage is now set.

"If I *never* felt attracted to the opposite sex, I must have been born that way. And if was born that way, *God created me that way.*"

So God created man in His own image, in the name of God He created him; male and female He created them. (verse 27) There is nothing here that talks of sexual attraction, only that we are created male and female in the image and likeness of God. But then verse 28 adds, *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in numbers."* That's a sexual component that can only be possible as a result of having been created male and female.

Before someone suggests that I am negating the joy of sex God intended for us to have in favor of a procreation argument, I would simply say that my intent was to answer the statement, "God created me that way." Did God really create man to be sexually attracted to men or women to be sexually attracted to women?

I have written many times in previous editions of this newsletter that a circular argument has developed which supports same sex intimacy. It goes like this: "I love him. He loves me. We want to show our love for one another in a sexual manner. God is love. God blesses sexual intimacy because it is an expression of Himself as love. Therefore, God blesses us in our sexual intimacy."

Undergirding this entire argument is, for many, a deeply spiritual foundation, a desire to love God and to be obedient to God in the context of their same sex relationships.

For me and those like myself who walk through each day seeking the strength to live free of behaviors we believe to be contrary to the will of God, there is something initially appealing to the manner in which some have justified their homosexuality. It's a little like being on a serious diet and watching someone consume a dessert that certainly "looks" good. Cringing a little on the inside, we say "No" to the dessert and move on.

Reading about pro-gay legislation in the paper, hearing more and more people laugh at and in some ways approve of “happy” gay characters on TV *because* the characters are gay, and knowing that a growing number of schools are initiating a pro-gay educational platform is depressing.

What is also depressing is knowing that many Christians condemn gays and lesbians to hell, denying them the grace God has for all His children at any point in their lives whenever they are willing to accept it. God is the final Judge, not you and not I. My role is to pray for myself and all those who struggle and seek freedom from the distortion of homosexuality, as well as to pray for those who have chosen to see themselves in a gay or lesbian identity.

Did God really create all this confusion, or did we? *For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.* (Mt.13.15) Heal us all, O Lord!

Can the Church be the Church to the Homosexual Struggler?

October 2001

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. (Acts 9.31)

It has been a number of years since I last wrote specifically on the Church's response to the issue of homosexuality, although I have made frequent comments with regard to this topic in the recent past.

Just as in the secular world, there exists a continuum of opinion about homosexuality and the manner in which the Church should respond. On one end are those churches that openly celebrate the "gay" life, endorse and even encourage same-sex marriages, and ordain active homosexuals into ministry.

I find it interesting that many of these churches take a liberal position so as not to be seen as discriminating or politically incorrect by the secular world. This same world, by the way, often feels a strong need to delegate religion *and* faith to a one-day-a-week activity or belief system and then only in specific buildings such as churches.

On the other end of this continuum are churches who condemn anyone who is either gay or struggles in any way with homosexual feelings. It makes little or no difference that some of these individuals are more celibate than their heterosexual counterparts. The irony connected with this group, I think, is that many do not believe homosexuals can change, so their theology allows no hope for those they condemn.

The majority of churches today find themselves just left of the middle—not wanting to offend 1) those who take a traditional Scriptural position, 2) those who are perhaps unsure about homosexuality, 3) those who quietly live as gays, or 4) the countless variations possible within the previous three. Many pastors in these churches, however, choose to manage this balancing act by not saying anything at all about homosexuality from the pulpit.

There is, however, a smaller segment of churches in this middle area who reach out with love based on the teachings of God's Word to gays and lesbians as well as to those who struggle with their homosexuality. What makes them unique in today's world is that they dare to say that change is possible for the homosexual.

For the most part, these churches realize that life is a process for everyone, that no one is free of temptation, and that temptation is not sin.

When I first started to pray about this article, I was struck by the idea presented in the verses I shared earlier. In particular, the idea that churches were strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, and because of that, they grew in numbers, *living in the fear of the Lord*.

I remember that as a boy I heard a lot about "fearing" the Lord, and in my childish mind, fearing God made God someone to be kept at arm's length.

Then as I approached adulthood, churches started to emphasize the love of the Lord. God was supposed to be my "best friend," an understanding deity who winked when I sinned and said, "Don't do that." In some ways, the success of my personal faith seemed to depend upon whether or not I was having "warm fuzzies" whenever I thought of God.

More and more, the word from the pulpit was just about love. It seldom if ever seemed to talk about the kinds of struggles I was having with my sexuality. Not that I wanted to hear someone condemn my behavior publicly. I guess I just wanted to hear someone say, "This kind of behavior is not in God's design for you, but as a representative of His church here on earth, let me tell you that you will have all the love and support you need to make the right choices in your life." If words to that effect were spoken, I missed them.

At some point, I started to wonder if the Church even "feared" the Lord, because from where I sat, more emphasis was being placed on making sure people felt good about themselves than on being everything they could be in the Lord's design.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. (Ps.111.10) If this is true, then it must be God's word and not mine or the world's that determines what is right or wrong.

Throughout the many years before I finally surrendered to the Lord, His precepts were like a giant obstacle to my happiness, so when homosexuality began to get favorable press as just another lifestyle which somehow sidestepped some of these precepts, I really wanted to believe the world. It certainly seemed a much easier route to me, and after all, this was about love, not about my being obedient.

I can tell you, however, that I first began to really find freedom when I accepted God's precepts without trying to minimize them or assign them to everyone else but myself.

Matthew Henry wrote: "No man is wise who does not fear the Lord; no man acts wisely except as influenced by that fear. This fear will lead to repentance, to faith in Christ, to watchfulness and obedience."

God doesn't ask whether or not I am comfortable with His precepts. One of the most difficult things I have come to learn is that it doesn't matter whether or not I think my behavior is right or wrong. What matters is whether God says my behavior is right or wrong.

Acknowledging that truth in my life meant having to say I was sorry. It meant turning from homosexual behavior as being a response or the answer to the needs I had—needs such as loneliness, depression, anger, etc. It meant actively seeking God's voice in how my needs should be met.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. (Ps.19.9)

Some simple truths stared me in the face when I read those words: God's will is never wrong, it never fails, and it always leads to the best solution. The will of humankind is subject to error, easily disappoints, and provides answers that are imperfect and therefore not the best solution. It's a little like asking someone if they would drink from a glass containing pure and refreshing water or from a glass containing liquid sludge.

If I accept all this, then the Church must gently remind me from time to time of the path I have chosen in the Lord. It must be a beacon that shows the way clearly in any darkness, not an occasional flicker of God's love.

The Church cannot change someone's homosexuality any more than a support group can. So the church then should not put on the mantle of psychotherapy, offering promises of heterosexuality. They will no more succeed in doing this than succeed in creating tension- or divorce-free marriages.

The Church can, however, help all who enter to grow in relationship with the Divine Therapist, the One who heals places deep within. It can support, encourage, admonish, and most of all love the body of Christ.

But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love. (Ps.33.18) When I am asked what single thing I try give others who walk difficult roads in life, I answer that I can give them no better than a hope built on faith. It is not mine to understand all the ways in which the Lord works—some days I understand precious little.

I am no different than other people in the Church, I just sometimes *think* I am. As a matter of fact, don't most of us? But we are ALL the Church; we are ALL the body of Christ; and ALL things are possible with God.

I can think of few things sadder than to see the world consider itself God, and I shudder to think someone I love might hear Jesus say, "Depart from me for I know you not."

My whole being anticipates intimacy with God for all eternity, joining with the communion of saints praising Him. For then we shall be like angels, the old will have passed away, neither homosexuality nor any other struggle an issue.

The Church will probably not become what I hope it could become, but that is less of a burden now for me than it has been in the past. That doesn't mean I won't hope for it, just that I will always try to remember that the Church is made up of imperfect people like myself.

So don't look for the Church to "fix" or "repair" you. Look instead to God, and then see how He will use the Church as a vessel of His healing.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria [and the world] enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.
Can you see it happen? Can you see yourself a part of that?

The Journey

December 2001

He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observation of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. (Ezra 7.9-10)

The Hand of the Lord Was Upon Ezra

First of all, I don't know about you, but for years I saw the hand of the Lord upon others but had trouble seeing it in my own life. I bore stains that I truly believed could never be removed. I had sinned in ways that seemed to go beyond the kinds of sins I thought others committed, so I would say, "I'm sorry, Lord, I really *am* trying. Won't you forgive me just this one more time?" And the words were repeated and repeated and repeated until I was certain that I had used up my quota of the Lord's forgiveness.

Logic and a fundamental instruction about my faith should have made it clearly understood that I could *never* exceed the forgiveness that was mine for the asking, yet I think that many of you would join me in saying "I knew that. . . I just didn't feel it." We have an identity in the Lord because we were created with His knowledge and in His plan. Yet I knew my sexual identity was flawed and that impacted how I saw my basic identity—even with God.

"For the gracious hand of his God was on him." I could understand and acknowledge the hand of God being upon his special people—people like Ezra—but it took a lifetime, it seems, to believe that I was – we *all* are – among God's special people. 1 Chronicles 4.10 says "Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, *that Your hand would be with me*, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!'"

That God's hand might be with *him*. That's how I saw things, but I was to learn that God's hand is with all of *us*, to *lead* us, *protect* us, *strengthen* us. The hand of God is everything – for God IS everything! The first step on this journey begun is to personalize that simple thought: "For God's hand is upon me."

Ezra Had Prepared Himself

"For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observation of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." Ezra sought the law of the Lord to learn what God wanted him to do; he sought for ways to actually apply the law to himself first; and he sought to teach others the statutes and ordinances.

It was the Law of the Lord I couldn't live up to. As Billy Graham wrote in *Peace with God*, the law points out how far we have fallen. . . it confronts, it never encourages.

God's Word is our teacher. It confronts us, admonishes us, but also encourages us and gives example as to God's heart for our lives. The Great Command summarizes our life in the Lord. "One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Two things stand out to me. The first is the idea that our relationship with God must be a consuming relationship for God wants *all* of me. It must be an act of total surrender. The second is that if I cannot love myself correctly, then I cannot love others correctly. Looking at past relationships now, I can see how I filtered all of them through a shattered self-image. Further, adopting the image I know God has for me is a process of trust and faith, because shards of my past brokenness can still be felt every now and then.

Ezra Sought the Lord

Ezra believed that God would be with those who sought Him and to that he entreated God's protection through fasting and prayer. He believed that God rewarded those who diligently sought God and further, he believed that such faith pleased God.

Here again, most of us have sought God and have begged Him for the freedom from homosexuality or some other specific thorn we have in our lives. Many of us might even have fasted many times over,

sensing however that nothing seemed to change or that God maybe didn't hear. And a few of us might even have considered that a lack of change might be God saying, "I created you this way. . .Celebrate!" In the end, though, we rejected the ideas planted by Satan and sought instead to allow God's plan to be God's plan and not a mirror of what we *think* God should do. Psalm 9.10 says, *Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.*

Ezra Stepped Out in Faith

Scripture says of Ezra and those who traveled with him to Jerusalem: *Trusting the Lord would protect them, they began their perilous journey.* (8.31) It was not easy, for there were enemies and potential for ambush along the way, but Ezra illustrated that he had a living, working faith!

Some might think the journey they have begun is not nearly so perilous as the one Ezra and his followers made, but I wonder.

Granted, there were highway robbers waiting for the opportunity to relieve travelers of their precious commodities and money, and it definitely took time for the law to apprehend or even find those criminals. But thieves in the days of Ezra could not steal an individual's identity.

Today, I would challenge you to stand up in a public forum, announcing either your belief that homosexuality is not genetic or the fact that homosexual behavior is sinful. What do you think the response be to that announcement would be?

What if you belong to a church that has publicly pronounced homosexuality as a gift from God? Would you feel your needs being met in such an environment?

What if your workplace established a policy that promoted diversity with a heavy emphasis on gay and lesbian issues while pointing a condemning finger at "those homophobic, right-wing Christian organizations?" And what if your struggle with homosexuality became public knowledge to the point where everyone was telling you how "wrong" you were not to "go with the flow?"

And what if your children came home from school, shared that their school was having a "Celebrate Gay and Lesbian Day," and told you that the school Gay & Lesbian Orientation Specialist wanted to see you after school the next day? Lest you think such a position is made up, you should know that many school districts have hired individuals whose express purpose is to assist "gay and lesbian" students in feeling more comfortable in their classes.

All of these things are part of our perilous journey. All of these dangers lie in wait for our response. And all or most of these things will have to be faced (and indeed *are* being faced) for those of us who have begun the journey. But I also believe with all my heart that we, like Ezra, have the hand of the Lord with us.

Ezra Was Willing to Face Difficult Situations

Upon his arrival, Ezra found a difficult situation. Many of the Israelites had inter-married with Gentile women. . . the rulers and leaders of Israel being some of the worst violators. Because of the situation he found in Jerusalem, Ezra was moved to fasting and prayer. Others joined him while he offered prayer confessing the sins of Israel. Rather than point a finger, Ezra accepted the responsibility that was his as a leader and teacher. It would have been so easy for him to rationalize away any need for the people to change; but Ezra did not let the emotionally charged issue deter him from doing God's will! He reminded the people of the law of the Lord and of the covenant God had with them.

I struggle sometimes with the idea of confessing the ways I disobey God. . .times when I say to myself, "If God would just take away this attraction I have for men, I wouldn't even consider entertaining those fantasies I sometimes have." In other words, I want to minimize my responsibility as being nothing more than remnants of the man I used to be and I *certainly* don't want to label my "indiscretions" as sin.

But I can't live with that kind of lying, especially not if I am seeking the presence of the Lord in every facet of my life. Nor can I set aside what I believe God has been showing me about my sexuality merely because I live in a social climate where my belief system is becoming more and more unpopular. In the final analysis, however, God is not going to ask me if I enjoyed the difficulties I face each day because it really isn't about a "feel good" attitude of living. It's about obedience.

My prayer is that you will feel God's love in a very intimate and real way. It IS a journey begun for all of us. . .and it is a journey well worth taking.

2002

What Does Our Witness Really Look Like?

February 2002

On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.
Mt.10.18

Did you ever get the feeling that people were watching you, just waiting for you to say or do the wrong thing? And on one of those occasions when you did say or do the wrong thing, did you hear the words, "You'll never change. You'll always be the way you are and there's nothing you can do about it" or words to that effect?

When people know that I struggle with homosexual issues, they filter my witness through their own personally defined ideas on homosexuality. If you are in the same boat, maybe the following ideas will help.

Start with Where You Are

In the past, my New Year's resolutions seemed to be a direct result of determining what the "new" me looked like and then making the appropriate statement or pledge in the presence of others. More often than not, my decisions (while good in and of themselves) were often huge leaps in logic and therefore beyond the reach of practicality.

I'm now more realistic about what my life is like, what parts of my life are unhealthy, and what goals I can set to turn my negative behaviors into positive ones. This is not about going to bed with the resolve to be "a new person" in the morning. The same issues that brought heartache the day before will resurface in the days and weeks ahead, so it makes sense to understand that and plan ahead.

The World Owes Us An Apology

I don't mean this to sound self-serving or to put on the cloak of "Victim of the World, Ltd" because that is not my intent. Somewhere along the way, though, definitions of what it meant to be a man or a woman got stretched, turned inside out or sideways, and yet held out to growing boys and girls everywhere as examples to be embraced.

That would have been fine except for the fact that I for one never managed to achieve the example shown. It seemed to me that every time I got close, the definition changed again.

The last I heard, there really isn't much difference between men and women. I'm told that it's all about providing equal opportunities for this or that job, making sure that the scales don't tip one way or the other while at the same time making sure no one's self esteem is damaged.

Those things are important but they do little to foster a healthy idea of male and female sexuality. With one faction of society reminding us daily that homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality, it's no wonder that the youth of today are confused and maybe even a little angry at times.

I know, the world moves on, and society adapts itself to the ideas of the day. I still feel a bit disgruntled, though, because the benchmark of gender identification should be a measuring stick, not some "here today, gone tomorrow" concept.

Is God the One Leading?

If we start with the belief that we are created in the image and likeness of God (Eph.2.10) and that God knew us before we were born (Ps.139.13), then it stands to reason that God really does know us. And if God knows us, then there is a design to our lives that is part of His plan.

I believe that homosexuality is not part of that design, yet at the same time, I believe that God fully loves the homosexual as well as the heterosexual. That love is not, however, an endorsement of the behaviors by either group that are not of His will.

Following God's plan means that each of us must surrender to His will (Mt.10.39). It cannot be that we design our lives and then expect God to set His plan aside in favor of that design. Yet God does step aside because you and I have been given the free will to choose or not choose God's plan. Again, the fact that He steps aside doesn't mean God approves of our doing so. Allowing God the lead in our lives demands a trusting relationship, an active prayer life, and a willingness to listen for God's will and then be obedient to it.

Healing/Change is a Package Deal

The changes I sought and experienced in my own life over the past seventeen years were rarely isolated. I didn't just decide to quit smoking and then quit smoking. I started to understand the effect my smoking had on those I loved—both from a health and financial position. So as I became more aware of those I loved, I was also able to see and accept the love they had for me. When the final cigarette had been lit and then discarded, more had happened than just the end of a bad habit.

There was always an interconnection between one issue and another or several other issues. Behavioral choices tend to be cause and effect issues—I choose a behavior because that choice answers some need I have.

Likewise, my relationships with God, family, friends, and those not my friends are very complex issues. I am convinced that this business of change is hard work, but it really is a matter of seeking the positive rather than the negative. If a choice I make is ever something I think to be "the lesser of two evils," both options are poor choices. There is always a third choice—the right choice. So allow God to bring you through all of the various steps needed to achieve what you wish. If you wish for God's way, it will always be the right way.

Is There Success in Failure?

Maybe it would be better to simply state, "To one degree or another, failure is inevitable." For the homosexual struggler, every fantasy, every same-sex desire can be a persistent thorn and reminder of personal weakness.

More critically, lapses of the mind and flesh often become a serious wedge. "God cannot forgive me." "What choice have I in all this? The feelings refuse to go away." "I keep trying, but it never seems good enough." Sadly, some echo the words of Popeye the Sailor and say, "I yam what I yam."

On the surface, there seems to be few things worse than coming to the realization that some things might never change, especially if we desire change in specific areas of life. But as Paul came to understand, when we reach what we believe to be the end of our resources (for we feel there is nothing more in us to give), it is then that God can and will do His greatest miracles.

There are times when I feel incredible joy in knowing that my life is in God's hands. I can't describe exactly what that feels like—perhaps the joy beyond all understanding—but I know it's there. The irony lies in the fact that I also know the next moment might be one of sadness for having failed yet again. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (II Cor. 12.9)

Are You Okay?

It's perfectly normal to respond, "No." But I question whether or not it's normal to see life as a pit becoming so deep that there can be no hope of climbing out.

Witness is not putting on some mask to hide from the world while proclaiming that all is well. Witness is the ability to set one's sight on God, a willingness to recognize God's grace in all circumstances, and the courage to acknowledge the presence of both.

There is one man in prison confinement who has been writing to me for a number of years now. Early on, his letters were filled with joy and an eagerness to pronounce God master of everything. Over the years, however, the bleak and often hopeless routine of prison life has been chipping away at his spirit.

His faith is real because he cannot feel hope—he simply accepts the fact that God exists and will make things right, if not in this world then in the next.

Lately, he has been experiencing despair over homosexual behavior that is a part of prison life for many. The behavior gives him pleasure and perhaps an escape for a period of time, but the aftermath is one of anguish. He shares with me that God will not welcome someone such as himself.

I want to shout, “How can you say those things? How can you see yourself rejected when you share with others the need for God’s presence in their lives despite what they have done?” I’ll write him and share with him, but most of all, I’ll pray for him. His letters have been and will continue to be for me a witness of the complexities humans face when seeking the Lord.

Homosexuality is for some a chosen way of life based on a self-determined belief that life for them can be no other way. Having decided this with some degree of finality, most people seek to live the best life they can, being the best person they can be. I can’t help but think, however, that had they turned one more corner, met one more person with a different answer, that their witness would have been different. The optimist in me says that it might yet be.

For those of us still in the struggle, for those of us still taking yet another step on the journey to true masculinity or femininity, and for those of us who have found new ground upon which to walk, our lives are a loving witness. Not a perfect witness or even necessarily a consistent witness, but a witness nonetheless.

Just Who Is God For?

April 2002

If God is for us, who can be against?

(Romans 8.31)

At the end of a recent Broken Yoke meeting, I casually asked, "What do you think the main article topic for the next edition of *Wellspring* should be?" One man quoted the above verse, and I am sure that the message was meant to be "No matter how alone you can sometimes feel, God is *always* with you, *always* calling us to His will, *always* the protecting God."

My immediate response was, "Well, that's great, but what about those who claim that God is on *their* side and they happen to be gay?" We tossed around a few thoughts around and then called it a night.

Quite honestly, I found myself thinking about this most of the following day without arriving at any simple answer. I replayed memories of praying before a sports event that God would sustain our team in victory; thought of countries going into battle armed with God "on their side"; recalled hearing of churches that proclaimed a more intimate relationship with God than other churches have; and so on.

Is God more for us because we obey His commands and more likely to reject us for disobeying? Does God love the homosexual struggler who resists temptation more than the person who decides that homosexuality is God's gift?

Greater minds than I have written on these questions arguing for and against with persuasion. At the onset I thought the route I needed to travel would be to throw a number of quotes at you. Like any writer hoping to convince his readers of the validity of his position, it would merely be a matter of inserting the appropriate number of views supporting whatever my position might be. But the moment I began the search for those quotes I could tell that the waters were far too deep.

If there were one thing I try to give you in this column, it would be my honest opinion on something. I don't expect you to believe or support my position, but I would hope you would weigh it against what you already believe.

As a boy I grew up believing that God loved me more when I was good than when I wasn't. It was the ultimate tool of behavior control as far as I was concerned because the last thing I wanted was to have God love me less. Like most children, my resolution to avoid certain behaviors was not always right on target. I learned, though, that if I said I was sorry and promised not to do something again, the fear of being unloved would go away—at least until the next goof up.

At some point in my childhood, I became familiar with sexual behavior and that was, I was led to believe, the ultimate bad thing I could do. Try as I may to avoid falling I was unable to be in control. The more I failed, the less I believed God loved me.

What made my sexual sins worse in my mind than other sins was the fact that they were homosexual behaviors, and those behaviors were clearly scorned in the church I grew up in. Keeping my desires a secret from everyone except those who harbored the same secrets became the way in which I survived.

God loves us all!

The Bible is God's *living* word. Each time I seriously consider how a verse applies to my life I find myself recognizing just how much God loves me. God's love is God's love, a never-ending commitment to each of us.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. (Psalm 145.13-14)

This verse acknowledges my failures with a reminder that God is with me through everything, through every challenge in my life. There is no exception to His presence or His love.

God loves us despite our behavior!

In my estimation, trying to argue the degree of God's love based on our behavior is like arguing apples and oranges—the one (God's love) is not contingent upon the other (our behavior).

The person who celebrates homosexuality as God's gift usually bases that celebration on the argument that God IS love, and to the extent of the argument I just stated, that position is correct. But the behavioral code of conduct found in the Bible clearly disagrees with the idea that all behavior based on love (real or perceived) is blessed in God's eyes. We love with an imperfect love while God's love for us is perfect.

There is a simplicity that is very appealing to the idea that God loves us *and* approves of everything we do. If I decide that God created me homosexual, then there is nothing more I need do but to live faithfully within the parameters of that orientation. I need only be a good person, love my neighbor, and seek God in all things.

It's the last part of the sentence I just shared that causes some problems. If I seek God in all things, I will most certainly come face to face with behaviors and attitudes that must change. For me the wall I ran into included parts of Scripture that spoke specifically against homosexual behavior. Try as I may, I could not read Romans 1.28, for example, and accept the idea which others offered that the verse only applied to those who were *not born* homosexual. Their argument was simple: Only those born heterosexual could exchange their sexuality for same-sex behaviors and therefore be in sin. In contrast, those *born* homosexual were only doing what was *natural* for them and therefore sin-free.

Another problem for me came in trying to understand how God could support my feeling that any homosexual behavior was acceptable, while at the same time condemning it in Scripture. Of course, if one starts with the idea that God created homosexual behavior to be good and pleasing, then all Scriptural references to that behavior have to be filtered through the lens of special circumstances, periods of history, or extenuating circumstances.

This is not an exercise in gay bashing or hate-centered theology. This is not an attempt to hit pro-gay people over the head with God's Word—God's Word must enter the heart, not the head, to be lasting. It is, however, an attempt to find words that might make sense to anyone questioning feelings he or she might have about homosexuality. It is also an attempt to know God's heart—not as I think it might be but as God leads.

So just who is God for anyway when it comes to the issue of homosexuality? Does God automatically cast all those who give in to their attractions to others of the same gender?

There are people who will say an emphatic "Yes" to that last question, and perhaps there are people waiting to see those same words in one of my columns. I can't make that judgment—only God can and none of us is God. None of us knows the heart of anyone else with God's authority.

I return, however, to my earlier argument about God's love versus our behavior. God IS for us. God is for ALL of us! All I can share with you that makes sense to me is what I have learned about my own life and the manner in which I feel God calls me to live it.

And God does encourage me in my writing—not because I say something is right or wrong but because my intent is always to point to Him. God forgive me should I fail to do so.

Memories of a Son

June 2002

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. (John 5.19-20)

Scripture tells us that Jesus would often go off by himself to pray to His heavenly Father. Most of the prayers you and I have are of the petition variety and when things go well they step into the realm of praise.

The relationship shared in the Gospel of John by Jesus about His Father was a communion of the most intimate nature, an expression of love that none of us could possibly imagine. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus restates His oneness in the Father and the Father's oneness in Him.

June 17 is Father's Day and a time most of us go to the nearest store to look for the appropriate card. Sometimes a humorous card is our choice—far easier to make a joke than to search for something a little more personal or matching the feelings we have. We stare at the open space where we will write our name, think about adding something more than just “Love,” and maybe in the end settle for that.

I am one of those whose father is no longer alive. He died when I was 16 years old but I don't think a Father's Day passes without me looking at the cards in the store. I'm not sure why I do that other than to remind myself just how much I still love him. And after reading the verse and agreeing with the card design, I still look at that blank space and wonder. What would I share if given the chance?

I am luckier than many of the men and women who write to me. My father wasn't abusive, he didn't yell or threaten, and he really tried to be a part of the lives of his children. I doubt we spoke the same language, but is that really so different from the majority of children in their relationship with their fathers?

Broken Yoke is a ministry that tries to help those who seek freedom from homosexual behaviors. As a man who has directed this ministry for twelve years now, I can tell you that a broken relationship (perceived or real) between father and child looms as a critical component in the development of the child's orientation. While I speak from a male perspective, there is little doubt in my mind that the same would hold true for a relationship between women and their fathers.

The verses I quoted at the beginning of this article are about the Father and the Son. It almost seems sacrilegious to interpret them any other way, but there *is* something to be learned by applying them to any parent-child relationship.

Verse 19 is one of parental example and a child's response. Dads are supposed to teach their sons how to become the protector, the provider, and the lover. It is the father's love and desire to do only good for his wife that teaches a son about becoming a husband himself one day. And a daughter who sees this honor and respect bestowed on her mother will know that she has every right to expect it from her husband when she marries.

Verse 20 is a reminder that what the father does is done because of love, and his sharing motivates him to want to do all he can to prepare his son or daughter for life as an adult.

For many of us who struggle with homosexuality, the connection we needed with our dads fell short to the extent that we had no confidence in the idea we could stand in the presence of other men or women as an equal. Such a gap in our identification as men or women could easily fuel a hunger for those components we feel we lack.

The reality is that no father can be everything a child wants him to be. I have, however, met some wonderful fathers who seem to fit that bill though. I often think that my father was one of them yet I know that he was a man and not some super being. He had flaws just as I do, and he made mistakes with his children just as I have made mistakes with my own children.

One of the things I frequently share in this column is that God has given me an identity in Him. I am a child of God. He loves me despite my flaws, my poor choices, and my stubborn attempt to hide my weaknesses rather than offering them to Him.

It is my identity in my Heavenly Father that allows me to see beyond any homosexual temptation. Contrary to the world's definition, I am not a gay man who loves God. I am a man who loves God and

happens to deal with homosexual issues in his life. There is a mountain of difference between those two positions.

I cannot believe that God created me as a homosexual man any more than I could conceive of my earthly father deciding that I should be homosexual and then doing everything in his power to bring that about.

In recent years I have finally come to understand that the same healing love God the Father offers me, the same complete love He offers me without conditions, is and was offered to my dad. And when I think of dad being loved in the same way I know that God loves me, I weep for the joy I feel in that knowledge.

There were many times during my early teens when I wanted to talk to my dad about the confusion I was experiencing, but I never did. Even if I had screwed up enough courage to mention the word homosexuality I don't think he would have been able to talk about it.

I can't speak for my siblings nor would I even suggest that we felt the same. All I can do is share what I feel, put it on the table for you to look at, and then let you make up your own mind about what you will do with the information I've shared.

With all my flaws and my good points, I am a man, a husband, and a father. When reading something that speaks of father issues as they might relate to homosexuality, it is easy for me to think about the negative things, the things that should have happened and didn't, and the things that did happen and shouldn't have. But if I look closely enough at myself and then at my father, I can see some of his goodness, his tender heart, and his manner of loving in me. He *did* give me a positive legacy.

If you are reading this with no positive memories at all of your father, ask the Heavenly Father to let you see your dad as He sees him. Ask the Heavenly Father to let you love your dad as He loves him.

I want to share something I have only spoken of a few times in public as a way of showing you how God did this for me. It isn't important that you believe what I write—just that you acknowledge that I believe it.

Seventeen years ago I had serious doubts about my ability to ever climb out of a pit I had made for myself, but I chose to believe that God would make that possible. My therapist had suggested I think about my father and my childhood, so I did. I thought about his early death, my inability to really be open with him, and the feelings I had that I had let him down as a son.

One evening I had a dream in which I was sitting in the small bedroom I had known as a boy. Jesus walked into the room and immediately behind Him I saw my father. Jesus said, "Talk to your dad" and left the room.

I recall looking at him and experiencing a wave of conflicting emotions—love, relief, and anger. I realized that I was angry with him for dying before I had a chance to finally get to know him and he me. But Jesus had said, "Talk to your dad" so I did.

We were still talking about my feelings when Jesus came in and said that time was up. After I hugged my dad he left the room with Jesus.

The next evening the dream started just as it had the first night. Instead of embracing him, though, I sat down on the bed and began to talk. He looked at me and asked, "Well, aren't you going to give me a hug?" It was the connection I most missed with him, the ability to touch and show affection.

In that dream I shared some of what had been happening in my life with him. As I write this for you, it strikes me now that he never said anything back. He just listened and maybe that's just what I needed for him to do.

At the end of our time together, we hugged once more and once more he left the room.

The third evening, I knew something was different. Jesus didn't say anything nor did He leave the room. I looked at my dad and then took his hand in mine, placing it in the outstretched hand of Jesus. In that moment I released my father and most of the anxiety I had about his early death into the hands of the One who loved us both.

Jesus said, "You can talk to your father at any time, and when you do just start talking to him." Looking at me, Jesus then asked, "Aren't you going to give your dad another hug?"

As I put my arms around my father, we were instantly in another place--high on a mountain--still holding each other. Then an amazing thing happened. As Jesus put his arms around both of us He became transparent and radiating an incredible light that went through both of us, a light I could only sense to be His pure love for both of us.

There were no more dreams like that but I remembered what Jesus had said. And now, when I feel a need, I have little conversations with my father and feel more connected.

It's doubtful that I could have arrived at this place of peace I have for my father without God's intervention and I thank God for that. Happy Father's Day, Dad! I love you.

I'm Not Alone

August 2002

Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets." (I Kings 18.22)

As a teenager struggling with my sexual identification, there were many occasions when I felt completely alone. Even though I knew I was attracted to other guys, I considered what happened between another male and myself to be an activity, not an identity.

Despite what I was doing, I just couldn't bring myself to say, "I am a homosexual" to *any* other person. Nor, by the way, did I hear another male say that to me until I was a junior in college. By that time, I realized that there were others like myself—certainly not exceptionally visible but they were there. There were even one or two organizations that existed for those of us with same gender attractions.

I have written on many occasions in the past of the difficulties faced by someone in the 50s and 60s who was found to be homosexual. For those unwilling to maintain secrecy, living could be a miserable experience and possibly even a risk to health and body. My own life was often filled with anxiety over possibly being found out—and eventually I was.

Society took a much dimmer view of homosexuality 40-50 years ago than it does today, and certain professions were considered more likely than others to have people who were "that way." The church was not much better in its attitude toward homosexuals, offering little guidance beyond a reminder that homosexual behavior was sinful.

In the world of today, one hears the word gay or lesbian far more often than the rigid sounding homosexual. Unlike the kind of secrecy I experienced as a young man, a teen today who experiences same gender attractions is encouraged to "come out," announcing with some pride to being gay or lesbian.

Today, children who have same sex attractions are encouraged to be open and accepting of their homosexuality by parents who have bought into an as yet to be proven genetic argument. Many schools endorse the faulty 10% claim Kinsey made in his study on homosexuality and teach the joys of diversity and two-mother families. And far too many churches appear more willing to accept the argument that God *created* individuals homosexual in their orientation than to hold to a Biblical standard pointing to the contrary.

Ironically, individuals who decide that homosexual behavior is not acceptable find themselves almost in the same position as I did so many years ago—feeling alone and unable to connect. But the word is *almost*.

By the time you receive this edition of *Wellspring*, the 2002 Exodus Conference will be just about over. Almost a thousand individuals will have come together to join in praise and worship. They will hear gifted speakers, participate in workshops on a wide variety of topics, and take advantage of an incredible time of fellowship.

I have been to ten Exodus conferences and each is more fulfilling than the last. Waiting in the line at the start of each conference to check in and receive the key to my room, I often look around and see familiar faces from previous conferences as well as new, perhaps slightly apprehensive faces.

When I greet a friend from a previous conference, I am reminded that there are others like myself who are still standing on the truth of their conviction with regard to homosexual behavior and God's word. We are still in the battle.

As I look into the face of a newcomer, I smile and introduce myself, trying to make that person feel a little less anxious. The first time for most people is a holy coming out, a time when one's presence in such a place and at such a time is almost an admission of need or struggle.

As much as I have learned from the teachers at Exodus conferences, however, I think that the best part is the incredible worship time we share. There is a connection with God that starts from deep within each person and literally soars up and out as voices sing hymns of praise.

To each of us at that moment, it isn't a question of *when* or *will* God heal and change as much as it is a question of *how*. And as we permit God's grace to fill us, we wonder what the future man or woman within us will look like.

Those moments of every conference are times when our hearts accept the truth of God's love and mercy. They are times when the self-imposed barriers within us fall aside and complete joy fills us because we know we are connected in a most intimate fashion with our Creator. We are His!

Outside of these times of worship, one might wonder why there are such deep valleys to be traveled and experienced. Why aren't the mountain experiences more lasting? I think the answer lies in the story of Elijah.

Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Despite what Elijah must have considered devastating odds against him, he not only challenged the prophets of Baal but made sure the task left no doubt as to what he expected of God.

After God's holy flames had consumed the sacrifice and Elijah had slain the 400 prophets of Baal, Elijah didn't dance for joy—he ran. He feared the wrath of Jezebel.

We learn in I Kings 19:18 that Elijah was not the only follower of God remaining despite Elijah's belief that he was. After appearing to Elijah in the small whisper, God told him that there were 7,000 others like Him who had not yet bent their knee to Baal.

One has to wonder, "Where were all those other prophets? Why was Elijah left to feel so alone?" I can't answer that question. All I know is that at a point when Elijah felt completely deserted and wanted to die, he was given information by God that was not deemed appropriate for him earlier.

I think the point can be made that God wanted Elijah to rely on Him alone. It was this faith in God that made it possible for Elijah to challenge the 400 prophets of Baal. Would Elijah have been as bold *in the Lord alone* had he thought there were another 7,000 who would be standing alongside him against a mere 400?

There are times when I think of those attending the Exodus conference as being like the 7,000 that decided to follow God's word despite what must surely have been the popular opinion of the day.

There are times when I think each of us who struggles with *anything* would like to feel more victory and fewer moments of struggle, but the answer is not necessarily the absence of struggle as much as it is the obedience that invites the Presence of God.

The irony is that God does not shower us with rewards for the decision we make to reject homosexual behavior any more than He gave a feeling of triumph to His servant Elijah. Instead, He gave Elijah another assignment, another chance to rely solely on Him.

By his obedience, Elijah became the man he was meant to be in the eyes of the Lord. God gave him no more apology for the trials he faced than He gives any of us for saying we choose Him. We don't get to walk around with medals for proclaiming our obedience to His word or for saying no to temptation.

We are, however, sons and daughters of an awesome God, the Ruler of our hearts and our lives! It might be far easier for some to rewrite God's word on homosexuality, but God IS the author of all that is holy. If something is not of Him, then it must be of the other.

At the moment, I feel a little like a warrior who has come in from battle—a little bruised and frustrated but knowing that victory is already the Lord's. There is a quiet joy in my heart because I know that tomorrow I will again walk into the world trusting God to lead me where I must go. And through it all, I know beyond doubt that I'm not alone.

And Such Were Some of You

October 2002

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (I Cor.6.11)

Bill (not a real person but could be) grew up thinking he was different from other guys in his class. They all seemed to be so outgoing and confident while he was unsure of himself, quiet, and pretty much a loner. They spoke about girls and sex in the lusty way boys sometimes do while he was afraid to tell them that *they* and not girls aroused him.

Before the end of high school, Bill had met a few other guys who felt pretty much as he did and that gave him some comfort. The relationships also made him uneasy because the others in his class labeled him and his friends gay and that identification went against his church upbringing.

By the end of college, Bill came to the conclusion that he had been born gay and that there was little that could be done to change his attractions. Hoping to end the discrimination he and his friends faced, he became politically active in support of pro-gay legislation.

If there were one thing that bothered Bill more than anything else, it was the slowness of the church he attended to fully accept him and his partner. Most of the large congregation was polite but a little self-righteous, he felt, in their response to them.

Bill shared his feelings with the pastor and was told that he should not worry about the occasional tension. "Some people," the pastor shared, "feel that the Bible condemns homosexuality, but those people are not taking into account the most recent medical findings that homosexuality is genetic."

The pastor went on to tell Bill that it would only be a matter of time before Bible scholars reinforced what the medical world has been saying and the tension would disappear. "Besides," the pastor added, "Scripture must be reviewed in light of the times we live in and that includes the latest medical advances. If it isn't, I'm afraid that not many people are going to want to stay members of this or any church with such a narrow view."

Bill left the pastor's office that day feeling a little better, but he still wondered why people had to be so slow in seeing how wrong those outdated views they held were.

Not long after, he saw a poster on the church bulletin board announcing a "Love Won Out" conference being held at another church across town. The sign said, "a dynamic one-day conference addressing, understanding and preventing homosexuality," and that made Bill see red. After making a few calls, he decided he would attend the conference if for no other reason than to show the presenters for the fanatics they were.

But something he did not anticipate happening, happened. The speakers did not offer messages of condemnation and bigotry aimed at himself and his friends. Instead he heard from men and women who claimed to have left homosexuality behind.

His next thought frightened him a bit because he had begun to wonder if a person could really change and, if that were true, would that mean he could change, too? A little voice in his head kept saying, "Make them prove it! Make them prove a person can change! Make them show their success rate!"

When the last speaker finished and the final chorus of a worship song had been sung, Bill walked up the aisle to the front of the room where one of the speakers stood chatting with a little old lady. Her heard bits and pieces of their conversation about the woman's granddaughter. He also heard the little old lady ask, "Why can't she just understand that she doesn't *have* to be a lesbian? Why doesn't she see what I see?"

Hoping not to appear too obvious, Bill stepped closer because suddenly the awaited answer seemed very important to him.

The presenter noticed Bill, though, and his look seemed to invite Bill into the conversation. The man continued, "I used to think I had no choice in my feelings toward other men and my sexual attractions to

them. Believing that certainly relieved me of the feelings of guilt I had over what I was doing. But as much as I wanted to believe being gay was fine, I just couldn't.

"How your granddaughter came to be lesbian," he said to the little old lady, "is how *she* came to decide that. There is no list of things that happened to her, although there might be common issues most women share as factors. And at some point in your granddaughter's life, it made sense for her to acknowledge her attraction to other women as being a natural thing.

"I bet your granddaughter is probably asking, 'Why can't Grandma understand? Why can't she see things from my point of view?' And if the two of you sat down to discuss this, you would probably both find things that just wouldn't make sense."

Bill interrupted, "But nothing in what you just said really answers whether or not change is possible. All you've done is admit that some people are different. Doesn't this woman deserve more than that? Aren't you holding out some kind of intellectual carrot in front of her? And in front of me, too?"

The presenter didn't look offended by the questions but he did pause for a moment before speaking again. Then he said, "I joined a support group for men and women with same gender attractions with an 'I dare you to change me' attitude. At least that's what I showed on the outside. On the inside, I was beginning to wonder what being like other guys might be like, so I kept coming to the meetings."

"The group I was in talked a lot about God's love and His design for our lives as His children. We looked at verses on homosexuality in the Bible and studied the opinions of various Bible scholars. We read books by men and women who came out of homosexuality and found ourselves comparing our lives with their lives.

"The longer I stayed with the group, the more I found I could read God's Word without feeling condemnation, without trying to reinterpret everything to fit the kinds of things I wanted to do. And the more I studied, the more I saw I had choices."

Both Bill and the grandmother looked at each other. It was the grandmother who spoke up. "Does everyone who comes to these meetings get healed? Do they all stop being gay?"

The presenter sighed and shook his head. "No," he went on, "I wish I could say yes. I wish I could say that there are studies with actual statistics verifying the changes people experience or don't experience, but I can't.

"One evening at group we talked about the verses in I Corinthians, chapter six. A few were emphasizing that homosexuality was not the only behavior listed that could cause someone to not inherit the kingdom of heaven. They were pointing out all of the other behaviors—something like making all sins equal, I guess.

"But I was feeling more drawn to verse 11 where it says, '*Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*' Those words said to me, 'You once were homosexual but now you're not' and I really wanted to believe that. I really wanted to have healthy attractions."

Bill started to raise his hand like he was in a classroom, blushed a bit and then asked, "How can you say that being sexually attracted to someone of the same sex isn't healthy? I can't remember ever *not* being attracted to other men."

The presenter picked up his Bible and said, "But the verse says, '*But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*' And the part that finally got through to me was that it was not in *my* name that all these things happened but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. My job was to be willing to accept that I was washed, sanctified, and justified, and when I accepted that, I realized I had become a new man.

"Look, I can't speak for your granddaughter or for either of you for that matter. I can only speak for myself. And what I can tell you is that when I find myself tempted to do things I used to do, I now know that I don't *have* to do those things. I can't give you proof that I've changed but I can tell you I believe in the new me. You have to decide whether or not you can.

"No one changes because someone else wants them to change. They change because they believe themselves that it's right to change. I'll help you find more information if you need it, but most of all I'll pray for you. And I hope that you'll pray for me."

Bill left the church that afternoon not completely convinced about everything he heard. But he left the church without closing the door on the possibility of change for himself. "We'll see," he said to himself and headed for home.

Is There A Way Out?

December 2002

Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry. Your own conduct was once of this sort, when these sins were your very way of life. What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his creator. (Col.4:5-7, 9-10)

I don't know how you felt reading the verses from Paul's letter above, but Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth felt a lot like "Just don't do that" to me. Maybe even a little like hearing someone say, "I know this is your first time driving but just back the semi down that winding ramp between those parked cars." And then with a smile the person adds, "It's a piece of cake." Yeah, right.

Recent protests at a "Love Won Out" conference in Washington, DC, by gays and lesbians seemed to center on the idea that if one is born homosexual, then there is little that can be done about the behavior choices that define same-gender attractions.

One protestor said, "Your sexuality is part of who you are and you can't separate it, so it doesn't make sense to me how they say you can love the person and hate the behavior."

Much of what I share as an Exodus International member ministry fits snugly with "Love Won Out" information. We don't, however, share a manual of sound bites to be used in public settings. We share what we believe. Yet what we believe is rejected outright by gays and lesbians simply because it conflicts with the agenda they promote.

There is nothing easy about putting to death any behavior that I have learned to see as solving some need I have. As I say so often, healing is not the absence of desire for something but the ability to make a better choice.

On the one hand is the message "You don't have to be gay." On the other hand, "Being gay is not a choice if you're born gay." The first sentiment implies a solution and a way out, while the second sentiment suggests, "Why fix what isn't broken?"

Because I am a believer in the first sentiment, let me offer what I feel pretty much outlines the path I have chosen for my own life. If you disagree with me, you disagree with me, but our difference of opinion does not negate what I feel has happened in my life.

It really is helpful to put a definition in place for what I feel homosexuality is so that you will understand my starting point.

According to Dr. Lawrence Hatterer, a homosexual is "One who is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually, but not necessarily, engages in overt sexual relations with them." (Changing Homosexuality in the Male).

I believe that we are all born with a gender—male or female—but our sexual orientation is developed through an ongoing process influenced largely by experience and environment.

Restoring a Distorted Image

A key element in my own struggle as a boy and into my adult life was the sense that I would never be able to be the man I thought I should be. I didn't always know exactly what that really meant, and I doubt that I could have described it to anyone who asked, but there was an image of man that I always felt was "out there somewhere."

So much of what I have read points at my father having the responsibility of defining the man in me, but when I was 12 or 13 this was not a quest that I was aware of being on. At 12 or 13, I was being a boy doing the things boys do.

At the same time, there is some truth to what I have read in books on homosexuality, although it now feels pretty much like hindsight knowledge. Back then daily living meant trying to somehow fit in with the other guys and most of the time coming up short.

Restoring a distorted image has much to do with rejecting the images of masculinity and femininity that are held up for reverence in movies, TV, and magazines.

A Being of Self-Worth

There is a measuring stick that was held up to me as I grew up. No, it wasn't anything I could see or touch because this measuring stick was about how I saw myself, about self-perception.

While in school, I had achieved a lot as a student scholar, a musician, and an athlete, but when I looked at what I had accomplished, it all never seemed to be enough. I thought to get love was to earn love and no single success I had gave me the sense that I was really loved.

A major move toward healing came for me at a Leanne Payne conference when she prayed that those who were disconnected from themselves would see themselves as God saw them. We had a right to be, and for the first time many of us accepted that as truth. I know I finally did.

It was an incredible thing to accept the truth that God had created each of us to be unique in our relationship with Him as men and women, not shadows of the masculine and feminine but the real thing.

Separation vs Connection

When I found others in my class who struggled as I did, others who had same-sex attractions, I thought that I had finally found the connection that I wanted as a male. What I actually found was more separation because I had connected myself to those as broken and as needy as I. The relationship was pretty much one of sacrificing any future attempts at acceptance in the mainstream of heterosexuality for the comfort zone of homosexuality.

I have no doubt that gays will say, "I am happier now than I ever was when I pretended to be something I wasn't." But I think that's a little like giving up a dream to be an accomplished artist because the journey to that goal requires more dedication, patience, and yes, suffering than first recognized. Anything worthwhile comes at a cost.

Sexual Identity

Leanne Payne writes about the cannibal in us that strives to have through others what is felt missing in self. That cannibal compulsion ceases when I believe that what I seek is already a part of me.

Men longing after men do so because the men they pursue display some attribute (physical or otherwise) that is not apparent in themselves. Women seek intense emotional relationships with other women for the affirmation such relationships provide.

Ironically, the males who interested me most were scholars, musicians, and athletes. If you are reading carefully, you will have already made a connection to what I have already shared. I did all those things, but they looked better on others.

Perhaps one of the most interesting things about growing up and finding one's sexuality is that just about everyone has the same fear about not measuring up. I have often wondered what life could have been like had we all only been a bit braver and shared our insecurity with one another instead of pretending that we had it all together. Things would not have been perfect but they would have been better.

I can't leave this section without saying something about pornography because porn is Satan's master lie to men about true sexuality. By the time I was married, I had a full-blown, secret addiction to porn. Those images only served to distort my sense of what my sexuality was supposed to be about. In the end, my addiction to pornography nearly robbed me of those closest to my heart, my wife and children.

No one forced me into bookstores. I really wanted to believe that what I saw was the way sexuality was supposed to work. It just never did. Fortunately, there was a bottom; I hit it full force; and when I looked up, God was there with His hand outstretched. And that brings me to the final point.

Restoring a Relationship with God

I really don't know many who have struggled with same-gender attractions who didn't storm heaven with prayers for a normal life. I do know a number of those who decided God was not listening to them because they personally didn't experience the kind of changes that they wanted to have.

For myself, I loved God but I kept waiting for His will to be done my way. That meant that one of the critical steps in my healing was to ask forgiveness for that attitude.

I also felt deep guilt and shame over the things I did that I knew I should not have done. Confessing my sins helped soothe the guilt but the shame remained like a mantle on my shoulders. Over time, it was that shame that formed something of a wedge in my relationship with God. That wedge made God's love seem unreal to me. Too often I found myself thinking, "What loving God would hear my pleas for help and do nothing?"

When God finally got my attention and I surrendered completely to Him, I could feel His loving presence as He shed light on areas of my life too long hidden in darkness.

Where once I carried only doubt and resignation, Jesus rekindled in my heart the hope and expectation that is with me at the start and close of each day. I still want all temptation to disappear but if it doesn't I know that I do have choices. I know that I have the love of family and friends, the encouragement of a good support group, and available professional counseling when I feel a need for it.

What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his creator. The verses have the tone of success and I occasionally don't feel all that successful. I have made a decision, though, and have crossed over a line God has drawn for me, a line of invitation to be part of the banquet of love He is offering me. You're invited, too.

2003

One Step at a Time

February 2003

Let us go up the hill of the Lord, to the temple of Israel's God. He will teach us what He wants us to do; we will walk in the paths He has chosen. (Isaiah 2.3)

As I begin this article, I am looking at a photo I took and mounted in a nice frame. It hangs on the wall beyond my monitor and just below a cross that I took a liking to at a local Christian book store. The photo is one taken from behind of my mother-in-law, then 93 or 94, as she leans on her walker. One foot is lifted in preparation for the next step.

To her left stands my son and to her right, my wife. Neither of them is moving. Both are looking at a place on the floor that will be her planned destination in a few steps. Beyond them all is a sun-splattered corridor, not exceptionally long for anyone who is healthy, but a formidable distance for someone like my mother-in-law. She will rest a few moments about 75 feet or so down the corridor, sitting at chairs placed, I think, for this express purpose. Then she'll count to three, lifting her body out of the chair on the third count and go the rest of the distance to her room.

She is now 95 and no longer in the room she occupied then, a move brought on to provide her with more care in meeting her basic needs. The distances she now walks are much shorter and more often than not the walker is traded for a wheel chair. It's still one day at a time, one moment to the next regardless of the mode of getting there. It is one step at a time.

This past week I received a letter from a man in prison. We have been corresponding for some time now, and there are moments when I wonder about the odd relationship we seem to share. There are many things on which we are in agreement but one or two that almost polarize us.

In his latest letter he spoke of the hatred he felt for himself as a young man coming to grips with his same-gender attractions. For him (as for many of us), this was his secret side. He wrote that he did everything in his power to change. He wanted to be what his parents thought he should be. He wanted to be what he thought God wanted him to be. But he fell short despite his best efforts.

Life took a downward turn as he turned to chemicals to block out the pain he felt inside. He blamed no one else for what was happening, not God, his parents, or friends. Not anyone but himself.

Now in prison, he strains against many so-called Christians who attend chapel services, point fingers of condemnation at those not attending or at those whose sins are more abhorrent, and then participate in some of the same behaviors they condemn. My friend sees a parallel between what they are doing and what he did in his secret life: walking outwardly in God's Word but inwardly seeking enough darkness to cover sinful deeds.

What he has decided is that it is better to be a loving, God-centered, openly gay man than to be a hypocrite like those he avoids.

He and I write back and forth, each of us sharing something we feel about homosexuality, not really trying to convince the other but trying to understand and encourage. He doesn't turn his back on me because I disagree over issues of change any more than I don't turn on him for the beliefs he holds. I like him. He is honest and open about life and he trusts me enough to read my letters just as I read his. Our relationship is one step at a time.

The picture of my mother-in-law reminds me that we all have a distance to go and there are times when our best efforts are just that. She loves me and stands by me but she could not run that hallway no matter how hard she tried.

I am not suggesting that we give up or that our goals should be less noble because the noble ones are too difficult. I am suggesting that God calls each of us into His presence. In those moments when we connect with the heart of God, He *will* teach us what He wants us to do. And in more ways than we know, we *will* walk in the paths He has chosen.

The “hill of the Lord” in Isaiah was Mt. Zion, the hill in Jerusalem which formed part of the area on which the Temple was built. Scripture tells us that the Jewish people streamed to the Temple because they believed the Lord’s teaching came from Jerusalem. Scripture also says that the hill towered above all the others, so getting there took effort. I would guess that for some the journey was very difficult.

I think that each of us sees the path to God as an uphill journey, and maybe we’d rather God would come more often to where we are. Maybe, too, if God were a little more direct with what He wanted of us we’d do better at making the good choices.

I don’t know about you, but I have gotten pretty good at rationalizing those times when my weak side is exposed for what it is—sin. Maybe there *are* days when I stop the climb figuring it’s the best I can do. And maybe I might even join my friend in thinking, “God will understand. He’ll know I am trying. He’ll know that I am doing the best I can.” The difference between us is that I decry homosexuality and he endorses it. But that difference does not negate the fact that we both are accepting less in our lives than what God has for us if we stop trying.

Years ago, there was a song made popular by Peggy Lee with recurring lines that went like this: *If that’s all there is my friends, then let’s keep dancing; Let’s break out the booze and have a ball if that’s all there is.* That song depressed me then and still does now, but the lyrics pretty much define the way too many people live. The one who actively seeks God *knows* that what is currently seen is not all there is. There is so much more.

Some Beliefs

We *all* have identity as men and women created in God’s image. God said, “It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him.” (Gen.2.18) I believe that to mean that God created men and women to be partners in their journey up the hill to the Temple. God created them to be fruitful and to multiply in their married state.

I believe that a man and a woman become one as husband and wife in a union blessed by God. I also believe that very deep relationships between men and between women outside of the married state can and do exist, but these relationships are not the same as that of husband and wife, nor should they be considered the same.

At the same time, a relationship in which both husband and wife have no other relationships outside of their marriage is a relationship that will suffer.

I believe that any relationship must have appropriate boundaries. Love need not be consummated in physical intimacy in order to find its fulfillment. And I would argue that proper restraint is the sign of a much deeper love than the relationship that demands otherwise.

All of what I have just shared comes from deeply held beliefs, yet sharing them on paper is no guarantee that times of temptation will be any less arduous for me than for anyone else reading this. But I know that the temptations are Satan’s effort to shake loose the truths I have learned on my journey up the hill.

My friend and I will continue to write and I hope to become a better friend to him through our correspondence. And in the end, I think that he and I will meet one day in God’s kingdom. I’d like that.

The image of my mother-in-law in that photo always draws me to the same conclusion: She could have simply stopped and not gone on. But the journey was ahead of her, one step at a time.

My journey is the same. One step at a time. I can’t see around the corner we call the future, but I continue to climb the hill. And I agree with Paul (Acts 20.24): *I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.*

In Me, Thou Shall

April 2003

You shall not make yourselves an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 5.8-9)

Say the word “idol” to most Christians and they either think of a golden calf, some noteworthy and celebrated individual, or the human object of some teen craze. But even if the connection they make is a Scriptural one like in the verse above, I doubt that it would cross many minds to associate the effort to eliminate a personal behavior pattern as a form of idolatry.

The other day I was thinking about a man I knew years ago. He was a good man, a man who desired freedom from sinful choices that had become addictions. He and I would sometimes take walks together in the early evening hours. Those were times of sharing about a lot of things but one thing remains that I never understood—he would not laugh.

After repeating a rather funny story with him and seeing no reaction, I asked him, “Didn’t you think that was a funny story?” He responded, “It probably was but I can’t laugh, at least not until I lick the demons in me that cause me to sin the way I have.”

What he had done was established a priority for his life—no humor, no enjoying things until he beat his demons. I thought, “Wow! That sure is determination.” But seconds later I felt sadness for him because the restriction he had placed on himself would also keep out the joy of living as a child of God.

Now I look back at my friend and realize that he was in effect trading one addiction for another and in the process he was creating an idol out of his struggle. He was living day to day with a constant “Thou shall not” sign waved in front of every normal living experience.

In a talk I gave two years ago, I shared this thought: “The more intimate my relationship with the Lord becomes, the more accountable I feel in that relationship. My life has turned from a day-to-day litany of ‘Thou shall not’ to one of listening for the voice of the Lord and hearing, ‘In Me, thou shall.’ And at the end of each day, I can see where I am finding my place in the world of healthy adults.”

My intent in saying what I did was not to have anyone ignore “Thou shall not” decisions in life as much as it was to say that we sometimes spend so much time worrying about what we are not to do that we allow far too little time for what we *should* do. Worse, I have met too many people who do not feel that they have the right to see anything positive about themselves. “After all,” they tell me, “if people knew what I struggled with, they wouldn’t even want to talk to me.”

Not one of us is without sin. 1 John 1.8-9 says, *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

What does God call us to do? What kind of people do you feel God wants us to be? Does God define us by the nature of our struggles, or is it **we** who do that?

We might know people who continue to call someone a drunkard even though that person in question has not had a drink for many years. I think the some name-callers just have a hard time believing change *is* possible, so they deny that change is possible just so they themselves don’t have to work to revise that opinion. My point is this: Change is not dependent upon how others see us, but how we see ourselves. And that image must be a mirror of the image God has of us.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139.13-14)

When was the last time any of us looked in a mirror and said, “I praise You, God, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made”? Does such a proclamation mean that we are without flaw? Absolutely not! It is our flawed nature that makes us dependent upon the mercy of the Lord.

Years ago, I came across this quote: “A friend is one who knows you as you are, understands where you’ve been, accepts what you’ve become, and still gently invites you to grow.” The part that bothers me is “accepts what you’ve become” because I could never accept or leave as is what I had become.

I realize that there might be concern over saying someone had “become” homosexual, especially if the argument is presented that one is born homosexual or heterosexual. The point I would make, however, is that I made choices I *personally* felt were not morally correct. Additionally, it has always been my perception that those choices were progressively more and more not in God’s will.

We, you and I, are called to support one another, to gently invite one another to grow. You and I are called to believe that we can change our lives, and that means walking in faith and in trust of what the Lord wants to do for us.

Successfully resisting sin is not merely a “white-knuckle” process, although there are times when it will be that. Successfully resisting sin is finding appropriate responses to the legitimate needs in our lives. Successfully resisting sin is seeking the best we can for ourselves, not giving in to thoughts and behaviors that have served us poorly in the past.

Satan wants us to believe that those choices were the best we could do, but we reject that lie in light of the pain those choices brought us. If a choice doesn’t lead us toward God, then it must be leading us away from God!

Satan also wants us to believe that right this moment there is nothing more important than eliminating the temptation to give in to same-gender attractions. Satan wants us to believe that God will have nothing to do with us until we have set aside our sinful ways. Satan would have us make an idol of the healing process, for he would like nothing more than for our eyes to be on ourselves and not on God. And Satan would want us to be so concerned about the admonition “Thou shalt not” that we fail to hear the loving admonition our Heavenly Father gives with “In me, thou shalt.”

The road the world travels is very, very wide. We are told that we have the right to do anything we want, provided our choices do not infringe on the rights of others. Society has gone beyond tolerating and now celebrates what our grandparents rejected. We are called to respect all people as children of God, but that doesn’t mean we have to agree with all behavior any more than they must agree with ours.

What I am trying to say is that whether my choices are right or wrong cannot be left to the whims of this changing world. Most importantly, God cannot exist as a one-day-out-of-the-week part of our lives. We must learn to make God a part of every moment of every day.

Jesus said, *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.* (John 8.31-32)

The truth is what Jesus taught us. It’s a road map for life for those willing to acquaint themselves with it. Not always easy choices, but definitely what you and I need. Pray for me. I’ll pray for you. And let’s look for the best God has to give us in life and in one another.

Whose Rights?

June 2003

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12.2 NIV)

For the last month or so the Associated Press (AP) interview with Sen. Rick Santorum (Rep-PA) has not been too far from the public's eye. Individuals and organizations sympathetic to pro-gay legislation and community attitudes have called for his resignation, openly censured Santorum for what they call bigotry and homophobia, and all but labeled the man an insult to democracy. After reading the initial interview a number of times, the following things stood out to me:

- Sen. Santorum is a man of deep conviction. Others might not agree with his beliefs or possibly the choice of example he makes but they cannot deny that Santorum's inner sense of morality shapes his thinking.
- The sequence of questions raised by the interviewer seemed to have a calculated, progressively entrapping quality to them. And near the end of the interview, the reporter incredulously states, "Sorry, I just never expected to talk about that [the danger of unchecked rights with regard to behavior] when I came over here to interview you" when it seemed clear to me that it was the *main* intent.
- Based on this particular interview, our country (most notably the press) concedes diverse opinion on most topics as freedom of speech but has been increasingly hostile to those who disagree with homosexual behavior as something healthy.

In a way, a lot of good people are to blame for the division we currently experience in this country over the issue of homosexuality. A lot of good people have known others with same-gender attraction, yet such attractions were not to be spoken of in public. To guarantee this implied silence, ridicule and scorn was heaped on individuals targeted as homosexual.

Those who served as spiritual shepherds through this time of silence should have condemned the ridicule and scorn for what it was—an immoral response. But such a condemnation would have also demanded a solution, and short of pounding the pulpit over the abomination of such behavior, they had none.

A lot of good people are on both sides of this issue and that makes it even more difficult to find solutions. When Santorum said, "I have no problem with homosexuality. I have a problem with homosexual acts" he rightly recognized that same-gender attractions do exist yet personally classified the acts as objectionable.

Pro-gay philosophy argues that if one has same-gender attractions that such attractions demand a response just as opposite-gender attractions do. They make the argument one of genetic cause and effect and then assign a degree of romantic sentimentality to same-gender relationships. The slogan makers in the Vietnam War era came up with "Make love, not war!" Who can disagree when the opposite of love is so clearly hate? Love is good. Go, love!

So today a lot of good people are conceding to the argument that what is done between consenting adults is fine as long as the behavior does not hurt anyone else. It is a concession that is made, I think, with the idea that "As long as it doesn't affect me, as long as the behavior isn't happening in *my* house, let them do what they want to do." It is a concession of separation that is backfiring.

The pro-gay movement doesn't merely want others to turn their collective backs to questionable behavior; it wants that questionable behavior to be accepted as appropriate. Good people are hesitating over that but becoming too vocal in their disagreement will, as Santorum is finding out, have consequences and penalties. And good people are still more inclined to be silent. Today the silence is called being politically correct.

When the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” he was acknowledging to us over the centuries that much is still the same. Societal morality *is* an evolutionary thing; a simple majority (and often a vocal minority) is all it takes to say something that was wrong and unacceptable yesterday is right and acceptable today.

He goes on to add, “But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Matthew Henry’s Commentary offers us that “Conversion and sanctification are the renewing of the mind, a change not of the substance but of the qualities of the soul. The progress of sanctification, dying to sin more and more and living to righteousness more and more, is carrying on this renewing work. This is called the transforming of us.”

Paul had written very clear mandates against homosexual behavior (Romans 1.26-28) but concluded that people would do what they wanted to do as it was their right to make such a choice.

In contrast, the contemporary argument is that Paul was condemning those who went against their “nature.” According to this argument, heterosexuals choosing homosexual behavior are guilty but homosexuals (thought to be born homosexual by some) are equally guilty if they chose heterosexual behavior.

If we lived in a culture where there was one faith, one clear concept of God’s will, respecting the rights of others would prove less demanding. But we live in a multi-cultural society and as much as I would like others to believe as I believe, that may or may not happen. Additionally, some of what others believe *will* conflict with the moral values I hold just as some of what I believe will be anathema to them. Respecting the rights of others does not, however, demand that I must agree with some of their actions, any more, I suppose, than they should agree with mine.

If Sen. Rick Santorum is removed from office for the expression of his views in response to questions put to him, then his right to free speech will have been denied. I believe that those who seek the advancement of gay rights by such tactics are wrong, and they do not deserve my respect.

There is one more part to the verse I opened with. It states, “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” There is an argument related to defining pornography that goes, “You know porn when you see porn.” Hardly a working definition, but it does imply that there is something in each of us that automatically questions such material as not being in our best interests.

I would maintain the same goes for any behavior we choose to act upon. Something inside of us defines whether in God’s eyes it is good, pleasing, and according to His *perfect* will. We can dull that voice by repeatedly bypassing feelings to the contrary, but we can never completely erase that voice.

Earlier I said that good people on both sides struggle with the issue of homosexuality. My fear is that those who agree with Sen. Santorum’s statement showing the difference between the issue and the behavior will step into shadows of silence. And in the end, it could happen that their optional silence might one day become a mandated silence.

Respect the rights of others? Most certainly. Concede your rights because they contradict ideas others hold? A coward’s decision. But we must all be ready to let go of anything in our lives that is not in “his good, pleasing and perfect will.” I don’t know about you but I think that there is much in my life that needs to be put to death so as to be “holy as God is holy.” It’s a difficult journey, a narrow road, but a journey immeasurably worth the effort.

As Myself?

August 2003

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-39 NIV)

A lot of letters come to the ministry every week—some full of hope and some filled with despair. The negative letters do have an effect on me despite the prayers I offer asking God to meet the needs expressed. It is all too easy to get into a mindset that says, "It's up to you, Bob, to help those people. It's up to *you* to show them the way to get the healing that they want." But I know that there is a lie in those words, for without God absolutely nothing happens. It IS God who *heals* all and who *loves* without ceasing.

Invariably the writers of letters that are filled with hope and joy share a common trait: there is a deep relationship with God at the center of their existence. However, these are not men and women who ride a perpetual tide of happiness for they also face low points, times when life comes crashing down on them.

These are also not men and women who sit back and wait for God to do things they themselves must do. They sometimes struggle with what they learn about themselves and about their pasts in therapy. They struggle with temptations that they would love to tell people no longer exist. And they do experience doubts about their ability to see themselves as God sees them.

Those who write from a position of deep despair often feel God has given up on them or has pushed them away because of their inability to overcome temptation. They often fear telling anyone of this issue of homosexuality because they know they will hear admonitions to be what they are or at least what others would call them—gays and lesbians. The argument thrown at them is that God created them with same-gender attractions and it is they who are making life difficult by not accepting the gift.

And there are those who write that healing demands they take personal responsibility to work on issues. God, they claim, gives them the self-knowledge that their same-gender attractions are not appropriate but it is they who must dig in their heels and set about the difficult task of change.

If the truth be known, I think that the healing process often involves all these components: the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows, the need for healthy relationships, recognizing I am in the world but not of the world and, most of all that God is part of everything.

I received one letter recently from a man who felt he had made a significant discovery about himself and about change. In his prayer time after a therapy session he felt God was telling him that he needed to love others, so this became a priority in his daily living, a task at which he failed miserably.

The man pointedly asked God why he was having such a difficult time. God's response came to him in his reading of Matthew 22:39 and it was just two words that tied everything together in a manner that finally made sense to him. The two words, *as yourself*, immediately clarified in his heart that he did not love himself.

He determined that his life become a promotion of doing what he knew he had not been doing to the best of his ability up to that time. Each day involved practicing proper hygiene, dieting, and exercising. He started looking and feeling better about himself and he started to see others differently as well. No longer was he seeking to have his needs met by men as needy as he had been, but now he was learning to love and receive love in a healthy manner.

Love your God with all your heart

Whatever support system you use (private therapy, support group, or self-help), it must start with God. The heart is considered to be at the core of our existence and the foundation of our determination, so loving God with all your heart is to place God above all else.

This type of love does not depend upon favorable conditions nor is it meant to imply freedom from life's difficulties, especially those that we see as contradictory to our personal hopes and dreams. To love God with all your heart is to set all else aside and love God because God *is* God and His love for us is beyond description.

With all your soul

When we say that an individual has real soul, we are acknowledging that the individual has emotional depth. I think it is all too easy to see loving God in the manner implied by Renaissance painters depicting an individual with head raised and eyes looking in a concentrated fashion on the heavens. To make sure we all recognize the spiritual connection, those artists often included winged cherubs.

But the soul is more than simply an emotional attribute of our being; the soul is the sum of our most passionate emotions. When we love with *all* our soul, there is no exclusion. We include our extreme happiness, joy, pleasure, anger, depression, rage, and a host of other variations as a clearly defined *part* of our love for God. When we love with all our soul, we offer it all.

With all your mind

Theologians equate the mind with understanding and I would take that to mean that as we grow in age and in knowledge our understanding grows in direct proportion.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. (I Corinthians 13.11)

To love God with all your mind is not merely loving God with the existing state of your mind but also with an attitude of growing in knowledge and understanding so as to better love.

Our Scripture said that these things were the first and greatest commandment. What I am not sure we understand is the use of the word *and* in verse 37. God's word doesn't say "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart or with all your soul, or with all your mind.*" It says, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*"

Regardless of what we are feeling at any given moment, regardless of the issue of homosexuality, the verse applies to all of us. I won't say that there isn't a ton of work to be done. I certainly won't say that boundaries, accountability partners, faith communities are not critical to the changes sought by the homosexual struggler.

What I *will* say is that all of those things are found in learning how to love myself so that I might learn how to love others and better receive the love they offer me.

The three verses that form the foundation for this article are not beyond our ability although one might pale a bit at the power behind those words. But God *does* know the state of our hearts and He knows how desperately we want to be whole. Love others as myself? By God's grace, yes.

An Undivided Heart

October 2003

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. (Psalm 86.11 NRSV)

Each day I look at my inbox for new email messages and delete at least 90-95% of them as junk mail or pornographic spam. When I was a boy, spam was a meat that one either liked or didn't but it was if nothing else nourishing. Computer spam is anything *but* nourishing.

Every once in a while, however, something unsolicited comes my way that doesn't get deleted. One such arrival was an opinion piece titled "No, God would not have approved of gay bishops" by Matthew Parris. Expecting the author to be at the very least a conservative with a fundamentalist view, I was surprised to read that he was both a gay man and a self-proclaimed atheist. Knowing that about him I was even more surprised by the manner in which he supported the title of his article.

Simply stated, Parris wrote that the views and teachings of Christ would not have readily been accepted by the Romans, but acceptance by the Romans or the Jews for that matter was not needed for those teachings to be true. Parris wrote that Jesus "was never reluctant to challenge received wisdoms that He wanted to change. He [Jesus] gives no impression that He came into the world to revolutionize sexual mores." Parris also suggests that the "new tolerance" on the part of the Church is born out of a "fear of becoming isolated from changing public morals."

Someone recently said that our churches need to be established on the mountain, in a place where people come to the Church out of a desire for what the Church can offer them of God. Instead, the person continued, we establish churches in the center of communities and seek to make them compatible to those communities. To succeed in drawing "the faithful," too many churches make it easier to divorce, to get abortions, and to honor same-gender marriages—all wrapped in a message of love.

I believe that the men and women who come to find hope and encouragement from ministries like Broken Yoke do so because in some deep part of their hearts they know that homosexual behavior is not pleasing to God. They know God did not create them as gay people; they know that God's plan did not include celebrating the union of two people of the same sex.

Their decision to do battle with desires they consider sinful would be much easier if God would simply give the word and all temptation would disappear. But in the clear majority of cases the temptations continue, occasional falls do occur, and the struggle they face is all too often faced alone.

I was taken aback recently when someone from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) announced that the whole issue of homosexuality, same-gender marriages, and the ordination of active gays and lesbians would continue to be studied. I was taken aback because Lutherans rely completely on the Bible, consider homosexual behavior to be a sin like other sins, and believe in embracing all repenting sinners within its church body. Perhaps I am naïve but I truly wonder why further study is needed—unless, of course, the possible result of the study would be the foundation of a new belief system for Lutherans.

The whole point Matthew Parris made was that if one believes in the Word of God, then the path of choice in behavior is clear. It is non-negotiable. To say otherwise is to ask God to recreate His Word so that we as individuals might be more comfortable with it.

Teach me your way

There are hundreds of thousands of people who say they are Christian yet they spend no time reading the Word of God. I will confess that the amount of time I read the Bible is inadequate, yet that is a situation I work on daily. The point is that God cannot teach us His way unless we are willing to look at what He has already given us.

Some argue that Jesus said nothing about homosexual behavior or at least that nothing is written in the gospels to condemn homosexual behavior. Bible scholars will not disagree with that statement. At the same time scholars point out two important points—made also by Parris.

First, Jesus did not shy away from attacking the hypocrisy or sinful practices he found in the leaders of the Jewish community. The second point is that Jesus did not contradict the Judaic laws rejecting sexual behavior that had been deemed an abomination. He did, however, point to a new way of dealing with such sins. “Go and sin no more” is the encouragement all of us need to hear. The words themselves don’t endorse the acts we commit as okay; the words serve to remind us that the things we often do are indeed sinful.

That I may walk in your truth

Without knowing the way on *any* journey, it is easy to get lost. How much more difficult, then, when we are trying to walk the narrow road. Jesus said, “But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matt.7.14).

Somehow the idea of me being able to think and do anything I want without having to face the moral consequences of those thoughts and actions seems a little false given the comment Jesus made. Yet if I make the commitment to study God’s Word and then live by those mandates I *will* make the choice to walk that narrow road. And make no mistake about it, we must all choose to follow His way.

Give me an undivided heart

“If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3.25). Jesus went on to point out that even Satan knew that if he opposed himself, he would not be able to stand. His end would come.

The other day I was thinking about this article and how often I am divided in my own heart. God has given me the faith to believe in the new creation I have been called to become. I not only accept but eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of what I am ultimately to become. At the same time, the battle within that Paul writes about in Romans 7:23 is a division within me that I wish would disappear.

While on his deathbed, the 17th century monk known as Brother Lawrence was in considerable suffering. Often during moments of pain he would pray these words from Psalm 51: “Create in me a clean heart, O God. Cast me not away from Thy presence. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.” What Brother Lawrence was praying for was an undivided heart, a heart that beat in unison with the Lord of His life.

To revere your name

In the end, the tension that exists due to a struggle with same-gender attraction will be lifted, and I and countless other men and women will be able to see how obedience to the Word of God brought Him great joy. Our lives will be a holy and spotless gift, washed free by the Blood of Christ, and laid at the feet of the Father. And in the end, we will all know that at last we stand with an undivided heart—a heart one with God.

In All Things Give Thanks

December 2003

But be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Ephesians 5.20 NAB)

I don't know about you, but I have always found it easier to thank God for good stuff that happens in my life. When not so good things happen, I petition God for an immediate release from whatever anxiety I might be feeling and ask for a return to some point of peace.

But the verse above clearly says "giving thanks always for *all* things" so somehow I am expected to thank God for everything that happens in my life. Talk about a thought that flies in the face of reason. How does one thank God for the loss of a loved one or any other terrible tragedy? But the verse does not say "giving thanks always for *some* things." It says "giving thanks always for *all* things." Whoa boy!

Right up front I am going to share an example of God's sense of humor with respect to these words.

I had traveled to Moline, IL, last weekend for a meeting with the director and some members of a ministry there. I planned an early arrival so that I could work on this article on an old laptop I sometimes take with me on travels.

The whole first page of this article had been written when something inside told me I should back up the file at that point. I had a floppy disk in place so I directed the program to save what I had written. A second or so later, I was getting a message saying the disk I was using could not be read.

I replaced the disk with a new one and went through the same steps. Everything seemed fine so I started in again on the writing.

Moments later the screen went blue and the message "A fatal exception error has occurred. Windows will now shut down." And it did. I restarted the computer, opened the program I was using, and clicked on the file showing on my floppy disk. After several seconds I knew things were not good. And they weren't. The document was there but could not be retrieved.

I started to feel some anger over all the time I had spent writing. Then I read what I had given as the title of the article and laughed—not a guffaw or a belly laugh but more of a chuckle. "So you want me to give thanks for this, Lord? Well, okay. Thanks." If I was expecting God to grace me with the sudden return of the file, it was not to be. Maybe God sensed something in me that said my thank you might not have been all that sincere.

The incident certainly was not an incredibly difficult one, but it did reinforce why I felt God was encouraging this particular topic. I wanted the disk to be fine, the article to be completed, and a sense of God's blessings on those efforts. What I got was a reminder that even though my intentions might be good, not everything would always fall in place the way I wanted it to.

Take homosexual struggle for example. How's that for leaping right into the fire? As a boy, things of a sexual nature happened in my life that should not have happened. But I made choices and acted out in ways clearly contradictory to what I believed was God's will for me.

I prayed to be changed; I prayed for control over my desires; and I prayed that I might finally get things right again in my life. God's love was there—I could feel it—but I believed I was a disappointment because of the desires I had. Back then I didn't think this particular kind of struggle was a good thing for which I should be giving thanks to God. Over the years, however, I have found that it was.

God didn't want me to give thanks for homosexual desires or attractions. He wanted me to give thanks because He was always there. He wanted me to give over what I could not change on my own. Most of all, He wanted me to be giving thanks to Him for the manner in which my life *would* change because of His presence. No instant transformation. No erasing of memories. Just the knowledge that I was being loved in ways I could never fully understand by an all-loving God.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14.26 NIV). Jesus knew that I would struggle in the manner I struggle. He also knew that I would need constant help, so he promised the Holy Spirit to be there for me—for all of us.

Lest there was any question about the results of the presence of the Holy Spirit and what that would mean, Jesus went on to say *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid* (vs.27). No matter how tense things might get, no matter how many times I might stumble and fall or struggle with the public attitude toward homosexuality, Jesus already knew these things and was comforting me.

Making melody with your heart

Knowing that the Holy Spirit resides within me is a cause for great joy. I don't know about you, but when I am happy I sing, and if I am not singing out loud so others can hear me, I am singing in my heart. The melodies come because in my heart I know *and* believe that the victory over sin has been won.

I have a friend who writes me wonderful letters. His heart is singing all the time despite situations that could easily be seen as reason for despair. Sometimes I start to think that he is overdoing the joy thing because it just doesn't seem natural that he should be thanking God for all the frustration he faces.

Don't get me wrong. I think he gets angry sometimes. I certainly think he would like things to be better than they are, and I know he would tell everyone he met if all temptation were to cease. It doesn't. But he continues to rejoice, to make melodies in his heart, and to hold on to the truth of God's word. And I truly believe that he is "giving thanks always for all things."

For you are the one I praise

Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise (Jeremiah 17.14). What strikes me about these verses from the Old Testament is that Jeremiah bases everything on the fact that the one he praises IS the one who will heal and save him.

I know that it may not seem as if I have offered any practical, down-to-earth kind of advice in this column. It's all "God stuff" as my daughter is fond of saying and not a step-by-step sequence of change some might prefer seeing.

There are some wonderful books available that deal with the homosexual issue and they include some of the step-by-step ideas, but I believe that the heart of change lies in my relationship with God and in my ability to believe and trust in His love. And I really believe that I serve a God who is capable of all things and a God who deserves my praise in all things. Yes, in *all* things. He will take care of me and show me what I need to do. He will bring me through everything for God's strength IS sufficient and in my weakness I fall on that strength. With this as a foundation, the books I read will have a better application.

The article is now done and I will save what has been written. My heart is at this very moment recognizing God's graciousness to me in this endeavor to put thoughts on paper for you. And my heart is indeed making melodies.

2004

The Right Direction

February 2004

⁷Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. ⁸Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. ⁹Rescue me from my enemies, O Lord, for I hide myself in you. (Psalm 143)

It occurred to me the other day that in some respects I would really not want to be a young person growing up today. It is hard enough being the age I am (and getting older) without having to make important decisions given all of the information and misinformation available in today's world.

Without much doubt, today's youth have technology available to them that was the stuff of science fiction books not long ago. Today they communicate with one another using cell phones, chat rooms, and email—none of which was available to me in my teen years. Because of computer technology, everything is but a click away.

In another respect, however, they are confronted daily with a new morality or lack of morality as well as a set of values that is derived more from our current culture and its various media formats than from any conservative family upbringing or church-centered community. One of the most divisive issues today's youth face is how to deal with homosexuality—how to feel about those who are gay as well as how to feel about themselves if they have same gender attractions.

I could not say that my parents, teachers, or church provided me with a very healthy understanding of this condition. As a boy who was torn by the secret of same gender attractions, I listened closely for any signs of help but heard little other than "People like that are sick!" or "Those people are going straight to hell!" Yikes!! Not much help there.

Answer me quickly, Lord

It seems to me that any personal prayer to God from someone struggling with homosexuality today either falls into the "Take these feelings away!" or the "Let me know you still love me, God!" kind of prayer. In the midst of my own prayers and petitions, I know that I often felt God's love but was confused by God's seeming absence in the face of my struggle. Despite my petitions, the feelings remained.

Today the argument in support of homosexuality I hear most often is the one that goes, "God created me—I was born gay—therefore God created me gay. Why should I change?"

Faith means trusting that God IS present in all things. It also means that when I pray for change, the most significant aspect of those prayers will be my reliance on God's continued love.

Do not hide your face

Those who struggle with same gender attractions are tempted to see their struggle as the central focus of their lives. The God they seek often becomes a single-issue God because of their search for the resolution. Many feel that for God to show love, the homosexual struggle must either disappear completely or greatly diminish.

When eyes are so focused on a single human point of reference, everything else is blurred by comparison; evidence of God in other aspects of their lives is equally blurred. In time, God tends to be formed according to *their* concept of who He should be and what He is supposed to do for them.

God's face is not hidden to anyone willing to still his or her heart, for a quiet heart would see evidence of God in more ways than might possibly be imagined. I believe that each of us is completely wrapped like a blanket with His presence. God's face is not really hidden—especially not to those who continue to seek it.

Show me the way

For many years I looked for ways to gloss over passages in the Bible that made me uncomfortable. As I look back I think that was so because I read everything in a “Thou shall not” mindset instead of concentrating on the verses that clearly said, “Thou shall.”

God’s Word doesn’t condemn same gender attraction; it condemns the sexual behavior often associated with it, a behavior gaining legitimacy in the secular world. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). There is much to be said for loving one’s neighbor, however, because the kind of love Jesus speaks about makes us whole. It doesn’t divide us. The perfect lessons of love are given us in the gospels. We merely have to learn them.

Rescue me from my enemies

I began this article sharing about the difficulties of being a youth in today’s world. Being a teen today must be very difficult because the lies they hear and see are subtle and alluring. Those lies are veiled in humor, in half truths, and in misguided sincerity.

Young men and women are being offered a makeover by an ideology that reeks of false intimacy and promises of social enlightenment, which ironically is nothing more than artificially produced soft light in an otherwise darkened environment of the mind and soul. The conflict created by homosexuality should not be a simple thing to understand. It is not merely warm fuzzies.

I hide myself in you

There is a compass on the previous page. Those familiar with how a compass works know that true north will always provide the bearings needed to arrive somewhere safe and sound. The compass I include has God as true north because only God can bring us through the maze we walk in life; only God reflects our true image as men and women.

When temptations surface in my life, I feel agitated and strangely disoriented because the object of temptation is little more than a moment of self-indulgence, a hunger that in saner moments seems ridiculous by comparison to the peace of moral righteousness. Yet that hunger is often both persuasive and possessive; it seeks total attention and total obedience. It demands of me what only God should have.

The secular world believes that those of us who call homosexual behavior sin are by definition homophobic individuals. We are accused of hating gays and lesbians and of trying to pound our beliefs into their lives with the Bible. Anyone who has struggled with and rejected same gender sexual behavior; has stopped smoking, drinking, or doing drugs; or has dealt with any other compulsive behavior knows that such animosity could never be the case. If anything, we reach out to others with even greater compassion.

For I put my trust in You

When all is said and done, all personal struggles must be laid at the altar of God. With prayer and faith, we will all make decisions with respect to the struggles we face, but our moral compass will never point us in the wrong direction.

There really is only one way and I think you knew I’d end up here. You knew I would end by saying that there IS a right direction for all of us. That direction is God!

Has Homosexuality Changed?

I Wasn't Looking!

April 2004

³God wants you to be holy, so don't be immoral in matters of sex. ⁴Respect and honor your wife (body).

⁵Don't be a slave of your desires or live like people who don't know God (I Thess.4:3-5 CEV).

In 1970, Lawrence Hatterer wrote a simple and I think usable definition of homosexuality in *Changing Homosexuality in the Male*. He wrote:

"One who is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually, but not necessarily, engages in overt sexual relations with them."

Somehow I think the definition has been changed to one of fewer words and more accessibility for those looking to justify a behavior. I would offer the following:

"One who feels a strong attraction to a member of the same sex."

If that sounds a little too loose and oversimplified, I would agree. Yet it is a definition that sure seems to fit what is happening in today's culture. Children in elementary schools who profess such an attraction are encouraged to believe that at the tender age of ten they are gay or lesbian.

When I was a boy, there was always a bit of emotional connection I felt when attracted to some classmate of the same gender. Sometimes it was hero worship for an athlete, a top scholar, or a good looking individual. Ironically, I never considered such attractions as being homosexual at all. For me, homosexuality came down to one major component—sex.

Not all relationships had that sexual component, though. As a matter of fact, the ones that meant the most to me demanded that sex would not ever be an issue. I wanted to be with Mark, for example, because I felt good hanging out with him. If he ever thought I might be attracted to him in a sexual way, he didn't let on. And I was glad that he didn't.

If I could be ten years old again and starting over, there are a number of things I would want to be different. I would like to have been more in touch with my dad. I would have liked to feel comfortable talking about any issue on my mind with either of my parents. I would certainly have liked to have been taught about sex in healthy, wholesome ways rather than relying on the half-truths friends and classmates shared in casual speculation. Being sexually active with other guys as early as ten, however, would not even have been a consideration.

That isn't saying that I would have rejected all same-sex activities that occur in the lives of many boys; just that I would have understood the behavior for what it was—behavior. It was not a matter of orientation.

I believe we are all born genetically male or female although there are occasional abnormalities. I believe orientation is the manner in which we learn to relate to those of the same gender as well as those of the opposite gender.

I believe that there is a transitional phase for boys, especially where sexual curiosity will take on a same-sex component. But this transition is short-lived in a healthy environment. Finally, I believe orientation is preference learned by repetitive choice—a choice that eventually feels natural and indeed preferential.

God wants you to be holy

At the very heart of the same-sex marriage conflict lays this truth for those on both sides of the issue. On one hand are those who condemn gays for committing behaviors called abomination in God's word. On the other are gays who argue God created them gay with physical intimacy being a manifestation of God's love in their relationships.

But there is another voice. It is the voice of those men and women who have same gender attractions, yet at the core of their spiritual lives want to be holy as God is holy. They have not been told change is possible, or if they have don't believe it to be true. They've spent a lifetime with this struggle and wonder why they should believe it would ever be different for them.

The religious will rise up and shout, “You can’t be holy as God is holy until you turn your back on your homosexual thinking!” Yet these same religious individuals shouting words of condemnation do not lift a finger to lighten the burden or offer to be supportive to those who want support. It is enough, they think, to shout.

Don’t be immoral in matters of sex

Sex. Now that’s a word that seems to be interestingly absent in most of the current debates. The gay argument is about equal rights. It’s about health insurance. It’s about being able to participate in medical decisions that heterosexual couples take for granted. It’s about love and commitment. Hard to refute.

I have spoken with a lot of people who know gays and lesbians, who consider them good and God-loving people. Why shouldn’t gays and lesbians be good people? Putting a face on this debate, however, is what makes the debate such a difficult thing.

Many in this country cringed when the Texas Supreme Court struck down the sodomy laws—not so much for the laws themselves but for the mere fact that this particular behavior was even mentioned in public. I heard one pro-gay radio commentator recently state something to the effect that sodomy was not what most people thought it was. Sodomy was really about sex between a man and a boy. Talk about distancing.

The gay issue IS about sex for most of us. It’s not about orientation. Scripture doesn’t condemn a homosexual orientation. It condemns homosexual behavior. Orientation is a preference, not a mandate in terms of how we are to respond to that preference.

Politically the gay issue is shown to be about a same-gender orientation that is pronounced fixed for a lifetime with all of the people-friendly characteristics and needs I mentioned earlier. At the same time, supporters of the popular show, “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” offer the show as evidence of how enlightened and diversified we have all become. Yet there is a collective wink at the innuendo that flows freely throughout the show about implied behaviors and relationships.

Don’t be a slave of your desires or live like people who don’t know God

Again, I think there are good people who have accepted homosexuality as what and who they are, have developed loving relationships based on their understandings of orientation, and now find themselves on the short side of rights offered to their heterosexual counterparts.

There are also people who have decided that neither God nor God’s people can make a difference in their orientation. Life for them is better lived without the rules Christians are encouraged to obey.

Opponents of their pro-gay agenda are described as bigoted, homophobic, uninformed, or insensitive. These terms all pretty much are a not-so-polite way of saying, “You don’t agree with me.” And the truth of the matter is I don’t.

Homosexuality *has* changed and pro-gays would argue that the change is for the better. I think it is they, however, who have redefined same-gender attraction by forcing a level of societal tolerance or acceptance. That the attitudes have been changing is not proof, however, that the condition itself was ever or should ever be considered an acceptable alternative.

I don’t think we’ll wake up one morning with everything looking as we think it should look. No one repents without some small reservation about saying no to self and yes to God. And in some ways we might be like the rich young man who went away saddened after Jesus told him to give away his wealth. Our behaviors can become old friends, comfortable short-term decisions that fit a need.

Homosexuality *has* changed and there seems to be no universal position taken by the church. Many churches have chosen to do nothing, to celebrate same-sex marriages, and to avoid any evidence of self-discipline in this area of life.

As awkward as it sometimes can be, I believe we are called to stand firm on a Biblical position toward homosexuality. Such a position does not mean we love those with same-gender attraction less. It means we love them more.

What I Do Is A Choice!

June 2004

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3.5-6)

Setting One -- The other day I was talking to a man who calls occasionally just to let me know how he is doing. Some calls are filled with positive things and some aren't, but I feel that this is a man who is hanging in there. He wants life to be right. He wants his feelings to be good and holy. As I said, he is hanging in there.

Setting Two -- Those who attend our weekly support group meetings normally share how the previous week went at the beginning of each meeting. We share victories, defeats, and the underlying belief that we are changing. Maybe not as some want to define change, but I think we are changing in ways that are important.

Setting Three -- A number of years ago, I sat and listened to a keynote speaker at an Exodus International conference. This man was highly respected; a leader in ministry to those who struggle with same gender attractions; and someone I had personally placed on a moral pedestal. I can tell you that on more than one occasion I have heard myself say, "I sure wish I could be where he is in this whole struggle instead of feeling as though I walk ankle-deep in mud."

At one point in his opening remarks he said something that made me suddenly very alert. In that moment I experienced a sense of freedom that I had been missing before.

Looking up from his notes and pausing a little as he took in the 800-plus sitting in that room he said, "After all these years of ministry, I still face many of the same temptations everyone here faces." I am not really sure what he said after that because I was still processing what I had just heard.

All three settings can be put in perspective by looking at what the speaker shared with us that day.

Having openly shared his heart, this speaker had stepped down from that pedestal I had constructed and became real for me. I felt that he was giving me permission to acknowledge my own temptations. His message was not saying that healing was the absence of those temptations. He was saying that healing for all of us meant making healthier choices, not painting our hearts with more shame because we had been tempted. Maybe most of all he was telling us the obvious—we *will* be tempted!

The friend who calls me told me recently that his therapist labeled him bisexual based on the physical attraction and sexual response he had to both men and women. My friend protested this diagnosis. In response, the therapist reminded him that all people are faced with sexual attractions. The bottom line is the choice they make in their response to those attractions.

Even as my friend relayed this to me, I was feeling some of the same reaction as I had had to the conference speaker. However one comes to same gender attractions, however much one wants complete freedom from the attractions, it is the choice of response and not the attraction itself that is the issue. Let me repeat that because it is so important: It is the choice of response and not the attraction itself that is the issue.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding

The Lord prompts us according to His plan for our lives. We either believe that God will be faithful in *all* things in our lives or we do not. That is what it means to *trust in the Lord with all your heart*. I cannot come before the Lord in my prayers and say, "God, this is what I want to do. And because you love me, you want what I want."

Scripture tells us that there is a battle we wage (Romans 7.22-24), and Paul admits that the battle is intense. Anyone who struggles with same-sex attractions knows that feeling. And despite the intensity of the same-sex feelings and attractions, it is still a choice as to the manner in which we respond to them.

The very first book I read on homosexuality and change was not a book. It was a small, 5x7 booklet of 48 pages by Colin Cook titled "Homosexuality: An Open Door?" (Pacific Press, 1985) My personal library now includes almost 100 books on the topic of homosexuality. I am not an expert but I think of

myself as being fairly knowledgeable on the topic.

When reading new titles today, I don't have the same rush of excitement I first felt reading Cook's book. I think that's because until "Homosexuality: An Open Door?" I had never read something written by a struggler that change was even possible. New books have added to my understanding of the condition by defining similarities that help define the condition. It took me some time, however, to realize that I only shared *some* of the characteristics others with similar attractions had. As I tell others, each of us is a book yet to be written, bringing our uniqueness in victories and failures alike to each page of the lives we live.

I do acknowledge the need people have to understand *why* this attraction developed, but I've learned that having this information doesn't really alter the attractions. The information might help me develop strategies to use when tempted, but developing these strategies means that I have to make the choice to use them. Knowledge alone is not a choice. It's information.

As my wife shared with me, *lean not on your own understanding* is pretty straightforward and doesn't need much explanation. But I think the concept faces a daily battle for most of us because we sometimes get it confused with phrases like "Be all you can be," "Have it your way," and "It's up to you."

**In all your ways acknowledge Him and
He will make your paths straight**

Another friend recently wrote and shared that he was falling short in the amount of time he was in conversation with God. I agreed that I, too, had been sharing far less of what was happening in my life with God than I once did. And it seemed to me making good choices was always better when I was connected with God in *all* things. During this time of connection, I didn't ask God how to tie my shoes but I thanked God that I had the ability to do so. The more I shared, the more intimate His presence was, and the easier it was to reject what was false and not of God's will. I wasn't perfect—just reliant.

It is relatively easy to say, "I did not choose to have homosexual thoughts. I was born homosexual. It's just the way I am!" Unfortunately that same argument is used to justify homosexual behavior that can not be justified. The fact of the matter is that we *do* have a choice as to how we respond. We can say no.

Thinking over the three settings used to start this article, I am brought to some conclusions. You don't have to agree with me because they are my conclusions, but if you've read this far, why not go the rest of the way?

First, life *is* a moral struggle for all people. Why, then, should we be so ashamed that we have one kind of issue instead of another? Why should we be ashamed that we have issues period?

Second, sharing how my week has gone with others and believing that their prayers will support me is a good thing. Each time I take that step to be vulnerable, it becomes a little easier and I become a little healthier. None of us stands on a moral pedestal, yet Satan would have us believe that we alone are moral failures, spiritual weaklings, and rejected by God because of our failures and weaknesses.

Finally, most of us are doing better than we think we are. I make poor choices every now and then and so do you. Fortunately, those poor choices are momentary lapses and not complete breakdowns. The hand of the Lord is still outstretched to take our hands; the desire of the Lord continues with the same focus—to draw us *all* to Him.

Circumstances *can* bring all of us to that decision that is between a rock and a hard place. Circumstances *can* make some choices seem more inviting and even more logical than others. But circumstances brought before the Lord will always yield the direction we are meant to take. And in the end, we do choose.

To Do What Is Right

August 2004

¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7.17-19)

I want to introduce you to some friends. To protect their identity, I've given them new names because I wanted them to be personal and real for you. Besides, each story might fit the manner in which some of you who struggle, so if it helps, just insert your own name where you think it might fit. Having said that, let me tell you about a man named Steve.

Steve has been a faithful group member for several years now. It is easy to refer to him as a friend, easier still to see how quickly others look to him for encouragement. He just seems to have a genuine interest in people and we all pick up on that.

I often wonder why Steve still comes to meetings. He has his share of life's difficulties and challenges, but those have not driven him to act out as he did years ago—pornography, cruising, anonymous sexual encounters. This isn't to say that he doesn't have temptation, though, because he admits to that. But he manages to make healthy choices. I know he comes to meetings for himself, but I also believe God has him there for the rest of us.

Another friend of mine named Joe died some years ago. Although I had only known him for a few years, he had the knack of giving real honor to our relationship—actually to *any* relationship he had with people. When I talked with him, his eyes were focused intently on mine in a way that told me he was really interested in what I had to say. I could confess freely to him without fear of being scorned or rejected.

Right up to his death Joe was a card-carrying member of AA, a friend and sponsor to anyone who needed either. I once asked him how long it had been since his last drink and learned that his time of sobriety was considerable. But he was quick to point out that he still attended AA meetings every week.

Bill is a different story. His life seems to be a roller coaster of emotion followed by poor behavior responses. His addiction to Internet pornography has led to acting out, and that has resulted in an exceptional amount of tension in his life. As he has shared with me, "I feel just like Paul in his letter to the Romans. The very things I don't want to do, I do. I just don't have consistent victory. No, it's worse than that. I just seem to have endless defeats!"

Three individuals. Two of them are looking to the end of the race; one has achieved the goal and is basking in the glory of the Lord, his sobriety now guaranteed for eternity.

It is sin living in me

When I consider the issue of sin and temptation, I know there is something in me that desperately wants to say, "This issue of homosexual attraction is done. It's no longer even an issue!" I am, after all, a new man in Christ; the old man has died. Then what gives when I have a lapse of some kind? An errant thought? A look at another man that lasts longer than it should?

Isn't victory supposed to be complete? I'm pretty sure that's what Bill is looking for in his life, so what can I say to him that will encourage him—or me for that matter? His victories are sometimes separated from sin by only a matter of minutes, not days or months.

In "Free at Last" author Tony Evans writes "Even though our sin nature was put to death in Christ, the sin it produced for all those years has lodged in our flesh." He goes on to say, "The law of sin is at work in our bodies, which is why we won't be taking them to heaven."

I don't awake each day with a burning desire to sin—especially to sin in the manner I had done for so long—but the potential is there simply because I have embedded that response deep in my mind. Should I be surprised when I experience an occasional desire for same-sex intimacy? No. Actually, God has made a provision for Bill, Steve, and me with respect to temptation.

I have the desire to do what is good

Something incredible happens when we recognize our sinful nature for what it is—the potential for

doing what we should not be doing. Something even more incredible happens when we finally accept the truth of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. Our heart becomes intimately joined with His; our desire to be holy as He is holy becomes a hunger in our daily living; and we recognize that we live by grace through those times of temptation.

The body is not evil but it carries the memories of sinful behavior that degrades its purpose—living as sons and daughters of God. Coming to the cross and believing that Jesus died for our sins should be a daily reminder that He has done what we cannot. Jesus has overcome the power of sin. And that, my friends, is the provision that supplants despair with hope.

Romans 8.5 states: *⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* Having my mind set on “what the Spirit desires” is to make a commitment to follow where God leads.

It is evident to those who know Steve that he has made this commitment to God. His life is encouraging to the rest of us because we can actually see the joy of the Lord in his eyes. He doesn't despair. He has placed his life in the Lord's hands (just as Joe did); he gives thanks for the presence of the Lord in all things.

My three friends pretty much represent a lot of people, myself included. Some days I feel more of the light and peace of the Lord than other days and I suspect it would be much the same for you.

Paul's letter to the Romans is a wonderful testimony deserving our attention. It has the same statements of human vulnerability as one finds in the Psalms David wrote. Both confessed to being sinners. Both men wanted to serve and be consumed by God, yet both knew that they did the very evil they did not want to do.

My friend Joe's life has been completed; he ran the good race and achieved the laurel of victory. Joe was a man who knew his own weaknesses but chose to dwell on the strength of the Lord instead. Being a man, he could not have been sinless and in his own eyes I would guess that he felt his sins to be as devastating as the ones Bill struggles to overcome.

Steve seems to be in the middle. He has not yet completed the race but he is not in the depth of despair that often plagues Bill. I like the example Steve sets and is willing to share.

I believe that one day Bill will have the same peace and joy that Steve has. When that happens, not every same-sex desire will have disappeared (although that could happen), but Bill will receive in his heart the ultimate victory that has already been won for him. That knowledge will have completed the journey from head to heart.

These are the truths I will continue to offer Bill when he asks for help. These are the truths I will use to remind myself of the love of God when I get frustrated. With the presence of the Lord living inside me, I will continue to seek “to do what is good” because I know those choices will be of my Lord and Savior.

¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8.11)

And Such Were Some of You

October 2004

⁹*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders* ¹⁰*nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* (1Corinthians 6.9-10)

The sermon started slowly with these opening verses, but in minutes everyone in the pew could sense the minister winding up emotionally. His hand came down more frequently on the pulpit; his extended finger pointed out over his congregation; and his voice reached a volume that strongly suggested everyone should be paying attention.

More than a few of his congregation were nodding their heads, all the while thinking of that man down the block who was seen holding hands with another man, or the woman at the office who not so quietly let it be known that she liked her men—with an emphasis on the word “men.”

Then there was Mr. Dziensky, who loved telling the other guys at the bar how he pulled the wool over the IRS in his last tax return. Without a doubt, these were the people the pastor had in mind, and more than a few of these in-their-own-opinion self-righteous individuals sat confidently on the side of good.

The pastor went on to say that Paul was really pointing out that *all* sins were worthy of death; *all* sins the reason Jesus died on the cross. He then paused as if to collect his thoughts.

In his mind he had intended his voice to reach for the ceiling of the church with what he was about to say, but it came out almost in a whisper. ¹¹*And that is what some of you were. But you were washed; you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

And in that moment the church was silent. No one moved. Oddly, the pastor stepped down from the pulpit and sat down, hands on his lap, eyes closed.

Perhaps thirty seconds later, he stood and signaled the organist to begin the closing hymn. That completed, he walked down the aisle of the church and stood by the exit as was his custom, wishing his congregation well as they left the church.

Some commented, “Good sermon” and others just nodded with a “Have a nice day” type of smile, quickening their pace as though they were late for some appointment.

Just when he thought he could return to the sacristy to change and then close up, a young man came up with his hand outstretched. “Hi, my name’s Steve.”

The conversation started with a few weather and sports comments. Looking at his feet, Steve nervously told the pastor he thought he was gay.

“Why?” asked the pastor.

“Because I get turned on by the sight of other men—well, not every other man, just certain guys that, you know, ring my bell. As much as I sometimes enjoy that, I just don’t believe I was born that way, so lately I have been asking God, no, begging God to make me right. It hasn’t happened yet. Even in church today I noticed one guy in the pew ahead of me. Even in church, pastor! How right can that be?”

“And then you hit that part in your sermon where I thought you would take off from the pulpit, but instead you almost whispered the last part of those verses. The minute you sat down, I could hear the part that said, ‘And that is what some of you were!’ running through my mind.

“I thought to myself, ‘Wait a minute. He mentioned homosexual offenders. He was talking about me! So if the Bible is right, then I don’t have to be gay. The only thing I don’t know is how I get to be one of those *were* guys. I figured you might know the answer to that, ‘cuz I sure don’t!’”

The pastor’s mind drifted to a ministers’ gathering a month or so ago. The discussion on homosexuality had been lively and the differences in thinking soon became apparent. By the end of the meeting, it was agreed that most believed the words of Scripture to be quite clear on the sin nature of homosexual behavior, while the smaller, yet more vocal members shouting that it was time to bring the church into the 21st century.

Troubled, the pastor had left that meeting feeling uneasy about the whole issue. He knew he sided with the majority on homosexual behavior being sinful, but he also wondered why those who supported

the need for a change in theology were so agitated. There was a passion in their words that was absent from the voice of those disagreeing with them, men whose words had merely sounded stubborn to the pastor.

A few weeks had gone by since that meeting and the issue of homosexuality had still gnawed at him. He knew he had not preached on this issue in the past, mostly because he really wasn't sure how he personally felt. He also knew that his training in seminary had been limited to little more than pointing out those verses in the Bible that condemned sexual contact between people of the same gender. "Stand by God's word" was how his teacher had concluded his remarks on that unit of study.

The idea of using 1Corinthian 6.9-11 as a sermon topic came to him the morning after he thought he had his sermon written for the coming Sunday. "Oh well," he thought, "I can always use the one I've just written for another week." With that decision made, he sat down and wrote his customary sermon outline.

The sermon he had just given turned out unlike anything he had ever shared with his congregation. For one thing, he lost control—something he never experienced before. As a matter of fact, he prided himself on his ability to "move mountains" when he was at the pulpit. Not this time. This time was different. This time the words took on a life he had not anticipated. And when it was over and everyone had gone, there was Steve, standing in front of him.

"I'm not sure I know what to say," he said.

Steve's face took on an anguished look as he countered, "Then what am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to believe? Give me break, pastor, if God doesn't want me to be gay, why isn't He clearer about how *not* to be gay?"

There was silence for a few moments before the pastor responded.

"Would you be willing to meet with me again just so we can talk? I have to tell you that I don't have much practice helping people who feel these kinds of attractions—never had them myself—but that doesn't mean I don't want to help."

"I'm not sure why I should," replied Steve, "but okay. And the only reason I can give you for saying yes is that I felt something during your sermon that I haven't felt before, and I think I owe it to myself and to you. I think you felt something, too, and I can see now that whatever it was, it confused you. So I think that means we both have issues."

The pastor stood and extended his hand. "Until next week." Steve shook the pastor's hand as their eyes locked. "Yeah, next week."

The week had passed too quickly as far as the pastor was concerned. He had been on the Internet looking for anything that he might offer to Steve as something that would work. He had called friends from his seminary days and gently turned the opening conversations around and pointed at homosexuality. The answers he got pretty much mirrored that ministers' gathering a month earlier.

What he read and heard that week didn't seem like the kind of quick solution he felt Steve might want. Actually, he himself had hoped for the same thing. Even the websites offering hope and encouragement all seemed to say the same thing—it's a process.

Steve was five minutes early, his face and body language broadcasting the hopeful anticipation he felt. One look at the pastor, however, told him that this conversation was not going to go as he had hoped it would.

"So you struck out, huh," Steve mumbled.

"No, I don't think I did, but the answers I got told me something I hadn't considered before you came to see me last Sunday."

"What's that?" Steve asked.

"Well, it's going to sound lame to you in some ways, but I learned that we all struggle with something. And the verse that got away from me in my sermon said: *But you were washed; you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* In other words, no matter what my sin issue might be, the cross of Jesus dealt with that."

Steve smiled and said, "So I *can* just keep being gay because if it's a sin, I'm covered. And if it isn't a sin, then it's no big deal except to those nose-in-the-air Christians who think everything should be as they want it to be."

"Well, I don't really think that's what I was saying. As a matter of fact," the pastor went on, "Paul

himself said, *'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?'* But Paul didn't say that his own temptations went away. He said that in his weakness, God's power is made perfect."

Rolling his eyes, Steve jumped in. "But Paul didn't have to deal with my kind of temptation. And besides, I don't think I have it in me to be like Paul. God was right there talking to him. God has never talked to me, and if He did, I didn't hear."

The pastor knew that Steve's arguments were sincere. "Dear God, help me!" he silently prayed.

"Steve, we all start at the same point. We all confess our sins and believe by faith that Jesus has dealt with them. Sometimes just confessing makes us feel better—freer maybe. But when the same sin temptations surface again, we start to feel hopeless and totally out of control. Satan wants us to believe that *none* of us has a chance. He wants us to believe that we do the things we do because that's who we are.

The pastor could feel something inside himself, a little like he felt during his last week's sermon. He felt like words were getting away from him or that they were not his. But he didn't slow down or stop.

"And because our particular sin hits us in the face every day, we begin to wonder why God created us that way. That's the biggest lie, Steve! Because when you and I start to think God wants us to be comfortable with our sin behaviors, and yes, they are sin behaviors, then God is seen as the one being confused. Why would He create something in us and then tell us it's wrong?"

Steve let out a heavy sigh as he interrupted. "Okay, let's say that what you are telling me is what I need to hear, maybe what we *all* need to hear. Does that mean that I have no hope of ever being normal? Will I ever stop being attracted to guys? And what about women?" His words flew across the room like bullets from an automatic weapon.

"Well, I did come across a web site called Exodus International and was really impressed with all the information they have. I saw links to support systems for youth, books, articles, and even a list of support groups all over the country. There's actually one in the city where you go to college.

"So I guess what I am saying to you is that I saw enough evidence to believe that guys who struggle with this issue *can* have success. I saw testimonies from guys who have been where you are and have found a lot of hope. I also saw enough to know that I have a lot to learn if I am going to be a pastor to others with this struggle."

Once again there was silence between them but it didn't feel uncomfortable. It was Steve who broke it.

"Something tells me that the road ahead is not going to be all that easy. But hey, maybe this is the narrow road the Bible tells me to follow, and if it is, at least I know it. You know, you sure didn't sound as confused as I thought you'd be. Matter of fact, good sermon!"

The pastor smiled and said, "Thanks. But I think this is one sermon that God meant for the both of us. You know that my door is always open to you, Steve, and I hope you'll touch base every now and then."

"Sure," Steve answered as he got up to leave. "The toughest part is over—I told someone."

What Have You Decided?

December 2004

¹²*Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* ¹³*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.* (Phil.2.12-13)

Our men's support group has been following "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren as a tool for discussion and change. I don't know whether or not Pastor Warren specifically considered his thoughts to work for people dealing with same-gender attractions, but in our group sin is sin. Above all, we know that it is only when we seek God that we finally come to the end of ourselves and find Him.

In Chapter 23 of his book, Pastor Warren writes:

"Spiritual growth is not automatic. It takes an intentional commitment. You must *want* to grow, *decide* to grow, *make an effort* to grow, and *persist* in growing."

After I read this I asked myself, "Isn't this really at the heart of the struggle with same gender attractions?" Warren was writing about spiritual growth, but I think I can make a case that becoming the men or women God calls us to be *is* spiritual growth. And I also believe that when we use word growth, we imply change—change that points our lives toward God.

You must *want* to grow

At first I thought this was the obvious part of the argument. I mean, doesn't everyone want to change? Doesn't everyone see homosexual behavior as the enemy? Well, I don't think they do.

The truth is that even though most of us are in a moral conflict with regard to our same-gender attractions, there is a part of us (hidden or not) that finds a comfort zone with those sins. There is a need in us that we think is met at the heart of these choices, a need that is wrapped up in emotional or physical gratification.

I have written many times in the past that I prayed repeatedly to God to free me from the attractions I knew were wrong, yet God did not seem to pay attention to me. The desires persisted and I said yes to them. Eventually, I told myself that if God really thought what I was doing was wrong, He would have been more definite in the manner in which He told me that. Instead of that definite answer, all I thought I heard was silence. Whatever part of me that continued to resist, that continued to *want* change was doing battle with the part of me that was happy with the way things were.

You must *decide* to grow

"Do you want dessert?" my wife asked. "I don't care," I replied. "Then I take it you don't want anything" was her response. Maybe I was just expecting her to know what I would like without my having to confirm it, but her feeling was that if I really didn't care, there was no point in her going to the extra trouble.

I think we say we have made decisions but they really aren't decisions. They are an attempt to put something aside that we would rather not deal with. "I'll clean out the garage in the next week or so" is not anywhere near the same as saying, "I am going out now to clean the garage." The statement is followed by a change into working clothes and a move in the direction of the garage. This is decision-making because a decision implies more than a temporary choice; it is a commitment. Once commitment is made, the resulting direction is obvious to anyone else willing to pay attention.

So far then, you and I have looked at our lives, felt convicted over the issue of homosexual behavior and thinking, and felt a desire that our lives should be different. We *want* to grow. We *want* to change. Having heard our inner voice in the matter, we make a decision, a bold pronouncement that implies commitment to the goal of change. Now comes the garage.

You must *make an effort* to grow

I think that for a time my initial efforts were pretty much little more than feeble statements to God and possibly a few others that my mind was bent on following the Word of the Lord. My prayers became more fervent; my mind searched for assistance from those who have been there and succeeded; and my skill for evaluating this project of personal change placed the time frame for the task at about two or three months.

The first time I fell after announcing my decision to change to myself, I immediately went to the Lord and asked for forgiveness. I also asked for the strength to avoid the kind of temptation that beat me up so often. The second time I fell, I did the same thing, but this time I was a little nervous. Hadn't I just done this repenting thing?

As the number of falls increased, so did my fear of approaching God. My initial intention was good but my follow through left much to be desired. I knew the pit had been dug pretty deep, however, when there were times I didn't care whether I fell or not.

I have little doubt that most strugglers know what I am saying because they have been there—maybe still are. Yet there is that still, soft voice inside us that gnaws away at our lack of resolve. And that still, soft voice encourages us to press on. Guess what? Another decision needs to be made—the decision to continue despite the apparent lack of success. That brings us to the final point.

We must persist in growing

It is the dedicated athletes who train day after day to shave a tenth of a second off their lap time, to increase their accuracy at the free throw line, and to look beyond the less successful moments in competition with an eye toward being a true champion. What goal do I seek in this battle against same gender attractions?

I think it is a mistake to consider the complete absence of same gender attractions or the heightened attraction to those of the opposite sex to be the goal. While both can happen, I think the choice is too narrow.

I would much rather develop to the point where I knew of God's grace in all situations. I want to eventually be a man who goes immediately into communion with the Lord when faced with temptation that would destroy rather than build me up. In short, I seek to practice the Presence in all aspects of my daily life. That's my goal—not just the absence of this or that temptation.

¹²*Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* ¹³*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.* These are the verses quoted at the beginning of the article. As Pastor Warren shares in his book, the verse does not say “*work for*” your salvation. It says “*work out*” your salvation.

There are simple, yet clear examples he shares that I think might help. In the first he writes, “In a physical ‘workout,’ you exercise to develop your body, not to get a body.” Then he adds, “When you ‘work out’ a puzzle, you already have all the pieces—your task is to put them together.”

As I read those examples, my mind went “Aha!” God has already given me everything I need to be the man I am called to become. My job is to work on all the components, to eliminate what gets in the way, and to seek to understand His will as I progress from day to day.

The second part of the verse reminds me that it is God who works *in* me and *with* me so that I can grow. God is right in the midst of all I think, say, or do. The question must be, “How close am I paying attention to His presence?”

Maybe some of you reading this will say, “Well, that's all well and good, but I have *decided* that I am gay. I was born gay. God loves me as a gay.” Before you start pointing out that you never *decided* to be gay, I want to remind you that recognizing the attractions you have is no mandate to give in to them. In some ways I would challenge you by saying you've taken the easy way out. You've decided you have no choice and therefore you don't *need* to make a choice.

It takes tremendous courage to stand up to yourself and even more to deny yourself. But that is exactly what we are all called to do. *And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (Mark 8.34)* I don't know about you, but those words are definitely a challenge.

Decide. Ask God for the grace to have your decisions mirror His decisions. This is not easy, my friends, and we definitely need to encourage one another along the way. “His good purpose” is the ultimate challenge, not homosexuality or heterosexuality. But when we seek His purpose, our sexuality will be in alignment with God's design. Remember, God has given us the pieces. It will be a wonderful picture when the last piece is in place!

2005

But the Serpent Said

February 2005

The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?"² The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;³ it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'⁴ But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die!⁵ No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." (Genesis 3.1-5 NAB)

This is a short story about Sara and Mike, two complete strangers yet both about the same age. Sara's house was a little nicer than the one Mike grew up in but both had parents who obviously loved their children. They did not own the latest in gadgets, wear the latest style of clothing, or do everything they wanted to do just because they wanted to do it. There were guidelines they had to follow.

School was another matter, however, and both struggled to fit in. Sara was attractive although a little plain. Mike always felt like he had two left feet. Both were average or slightly above average students in their class. Neither had a lot of close friends but they weren't like a few they knew who were completely isolated--real loners.

Sara

Things started to change for Sara in ninth grade when she started to hang out with Emily, a girl who wasn't really popular with many others at school but a person who made Sara feel good. Emily bought the latest teenage magazines, talked about boys when they were supposed to be doing their homework together, and went to movies Sara was not allowed to see.

One weekend, Emily stayed over at Sara's house. They talked until the early hours of the morning about everything imaginable, as well as some things Sara had never considered before. One of those topics was about being gay. Sara was confused by some of Emily's suggestions but trusted her best friend. Besides, Emily reminded her, they were at a time in their lives when they were expected try new things and explore new feelings.

Sara had all sorts of questions for her friend yet every question was met with the logical answer. It was true enough that Sara looked forward to her times with Emily-- sometimes even excitedly so. It was also true that of all her friends she liked Emily the best. She wasn't sure that she would call herself gay but as Emily pointed out, gay simply meant that theirs was a special relationship.

Sara thought her parents' attitude toward homosexuality was a little outdated. Whenever the topic came up, the Bible always seem to be part of the conversation. Sara believed in the Bible, and she and Emily had discussions about some of the verses Sara's parents had shared about homosexuality. In the end, Emily would remind her that many people misinterpreted the Bible just so they could persecute gays and lesbians. It shocked Sara a bit when one day Emily said, "After all, I think I'm a lesbian and you know me well enough to know that I'm not a monster. You know that I love God."

The more Sara thought about it, the more she began to question her own feelings. The more she looked at her relationship with Emily, the more she wondered what was so wrong with being lesbian. Even though she still felt a little uneasy about the whole issue, she was sure that Emily would never lead her down the wrong path.

Mike

There was a kid in Mike's class who had transferred in as a new student the beginning of the spring semester. Larry was quiet but pretty intelligent. Like Mike, he was so-so in athletics and was always

among the last picked for any team sport, but Mike and Larry seemed to have a really easy time talking and quickly became good friends.

They attended the same church, belonged to the same Bible study group, and really enjoyed church activities. The parents of both boys were genuinely happy that their sons had such a good relationship going.

One Saturday, Mike and Larry agreed to clean out the garage for Mike's grandfather. It was dusty, dirty work with piles of wood scraps, boxes of old tools, and half empty cans of this or that cluttering just about every free space. They were a little surprised, though, when one of the boxes yielded a number of old magazines. Not just old magazines, but old pornography.

Checking to see that no one else was around, they started paging through first one magazine and then another. These were not just girlie magazines-- men *and* women were on just about every page. What surprised Mike, although he couldn't tell Larry, was that he was more interested in looking at the men than the women. While he was excited, he was also a little ashamed.

In the end, they decided to wrap the magazines up in garbage bags and put them by the curb with the other trash. There would be a junk pick up the next day and that would be that. Except for Mike, that wasn't that.

In the weeks and months that followed, Mike found himself thinking about those pictures and remembering them with more clarity than he thought possible. The memories excited him more than he cared to admit even to himself.

Mike didn't know how to talk about this to Larry and he certainly didn't know how to talk about this attraction with his parents. Based on the sermons he heard the pastor give on homosexuality, he believed his thoughts were sinful. But try as he might, those images kept coming back and back and back.

Whenever the subject of someone being gay came up on television, Mike paid close attention. Everything he saw or heard--especially on sitcoms where a gay character was prominent--seemed to help him feel more comfortable about himself. The gay characters were good people, he thought, and so was he. Why should being gay make him any less of a good person? Even though he didn't share his thinking with anyone, even Larry, Mike started to look forward to going away to college. Once there, he decided he would be more open about his feelings and find others who shared those feelings.

But the serpent said to the woman

Neither Mike nor Sara grew up thinking that one day they might be homosexual or lesbian. Yet both encountered a period of conflict in their lives, conflict about their sexual attractions and certainly conflict over how those attractions contradicted their upbringing.

Both Mike and Sara held back and didn't tell their parents or anyone else for that matter about this new struggle. In the end, they both accepted half-truths as being total truth. Answers to the confusion they felt came in the form of attitudes others wanted them to have rather than attitudes that had been instilled in them as children growing up.

Gay people center their arguments on the concept of love and rarely if ever speak openly about the physical aspects of their relationships. They don't talk about the health risks that are often associated with their physical intimacy. They don't talk about the emotional codependency that often serves as the foundation of the relationships they have. And they certainly don't share the same perspective on Scripture as it applies to homosexual behavior that their conservative counterparts do.

It is sometimes easy to read the story of the Garden of Eden and point a finger at Eve. After all, if she had just said no to the serpent, everything would have been fine. But it didn't work that way. Something the serpent said appealed to her and by the time she finished thinking it through, Eve had convinced herself that she was doing nothing wrong.

The face of sin *is* appealing and few choose sin with the understanding that they are deliberately choosing to go against God's will. The world tends to justify homosexuality by saying that those who consider homosexual behavior to be sin are misinformed or religious zealots.

What makes the issue of homosexuality so difficult is the loving, human face it often wears. It's like the family's pet cat--an animal that runs where it will, damages any number of household things, yet stares at its owner with eyes that ask, "How can you not love someone as cute as I am?"

Why is it that people feel God expects no boundaries or demands no obedience? Why is it people feel God negotiates His own word so that it is comfortable and unrestrictive? God doesn't, but there is one who does, and his arguments can be seductive.

Should We Vote on It?

April 2005

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. (John 15.19 NASB)

The other day a friend and coworker in ministry to those who seek freedom from homosexual behavior sent out a group email announcing his decision to take a short sabbatical. He shared that he needed time to be refreshed—I can certainly understand that. But he also shared something that has been gnawing at me and has, I think, become the topic for this column.

My friend also wrote that the same morning another invitation to attend a gathering designed to "pay particular attention to the ways in which Holy Scripture upholds the sanctity and dignity of all blessed relationships" had arrived in his ministry mailbox. In short, it was a gathering meant to bolster support for same-gender marriages and from my friend's comments it was not the first such gathering on that topic in his city.

Only the day before, I received a letter from a man in prison who was writing about a cell mate. He shared: "I've talked with my cell mate about God. He believes he is saved but says there are things in the Bible he doesn't agree with. Isn't it amazing how quickly we throw out anything God says that doesn't line up with what our flesh desires? In a world where it is all about me and what I want, is it any wonder relationships based upon uplifting another have been all but destroyed? It is only the power of the Holy Spirit that will break the stranglehold self has on our lives."

Another confirmation (so it seemed to me) came as the result of reading an opinion piece against the Ten Commandments being displayed on government owned property in our local paper. The writer's point was very simple: Why worry about a little thing like an image of the Ten Commandments? Who reads them or lives by them these days? Are people actually willing to change their lives so as to be in compliance with these mandates?

Society would not, according to the writer, make such changes and sadly, I think I would have to agree. We live in a world where pornography is winked at; marital infidelity is considered pretty common; and church is a once-a-week attendance with little effect on the choices people make.

If you were of the world, the world would love its own

Ministries such as Broken Yoke are fast becoming defined by the vote of a public willing to take the easy route. Our mission statement says in part

This ministry seeks to support those who struggle with homosexuality and believes that such behavior is incompatible with God's design for their lives.

That, my friends, is like waving a red flag at a bull hungering for a challenge. With respect to homosexuality, the mission statement of today's culture might read:

Our society seeks to support and value the gay and lesbian community and stands firmly against any opposing voice.

I have never met a leader involved in ministry to those struggling with same gender attractions who did not seek to love gays and lesbians with a Christ-centered love. We leaders have "been there, done that" and *have found freedom.*

Most people would say that the easiest voice to dislike is the one that reminds us of God's law. The easiest voice to dislike is the one that walks through the city telling the people to "Repent, for the end is near." The easiest voice to dislike is the one that suggests sin where others would prefer to use the word choice. The popular, loved voice is a soothing voice, a "Whatever you want" voice, and a "The Bible really doesn't say that" voice.

***But I chose you out of the world;
because of this, the world hates you***

To be chosen by God says nothing about eliminating same gender desires. It says nothing about God making our daily walk easier. It does suggest, however, that to be hated is to turn one's back on a fluffy, personal, and need-driven faith as well as on those who would let us do whatever we want.

Being spiritually reconciled is not to reconcile God to our way of thinking, but to reconcile ourselves to God's way of thinking. God has created us as diverse creatures with our very diversity based on elements of *His* goodness. The important thing is that not one of those elements would contradict God or His law.

I have met people who have been hated for the stand on sexual morality they take when they speak out. It is a belief of the gay and lesbian community, though, that such a voice must be silenced. They call any voice speaking *against* same gender sexual intimacy a hate-filled voice, all the while preaching the need for diversity yet disallowing any voice that raises objection to their pro-gay point of view.

Should we vote on it?

Twenty years ago, the idea that churches would openly celebrate homosexuality and bless same-gender unions would have been unheard. To even suggest such a possibility would have brought scorn, not agreement. But in twenty years many people would say that we have grown wiser. Science, they add, daily provides answers to questions unanswered before.

Twenty years ago, the idea that our courts would ultimately decide to accept or reject same-gender marriages would have been a concept budding law students argued in classrooms. Today, however, some state courts have already ruled on this issue and others are gearing up for the arguments raised by both sides.

Because our American constitution holds to a separation of Church and State, that argument, while secular in nature, is emotionally charged and in the eyes of some, a matter of affirming the rights of good people who want nothing more than to love one another.

Statistically, some figures show that a slight majority of the popular vote would be against same-gender marriages, but this vote will not necessarily be won or lost in an open election. Just as we have seen in Massachusetts, it will be won or lost in the courts.

Yet if we *did* get a chance to stand on one side or the other, there probably would be far too many people standing in the middle—those who really don't know much about homosexuality but will opt to side with a politically correct position. In the end, the middle of the road voters will side with a pro-gay choice because gays are nice people. Who ever said they were not?

From where I sit, God is either not allowed to be part of the vote or His position has been altered—neutered would be a better word—to justify someone's choices. It should strike some of you as odd that we as a people would even be taking God to court.

The arguments are not new although the cause probably is. *If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.* (Joshua 24.15) It is still a question of serving God or of serving the gods of the world. *As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Amen.*

If I Could Tell My Church

June 2005

1Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (2 Cor. 4.1-3)

Recently Randy Thomas, Exodus International, sent an email to member ministry directors with a simple request. Scheduled to speak to a large congregation, he wanted us to share with him “one thing we would like to tell the church about homosexuality.”

I sat down ready to make my list—for it was indeed, I thought, a list of some proportions. Yet Randy had not asked for a list. He asked for a single statement that represented the desire of our hearts. I decided to ask a few of the men in our group what they thought. Here are just a few responses.

I'd share that this sin issue is the same as any other sin. We know that it is wrong. We also know that we want freedom from it.

When I meet with someone interested in coming to our support group meetings, we talk about what it was like growing up; we talk about our experiences with the church; and we talk about how we felt as someone struggling with same gender attractions. These are not easy conversations but they are necessary conversations.

Reading into the comment above I would say that when this man was young sins were defined by how serious they were. Some sins were so common no one thought much of them, yet when confession time came, these “smaller” sins were easily retrieved and the confessor felt freed of their burden.

With age came more serious sins and along with those sins came lives of increased secrecy. Even bigger sins were categorized, though, by how public one could be with announcing them. Sexual sins seemed to generate the most secrecy. Today, many pastors preach sermons maintaining that one can overcome sin and change—except if the sin is homosexual behavior. It is implied that anyone who struggles with that sin does so because there is no choice in the matter. He or she was born homosexual and if that is considered truth, then they maintain there is no sin.

There are not many other sins that enjoy such a dual interpretation. On the one hand, those who engage in homosexual behavior and believe it to be wrong feel they cannot tell anyone. On the other hand, some people are saying that homosexuality is genetic; pastors are being enlightened by modern psychology to have a more progressive attitude toward the issue; and the struggler, torn between a conviction that the behaviors are sinful and an inability to find help, learns to be an expert in spiritual camouflage. There is the visible man or woman walking in sexual sobriety, and then there is that second life—the one built in the shadows of sinful choices. Those brave enough to come forward to confess are often told by pastors (who have no other answer to give them) that the problem is not really a problem. It's a matter of acceptance of their condition.

I'd share that change IS possible and that the church should love the sinner.

There is a little of the first statement in this one but I believe it goes further in a way I would like to explore.

Once an individual confesses same gender attractions—especially in a fundamentalist church—the pastor and sometimes the congregation assume the role of overseer when considering that individual. They offer biblical discipline and express words of Christian love for the struggler. And all of that is good.

At the same time, however, the struggler is viewed as needy, weak in personal judgment, and someone to be watched closely. What love they might have for the struggler might be coming from the position of looking down on the individual in a way that clearly announces, intended or not, that the struggler is not really a spiritual equal.

Agape love is eye-to-eye level love. There is no issue of being superior or less tainted, for all fall short when it comes to sin. We are all in need of the cross, and because of the cross we have the

potential to love one another as we love ourselves. I can tell you that incredible healing comes to any sinner exposed to a church living these principles.

I'd share with the church that they should not assume the problem of homosexuality is not present among young people just because no one has stepped forward or that it doesn't appear to be a problem among the church's youth.

By the time this edition of *Wellspring* is published, I will have met with an area church youth group wanting to talk about homosexuality. The material I'll offer will be specifically geared toward their age level but it will be the question-answer time when the issues most important to them are discussed.

By the time a teen makes the announcement to mom and dad that he/she has same gender attractions, years of personal struggle in silence will have already been endured. Often mom and dad (and the pastor) are clueless that there is even an issue of gender identity struggle. The announcement actually becomes something of a "Mom and dad, this is the way it is, so love me as I am because I can't change it" kind of thing.

If nothing is offered our youth in terms of a Biblical approach to homosexuality offered with care and understanding, should we be surprised when they find answers from others their age with a "socially acceptable" viewpoint? Should we be surprised that TV shows have more influence on their opinions than the message preached from the pulpit—especially if there is no message being preached? Should we expect our youth to talk and discuss the issue only after the crisis that usually follows a "Mom? Dad? I have something to tell you" opening?

The gay community is right about one thing, homosexuality IS an issue for our youth. It's why so many adults with same gender attractions tell me "I've felt this way for as long as I can remember."

If I believe homosexual behavior is a moral issue, then homosexual behavior is most certainly a church issue. Our youth should be able to find help from their parents and if not from their parents, then the church. If they find help from neither, finger pointing after the fact will make little sense other than self-justification.

Homosexuality and homosexual behavior are not part of the same definition for life choices.

Homosexual behavior is a response, not a mandate.

I have felt that the church tends to view the issue of homosexual orientation as inseparable from homosexual behavior. For most strugglers, there is eventually an acting out based on those attractions—either in the form of sexual activity with a person of the same gender or personal sexual activity fueled by an active fantasy life.

As one who faces the temptation of same gender attractions, I want the church to be supportive of me, to hold me accountable in a loving, Christ-centered manner, and to be offering me hope. I want the church to know that I am willing to support others in prayer regardless of the nature of *their* struggles because in doing so I can feel more connected to the Body of Christ.

I want the church to know that it does not have the responsibility to make me heterosexual—just to strengthen my relationship with God—for He will guide me so that I can take care of the rest. Finally, I want the church to know that I see a light at the end of my temptations. It should come as no surprise to anyone that it's the same light of eternal salvation they see.

¹Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

These words are light and truth for all who seek the Lord. The heart of those who shared their thoughts in this article speaks to a deep desire that our churches be united. We want to tell you that change is possible. We know because we experience it every day. A big question remains, however. If I could tell my church, would they listen?

We Hung Our Harps on Willow Trees

August 2005

Because the Exodus International conference is taking place during the weeks I normally produce this newsletter, I am including a piece I wrote for the April 1995 edition of *Wellspring*. I hope that you will find it helpful.

Beside the rivers of Babylon we thought about Jerusalem, and we sat down and cried. We hung our harps on the willow trees. Psalm 137.1-2 CEV

With these words, the psalmist provided a most powerful image when describing the exile of the Jewish people, an image of pain and separation that cannot be ignored. So great was their despair that an instrument of praise was not hidden but displayed openly hanging from a willow tree.

As a musician, this symbolism reminded me of a time ten years ago (now 20 years ago) when I stared at the piano in my home wondering if I would ever feel able to play again. There was no spirit of joy to prompt any playing, and somewhere within myself I think I wondered if God would even accept what I offered. The offenses I had committed that brought me to this point in my life were too great, I thought, and the pain I had caused so many others prompted silence as a substitute for words I couldn't find to express the remorse I felt.

One day, a friend asked me to make her a copy of a cassette containing songs I had written. As I listened to the music and adjusted sound levels, I started to cry because the songs I thought written for others were just as healing for me.

A few days later, words linked to a simple melody became the encouragement to take up a guitar, manuscript paper, and a pencil. Within an hour, *Come, Share My Love* was complete. I don't sing it often, but each time I do I remember that the Lord wants to bless me despite times when I have hung my harp.

Many who struggle with homosexual issues experience the feeling of exile. They face a world that either tells them it is perfectly "normal" to be gay or one which demands change with a simple formula of words. The reality of the struggle most overcomers face IS that it is a PROCESS. And while they are in that process, they may have to deal with the isolation experienced by the polarized views of others.

An overcomer might find that support groups can be extremely valuable as places where they can be affirmed in their decisions by those not quite so far on their journey or encouraged by those who might be farther along in the process. The group structure can also be a relatively safe sounding board for the expression of feelings that had earlier remained unspoken.

Healing for any person begins with an internal belief that changes are possible, and that God's grace is at the core of those changes. People can and do offer a contribution of support to the wounded who stand with outstretched arms. The support they offer is critical, but the healing changes originate, proceed from and find completion within the wounded themselves.

I have experienced times of intense praise and joy, times when my conversations with Jesus have flowed with love. He instilled in me a passionate belief that I was His and that my hope for healing was not an idle thought. It saddens me when I think of the times I have hung my harp of praise on a willow tree, silent because of feelings of isolation or separation while in the presence of others.

We fail each other on a daily basis, not because we intend to let others down but because our own needs sometimes cloud our vision. If our relationships with others sit on one side of a scale and our needs on the other with God as the central point or fulcrum, there will be times when the weight shifts from good to not so good. When that happens, are we still able to focus on the fulcrum?

Relationships and needs will always be intertwined. The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 reminds us that we have a responsibility to one another, to serve and reach out as well as to be served in our own needs. We are to act as a witness of the Lord and as one who seeks the Lord in others.

Mario Bergner, in his book *Setting Love in Order* (Baker Books), relates an incident in which he and a female friend were drawn inside a church one evening by the sound of praise and worship. They stayed a while but left before the service was over. Once outside, his friend said, "This lesbian Jewish girl just felt the presence of Jesus in that church back there." Jesus calls each of us to be with Him for eternity. What an awesome invitation! So no matter how difficult things get in our daily journey, may our harps never, ever be silent.

Like Trees Walking Around

October 2005

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." (Mark 8.23-25)

On more than one occasion, scripture tells us that all who came to Jesus were healed. He touched some of them and some of them touched him. Either way, healing occurred. They trusted Jesus to free them of whatever illness they had. They trusted that he would drive out the demons that afflicted their lives. And he did. He did it all!

But there was this blind man. The story we read is that friends brought him to Jesus begging him to heal their friend. Jesus did not stretch out his hand. He didn't pronounce a few words then and there as he had done before. Jesus did another unexpected thing. He took the man by the hand and led him out of the village. Bible scholars say Jesus was responding to a lack of faith in that place, a town where earlier miracles had no effect on the people.

Once outside the village limits, Jesus spit on the man's eyes. Not a simple touch. Not a penetrating yet loving stare. Spit. Then he put his hands on the man's eyes.

When I come to the part where Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" I sometimes stop reading. I know the next verse but in my imagination I think of myself as the blind man jumping up and down all the while yelling, "I can see! I can see!" This is the healing style I want Jesus to offer. I want it to be of the instant variety. After all, most of the miracles Jesus worked were that way, so why not this one, too?

The blind man was obviously not blind any more because he answered, "I see people." Somehow I almost imagine his voice to be a little flat. Maybe I even imagine the man asking, "Is this the best it's going to get? Everything is pretty much a blur, you know." But I am a bit imaginative. Maybe his words had the sound of intense anticipation. At the same time, we only have evidence that the man's friends believed Jesus could heal. The blind man had said nothing, had asked nothing.

In response to the man's answer Jesus didn't say, "Well, it's certainly got to be better than it was." Instead he touched the man's eyes again. No spit in the eyes. Just a touch. But this time it was *the* touch and the man saw clearly.

There are miracles happening every day but they don't seem to make the front pages or the evening news. A skeptical world claims restored health to be mostly a by-product of medical sciences, skilled physicians, or the amazing recuperative powers of the human body. They would be right, of course, but without acknowledging the power of God they would be falling short. Besides, some healing simply defies explanation although the secular world might say it was "just one of those strange things."

I am not the only man I know who has same-gender attractions and rejects those attractions as unwanted and contrary to God's design for my life. I am not the only man who has called out to God for an instant transformation only to face times of frustration or moments of doubt as to whether or not I could say no one more time.

In 1985, I took a series of psychological tests and the initial results showed a definite homosexual orientation. I have to tell you that I was relieved. Science was telling me this was how I was sexually wired. Science was validating all the things I had felt for so long. Science was giving me permission to tell people, "Well, that's who I am—the doctor says so—what more can I say?"

At the same time, however, friends took me to visit the Lord. He was, they told me, alive and well and just waiting to heal me. This was a charismatic group, people filled with the Holy Spirit and more than willing to lay hands on me and pray for me. So I let them do that. After all, I had the medical community on my side so if God didn't work out I could always fall back on that.

Although I was skeptical, that visit and others that followed clearly convinced me that God could and did change lives for those who sought His presence. Those other people were not struggling with same-

gender attractions but they did acknowledge something wonderful happened to them because of prayer and faith.

Two things happened. First, I found myself getting a little angry because the tests I had taken with the psychologist validated the attractions I had. To tell the truth, I didn't really mind the attractions so much in those days. What if God *did* zap me, so to speak, and what if all those things the church had told me about homosexuality being sinful *were* right? That definitely did not seem fair to me. After all, the tests told me I was homosexual.

Second, my friends loved me, prayed for me, and rejected my claims that same-gender attractions were normal for me. They did not look at me through the prism of my sins or desires. Instead, they looked at me as Christ looked at the blind man—with compassion and a desire to heal.

When my friends began praying for me and encouraging me to reclaim my masculine identity, they did not make the mistake of pointing at some macho-looking or macho-acting man saying, "Be like him." Nor did they say, "All you have to do is ask Jesus to give you sexual attractions to women and remove same-gender attractions." However admirable these two goals might seem to be, they told me to seek the image of masculine that God had designed in my heart before I was in my mother's womb. They encouraged me to seek MY masculine identity!

Sometimes I think I have a pretty good handle on that identity but at other times the image is definitely "like trees walking." What makes the difference, I believe, is that I believe the goal is attainable. The distortion is not permanent—it WILL clear and it IS clearing. For that I will be eternally, and I mean eternally grateful to God!

It's Who I Am

December 2005

"When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139.15b-16)

In late October, Broken Yoke Ministries hosted the Exodus International regional conference, "Journey into Healing." Before sharing too much about that, however, it would probably be good to clarify some things because not everyone reading this knows about Exodus International or even about Broken Yoke Ministries.

Exodus International is the largest Christian referral and information ministry dealing with homosexual issues in our world today. Broken Yoke is a member ministry of that organization. Each year Exodus hosts a national conference where hundreds attending hear excellent presentations in the general sessions and then choose workshops offered on specific topics.

A regional conference is an opportunity for ministries in a specific geographical location to come together in much the same fashion but in perhaps a more personalized setting due to its smaller size.

It is a little harder to hide at a regional conference. Sooner or later someone is bound to introduce him- or herself. For some who attend, the lack of anonymity can be a problem. But underscoring everything is the desire to feel God's presence while talking about homosexuality. People come expecting miracles—and miracles happen.

We had excellent speakers this year. Mike Haley, *Focus on the Family*, shared his story with us on Friday evening and then offered "Five Steps to Success" on Saturday morning. [The steps are offered on page two of this newsletter.]

Randy Thomas, director of member ministries for Exodus International, gave his testimony on how God changed his life at the Saturday evening general session.

We had a time for questions and answers and a time for breaking into small groups, both designed to let people share how they felt about what they heard. We also had heartfelt times of worship—the literal heartbeat of any Exodus conference, national or regional.

Sunday morning we gathered for our closing worship time before packing up and returning home. One song ("Lover" written by Nate Oylo, our worship leader) became something of a central theme for our conference. In a conference designed to discuss masculine and feminine identity, one verse in this song rang especially true. It went "I'm a lover of God, that's who I am. So arise in love, and go forth in love, and live in love, for God is love, God is love."

We picked up on that simple truth; it had been repeated without anyone planning it in every session we had. "I'm a lover of God, that's who I am." When everything was said and done, what better could any of us hope to be?

Early Sunday morning (and I mean early), I kept hearing Nate's melody but with new words. "I'm a man of God, that's who I am." And then I saw the women who were with us and immediately heard, "I'm a woman of God, that's who I am." Over and over the new phrases played in my mind, so when I saw Nate before the worship service I told him what I heard and asked if he could use this. He did much better.

Nate had the men stand on one side of the large meeting room we were in facing the women who were on the other side. A large iron cross was sitting on the fireplace mantel in the room. One of the men took it down and one of the women stood with him in the middle between the two groups holding the cross in the air.

After a brief explanation, Nate began his song and the men held hands toward the women singing, "I'm a man of God, that's who I am. So arise in love, and go forth in love, and live in love, for God is love, God is love." It was a blessing and a statement of truth.

With hands extended toward the men, the women then sang, "I'm a woman of God, that's who I am. So arise in love, and go forth in love, and live in love, for God is love, God is love." More truth. We men

and women were being blessed with a simple yet profound affirmation from God. No distortions. No gender identity conflicts. Just the simple truth.

*"When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

When God's truth is proclaimed and heard with the heart and not merely the ears, something happens that can only be expressed as miracle. His word is like the sharpest of knives cutting through anything and everything that stands in the way of it being received and understood. That morning hearts were touched as His simple truth "I am a man of God/I am a woman of God" cut through lies Satan had been implanting.

When we finished singing, one woman tearfully shared that for the first time she saw men blessing her—not homosexual strugglers but men of God. She felt blessed as a woman—not as one who faced lesbian issues in her life but as a woman of God.

A man shared a similar feeling about seeing the women across from him in a way he had not seen them before. For him, for most of us, it was a simple yet profound truth.

Another woman stood with eyes fixed on the floor as she told of her hatred for men. Her voice was barely audible (at times little more than a whisper) yet the abuse she suffered at the hands of men was clearly understood. The song didn't erase the abuse but it did remind her that she, too, was a woman of God. It's who she was and is.

There is much more healing needed in her life and in the lives of each of us singing that song, but God will see that healing happens. It *is* a journey we travel and journeys involve seeing things, meeting others, and growing because of the paths we walk.

There is no snap of the fingers mindset to what we do because life isn't that way. Sometimes our understanding truly is like a light bulb coming on at the touch of a switch but most often it is more like holding a candle and walking in directions that are not always well lit or clearly defined.

There is one more aspect I need to share before closing. I believe that the power of that special moment we had came because we sang to each other—men to women and women to men. It might have been powerful if only men were present but not anywhere close to the opportunity God gave us.

I don't think we have to understand or have a strong physical attraction to the opposite sex in order for us to identify what God has designed. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe we think the opposite sex is alien *because* we don't have a strong attraction to them. And maybe the vision we have of the opposite gender is distorted because we only see them in relationship to our own brokenness as men or women.

In Psalm 139, David points out that there is nothing about us that God does not already know. As much as we might like to hide from the identity God designed for us or as much as we might like to recreate that identity to fit into a positive pro-gay one, we can't. We are men of God; we are women of God; that's who we are. That's who we are.

2006

Who Lifts You Up?

February 2006

“¹⁶From him (Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4.16)

I don't know of too many of us who at one time or another did not have to listen to “When I was a kid” while growing up. We'd nod our heads aggressively with the hope of ending the conversation as quickly as possible. Or perhaps our eyes would become vacant as our minds transported us to some other safer and certainly less boring place than in a room listening to “When I was a kid.”

The phrase was, I think, little more than proof that there was quite a gap in generational thinking. And being the “full of wisdom” creatures we were at the time, the parent who dared such a comment proved, in our thinking at least, that he or she was clearly out of touch. In matters that meant the most to us, it was pretty easy to say our parents just wouldn't understand.

My generation was and is no different from generations past and those to come, but I think one thing happened to all of us to at least a certain degree. We took a step away from the potential support of loved ones, particularly in sensitive areas of our lives, because we saw it as a move toward independence. Maybe it was and maybe that's how it should have been.

At a recent Broken Yoke meeting, we watched a short video presentation on forgiveness. One of the comments the young pastor made was that everyone carried some hurt, struggled with some personal issue, and felt the weight of that in their daily lives. For most, it was a hidden hurt not to be shared. For others, it was an issue that brought them feelings of helpless shame. As I thought about it, I decided that silence was the rope that held them captives; silence was the door that would not be opened to others who might help.

There are thousands around the country with same-gender attractions who do not consider homosexual behavior an acceptable response. They would not watch “Brokeback Mountain” and call it a tender love story. Instead, they would say the film reminds them of all the reasons they have to leave that lifestyle, not endorse it. For them, the film does not point to society's inability to collectively celebrate homosexual and lesbian relationships as much as to point out the flaws in those relationships.

It is growing increasingly clear that men and women who seek help to leave the gay life find it more difficult than they might have imagined. Rather than support and encouragement, they face confusion from one side and anger from the other. I say it that simply because no matter what group I use as example, the result is pretty much the same.

When I asked the men at our meeting that evening what they found helpful about our group, they used words like affirmation, understanding, tempered response, and encouragement. They spoke of feeling able to share some of their intimate struggles because others in the group had already done so and had not walked away defeated.

I asked them to describe an ideal group and heard things like a place to be real and realistic, 24/7 help if they needed it, a place to feel honor and integrity, and a place to feel safe. Such a group would be a resource not only to strugglers but to churches and community alike. It would also be a place where they did not have to be neat and tidy. Above all, such a group would be a place where no matter what had happened the week before, God would know each person stood before the throne with a sincere desire to understand and feel God's love.

Interestingly, no one felt that an ideal group would be a place where everything was fixed at the end of the evening. Rather, it would be a place where words like reconciliation and repentance could be

spoken without fear. And the ideal group would be a place where every man recognized the human dignity of another man; every man recognized his neighbor as equally loved by the Lord who loves us all.
***the whole body, joined and held together
by every supporting ligament***

Sometimes I am frightened by the idea that the body of Christ is not as joined or held together as it could or should be. We are a people who either tolerate anything and everything or very little to nothing. To be in the middle is to be indecisive—so say those at either end.

Our group members want support for the choice they have made to reject same-gender sexual behavior or inappropriate emotional attachments. They don't want the body, the church to tell them that they have it all wrong; God created them gay, so celebrate it. They don't want the body, the church to tell them that only complete, undefiled saints are allowed to become or remain members.

Our group members have taken steps in a direction they feel called to take. The two extremes allow for no progress, only the tension of being tugged and pulled in conflicting directions. Such conflict encourages the silence they have carried for too long, the shame that gave birth to the silence in the first place.

If you are wondering what is happening in the middle, rest assured that I am not suggesting any compromise on the morality of behavior. It might be easy to suggest that there must be a give and take on both sides, but I think it really is more a matter of loving as Christ would love—not advocating sin but recognizing the need for sinners to be loved, nurtured, and encouraged.

***Grows and builds itself up in love
as each part does its work***

As I reflect on the notion of growing and building up in love, I find myself wondering what it would have been like had I heard, "When I was a child, there was always someone who seemed different. Today we'd say gay, but back then it was just they were different. I don't know if I ever understood completely what they were going through, but I know that they needed friendship; they needed all of us because something was missing in their lives and we could all help fill that void." I think I would have paid attention to something like that being said to me.

I think I might even have said, "Dad, sometimes that's me you are describing." And he would not have ranted or raved; he would not have called me a sissy or queer. He would have reminded me I was his son; he would have reminded me of his love; and I think that would have gone a long, long way.

One concept that eludes pro-gay individuals is that being what we are called to be in the Lord is hard work. I told a caller to the ministry tonight that if what I hear in church does not convict me a little, I start to wonder if I am growing in my faith. Church is not about being comfortable all the time because that would imply nothing needs to be changed. And the last time I thought about it, I decided change is hard work.

Maybe the ideal group is a work in process right where our members meet. Maybe it is the members of our group who will transform those in their churches, enlisting them as prayer warriors, as accountability partners, and as brothers and sisters on the journey through this life and into the next.

The first step, however, belongs to each individual who has decided that the struggle is a weight that must no longer be born alone. Persevering through silence while hurting will never bring healing; it will never allow others to serve as perhaps they themselves have been served in their moments of trial; and that silence will never build up the body, strengthen the ligaments, or produce the fruits a healthy body should produce.

If homosexuality is not an issue for you, recognize the fact that there is still something inside you that needs to be released. Whatever that might be, lift up others just as you would want to be lifted up. It's a team effort, folks, and we are all part of the team. A little disorganized at this point in history but with all the potential of true greatness in the presence of God!

Be Transformed

June 2006

Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry. Your own conduct was once of this sort, when these sins were your very way of life. What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his creator. (Col.4:5-7, 9-10)

Perhaps one of the more difficult aspects of walking the Christian walk lies in how we tend to read verses like these. I say that because few people are so ignorant of themselves that they don't know when they have done something that they should not have done.

The moment I tell a lie, I know that I have deliberately tried *and maybe succeeded* in deceiving someone. People use words like "It's just a little, white lie" but when push comes to shove, a lie is a lie. And for the one who lies, personal stature is diminished. And maybe the saddest thing of all is that we often pass off things like "little white lies" as having no consequence.

Other behaviors, such as fornication, murder, and tax evasion, are what a lot of us would call "biggie" sins—hard to ignore when they happen and definitely things we know we are to avoid.

Over the years, I have been blessed to hear both men and women recount a moment in their lives when they knew that they had done something, something really bad. There was no list of "Thou shalt not" behaviors tacked to their bedroom wall, yet without being specifically told something was sin, they knew it was sin.

These people would also share with me that some serious sins could be acknowledged to mom or dad, teacher or minister, and other sins could not. Some confessed sins were easy to deal with and even came with "This is how you can avoid doing this again" instructions. And some sins seemed too private, too shame-filled, for anyone to understand. Silence, far from healing anything, won out over confession.

Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth – in other words, anything that is not of God or pointing toward giving glory to God.

Behaviors, however, have a tendency to become habits. Some habits, like keeping a neat desktop, saying the word "like" in every sentence, or separating food on a plate so it doesn't touch, are rarely given any thought. They are called harmless although sometimes annoying behaviors.

Other habits, like spreading gossip, being late for any and all appointments, or smoking, are behaviors that can have a serious consequence – for everyone involved. People avoid gossips unless they themselves like to hear the latest on someone. But in general, a gossip is not trusted.

The person who is constantly late for appointments is labeled unreliable—a label that might result in being passed over for promotion or even being let go from a job. No one counts on a person who is unreliable.

The person who smokes knowingly risks his or her own health as well as the people around who do not smoke. Unfortunately, people who are often very good people and wonderful friends are sometimes excluded because of their smoking habit.

Your own conduct was once of this sort, when these sins were your very way of life. The examples I have given so far are behaviors that might indeed have been considered *your very way of life*.

Additionally, I would add that at least in the eyes of others, those who practice those behaviors have an identity that links them to the behaviors: He's a gossip; she's unreliable; he's a smoker.

And over the years, these identities have been addressed in self-help books, support groups, and public educational forums. The goal: stop being a gossip, an unreliable person, or a smoker.

But what about homosexuality? What about lesbianism? Although some churches and organizations reach out to people with same-gender attractions, there seems to be a growing movement to not only accept the homosexual condition but to celebrate it. And sadly, those who think otherwise are being called homophobes or right-wing extremists.

My childhood was filled with inappropriate sexual activity as a boy, behavior that eventually left me with no choice but to say that I was a homosexual. Gay was not a word used back then, and even if it were, I would not have called my life gay. I think that there is a major difference between physical pleasure and emotional/spiritual happiness.

For many with this struggle early in life, there are only two apparent courses of action. The problem either goes away (God's intervention) or the problem ceases being a problem if enough people say it isn't a problem. And here is where it gets sticky for the church.

Let me share a few observations:

1. Secular society, a fancy phrase for anything outside of church, often endorses as truth all that is shared with them in the media.
2. Gay-friendly is societal correctness, a live and let live attitude so long as "I don't have to be involved."
3. God created us; God is love; gay is about love; therefore gay is good.
4. The world wants the path of least resistance. If we struggle with our weaknesses or sins, maybe they're really not sins—we just think they are.
5. And finally, churches tend to either completely reject those who admit a same-gender attraction if it doesn't disappear within a short time frame *or* they decide to redefine homosexual behavior as a legitimate expression of love between two people.

If any of us is looking for the simple solution to this, it won't be offered this morning. In my situation, and I must emphasize that I am speaking only of my life, I have decided that I would rather be in battle against behaviors I believe are sin than choose the simple route of endorsing them.

That is not the same thing as saying I despise those who have chosen a gay identity. How can I do that when it was the same label I wore for so long? Knowing and loving gays and lesbians is not the same as putting a stamp of approval on *everything* others do. It is loving them because Jesus taught us to love others as ourselves.

But there is one concept I needed to come to grips with in my own struggle, however, and I'll share that now. I can honestly say that I would never have chosen the path I walked for so long, but I cannot say that I was without choice. And that is not a matter of genetics. It's a matter of free will.

I believe that change is possible—it's the signature verse for Broken Yoke Ministries. But I also believe that such change will stretch anyone willing to be a partner to the process. Sometimes when pastors ask me what they can do to help people with this issue, I point to things in my own life and in my relationship to God as a means of bringing understanding.

Everyone who admits to a same-gender attraction will bring a unique background and perspective.

For me, I learned these things:

1. Homosexuality forces a redefining of God and His commandments because without redefining, there will always be conflict with God's word.
2. My homosexual struggle created polarization within me in terms of my relationship with God in two ways:
 - a. Recognizing my sinfulness and inability to stop the behaviors made my confessions of sin mere exercises of shame. I promised never to sin again in the same way yet repeatedly found myself doing that sin. Eventually I questioned how I could ever approach God.
 - b. God was supposed to be able to free me from homosexuality but my prayers seemed to go unanswered. Maybe God *did* create me to be gay.
3. And for a long time, I wanted God to heal me more than anything else but shame created a wedge that made His love seem unreal to me.

As I learned to seek God, to listen to His voice within me, God made me aware of the hidden places I shared with no one, places filled with unmet needs, distorted relationships, and a deep desire to be loved.

God's love and presence created a resting place for HOPE. Once hope was in place, I was able to see how He brought other ways of healing to me:

The love of family and friends

Support group systems
Professional counseling
Church community
A love for the Word of God

What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his creator.

Becoming a new man, being formed anew in the image of my Creator, does not mean the past disappears nor does it mean same sex temptation ceases. Being a new man in Christ is being a man with options in the face of temptation. Being a new man in Christ in a faith community means being a witness of the presence of God, the power of the Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection, and the working of the Holy Spirit within me.

This is the option the church must offer to who struggle; this is the standard of truth for all who profess to be Christian. Anything less is just that—less.

WWJD?

August 2006

³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. (John 8.3-6)

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." (Luke 19.7)

My thoughts are rushing around at the moment because the verses that I have just shared offer so many directions. Let me share a bit of what prompted this article. Just as I originally thought about this in no particular pattern, so there will be no order in this list. Just bear with me and maybe it will become clear.

- I've noticed that when good people try to convince me that being gay is okay or even blessed, they never call the behaviors of same-sex intimacy with another person sin. They call it love.
- I've noticed that when good people argue that homosexuality is an abomination according to God's word, every passage that bolsters their argument is a passage about homosexual behavior or something that demanded consent. It is rarely about homosexual temptation.
- I've noticed that it is the people who are at one end of the argument or at the other end who see those at the opposite end as 'those people.'
- I've noticed that the people in the middle of this argument either have the right idea about the human condition or they don't know enough about it to have an opinion one way or the other. This latter group is most often willing to say "As long as the gay person doesn't come on to me" or "As long as that religious dude keeps his opinions to himself."
- I've noticed that if those in each group claim a relationship with God, then God is seen as blessing the opinion they hold and in contempt of the opinion the other group claims. This is a little like, I suppose, believing that God wants my Milwaukee Brewers to finish the season with a winning record because God is, after all, a Brewer fan.

Just because I have noticed all these things doesn't mean that I have come to conclusions that would be acceptable to everyone. I am, I think, biased because of my own daily walk with its temptations and difficult times alternating with feelings of divine love.

While not as marketable as it was not long ago, WWJD bracelets, book markers, and anything else that could or would be used by Christians still are evident. I am certainly not Jesus, but I have to ask myself, "What *would* Jesus do?"

One of the first things I think is that Jesus would not be afraid to call some behavior a sin. Today we tend to define sin as what other people do; reasons for us to come alongside them and say, "Let me pray for you." In such moments, it seldom occurs to me that my own life has its share of sinful behavior. But I tell myself "God understands. God knows I am trying. And Jesus already died for the sins I commit." So what's with the dark cloud that has me pointing at other sinners with scorn and self-righteousness?

There is no doubt that the woman caught in adultery was, in fact, caught in adultery—never mind the fact that there was a man present. The rules were different for men back then, I guess.

Jesus didn't say, "Give her break. She was just earning a living to support herself." He didn't say, "Couldn't you see that she loves the man she was with—even if he was married. Sometimes it just happens that way." No, Jesus looked at her after everyone had left, asked her if anyone was left to condemn her, and when she answered, "No one, sir" said to her, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." (vs11)

Jesus called it sin and that meant he was on the side of those who refuse to call sin something more pleasant to the ear. But Jesus did not condemn the woman, and that puts him in the middle group—

those understanding the human condition. This middle group of understanding people would have encouraged the woman, would have asked how they could help, would not have turned their back on her.

The self-righteous people were correct in identifying a behavior that was not in God's plan and certainly something that was considered abomination. And this isn't a bad thing because we are all called to recognize the absolutes of God's law (the things that are right or wrong and to be observed). But the self-righteous people are also the ones who saw Jesus leave with Zacchaeus. They were the ones who said, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." I don't know about you, but when I read this line, I can almost taste the venom in their voices when they said 'sinner.' No encouragement here; no help offered; no invitation for the sinner to come and have a meal with them.

To the liberals, this story of the woman caught in adultery really has no relevance to them because there was no sin for Jesus to consider. Had they been in the crowd, they would have been arguing against the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, demanding that the laws be rewritten so as to be fair to the woman.

Nothing is ever so simple when real people are involved, however, so I am catching myself even now choosing to stand on the side that agrees with my own beliefs. Given a different issue, I might just as easily stand in the middle or at either end with almost equal comfort.

My daughter reminds me that I am a Republican because of my conservative views, and I find myself saying "No, I vote for the person I believe will do the best job whether Republican or Democrat." But she's right. I *will* vote more on the conservative side than on the liberal side.

So what would Jesus do with the issue of homosexuality? I think Jesus affirmed marriage between one man and one woman when He said, "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife*" (Mark 10.7). I don't believe He said that as an affront to gay rights. I also don't believe Jesus said much anything about homosexuality because the Jewish position on this at the time was so clear. It didn't need comment.

Some might argue that if Jesus walked among us today He would have said it differently. If that's true, then right and wrong are not defined by a single scale but by circumstances and times. And if that's true, then thousands of people like myself who have same-gender attractions are missing out on all the gay community has to offer. Despite the potential in this idea, I am happy to be standing right where I am.

God doesn't love me more than God loves a gay person. God doesn't make me rich with reward for saying no to same-sex behavior any more than God casts evil and bad things on those who say yes. But it isn't a matter of God's love because God's love is *always* there. The real issue is one of seeking God's will in all things despite how I might feel about those choices—especially when they conflict with the ones I would rather make.

Choosing what I want to do and then creating the image of God blessing or actually orchestrating my choices is backwards. That's what I came to see in my life when I finally surrendered myself to God. And that surrender, my friends, is something that I try to do each and every day.

Rather than being a fluffy Christian sentiment, I think WWJD asks a very important and difficult question. Because if we ask the question, we might just find out that what Jesus would have us do is the opposite of what we'd do. And if that were the case, what would our response be then?

Sin/Sinner, What's the Difference?

October 2006

²*But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

(Luke 15.2)

⁷*All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"* (Luke 19.7)

A few weeks ago I attended a series of talks on how ministers might better understand the whole issue of homosexuality. The event, co-sponsored by *Focus on the Family* and the Family Research Institute of Wisconsin, drew approximately 200 pastors or church representatives.

At one point the following comment was made, "Avoid the phrase 'Hate the sin, love the sinner' because regardless of the intention, the sinner often identifies with the sin and is incapable of separating the hate." Almost immediately I thought of the title that had been set aside.

The phrase "Hate the sin, love the sinner" has been around for a long time, and I always wanted to take it as it was meant. After all, I could do wrong and people would still love me.

One of the problems I have, however, fits like a glove with the presenter's remarks. Years ago, I was often involved in homosexual behaviors and to be honest, I did not hate the sin behavior itself as much as I hated the internal conflict that always followed. In other words, it was a case of the body and the mind at war.

Paul stated it this way: ¹⁵*For that which I do, I know not. For what I would do, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do.* (Romans 7.15) When I thought about my life and finally got a handle on what he was saying, I said, "Yup, that's me."

I suppose that had I bought into the "born gay" thinking, I would be saying Paul was speaking about some other sin. But I couldn't do it. I knew that what I felt was one thing but what I did was another.

Twenty one years ago, the acting out part of my same-gender attractions was set aside. As for the attractions themselves, let's say that they come and they go. The good thing is that they no longer consume me; they no longer force my decisions.

"Hate the sin, love the sinner." In the past, I lived with the notion that my behaviors defined me, and once the definition was made, the behaviors came much more easily. I believe that sexually acting out with someone of the same gender is clearly not in God's plan for me and I call such behavior sin. Others might argue that point, but I don't ask them to live my life for me, anymore, I suppose, than they would want me to live their lives for them. At the same time, I won't make excuses for my beliefs and if others ask how I feel about same-sex behavior, I will tell them.

"This man welcomes sinners"

"He has gone to be a guest of a sinner"

If you think about it for a moment, doesn't the statement beg the question "How does one get to be a non-sinner?" The Pharisees would have had no way of knowing whether those sharing a meal with Jesus committed a fresh sin that very day, so I am guessing the Pharisees were actually saying, "Those people did wrong in the past and we know about it."

But there is a second argument implied in what the Pharisees said. There was/is no hope for a sinner—sinners are to be shunned. No exceptions. The Pharisee in Luke 18.11 said, "*God, I thank you that I am not like other men*" and you know something? There are a lot of people who react the same way when they learn someone is gay.

In a perfect world, we would all recognize ourselves as sinners—especially when we compare ourselves to the perfection of God. Maybe what I am suggesting is that sin can be defined as anything not God-like or not having the characteristics of God.

But in my human way of thinking, that bothers me a lot because as a boy I was taught that the object of daily living is the avoidance of sin and doing good things for others. The definition of sin I just shared makes it sound like just about everything I do now is sin, so what hope is there? More to the modern person's thinking, what a bleak existence!

But it isn't. It's anything but. What I am suggesting, however, is that most people have at least one behavior (thought or action) that would be called sin; most people do not give much thought to lesser behaviors that don't cause them anxiety; and people have the capacity to redefine a negative behavior as acceptable if the end result of the behavior is considered desirable.

We *all* sin so why do we have a hard time accepting that fact? Here's my guess—and it will only be a guess. The Pharisees actually answered the question for me because they defined people who sinned as bad; bad people are to be shunned. We shake our heads in disgust at the attitude of the Pharisees but it really is how many people think.

Proof of this attitude in modern times is to compare the word sinner with any convicted felon, for it is the convicted felon whose sins have been made public, whose behavior has been chastised, and whose future is in question.

Finally, I would offer a simple statement: Sinners are often really nice people, talented people, and well-intentioned people—at least for the most part. Why are we supposed to think otherwise?

The problem with simplifying things like this is that we are prone to dismiss the sin *because* we see a person as a good person. It is, after all, bad people who sin. The Pharisees told us that.

I am inclined to believe that the journey of one who sees a sin behavior as something to be overcome recognizes *both* sin and the personal capacity to sin. For the one who also believes in God, in the power of Christ's death on the cross, and in the reality of the Holy Spirit, life is filled with great joy.

²² *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.* ²³ *They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* ²⁴ *I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."* (Lamentations 3.22.24)

Hate the sin, love the sinner? The words provoke the potential for a healthy response to negative behavior, but I would agree with the speaker at the pastoral conference. The words are fluff, the sentiment filled with the potential for self-righteousness. And one has to wonder whether or not anything really changes when they are spoken.

Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, "Go and sin no more." Don't you sometimes wonder if she succeeded?

A brief follow-up on "Sin/Sinner, What's the Difference?"

I don't normally have feelings such as I experienced after writing the main article for this issue, but this time I came away from the final sentence feeling that there were some important things shared but no clear answer that was obvious for me to the main question stated in the title.

As I mulled over everything, I think I came to a conclusion. This conclusion might not be the answer you had hoped to read, but it does make sense to me.

The difference between sin and sinner is in the attitude of either the sinner or the one who is faced with the sins of others. For the person who believes in the human capacity to sin repeatedly, I think the words "Lord, forgive me, a sinner" are honest, true, and spoken with humility. The words do not diminish the sinner's relationship with God; they emphasize it.

For the person who sees sin as a label that forever separates the sinner from participation in the community of believers, all serious sin becomes a wedge of unforgiveness.

I do understand that some sins create incredible pain for those sinned against, a pain that might cripple the one sinned against for life. Given such deep hurt, anger directed at the sinner is often approved of by those seeking to be compassionate to the one harmed.

In the end, however, the seeming peace that comes from separating the sinner because of the sin heals no one. Such anger or indignation serves only to affirm a self-righteous aloofness. And although such aloofness might be understandable, it definitely is not what Jesus would have taught—nor did He.

People Will Disagree

December 2006

²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11.28-29)

If someone has been keeping track of the verses I have used for the main articles in this newsletter over the years starting in 1992, they might be able to point out that the verse I just shared has appeared in other articles. I'm not sure how to explain it to you, but I always feel a deep connection with God every time I say or write the words. I do even now as I begin sharing with you.

But there is more to the verse than merely the idea of finding a loving connection with God or even that promised rest for my soul. There is a process of surrender that is clearly evident and a confession of the heart that makes the need for surrender a high priority. Two questions. First, surrender from what? And second, if I figure that out, how will I know that I am serious about the whole thing and not just in search of some warm fuzzies?

The first question is easier to answer because I have always known when I am doing or thinking something that is not part of God's desire for my life. If I stretch the truth a little (some call it a white lie), I know I have done so. Whether or not I am actually bothered by that knowledge is another question though. It really is easy to tell myself something is no big deal, and if I do it often enough, I start to believe nothing is really wrong.

I also carry a few extra pounds – well, some would say more than a few extra pounds – and every time I look in a mirror, I say something like "It sure would be great to be the same weight I was 20 years ago."

Along with the statement comes a quick recognition of what it would take to lose those 20 pounds, so I promise myself that tomorrow I'll start a serious program of eliminating snacks and doing whatever exercising is needed to tone up those long dormant muscles. I can see it all now. Well, actually I can't but I know self-image is important to the process, so I'll keep an open mind.

Somewhere in my teens I realized that my same-gender attractions were more than a passing thing and were in fact bringing me to a self-definition as a gay man, although the word gay wasn't used back then. In my heart I knew it was wrong but I wanted the feelings to be okay. More importantly, I wanted to *feel* I was okay despite the attractions and the behaviors.

Nobody talked back then about the difference between the attractions and the actions in terms of being different. No one shared that the attractions themselves were not sin, just the decision to act out on those attractions was. So every thought, every extra look at some good looking guy was an occasion of sin and of stepping out of God's will. At least that's what I believed.

I often wonder if I would make the same decisions about my orientation that I did back in the sixties if I were a teen today in 2006. Today there are all sorts of people wanting to say "Gay is okay" or "Be true to your feelings." And you know something? What they offer is the easy route because it approves of both the attractions and the actions. Despite some honest effort on my part to believe that, I couldn't and don't.

So, where does this surrender thing come in and how do I know I am serious about the process?

Weary and Burdened

God's word gives us some good examples of men and women who saw their sin, knew it could not continue, and did something about it.

After Nathan pointed out to David that he had sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, and all of Israel, the truth of what he had done sank in. Learning his newborn son was dying, He put on sack cloth and refused to eat or be consoled with the hope that God might allow the child to live.

The adulteress, who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with her hair, focused only on what she was doing; she ignored everyone else in the room.

The prodigal son, finding himself in a dire financial situation, decided to throw himself at the feet of his father and beg for a place among the servants.

The tax collector acknowledged his wrong before Jesus and offered not only to make amends but to do so in a way that would have exceeded the expectations others might have of him.

Me? Where do I fit among these who surrendered and who sought forgiveness with such intensity? Some might suggest that I don't, but I believe I came to a place in my heart that was burdened beyond what I cared to carry any further. I was sick of the conflict and looking for a way in which to get out of it.

When I finally got serious about this particular issue, I knew that to side with those who rejected the notion of sin for same-sex behaviors was not an option. I know some disagreed then and some still do; I also know that some feel my decision is just another way to condemn them. But I can condemn no one when I am so much in need of God's grace and mercy.

The yoke I carried as a young man was not a thing of comfort or of positive purpose. It was a weight of oppressive thought, a chain that kept me from becoming the man I believe God created me to be.

Take My Yoke

The signature verse of this ministry has always been Isaiah 58.6: *This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke.* Homosexual behavior was the yoke that prevented me from walking in the kind of freedom that I truly sought.

I always wondered "What's the difference between the yoke I carried for so long and the one Jesus wants me to put on?" I've read some of what others have shared, but maybe I can put my own words on paper here and encourage you to do the same on your own sheet of paper.

Jesus came to serve and to show us how to apply the two great commandments to our lives. We are to love God with all our heart, our soul, and our minds. We are also to love our neighbors as ourselves. That's the yoke of Jesus and we have His life as an example of how to do it. Taking on that yoke is so different from the yoke that burdened me—and maybe still does some days—because that old yoke never really fit. This one does.

Learn from Me

Breaking the bondage of sin—any sin—is not supposed to be a daily same-old, same-old in the decision-making process we have for our behaviors. Every day we seek God with all our hearts, minds, and souls, is a day we find *new* ways to choose, *new* hope in the goodness of our choices, and *new* freedoms that result from the choices we make.

We learn from Jesus through His word that speaks love, discipline, and encouragement. We also have His saints living and dead whose lives reflect that same ongoing desire to wear the yoke Jesus wore.

Maybe what I see the most in my own life is that the yoke of Christ is not a freedom from my failures past or present, but the understanding that God knows my heart, knows my needs, and desires that I *do* find rest in Him.

Some people will agree with what I have shared and some won't. God does not call me to make choices for other people but He *does* expect my life to reflect His will. Jesus was obedient; it was part of His yoke; and if I am to follow Jesus, it must be part of my yoke as well.

2007

The Demonstration of Love

By Bill Windel

November 1988

As part of celebrating our 20th anniversary, I'm including this article written by the founder of Broken Yoke Ministries, Bill Windel, in the first edition of this newsletter. I hope you will be blessed by it.

God has done so much in the lives of so many. We serve an AWESOME God! This is a fact that bears repeating. Our God is an awesome God. I'm reminded of the Scripture in Exodus 34:6 that reads "And the Lord passed before him (Moses), and proclaimed, 'the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, on to the third and fourth generation.'"

God is God! Hardly a fact many of us need reminded of. Yet if we think about it, we will admit that many within and without the church either have not keyed in to what that bold statement means, or they have not taken time to inquire into the character of this awesome God we serve. The Scripture in Exodus portrays to us the balanced character of God. He is awesomely balanced between his merciful goodness and his perfect justice.

Some people tell me that I am less merciful than I should be. I am also told that I tend to lean toward having a heart that will condemn rather than love and affirm people where they are at. Well, that may or may not be true. I do know that I have been forgiven much. It stands to reason, therefore, that I should love much. But love whom? The Scripture tells us that we are first to love God with all that we are! We are then commanded to love others as ourselves. Jesus promises us that, if we can do this, we will have done all that is contained in the law and the prophets.

My deepest desire is to love God with all I have in me. How short I fall. Secondly, my desire is to love, with a perfect love, my brother as myself. It is important though, that we do not forfeit our love for God in order to love one another. Love is not love that only affirms. Love is love that will confront whenever necessary. If I say that I love God and I'm not faithful to express his true heart to you, then I do not love him. If I say that I love you and do not demonstrate what is God's revealed will and purpose for you, then I have deceived you and have not truly loved you.

There is a crisis in the church. Sin is not dealt with in many churches today. It appears that we have adopted the humanistic "I'm okay--you're okay" philosophy seen in this generation. Yet God continues to be God, speaking to his church pleadingly to love as he loves, to love with a great mercy and goodness. We all need that demonstration of God's unfailing mercy. But more, to love with a love that is willing to roll up its shirt sleeves and work with a struggling brother or sister to bring them to a place of victory in overcoming his or her sin. Love is an action, not a tolerance! It is not rejection to encourage another to love God with all his heart. It is obedience and the greatest demonstration of love.

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us instruction in the way to handle church discipline. It's a Scripture passage I have frequently been pointed to by other loving, concerned believers. I wrestled with the whole area of church discipline until I realized one day that Jesus taught that particular lesson immediately after telling the parable of the man who had a hundred sheep and left ninety nine to look for the one that was lost. Immediately before Jesus begins his teaching on discipline, he says "Even so it is not the will of your father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." This is the heart of God--that not one should perish. Love is love that keeps the salvation of a brother or sister as priority in relationship. Love is not love that affirms our brother or sister in sin.

Homosexuality is sin. The Scriptures assure us that homosexual offenders will not see God. To say I love the homosexual person and yet do not encourage the individual to repent of his or her sin and to turn to God for his forgiveness and healing, than I have not loved at all. It is commanded by God that we love the homosexual and at the same time, that we loathe his sin. This can only be done if we are able to distinguish between the sinner and his sin; between the orientation and the behavior. We are commanded to love through sin--never around it.

I know that this appears to be a tough message for our first newsletter. But this is my burden and the vision of this ministry. The homosexual sinner, as all of us sinners, needs the church to be "a pillar of truth." The last thing they need is another double minded, polluted message that God accepts them and affirms them in their sin. God has the greatest right to be who he is--perfect in all his ways. Let the message of the church be pure and undefiled, proclaiming forgiveness and deliverance to those who are oppressed. It is not our father's will that one should perish.

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." (I Thessalonians 3:12)

Note: April and June 2007 were repeats of earlier editions

Am I Really Changed, Lord?

August 2007

Based on June 1994 Article

The other day, as I stood in front of a large mirror, it was painfully obvious that I was not looking at the same physique so proudly carried in my youth. Not that my body was particularly well-defined, mind you, but I was satisfied.

These days, I lean forward a little to check my shoelaces or read the bathroom scale. I also play the game called "Hiking up one's pants" after getting up from a chair because my belt slides south at such moments. And friends who have not seen me in a number of years greet me with the words, "Boy, have you changed!"

I confess that some days I reminisce about wearing a pair of size 32 pants, or a shirt that doesn't look like a ski slope on me. The reality of my self-image, however, is focused more on the inside of me than on my outside.

If tomorrow my body were returned to its earlier state, others would have no difficulty in recognizing the change. They might even ask, "What sort of diet were you on?" or "What kind of exercises did you do?"

Change. That's what seems to be at the core of my struggle with negative behaviors. Change. How do I find it? How do I recognize it if and when it occurs?

Not all my behaviors are obvious to others or even to myself, although a cause and effect relationship can be found in most situations if I probe deep enough. Being overweight, for example, is recognized externally, but the reasons I am overweight might not be so easily detected.

The verse in Scripture that says, "I thank you, Lord, that I am fearfully, wonderfully made" (Ps.139.14) flies in the face of my struggles, because from where I stand, my failings and weaknesses seem such a contradiction to that verse. The first step in change must, therefore, be to allow God the freedom to work on me in the areas of my life GOD chooses and in GOD's timing. Wow! That means I have to be flexible—not one of my stronger points.

I remember back in 1983 being forced to seek therapy because parts of my life were running amok. In the beginning, my days were filled with prayers that God would change me, but not much happened—at least as far as I could see. I had asked God for help but refused to give over my desire to be the one in charge. Sound familiar?

Being in charge, I brought intensity and focus to the sessions that might have impressed the therapist, but that did little to promote change. I simply became better at hiding my behaviors from the world and myself, while convincing myself that progress was being made. Two years later, I surrendered for real and let God take charge. Life hasn't been the same since.

Someone once told me that true surrender is not unlike a person hanging on to the controls of a boat out of control in turbulent waters. The most difficult thing is to let go of the wheel and to trust.

Believing that God knows my needs better than I, the process of change will not be the straight line I would choose left to my own devices. Some of the issues I face daily appear to be unrelated to what I *think* my main issues to be. But God knows that one of those "unrelated" issues might be a major obstacle in the path of my healing.

I try to apply the phrase "Stop and smell the flowers" almost daily in my healing journey. In the morning, I thank the Lord for the gifts of life yet to be experienced. During the day, the Lord encourages me to see evidence of His presence that previously might have been ignored. And in the evening, recalling the events of the day, I thank God for the healing events I did not see, asking for more awareness in the coming day.

Over a period of time, I have come to see that negative behaviors once dominating my life have diminished or even disappeared completely. "Wait a minute!" my mind shouts. "We didn't cover that in therapy yet!" "Not fair!" another part of me hints. "I was going to concentrate on *that* issue at next week's meeting."

Some changes sneak up on me without asking my permission and only become obvious in retrospect or in another's observations of my behavior. Some changes ARE obvious AND planned (to stop smoking, for example), but most are part of a broader picture. The biggest change, of course, will be when I enter paradise to spend eternity praising God.

The kind of commitment required is one which seeks God in all things *and* practices the Presence. "And Jesus said, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Lord,' they told him, 'Open our eyes.'" And Jesus did. □

Just a thought or two more. . .

1994 sounds like a long time ago and then again it seems like just yesterday, so have I changed? Yes, but I wanted to share a little of what that has come to mean for me.

When I surrendered my life to God in 1985, I did so because my way of handling my issues had proved so disastrous that not even my inflated ego could continue to pretend otherwise.

The main article (Am I Really Changed, Lord?) is still true and I want to emphasize that to you. The changes are on the inside, deep in my heart, overflowing at times into my actions with the kind of results that I only once dreamed about.

I am confident in my knowledge that God loves me, forgives me, and continues to call me. I think I believed this in 1994 but the passing years have matured my knowledge into the stuff of which conviction is given birth, the kind of conviction that confidently whispers these truths or emphatically voices them from the stage of some convention.

I would add, however, that anyone seeking change should trust God to give evidence of that change because it is common today for others to believe that they should be able to define it for you. Still others will deny you because given what they know of homosexuality, there is nothing you should have to change. Celebrate, they say. I say, "Better things are coming for those who put their faith and trust in the Lord." Change *is* possible!

Note: October 2007 is a repeat of April 2004

Be Holy As I Am Holy

April 1998 – December 2007

1998

As obedient children, do not yield to the desires that once shaped you in your ignorance. Rather become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy One who called you; remember, Scripture says "Be holy, for I am holy." (1Peter 1.14)

As a young child, I remember being fascinated by the lives of saints, men and women who had lived as faithful servants of God, many giving their lives as witness of their faith. The idealistic boy in me often thought "What a noble thing—to give one's life for Jesus." But as a boy, I had little concept of the kind of pain that might accompany such a death, and the first time I had an allergic reaction to several bee stings I knew that any romantic hope of being a martyr (or a spy) was doomed.

But the idea of holiness drew me like a moth to a light on a summer evening. It's what I wanted to be, and church with its towering steeple reaching for the sky was a holy place where I felt a sense of belonging.

At age seven, I knew about sinning. Hadn't I told lies when confronted with the evidence of something I had done wrong? Hadn't I said words I wasn't supposed to say? What I had not counted on, however, was the manner in which things sexual would dominate my thoughts in the coming years. What I had not counted on was the sense of separation from God I felt when I gave in to those temptations.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to talk with a lot of men and women who shared similar feelings. We agreed that despite knowing of the power of the cross and the forgiveness won by the death of Jesus, each sin of the flesh was like a wedge being driven into our spiritual lives.

Instead of feeling closer to the Lord *because* of our struggles, we felt as though we were being dragged day by day in the opposite direction. And while the nature and number of our sins might have varied, homosexual behavior carried the most weight. It was a sin that "felt right" despite the guilt and despair that usually followed.

The question I hear quite often is "Why would God give me these feelings and then tell me they are wrong?" The whole issue, it would seem, hangs on whether or not homosexuality is a design of God or of humanity. Indeed, why would God do such a thing?

The answer, which I believe with all my heart, is that He didn't. Having said that in no way denies or minimizes the struggle.

It's not my intent in this column to write a thesis on the reasons for homosexuality. It is enough, I feel, to acknowledge the existence of feelings within myself that contradict the faith journey I want my life to be. It is enough to know that temptation is temptation in all its forms and sinful behavior is sinful behavior. *"Be holy, for I am holy."*

Wait a minute. Isn't sin the opposite of holiness? Doesn't holiness imply the absence of sin? And if the answer to both of those questions is "yes," how can anyone become holy?

I have been thinking and writing about the apostle Peter lately, remembering how he not only denied knowing Jesus once but three times. He had seen Jesus transfigured. He had seen miracle after miracle and had even said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Mt.16.16)." With all of that knowledge, how could he have denied knowing Christ?

In a breath, I saw the number of times that I chose sin over God—perhaps not always deliberately saying "I reject you, God," but certainly choosing something greatly inferior and often harmful to myself and others. Then I saw something else.

The label "homosexual struggler" itself defined me as separated from God when I allowed it to be so. In my pride I proclaimed myself guilty of a sin beyond forgiveness and change and set myself apart from the rest of creation. Others didn't understand my struggle—even made fun of it—and God didn't seem to be listening to my prayer. If that sounds like extreme thinking, let me assure you that these thoughts are not uncommon.

Peter's despair over his denial of Christ must have been beyond belief, yet Jesus specifically sought him out so that Peter could be healed, not of his sin but of his feelings of separation. The sin had been forgiven and dealt with on the cross. It was the aftermath of pain-filled emotion that crippled Peter, and I think that I can understand a little of how that felt. So can you.

The Lord calls each of us to sit with Him at the charcoal fire. We hear Jesus ask us "Do you love me?" not three times but as many times as we feel we have separated ourselves from Him. There is, perhaps, hesitation in the beginning. Does Jesus *really* love me that much? I can tell you that despite my sins, He still calls me to serve Him.

At some point the tears begin to flow as the heart opens and accepts the love being offered by God. Over and over Jesus says "Come to me when you feel such burden. I'll take that weight from your shoulders. You don't have to carry it. Just remember that I see you as you are and as I created you to be. Alone your struggles will be too much, but I am with you always, and that means even in the times when you don't choose me. And because I *am* with you, you can be holy as I am holy."

Like Peter, we have the choice of accepting the love Jesus offers or rejecting it. Peter accepted it and died suspended upside-down on a cross. "Greater love than this. . .

2007

Some might think that over a twenty year period a program would have been developed that would guarantee the changes that those with same-gender attractions seek, but such has not been the case.

We remain a ministry because those connected with Broken Yoke have decided it is important to offer a place for individuals to come for support. This is a ministry that has a newsletter dealing with homosexuality not because no other newsletters exist but because we believed that some people will never attend a group. They will never show their struggle to anyone else.

But these same people *will* sit down and read *Wellspring* hoping, perhaps, that this might be the month with the answer they seek.

I can tell you that when I read "Be Holy As I Am Holy" today, it was as fresh for me as the day the words first found their way to paper.

A friend of mine in a similar ministry once said that he was tired of treating symptoms and he may have a point. If someone told me that I would have to deal with same-gender attractions and the occasional temptation to act on them five years from now, I'd could easily sigh and say, "Then what's the use? The gays have it right."

But they don't. I believe with all my heart that it is the presence of God within me, the relationship I seek every day that confronts me in my potential weakness. The voice doesn't proclaim "Get your act together, Bob, and stop thinking this way."

Instead, the voice says, ²⁸*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

²⁹*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰*For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" (Matt. 11.28-30)

2008

Stopping Short

February 2008

²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19.21-23)

I can still recall thinking to myself after hearing the parable of the rich young man, "Lord, don't let me get rich because I want to be in heaven with you." Of course, I was young at that time and for some reason believed the parable was all about money. But it wasn't. It was about focus, attitude, and opportunities.

Even though the parallel is not perfect, I want to draw a comparison between the rich young man and the issue of seeking freedom from same-gender attraction and/or same-gender sexual behavior. That might seem a bit of a stretch to some but I hope what I share will have made sense by the time I get to the end.

The young man had approached Jesus and asked what one good thing he needed to do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him to obey the commandments and then listed them. Knowing how difficult a time I sometimes have keeping the commandments, the young man's declaration of having kept them all probably produced a "Wow" from me the first time I heard the story.

Jesus calmly followed with the suggestion that the young man sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and then follow him. This suggestion was where the rubber hit the road, so to speak, for the young man. His life was not uncomfortable and he had grown accustomed to having all his needs and wants met because of his wealth. Is it really any major surprise that he went away saddened?

We wouldn't really be all that surprised if a young person of considerable finances today had the same reaction as the rich young man. After all, Jesus seemed to be offering poverty in exchange for the good life despite the argument some preach today that we are called to receive everything we ask in His name. At the very least, however, Jesus offered a different kind of self-discipline and perhaps even personal denial than what the young man expected.

I have good friends who have asked me what I have against gay and lesbians. I tell them nothing, but they kind of roll their eyes when I say that. After all, anything less than celebrating homosexuality is considered condemning it. I am in their eyes, at the very least, politically incorrect and socially biased.

A Matter of Focus

I was raised in a world of goals and expectations and many of these were made for me by significant people in my life. What I should do for a living, what my favorite foods should be, and even the kind of people I should consider friends were suggestions that come at a nudge or even a push from someone else.

I learned quickly what appealed to me and what didn't and resolved my personal conflicts using the least painful methods.

At an early age, however, I was confronted by a conflict I didn't understand, didn't really want, and didn't feel I could tell anyone about. It had no name for a number of years but eventually I learned it was homosexuality.

Mom and dad didn't say anything about the business of sexual contact with other boys—just that good boys treated girls with respect. I kept that commandment as the years passed but increasingly saw my attention focused on finding a connection with other guys, a connection that made me feel both

accepted and desired at the same time. Fearful in the world of boy meets girl, I eventually came to believe that success there was less desirable than the success I thought I was having.

Attitude

At some level, I think most of us who deal with same-gender attractions come to a point in life where we think we have no say in the matter. For some, the oft-repeated behaviors become too much the answer in meeting other needs, even when those specific needs are non-sexual in nature. For others, the idea of being born gay makes the whole issue one that is totally out of their hands. "This is just the way I am."

I personally never bought the argument that I was born gay but I certainly understood how my behavior choices often went down the street of same-sex behavior. The difference, though, was that despite the addictive nature of these behaviors, I really wanted a type of wholeness that always seemed just out of my grasp.

For me and all those who consider same-sex behaviors contrary to God's will, this attitude is the reason people roll their eyes at anyone who feels change is possible.

Opportunities

Jesus said, "Then come, follow me" to the young man. It was an invitation for the young man to see himself on a much deeper level of relationship with God than merely obeying commandments and the young man could not get beyond what he believed was the life he was called to live.

After almost twenty years of ministry, I have come to understand that none of us is exactly like another. We bear similarities in some respects yet make decisions and choices unique to ourselves as individuals.

When push comes to shove, however, I personally believe that the invitation "Come, follow me" is open to all of us without exception. But the invitation for us, as it was for the rich young man, asks us to set aside what *we believe* is the way we are for the way *we are meant to be*. The rich young man focused on his wealth, and his attitude was that his wealth was so important to him that he could not surrender it.

As much as I might have *thought* my same-gender attractions defined me or how much pleasure might be part of that, the invitation reminds me to surrender so as to be made more complete.

I would argue that this is not a one-time surrender but a surrender that occurs each and every day. I would also argue that memory is not erased just because we surrender. Each day will bring its share of new temptations—some sexual but most of them non-sexual. The temptations, however, are in direct contrast to the invitation.

Stopping Short

Almost 23 years ago, my life was at a crossroads. I was asked to choose between a recommitment to my wife or an agreement to have our marriage annulled. To recommit meant that the struggle I had for so many years with same-gender attractions would go on.

I took accepting an annulment to be the door I thought I wanted to pass through, a door where I could finally live with my choices but in the open. The moment I said the words "I chose you" to my wife, I truly wondered why I had said them. But I am certainly glad that I did.

Stopping short is settling for something that we think is in our best interests. It's the old saying "have your cake and eat it." But stopping short is less than ideal. The young man knew that. He went away saddened.

I cannot answer for those who have managed to reconcile their choices in such a way as to make them seem in agreement with God's word. I can only answer for me. Nor will I judge them as without redemption for that is the Lord's final decision.

But I must certainly proclaim when asked, that I cannot straddle the fence on the morality of homosexual behavior. Likewise, I cannot put on the face of self-righteousness and condemn those who disagree. We all stop short of being who we are called to be and of doing what we are called to do. The invitation, however, remains the same. "Come, follow me."

Me?

April 2008

²⁵*Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you." (Matthew 26.25)*

This coming Sunday is Palm Sunday followed by the most meaningful week of the year, in my estimation, Holy Week. If one participates emotionally and mentally, there is the experience of incredible darkness and pain associated with the death of Jesus on the cross but also the indescribable joy that comes with the resurrection.

Every year I find myself thinking about Judas and the simple question he asked Jesus during the last supper. And I wonder if Judas actually believed that he was betraying the Son of God or if his question was little more than window dressing for the benefit of the others present. I doubt, however, that I would have risked being exposed in this manner, so I come back to the intention Judas had in asking.

This article is not about whether or not Judas deserved the scorn many over the centuries assigned him. Everything that happened to Jesus had been foretold; someone (Judas?) would betray Jesus.

No, my focus this month is more on the notion that I have committed sins during my life that others clearly called sins that I would have argued were justified behaviors.

The question remains, "How could I do something clearly designated as sinful behavior and not call it sinful behavior?" My answer might surprise you but I think I could do that because I considered myself a good person. Good people don't do bad things; bad people do bad things.

Romans I

Years ago the sins mentioned in God's word belonged to others although I knew myself to be just as guilty. Romans 1.29-32 offered me this indictment:

²⁹*They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

I have to ask, who is comfortable seeing this list as proof of his or her dark side?

How do we get around such an indictment? We say things like "I've done that but have confessed it and now make every effort to avoid future sins of that kind."

But there is another method we use—we simply say that what we do is not a sin. It might be a sin for someone else but not for us. We sometimes go even further and suggest that what we do and not call a sin is a sin for someone else.

²⁴*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. (Romans 1.24-25)*

The passage that follows this in Romans is pretty clear in pointing to the notion of men having sexual relations with other men; women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

But if we accept the argument that people are born gay, then these passages are really about heterosexuals who have rejected the manner in which they were born and have therefore rejected God's plan for them. They are not about people born gay unless the individual born gay exchanges same-gender attractions for opposite-gender attractions.

But I am a good person

Years ago I really wanted the "I was born gay" argument to be true because it freed me from the guilt I experienced after acting on my same-gender attractions. I was a good person but everyone was saying the being a homosexual was definitely a major no-no. Bad people were homosexual or lesbian. How could I keep calling myself good if I kept giving in to my temptations?

The problem is that I was and am a good person. Many people I know who have accepted living as gay people are good people. So as I have written so many times in the past, the whole issue is not about

being a good person. It is about dealing with the issues we face honestly and openly. It is acknowledging that we all face something that we would rather not have to face, some secret darkness to be protected at all costs

Condition vs Behavior

Many Christians (all good people) out and out condemn someone who has same-gender attractions and pronounce those strugglers doomed for eternity. They are like the Pharisees Jesus said placed weights on the shoulders of others while not doing anything to ease that burden. My guess is that it is far easier for these good people to condemn others than it would be to become involved in their lives in some supportive fashion.

I have personally found considerable peace in accepting the fact that though I have such attractions, it is not mandated that I *act* on those attractions. Though not a perfect analogy, it is like having a cold and deciding that life won't stop because of the condition. What are required are intelligent options—doing within reason given the condition of having a cold.

The gay community will probably argue that I am not being true to myself as one created gay. They would also argue that I am passing up opportunities for the physical pleasures associated with a committed relationship. They might even argue that because I still have the occasional temptations, I am doing a disservice to my wife as husband. She should, they'd maintain, not have to deal with a man in such a conflict.

But the conflict is in their eyes and not mine. My role as a follower of Christ is not to validate same-sex unions as equal to traditional male and female weddings. I cannot and will not redefine what I have come to believe is God's design for my life as a man, nor can I openly condemn those who believe what they do is right.

Maybe you were with me until I wrote that last part arguing that Scripture is clear about the attitude we should have to sin. There is a difference between condemning the behavior and condemning the people. Only God has the authority to condemn people.

¹²*If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?* ¹³*And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.* ¹⁴*In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.* (Matthew 18.12-14)

Me? Am I the lost sheep that wandered off? I am pretty sure that I am but I also know that I am not alone. Jesus healed all sorts of people and the first thing they did was give praise to God. The second thing they did was tell everyone who would listen what Jesus had done for them.

Sometimes finding the lost sheep is one part of the process. The second part is convincing that one to come home, a task that is not always successful.

Would I have sought out Judas following the betrayal and encouraged him to seek forgiveness? Or would I have been glad to know that he took his life in despair over what he had done? When it comes to sin and sinning, I think we can all ask, "Is it I, Lord?" Me?

An Angel in Disguise

June 2008

²⁰ See, *I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.*” (Exodus 23.20)

At first glance over my shoulder, it would be too simple to reject the notion that I have been visited by an angel. There have not been any blinding lights, no unearthly vision waking me from a deep sleep, and to my knowledge, only a handful of times when I felt myself in a real conversation with God. I don't say that last part often, though, because such things can make people wonder. And before you think it, no, I am no more special to God than any of you reading this.

My education in the matter of angels, however, is pretty limited to what I learned as a child, but maybe it's time to re-visit the topic—especially in light of this journey you and I are on.

Part of this topic comes because of something I heard in a talk given at a prayer meeting I attended. Before starting his talk, the speaker told us to close our eyes and imagine ourselves in a state of peace.

After about fifteen seconds, we were told to open our eyes and then raise our hand if our experience of peace included the absence of stress, tension, anxiety, or of the removal of specific situations. Most of us raised our hands.

He then he went on to quote these words:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14.27)

The peace we all thought was so wonderful, he shared, was the kind of peace the world offered, a peace that was defined by the *absence* of negative things. God's peace, he went on, was to be in the midst of a negative situation knowing that God was *with* us regardless of the outcome.

If peace means to be separated from tension, then nothing changes with this kind of peace in our lives or in the lives of those we love because all we do is run from the tension. But if we acknowledge God's presence in ALL situations, we have the ability to come through tension and strife with the possibility of positive change.

Being separated from tension is not merely a matter of finding a place to hide and being completely alone. Being separated from tension can also be achieved by choosing belief patterns that have the least amount of resistance or make the fewest demands on us.

For some, this means choosing a church where the message is about God's love but rarely, if ever, about the manner in which they are to love their neighbors, to deal with social injustice, or to confront their own failings. These people leave church feeling affirmed but life doesn't change much for them. The office might still be the same old battleground, money is still short—especially for the items on the “I want” list—and painful secrets or memories they might carry inside haven't really gone away.

Okay, so what happened to the angels I mentioned at the beginning of this article?

In Scripture, angels are often spoken of as messengers of God. We also read that Jesus told those who came for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?*” so we can presume that they are especially powerful.

“Touched by an Angel,” a popular TV series, made angels a little more human and involved them more actively in the lives of people. And lest I forget, I can still hear my grandmother say, “Be an angel, Bob,” followed by a request to do something for her.

When I came across the opening verse, I actually saw angels as a bit of all three—not really a Scriptural position to take but if viewed as a way God often speaks to us, my focus is reasonable. And if what I share sounds a lot like my grandma's use of the word angel, that's okay. She was a good woman.

During my teen years, no one was really talking about the issue of homosexuality very much—at least not in the manner it is today. My denominational beliefs certainly included the notion that same-sex behaviors were immoral but in some ways that's like seeing a posted speed limit on the highway and knowing that sooner or later the sign will mean little or nothing. After all, don't most police allow for a

small margin of sinning in this respect?

The angels in this time frame were those who knew something of my struggle but didn't allow that knowledge to influence their ability to treat me with compassion, respect, and encouragement. Have you met someone like this?

One day I met another angel but I didn't think of him that way at the time. You see, this person had written a booklet describing his freedom from homosexual behavior, a freedom that had been in effect for more than eight years. It was the first time I had heard that such a freedom was even possible.

I wrote him a letter explaining my excitement and desire to learn more. I eventually received information that he had not only fallen once, but several times. Not much of an angel if you ask me. But he was an angel of the Lord despite his fallen nature because for the first time I started to believe that I *could* change. *He* was not the way to change, only an announcement that one could. Have you met someone like this?

Then I met a man who felt led by God to start a support group system for those with same-gender attractions, corresponded with him, and eventually attended meetings he led.

This "angel" had a family to support and ministry wasn't paying his bills, so he made the difficult decision to resign. I really wanted him to continue the ministry, but we both knew that he was serving as he felt called by the Lord to serve. The fact that he stepped away did not make him any less the angel introduced to me. He was an encourager with a heart and love for the work of God and, like the other angel, was not the path I and others were to follow. Both men were directional signs the Lord placed in our lives. Have you met someone like this?

My first Leanne Payne Pastoral Care Ministries conference was followed by my first Exodus International conference—literally the gathering place of hundreds of angels. Those in attendance offered one another (and me) hope and encouragement as well as a true joy in seeking the Lord in all things. Far from perfect (and who but Christ is), God used each of them in His fashion to draw me closer to His will, His way, and His love. Have you met people like these?

There is a common thread that all of these "angels" have. They all reminded me that some decisions I would need to make would be difficult decisions. They reminded me that I needed to be able to say no to certain behaviors and relationships even though I really wanted them.

The tension-free message others offered pointed out that I was born with same-gender attractions and that I did myself a disfavor by refusing the path they believed God had given me. Some times I was led to believe that I could never have true happiness unless my belief system was in tune with theirs. Have you met people like this?

"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared."

I believe that God keeps His promises and I believe that "angels" have been sent to bring me to the place God has prepared for me, although they did not always make me feel comfortable. Through them I am reminded that change and growth are a matter of the kind of self-discipline clearly evident in God's word. If you look closely, you've met and still meet your own angels. The question is, are you paying attention?

What I Have

August 2008

⁶Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. (Acts 3.6-8)

One of the cornerstones of homosexual struggle is isolation but not necessarily in the sense of always being alone or of hiding from others. In this case, isolation is usually the fear of having others know of same-gender attractions, especially those close to us. To be too open about such things is to risk rejection.

Ironically, coming out is celebrated by a growing number as finally embracing an identity over which there was little or no control in the first place. But such an announcement is also cause for great distress in families where biblical beliefs are in conflict with same-sex behaviors. In recent years, there has been something of a slide to one end or the other—celebrate/accept same-gender attractions or adamantly oppose/openly condemn both the condition and the individual.

Though there are support systems such as Exodus International where those who struggle with and reject the condition as incompatible with their beliefs can find help, these organizations are seen as out of touch with the times or worse, homophobic. Homophobic is, by the way, a word that is assigned to anyone not in the celebrate/accept camp despite the depth of its true meaning.

The other evening, our support group was discussing the whole issue of temptation, the frustration of falling short in thought or deed, and the desire to be completely free from *all* same-gender attractions. It all seems so difficult at times, especially in light of the popular pro-gay philosophy being shared in media, heralded in our educational institutions, designated through diversity training in the workplace, and preached from many pulpits. In the face of such overwhelming odds, I am not surprised when strugglers give in.

I am a ministry leader, a group facilitator, and a writer whose purpose is to encourage those who come to our ministry seeking help, who correspond with me on this issue, or who read this newsletter.

If I had somehow discovered the formula for a low-cost fuel, I'd be calling press conferences and my bank balance would be soaring. Because ministries such as this lack a sure-fire, works every time formula, our message is usually ignored or rejected.

I and others talk about the freedom one can have from same-sex behaviors, the joy of an identity as designed by God, and the ways in which each day is a day closer in that spiritual walk.

Although what we offer is good and, I believe, biblically correct, those who do not struggle with same-gender attractions want to measure our healing and change by the "I no longer have any temptation" yardstick. I know, I beat this drum in most of the letters or articles I write, so some of you might already be saying "Tell me something new."

Silver or gold I do not have

The man had been crippled since birth and his station at the gate begging for alms represented his livelihood. Looking up at Peter with an outstretched hand, he either expected a coin or the kind of rejection more common to him than a donation.

Peter told the man had no money and from the crippled man's point of view, that might have been what we'd call "end of story." But it wasn't.

"Can you change me?" is a pretty common question heard by people in ministries like this one. Arrogance would, I think, be to say "Sure, come to the meetings. We'll make you straight." Such power and authority over the lives of others is not mine to proclaim.

But what I have I give you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!

Peter had walked with Jesus, had seen the miracles, and had finally embraced an unreserved faith in the power of Jesus' name. He believed and was, I think, lead by the power of the Holy Spirit to say what he said to the cripple!

I ask myself, "What exactly do I have? What can I offer that makes a difference?" In a word, faith. I believe in the man I am *becoming* not because of the absence of temptation but because of the presence of and belief in an identity that is mine in the name of the Lord.

Taking him by the right hand

It is rather important, I think, to recognize that the cripple did not immediately respond to the command "Walk!" Had I been that cripple, my mouth would have hung open, my face would have been furrowed in confusion, and my internal defense mechanisms would have been on full alert. But Peter would have recognized this response, so he reached out and took the man's hand, the man's *right* hand, the hand seen as a potential defense against attack.

This is where the parallels I am trying to draw become more difficult—not in sharing them but in terms of what they mean, what they demand of us.

Is it enough for me to make the decision that same-sex behavior is incompatible with my beliefs and to feel the changes I have felt since starting on this journey or must I share these feelings and attitudes with others? I've learned that the notion that one can actually be free of same-sex behavior makes some very angry and others very uncomfortable.

He helped him up

The cripple was carried each day to the gate by family or friends. Light or heavy, his weight would have been born by those who carried him. Peter's hand was more than mere touch. It was an invitation the cripple had never received before. Relying on the strength of Peter's hand, the cripple stood.

The men and women who come to our support groups do so because they know others will listen without judgment and pray with and for them. They come to be encouraged. They come in faith. They come to see an extended hand of support.

Instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk around.

This crippled man had just experienced the kind of healing experienced by countless others at the hands of Jesus, only this was Peter speaking in the name of Jesus. The healing was, I believe, instantaneous yet there was a certain amount of learning how to walk, jump, and run that the former cripple would have to go through. We need to remember that he had been unable to walk from birth.

Something happens when we believe, when we *really* believe. It's that moment for the swimmer who stands at the edge of a diving platform, knees shaking and mind wondering what possessed this attempt. Eventually, though, the leap is made and, in that moment after resurfacing, all doubt disappears.

That initial and in some ways magnificent moment did not make the swimmer an accomplished diver, but it made future attempts and more complicated dives a possibility. So how do I sum all this up?

I believe that same-gender attractions happen and I believe that they can lead to same-sex behavior. I do not condemn myself for the attractions but believe that with time they can be minimized or even disappear. Even if they don't, same-sex behavior is not an alternative for that IS addressed in the Bible as wrong.

I believe that I am as responsible for supporting and encouraging those around me in their difficult times as I hope they are to me. Our struggles do not have to be the same and usually aren't, but there is a vulnerability and transparency necessary for our struggles to be seen in the first place. I am not required to understand, only to pray with and for others as I hope they are willing to pray for me.

Mine is to share what I have learned with those who seek that information. The world's view on homosexuality is far easier to adopt than what we read in God's word, but I must always be mindful that God's word is not a hammer. It is an invitation, an extended hand. Just as the cripple surrendered his right hand, his means of defense, I have to surrender and trust.

When push comes to shove, I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give to you!

2009

Let's Talk

February 2009

¹² *For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.* (Psalm 72:12)

In 1985, I was introduced to the writing of Leanne Payne whose book, "Broken Image", I threw across the room when it was given to me by a friend. The words of this book were at first alien and even a little frightening. Only by God's grace was I eventually able to read and reread this life-changing work.

Not too long after that, someone sent me a copy of "Homosexuality: An Open Door?" by Colin Cook. It was more of a booklet than a book and I read it several times. What made his booklet perhaps more personal for me was the fact that Cook had claimed freedom from homosexual behavior for a period of eight years. That astonished me because I had never heard of *anyone* claiming such a thing before.

Sadly, he did have a relapse and his fall brought me a considerable amount of stress and anxiety—most of which I directed at God. Why, I mentally shouted, did God place this kind of hope in front of me like a dangling carrot and then pull it away? The answer put on my heart was God's and not mine. To rely on man (others) was to put faith in the wrong place. To rely on God was to have faith; it was to trust that things would work out even when they appeared hopeless.

The first time I attended a Broken Yoke support group meeting, I sat with 15-20 other men of varying ages listening to Bill Windel, the director of the ministry, speak on homosexuality and God's word. Our time together included praise and worship as well as small group sharing. Though I had to drive 65 miles one way, those weekly meetings were filled with meaningful encouragement.

A year or so later, I attended a Leanne Payne Pastoral Care Ministries School at Wheaton College. It was an incredible experience to sit down in a room with 750-800 others, listening hour by hour to Leanne and the members of her team share of God's life-changing miracles.

Her lectures were frequently interrupted by moments of the Holy Spirit, times when everything stopped and we knew that the presence of God was clearly moving among us.

I attended my first Exodus International conference at the Point Loma Nazarene College in San Diego. The man assigned as my room mate was a gentle man with gaping holes in his socks and a hand painted tie given him by his children for Father's Day. He directed a ministry similar to Broken Yoke Ministries and over the course that week I found him a wonderful listener and a witness of God's love.

That first conference was filled with workshops on things related to the issues of homosexuality and lesbianism. The volume of praise during our worship times rose to levels that I had not heard before—an example, I think, of what the time of praise and worship in every church should be.

Over the years, I have been to Exodus conferences around the country, have presented workshops on various topics, and have gained much from the experiences others shared during those gatherings.

There is a reason that I have shared this brief history with you. All of these experiences were occasions when men and women *talked openly with one another about their struggles, believing in the changes that were and are possible!*

People have a tendency to shy away from such conversations, especially if one party is a struggler and the other is not. This is understandable on a number of levels. Not many people really understand homosexuality or lesbianism in any other format other than the kind of jokes sometimes heard growing up or the kind of current media representations where one is either gay or straight—both are equal choices.

The needy who cry out

Because one often hears or reads about gay rights and issues, it might be expected that those who seek freedom from same-gender attraction and behavior would have an equal public platform. Such is

not the case. If anything, some are made to feel that their story of freedom is little more than an attempt to bash those who have accepted their homosexuality or, at best, is evidence of confusion.

In all the years I have been associated with Exodus International ministries, I have never heard any ministry director offer a word of hate against gay people or organizations. Nor have I, to the best of my knowledge, done so personally. To do otherwise would be, in my opinion, to forget that most of us in this kind of ministry have chosen to step away from our own involvement as same-gender attracted individuals in a gay culture.

One characteristic frequently mentioned by those sharing their struggle is the wall of secrecy they have erected as a form of protection. Coming out to family and friends takes considerable courage, and definitely carries the implied question. "Do you still love me even after what I have told you?"

I hear from parents of teens announcing their attraction issues and the first thing parents want to know is "How can we fix this? How can we make our child normal?" I often share that by the time their child declares this attraction, a decision has already been made. The attractions are sometimes contradictory (pleasure versus the morality of the behaviors) but to at least some degree, the attractions have become an identity. "I am gay." "I am a lesbian."

More often than not, parents tell me that their child has looked them in the eye and declared, "If I could be straight, I would be. I was born this way because who in their right mind would choose all the conflict facing gays today?"

I won't pretend that this kind of situation is easy on parent or child, but I will offer that communication is critical. There is an attitude, I think, that proclaims "Success in life is to be conflict-free." Along the same line, "Every issue has a solution; every solution is clearly seen as a healthy and desirable solution; and any solution worth following results in feelings of contentment and the absence of tension."

I will admit that life outside of attending conferences and support group meetings, can feel like a letdown in some ways. Maybe that's because those occasions give a glimpse of healing and living that rings true in the heart of a struggler whereas daily life does not. Sadly, however, those feeling a conflict with same-gender attraction are not hearing the message of freedom in one place where it should be trumpeted—the church.

Twenty-four years ago, I made a decision to believe that my brokenness could be healed. That decision demanded surrender and as much as I would have preferred, the decision did not erase the attractions from my brain. Over the years, however, I have decided that the occasional attraction was just that, an occasional attraction.

God gave me the courage to be open about the issues in my life but more importantly, day by day He reminds me of His presence and His love. My saying no to me is not the end of my world. My saying no to me turns my mind in other directions and to possibilities I would not have otherwise seen.

Change is definitely possible but it is made more difficult if the desire for change is kept in an emotional closet. Coming out of that closet does not have to be the announcement "I am gay. Deal with it!" Coming out of that closet can be an invitation to talk. So let's talk!

Can't I Have It Both Ways?

June 2009

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. (Romans 6.19 – NIT)

I am using these everyday examples, because in some ways you are still weak. You used to let the different parts of your body be slaves of your evil thoughts. But now you must make every part of your body serve God, so that you will belong completely to him. (Romans 6.19 – CEV)

If you were asked to define homosexuality, you might say, "It's being sexually attracted to people of the same sex" and stop there. Dr. Lawrence Hatterer, author of *Changing Homosexuality in the Male*, defines the word as follows:

"One who is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually, but not necessarily, engages in overt sexual relations with them."

For years, however, I considered the major difference between homosexuality and lesbianism to be fairly simple. Men are interested in sex; women are interested in relationship.

The danger with such simplification is that men can be and are interested in connecting on an emotional level with men just as women can be and are sexually drawn to other women. Though sexual relations, as Hatterer pointed out, don't have to occur for the homosexual or lesbian, it is often the repetition of such behavior that not only encourages but sometimes demands assuming the label.

Interestingly, if the attraction men or women have with someone of the same gender is defined as intense but not sexually motivated, we often describe such people (especially women) as in an emotionally codependent relationship. It is considered unhealthy only insofar as one or both parties do not feel psychologically complete or whole without the other.

I must admit that even putting a single word on paper dealing with a topic so complex is a bit daunting. At the same time, I have never pretended that this newsletter is anything more than an attempt to share with you ideas that cross my mind or a topic that others have asked me to write about. So I'll continue and hope that it all makes sense by the time I get to the end.

From the male perspective, I can remember a time in my passage through puberty when sex was ever present. Beginning as a form of personal curiosity, masturbation eventually grew to a full-fledged addiction, a condition many men have acknowledged as present in their own youth. For some, the addiction is ongoing.

In slavery to impurity

My spiritual advisor recently suggested that people tend to consider sexual sins at the top of their sin list in such a way as to say "If only I could be free of these behaviors, the holiness I seek would be mine." He was pretty much describing my teen years.

I do agree on the importance of seeking a focus on being Christ-like in my actions as well as loving my neighbor as myself, but sometimes it is not hard to see how secret sins of the flesh can dominate one's heart—not to mention how one sees relationship with God.

The word slavery caught my attention because it immediately brought to mind the notion of doing something for another not because of free choice but because the action was an enforced requirement. I would say sexual behavior repeated to the point of addiction could be considered slavery.

I know that pornography and masturbation both contain the element of pleasure, and for most of us perhaps our early experiences with either were undertaken with an "I can control this" mindset.

Based on my own experiences and the sharing of others, I know that such an attitude can be self-delusional. Given how difficult it can be to break sexual addictions, the word slavery is a good description despite what those who argue otherwise might say.

Wickedness/Evil Thoughts

We all sometimes consciously think things that we could describe as wicked or evil, but I think it is more real to say we think thoughts and in retrospect decide that they might have been wicked or evil.

My spiritual advisor would suggest that people tend to elevate sexual fantasy as having the greatest potential for being wicked or evil. Maybe he is right. Others have told me that they have felt that way. The message is that what God had created to be holy had become shame-filled and secretive.

I read somewhere that whatever does not draw us closer to God must by definition come from the evil one (Satan). In short, God always calls us to be closer to Him, to experience the love of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, choices failing in this objective might not yet be sin but as James 1.15 suggests, they have the potential to give birth to sin if allowed to grow.

***Make every part of your body serve God,
so that you will belong completely to him.***

I do not believe that men and women are created homosexual or, for that matter, heterosexual. We are created male and female—a gender and not a behavior or an attraction. Nor do I believe that one wakes one morning and declares a homosexual or heterosexual identity for such a declaration would clearly indicate a well-thought out choice. Orientation is a process and not a given.

I believe that we are born male or female and enter an environment that is complex, an environment that both encourages and discourages. As members of this complex environment, we are shaped by the things we do as well as the things that are done to us—directly or indirectly. One thing that can be said with certainty is that none of us is shaped in any environment exactly in the same fashion as another.

An undisciplined body will do whatever it wants, for it is neither moral nor immoral. It simply is. Yet we often define who and what we are based how our bodies respond to thoughts and actions.

Those who tell me of incredible struggles with pornography, for example, often place all of their energies on the physical avoidance of anything pornographic. They experience success for periods of time and feel dirty and condemned when they fall. Some with an addiction to masturbation or sexual fantasy relate their victories in terms of days or weeks since their last fall.

The problem with this approach is that the focus is on the elimination of a negative behavior rather than on the search for something positive. Frustrated by frequent falls, it is not hard to understand why people confess “That’s just the way I am” or “I was born that way.” Once this declaration has been made, the only available option is to redefine the negative thought/behavior and make it a positive.

In short, life becomes a day-to-day decision to reconcile life choices so as to have it both ways. In personal terms, if I declared something sinful in my teen years but now consider it a normal consequence of sexual identity, then there is no need to change.

Finally, I believe that God created me and called me. I am not a rubber-stamped male, undistinguishable from other men. I am certainly not without my failings but my failings do not define me in the eyes of God.

I don’t feel uncomfortable in declaring that I want to serve God in all things and in all ways. At the same time, I am learning that sin often points to the absence of something better. I know this because sin creates inner conflict that should be recognized for what it is—sin. Finding ways to eliminate that spiritual tension only serves to restrict God’s access.

The bottom line is that I can’t have it both ways. I cannot do whatever I want and still declare that I serve the Lord with all my heart, soul, and body. I can, however, recognize my weaknesses as opportunities for fresh vision, self-discipline, and healing change.

No one gets to go through life without challenge. The path of least resistance is not always the most rewarding path or the most fulfilling journey.

It's Your Mirror, What Do You See?

October 2009

²²*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* ²³*Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.* (James 1.22-24)

Growing up, I looked in a mirror (or any reflective surface for that matter) with an eye to how I might look to others. Ego-centered from early childhood as a defensive mechanism to ward off a negative self-image, how I dressed, how my hair looked, and how attractive were primary measuring sticks. It only takes a quick glance these days to see how my earlier standards would no longer work.

A therapist introduced me to a different way of using a mirror. "Affirm yourself," he would say week after week. "Remind yourself that there is a good man inside. Don't wear the mental clothing of negativity. Reject it!"

What he was suggesting was not that I endorse the pride-filled self that defined me for so long but to see how those images were not good. They were destructive. His encouragement, on the other hand, was to see the positive self, believing that a positive self-image would reject the behavior choices I made for so many years.

Looking back, I know that I looked for myself in other guys, how *they* acted, looked, and lived. I wanted what I thought they had, so seeking a positive self-image kept coming back to how I compared to them. From my point of view, I failed in this comparison test. Despite wanting what my therapist told me was already mine, I couldn't find it because I was looking in the wrong places.

I really wanted to believe that his instruction would change my life but somehow I knew that though the positive image he encouraged was a part of me, I knew it didn't originate with me. My inner eye was defective and distorted.

Listening to the Word

Growing up, I heard the Word and read it. I even composed songs based on the Word, but somehow the lessons I heard and read didn't take root. I looked in the mirror and try as I might, the image was always a reminder of the way I always looked in *any* mirror.

The phrase "*Anyone who listens to the Word*" demands active participation. In retrospect, I would suggest that when the invitation was given to listen to Scripture, I joined everyone else, sat down, and within seconds dismissed the reading as something I had heard before—nothing new—or not as important as allowing my imagination run free. After all, I kept listening for how to be a normal guy. My blinders made it difficult to receive the messages that were all designed to get me there.

I am not suggesting that I never took to heart what I heard or read as much as to say that when weighed against my life's choices at that time, the Word eventually was set aside as not being as fulfilling or satisfying.

The mirror in James is actually the path we are called to follow in order to live as God desires. As I considered this, it seemed to me that the mirror is really the reflection of God as God seeks to exist in our lives. A line in "Mary, Did You Know" (Mark Lowry) goes "When she kissed the face of Jesus, she kissed the face of God." What an awesome thought! What a connection!

Growing in the Word

¹¹*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.* ¹²*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* ¹³*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.* (1 Corinthians 13:11-13)

My childhood was better than many I hear about in the letters I receive but it was flawed just as their lives were flawed. Perhaps none of us really escapes being flawed because nothing in life is perfect, so no one escapes touching imperfection in one shape or form. I know, an obvious statement, but it is self-perception that drives our choices.

I couldn't really see myself becoming a man because I couldn't make the connection with other men that was mine to make. I didn't understand that I defined masculinity by some universal standard and because I felt different from that standard, I was different.

I often write that every choice we make is based on a legitimate need. The choice itself might be legitimate or illegitimate but the need does not change. *I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child.* In other words, I saw everything as it applied to *my* wants and needs.

In the normal scheme of events, childhood progresses into adulthood and children are taught that life is not solely about personal needs or wants. A balance should exist between us as individuals and the world around us. Simply stated, many of us enter adulthood without having all the t's crossed and the i's dotted. Electricians would say that not all of our wiring is as it should be.

So the mirror we look into from Paul's perspective is a poor reflection. The image of God, the clarity of life instruction can be seen but not clearly enough when personal brokenness dominates life. Complicating things, the mirror of society reflects acceptance of the same-gender distortions I felt.

A heart that learns to surrender wipes away the distortions in the mirror a little at a time. God becomes real. Jesus becomes personal. The Holy Spirit becomes alive each and every day. What were once only words now becomes reality and that reality begins to know at least in part the awesome nature of God.

It all seems beyond our human capacity. With every surrender, with every rebirth in healthy choice comes the knowledge that much more awaits. And maybe we wonder how we will ever reach the destination of oneness with God that we are taught is ours. The men in our support group sometimes wonder if they will ever feel normal, more like men without same-gender attraction.

Paul doesn't minimize this difficulty but he does offer something of an individual road map in three words: faith, hope, and love.

Living in the Word

¹*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* (Hebrews 11.1)

The first and second signposts we are called to follow are connected, both encouraging and frustrating at the same time. We can have faith in ourselves, in others, or even in things, but those pale to faith in God. In all things other than God, we can almost always have instant verification of the result.

"I have faith that I can accomplish this or that task" and then I complete it because I know that I can. "I have faith in someone because I believe that person capable of being successful" and most often the person does if the expectation is reasonable enough. "I have faith in my car that it will get me home this evening" and then I rest in the knowledge that because I have enough fuel and the car has been running as it should I will arrive home safe and sound.

Faith in God is more complex because while God's design for our lives IS a perfect design, our vision is imperfect. Our hopes are somewhat imperfect as well but when offered to God in our petitions, we trust God to redefine them to fit His will, His perfect design.

Then there is love. Of all the areas of my personal brokenness as a child and then as an adult, this is the one most distorted in the mirror of my life. Not that I was unable to love or receive love as it was meant to be, just that I defined love as a child would define it—that warm and positive attention directed at me because it is what I deserved.

³⁶*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?* ³⁷*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* ³⁸*This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹*And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* ⁴⁰*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*" (Matthew 22:36-40)

There have been countless sermons and lectures on these verses and I certainly would not suggest that anything I am going to say will match or even come close to matching them. I do think, however, that if the mirror is to be clear, if the reflection is to remind and teach, then it is not enough merely to look.

We cannot love what we do not know and we cannot know without having made the effort to seek. God's word directs us, teaches us, and draws us into a deeper relationship with Him. It also opens our eyes to those around us.

The child becomes the adult in the security of knowing he or she is loved by God and in this knowledge is able to make decisions that meld with God's Word. In short, the one who seeks God will hear or read God's Word and *do what it says*. As I grow older (and prayerfully wiser), I can recognize that healthy gender identity comes in that relationship with God.

There are many who suggest that we should place others before ourselves and call that Christian living. I would humbly suggest as one who has waded through a lot of muck and mire that healing comes from seeking God first, focusing on the intense relationship God wants with us second, and believing that *from* that relationship will come the appropriate love of neighbor.

To ignore self is to ignore self-maintenance and from my experience, when we stop taking care of ourselves, we cloud the mirror. To suggest that all this is easy would be an insult to the journey we are all on. We all have the ability to choose God as our destination in day to day living. The journey is enhanced, I think, by all the wonderful sights and experiences that will be ours if we are willing to look for them. The mirror you use in life is yours, however. What *do* you see?

2010

The Need to be Loved

February 2010

³ *Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. (Psalm 84.3)*

It was a difficult conversation—hard for the one who called and for me as well. But the call was not all that unusual from others that have come to the ministry over the years. In the first moments, however, I reminded myself that I could change nothing. But I could listen. I could also make sure that God was central to the conversation and I could trust that there would be something I could share that might help a little.

After we both said “Goodbye and God bless you,” the situation had not been resolved but it had been shared. And that, my friends, is really important.

There is nothing simple about same-gender attraction, no simple formula that can be applied to all who struggle with those attractions. The seemingly endless variations people bring might fall into categories and sub-categories but from where I sit, these variations remind me that only God knows *exactly* what each individual needs. And sitting on top of that list is the need to be loved.

We come by that need naturally, being children of God, called to be one with God for eternity, loved to the point of Jesus dying on a cross so that an eternity of God’s incredible love might be ours.

Along our journey of living, love becomes translated in ways we cannot understand. As babies, most feel unrestricted love. Then love becomes something to be earned, withheld when we fail, and sparingly given when we succeed. The rules are not the same and the prize (love) gets redefined depending on who is bestowing it. Only God’s love is constant.

Confusing the Issue

Perhaps you’ll have noticed that I have avoided any mention of sexual intimacy. My reasoning is simple. For a child, the purest forms of love were those experienced before love got complicated by things like earning it or adding a biological component.

For some time now I have been arguing that the body often works independently of the mind. Pleasure to the body is neither right nor wrong. It is just pleasure. In the best context, pleasure between a man and a woman flows out of love and relationship. Aha, some might be saying. Gotcha! If a man loves a man or a woman loves a woman, isn’t sexual pleasure a fruit of that relationship?

God’s word calls us to love one another in the same manner we are loved by God. But not all love is meant to be sexualized. If it were, there would be no boundaries set because all sexual contact coming as a result of perceived love would be appropriate. Unfortunately, many consider sexual attraction to be love.

Even the sparrow

It doesn’t take long for all of this to be really complicated, so I won’t even attempt to satisfy everyone’s viewpoint. What I think, however, is rather than to do that, I want to head in a different direction—simplicity.

The sparrow has found a home; the swallow a nest. It is a place near the altar of God. The apostles, the early Christians, and those who have achieved eternal happiness found it, I believe, by seeking God and resting near the altar of His love.

When I am in God’s will, when I listen for His voice, I act as I am meant to act. I serve as Christ taught me to serve. And I love without complication, without the definition of love so much as with the evidence of love.

Such love is both appropriate and holy. It doesn't demand anything nor does it need to meet my expectations. Such love exceeds those expectations and as C.S. Lewis would suggest, it surprises me with its resulting joy.

We all hunger for love and a need to be loved but I fear we are destined for disappointment when we seek it in one another *before* seeking it in God. Like one offered water or food when thirsty or hungry, accepting what *feels* like love only produces temporary relief.

"This is the one who understands me, who loves without reservation. It *must* be good. It must be of God!" This is the human argument. "We loved because He first loved us" are far better words for all who are seeking. (1 John 4.19)

A Note on Childlikeness

Jeff

I find that I must become like a child in Christ. Some people might find this humiliating or ridiculous. I find it essential to all my relationships. It is essential to my relationship with God, to people, and to me. There is a huge difference between an adult and the childlike mature person. It is only in my childlikeness that I am willing to receive. I can always tell when I start acting like an adult because I feel strong resentment grow in me. It is only when I am like a child that I am willing for that resentment to melt or bend.

My ability to receive love from God only comes from childlikeness. When I am calm, gentle, slow, shy, meek, unassuming, and tender, I find that I can relate to the gentleness of God. It is only at this point that I am then willing to receive something so personal and vulnerable as warm loving affection from God. It is only at the place where I am able to imagine sitting on Jesus' lap that I find he is big enough, strong enough, and loving enough to handle my situation in this fallen world. It is only when I am childlike and imaging Christ camping out next to me at night, that I can reach over and tenderly hold his cross-scarred wrists and ponder them with childlike tears of sorrow, as he gently falls asleep.

I find that when I experience these moments and mornings of calm childlike love with Jesus that I begin to be able to love others with a new fresh love that I simply could not give as an adult. I find excitement in the small and simple things of life. I find that I don't need to purchase as much because I am interested in what I have. I find that my palette for life expands to new depths and breaths. I find that I have the ability to run and jump next to someone on the couch and just sit next to them because they too are a created being. I find that I say less with my mouth and wait longer with my eyes when I see someone new or someone known.

Childlikeness has a quick ability to receive correction and forgiveness and this leads me to be very gentle with myself. I no longer need to harshly rebuke my thoughts or actions. Instead, all things are brought before God for inspection, questioning, and approval. I no longer have the desire in childlike love with Christ to so absorb myself with something that it gets in the way of love or becomes addictive. If something does move toward addiction it is gently moved aside for a time or simply reset to its proper place. It is in this, that I find as a man that I can truly become what Christ is looking for. It is in the childlike love that my appreciation of robust strength is formed and my desire for gentleness continued. The knowledge that Christ would gently correct me as I begin to grow in masculine love and action, allows me to explore all the mysterious and secret places of my personhood without fear.

Times Have Changed

June 2010

⁵ *Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32.5)*

"On October 22, 1989, Bill Windel (founder of Broken Yoke Ministries) spoke before an audience of about 2500 people at the Milwaukee Mecca Auditorium. The meeting was sponsored by the Family Concerns Coalition and was organized to educate the attendees about the pandemic of AIDS. The main speaker was Dr Lorraine Day, an orthopedic surgeon at San Francisco's General Hospital. Bill was asked to bring his testimony following Dr Day's presentation.

"The response to Bill's testimony was overwhelming, a standing ovation! Of course, not everyone attending the rally was quite as exuberant about an ex-gay sharing the power of Jesus to heal the homosexual, but they heard the truth." (*Wellspring*, November 1989)

I was not present at that particular rally but I remember the almost electric excitement that surrounded it in the days, weeks and months that followed. Bill received several invitations to speak on both AIDS issues and homosexuality as a result of that 10-minute sharing.

Within a few years, people were no longer talking about AIDS or HIV+ situations. Most knew that they would not contract AIDS unless they used dirty needles or had unprotected sexual contact with strangers, so fear was set aside in favor of intelligent caution.

Every now and then the AIDS situation in Africa will make headlines; donations will be made to help the men, women and children affected; yet not much changes in terms of behaviors known to spread the deadly disease. In other words, one of the reasons this ministry was frequently contacted has more or less disappeared.

About ten years later, another shift started to become evident—public acceptance of homosexuality and lesbianism. *It's Elementary*, a pro-gay documentary aimed at elementary school-aged children began to circulate in Wisconsin schools.

Mike Levenhagen (Reclamation Resources) and I were part of a panel discussion on PBS television in Green Bay, sharing thoughts, questions, and concerns with supporters of the film. I recall asking a young man why the film made no mention of sexual behaviors and the possible consequences. He shared that school administrators had rejected any mention of this aspect of being gay. The main purpose was to show children how normal it was for people of the same sex to love one another. I could object to many things in the film, but I could not object to that because we are *all* called to love one another. That love does not demand sexual intimacy, though.

Before long, people who considered same-sex behaviors immoral or sinful were considered biased or homophobic. Pro-gay literature could be found in school kiosks; gay and lesbian groups were formed to help students feeling persecuted by straight students; yet Christian students who voiced a different kind of love were denied a voice.

In that same time frame, I noticed that more pastors were unwilling to even mention our ministry to someone who shared same-sex attraction with them in counseling. After speaking to one lesbian pastor, I asked if she would point someone in our direction who felt a desire to deal with those attractions in a different way. She looked at me and said, "No."

The message she and others were sending was simple—a person who had same-sex attraction would be best served by learning to accept and embrace those attractions as who they were, who God created them to be.

From my perspective, what was missing was any concern for individuals of *any* age who sought alternatives, alternatives that coincided with their understanding of God's intent. What also became clear to me was that if pastors believed that God created individuals with same-sex attractions, then there could be no sin for those thus created.

**Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity**

This is, I suspect, where my belief system comes face to face with a major decision. If I believe that same-sex behavior is sinful, then I am able to acknowledge it when or if it occurs in thought, word, or deed. I cannot cover up and present myself as blameless to others.

On the other hand, if I believe that God approves of same-sex behavior, then I have nothing to acknowledge and nothing to cover up. This is, I suspect, the choice many make and I don't believe that they make the decision lightly. I know too many who have done so and they are not terrible people. They are good people.

My understanding of the Bible is that there is no sin for those who deal with same-sex attraction. Every Biblical example of sin, however, is connected to behavior choices and I do not believe that God created the very thing we are told to avoid.

You forgave the guilt of my sin

One cannot be involved in this kind of ministry for as long as I and others have been without coming to know that God understands our situation, knows why we have the attractions we do, sees us in our failures *and* in our victories, and forgives our failures.

Believing that simple truth has given me immense hope. I don't have to have complete freedom from the occasional temptation to know that my walk is the one I am called to make and that is such a blessing.

Times *have* changed—some things for the better and others not—but God's love and presence never changes. We are called to seek God in *all* things and I am convinced that when we do, we will make God-centered choices. They will not always be easy choices, but why are they meant to be.

It's Still a Journey

October 2010

³ *Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture..* ⁵ *For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.* (Psalm 100.3-5)

Twenty-five years ago I made a decision that seemed to contradict how I had defined myself. At first, that decision represented more of a desire to be just like other guys in their expression of masculinity, but with time I learned to see myself as having similar characteristics without being a clone. In other words, when I looked in a mirror I saw Bob, not a man trying to look like someone else named Bob.

I'll admit that in the beginning I was pretty caught up in the notion of copying others. I was especially drawn to those who publicly proclaimed a freedom from same-sex attractions and in 1985, there were not many of them who made such a statement.

I did, however, eventually find support ministries like Pastoral Care Ministries (Leanne Payne), Love in Action, Metanoia Ministries, and Exodus International whose main purpose was to help men and women like me on our journey. Their newsletters and in particular personal letters responding to my mine planted within me a new image of masculinity.

The first support conference I attended was held at Wheaton College. It was a PCM School (Pastoral Care Ministries) with Leanne Payne, Clay McLean, and Mario Bergner sharing in a way I had never heard.

Homosexuality was certainly an implied focus of the gathering but the primary focus that week was on God's design, on having a relationship with God, and of choosing to "Rely on God alone." Definitely not what I had anticipated, since I was looking for a "Setting Homosexuality Aside 101."

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

I thought the object was to deal with me, with my attraction issues so that I would be okay in God's eyes. But I had it all wrong. My struggle was misdirected though it's logical to see how that could have happened. My temptations, my sins, all seemed to be choices I made that put me out of God's love. God, on the other hand, was saying "Look, I know you have temptations and I know you sin, but you seem to miss the point. I love you and have called you to be mine."

No word about homosexuality. No word about my many failings. Just a simple truth—I was loved by God!

This focus did not eliminate my issues. There was not any presto-chango done at Wheaton that week. I came home knowing that at some point I'd be dealing with the same problems I had before the conference, but something was different and that something was significant!

Readers of this newsletter already know I do not believe I was born homosexual. I do remember a time in my childhood when I was like every other little boy in the neighborhood and eventually at school. I didn't think about same-sex attraction—I didn't even think about sex.

I did know, however, that I felt attracted to some boys more than others but it was because they were good athletes, smart students, or just easily likeable. I even had a few adult male role models in my life I placed on pedestals. Popular thinking today would suggest that my attractions were really evidence of a developing homosexuality, especially when during puberty the attractions often had sexual overtones.

I didn't know it at the time but I had things backward and I wasn't the only one. Most of the choices I made growing up were decisions that agreed with how I felt. Emotionally and spiritually, I had a lot of conflict during my teen years, but I knew what felt good physically and I went after it.

What I learned at that PCM School and at gatherings in the years that followed was that if I focused on God and gave my life to God's design, the rest would fall into place. And do you know something? It has.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations

When I share that my journey began twenty-five years ago, that is not quite true. The journey began after the first behavior done in secret—in secret because I was ashamed. Nothing anyone else said altered the feeling that I had done wrong. In the years that followed, I experienced that feeling more than I care to admit.

Twenty-five years ago, however, I made a decision to deal with my same-sex attraction. That decision underscored the notion that what I was doing was not compatible with God's design. Public opinion today would suggest I was repressing my normal attractions, but the public does not have to live in my skin. I do.

The skeptics always measure success and change by the complete absence of same-sex attraction. Just as I have shared many times in the past, change is not the absence of temptation but the ability to choose to reject that temptation. Additionally, change is not measured by heterosexual desire but by the desire for holiness.

Not everything that has happened since 1985 has been a positive experience, but as David shared, *"His faithfulness continues through all generations."* I do see myself as one of the sheep in His pasture and I do believe that I am to listen for His voice.

I can pretty much guarantee you that if you walk a similar path, it will not be approved or affirmed by a lot of people—even people of strong faith. Some might even suggest that you are not following God's design. They might also say you are implying those who follow a gay or lesbian walk are automatically rejected by God.

God is a relationship that extends a lifetime and beyond and I will not condemn anyone to hell for the choices they make. My life choices, however, cannot be determined by some popularity poll. When it comes time to meet the Lord face to face, I must answer for my life, just as those who disagree must answer for theirs.

In closing, it is somewhat significant to me that this brief message is loosely based on two verses from Psalm 100 because this article is the 100th article I have written for *Wellspring* since 1992. I am still writing; I am still seeking the Lord; and I am still on the journey.

2011

Becoming Clean

Jill Rennick
February 2011

My earliest nickname growing up was “dirty gerty” and I didn’t mind. I lived outdoors: climbing the maple tree in our back yard; riding my bike in the dirt field behind our house; fashioning small cities with dirt roads traveled by match box cars with my friends Craig and Penny. It never fazed my mom; that’s what baths were for. Unfortunately as we grow older and the dirt in our lives is impossible to clean in the tub, we often begin to hide it. But God’s not fooled. And, when we’re ready to face it, He’s not fazed. That’s what His Son died for.

Facing our dirt honestly is the first step towards becoming clean. This is not easy, especially when our natural tendency is to protect our appearance. However, the reality is that *acting* clean is not the same as *being* clean. God’s plan and purpose is that we would truly be clean from the inside out. Initially though we come as we are, dirty.

When we show up as we are (dirty), we discover two things. We are both accepted as we are and given hope and power to change. In Matthew 9:10-12 Jesus is eating with “tax-collectors and sinners”. When the Pharisees challenged him about this (because they of course were not like “those people”), Jesus says to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Jesus is not looking for those who “have it together”. Rather, He comes to those who know they don’t. And He wants to sit at a table with us, even those of us who struggle with homosexuality. By His grace, we are accepted as we are.

In addition (by His grace), we are given hope and power to change. It’s incredibly relieving to know that we can come as we are, but we’d be stupid to want to stay there. Our dirt does not surprise our Master but it’s still dirt. What’s ugly is still ugly and it damages our ability to live and love in the ways we were created for. In Titus 2:11-14 we are told “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” By and through His grace we can discover and experience change!

The Gospel message, which includes the truth that the work or death of Christ on the cross pays and provides for our “uncleanness,” does two things for those who trust it. First, the Gospel makes it possible for the dirty to “be clean”. Hebrews 10:10 says, “we have been made holy (made clean) through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. We are washed (past tense, it’s a done deal).” We still sin, but God no longer defines us or judges us by it. In His eyes, we are clean!

The Gospel also makes it possible for the dirty to become clean. Even though Christ’s sacrifice declares us clean, we now enter the process of *becoming* what we’ve been declared to be. II Corinthians 7:1 instructs, “let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” Just like a husband or wife can grow into becoming more of a husband or wife than they were the day they married, so we are in the process of becoming what God has already made us to be: His children who reflect His image.

Somewhere along the line, we heard the message that we “shouldn’t be dirty”. We shouldn’t have ugly, dirty stuff happening inside us or at the very least, it shouldn’t spill out of us onto others. In response to that message, we react to the reality of our dirtiness in a variety of ways:

- We live as if it doesn’t exist – denial (“that’s not dirt”)
- We give it a momentary glance of disapproval – apathy (“yuck but oh well”).

- We excuse it – blame (“it’s not my fault so I’m not responsible”).
- We hide it – cover-up (“nobody can ever see this”)
- We beat ourselves up over it – self condemnation (“you’re a horrible mess”)

God’s desire is for us to respond differently to our dirt. Rather than living in denial, God wants us to acknowledge it as He reveals it to us in through His word and by His Spirit. Rather than being apathetic, God asks us to take the time and do the hard work of dealing with it. Rather than excusing it, God wants us to own our own dirt. Even though many of us have had experiences that have impacted us in negative or painful ways, blaming others for our own choices will keep us stuck in our dirt. One of the sweet truths Christ offers through the Gospel is redemption. This means that He is able to take what should destroy us and bring hope and beauty out of it. Rather than try to hide our dirt, God asks us to admit it to Him and others who will pray for and encourage us. When you try to hide dirt, it usually just gets spread around. And, rather than beat ourselves up over it, God asks us to trust His mercy and grace.

He asks us to deal with everything He reveals—both what we often see as mountains of dirt (the stuff we fight so hard to keep hidden) as well as the dirt clods of daily ugliness: the selfishness, the slight impatience, the small frustrations accompanied by pride, the acts to gain attention, the tendency to be annoyed, the need to be right, the discontentment with my current situation, the habit of not noticing others while taking care of my own stuff. God asks us to respond to these things in the context of relationship.

My response to my own dirt is never supposed to be a solitary activity. God wants me to deal with my dirt in His loving, merciful presence and when He provides, in the presence of His people. Why? Because only He can wash me clean, only He can forgive, only He can remind me that I’m still loved and accepted; only He can bring real change. He is not daunted by my mountains or dirt clods—to Him it’s all dirt. And He’s been in the business of cleaning up messes since the Garden of Eden.

Has the Message Changed?

October 2011

⁴ *But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who long for your saving help always say, 'The Lord is great!'" (Psalm 70.4)*

Normally the main message of this newsletter pretty much writes itself. I would, however, suggest that there is always a time of praying and listening involved and, God willing, I am paying attention. Somehow, though, it all seemed much easier twenty years ago because the ministry was formed in response to a clear need for support by those with unwanted same-sex attractions.

As I suggested in the June *Wellspring* edition, in the past 40 years “the attitude and in some ways the belief system surrounding homosexuality and lesbianism—not so much for those who seek freedom but from those on the outside looking in” had changed.

When this ministry was formed, there was considerable focus on HIV and AIDS. Church leaders contacted us more because they were concerned about the possible spread of the virus by infected individuals than about the manner in which they might minister to those infected. At the same time, the health concerns encouraged conversations about homosexuality—at the time considered a primary means of virus transmission.

Health officials today point to unsafe sex and dirty needles as major sources of HIV transmission. Homosexual behaviors still account for some of the spread of this disease but one rarely hears this as a serious connection.

One thing I don't think has changed since the 80s is the attitude of people who truly want help, who truly want to set aside the same-sex attractions that lead to what *they* consider immoral behavior choices. It can no longer be presumed, however, that everyone is on the same page with regard to the morality of same-sex behaviors. So what's the message of this ministry?

Our mission statement says in part -- *This ministry seeks to support those who struggle with homosexuality and believe that such behavior is incompatible with God's design for their lives.* It is our belief that homosexual behavior is incompatible with the word of God. Not long ago such a statement would have met with nods of agreement from the majority of church-goers but such is not the case today.

If anything, the primary focus of Broken Yoke Ministries is to encourage individuals in their identity as sons and daughters of Christ. In years past, the focus was on homosexuality as a condition, methods of treatment, and ways to encourage those in their struggle. We don't deny the presence of same-sex attractions or even the reality that the causes of homosexuality and lesbianism are complex. Like many ministries similar in purpose, we used to simplify the struggle, but I think that left many who did not fit the one-size-fits-all description of homosexuality wondering why they had attended the meetings.

But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you

Looking through past editions of this newsletter I saw that even though I have presented many variables for those who struggle to consider, one focus has been pretty constant. Seek God in *all* things.

Attending weekend services is to attend weekend services—a duty for some, a joy for others, but only one occasion of spiritual focus. Even as I write this, I am aware of my own inadequacies when it comes to actively seeking God in *all* things. My will, my desires, needs and dreams still sit at the top of my priority list each day. There are times when I catch myself and, like moving text in a document, I click on and then move God to the top of the list. There is a certain amount of risk doing this, however.

We all risk knowing that the object of our desire at any given moment might be flagged by that still, soft inner voice suggesting we avoid what we think we want.

Still, in the occasions when I am asked what people can do in their daily walk, it remains “Seek the Lord.” It is not judgmentalism on my part. It is not pointing a finger of condemnation at those who don't believe same-sex behaviors are immoral. And it does not suggest much will change without considerable surrender. But in the end, we will rejoice and be glad by seeking God in all things.

**May those who long for your saving help
always say, "The Lord is great!"**

No message is worth offering unless someone wants or longs to hear or read it. This is, I think, where things get a bit complicated because our message of freedom and change is considered both unnecessary and perhaps for some even insulting.

Our ministry is and always has been available for those who desire the specific kind of encouragement we offer. Our ministry never fails to point individuals toward a deeper personal relationship with the Lord and in doing so we freely echo the message "The Lord is great!" And as we move into our 25th year of service, our ministry remains committed to the Biblical principles that have served as our foundation.

Has the message changed? Not really. Has the audience changed? Now *that* might be a question worth considering. Any belief system that has roots two centuries old is bound to feel the tug of a society that wants its belief system to match its lifestyle. Finally, I have to ask myself "Have I changed?" And the answer to that question is, I think, a resounding yes!

2012

Then and Now

June 2012

¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* ¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.* (Psalm 139:14-15)

Once Upon a Time - 1992

I'd like to tell you a story about a special child. Maybe there are parts of my story that will sound familiar to you. My story is about a little boy, but it could just as easily be about a little girl.

The little boy wasn't unlike the other boys in the neighborhood. He liked baseball, climbing trees, eating green apples, and racing down the sidewalk on his bicycle. School was okay except for those times when the teacher passed out tests. Recess was great -- especially in nice weather when the boy could be outside!

One day, the little boy realized that he wasn't always included in pickup games of baseball after school. He also realized that if he sat down first at a table in the lunch room, those he thought his friends often sat at another table even though his was empty. The more he tried to understand, the less he understood.

There was one place where the boy found happiness -- in church. Jesus was incredible, he thought, and just being where Jesus lived brought him immense peace not to mention a tingling sensation up and down his back. It was easy for the boy to talk to Jesus in his heart. He was never lonely during these conversations with his friend, but it still hurt him not to have friends like he did when he was much smaller.

There came a day, however, when the boy knew that some of the things he was doing were very wrong. Visiting his friend meant owning up to things he was very ashamed to admit. Jesus still reached out and spoke love words to the boy, but the boy had trouble believing the words. More and more, the boy wished for those days, so long ago it seemed, when nothing separated him from his friend.

As he grew older, the boy heard those around him saying that what he did really wasn't wrong. They told the boy he was different from others, but it was okay to be different. After all, they insisted, God created him and loved him just as he was. The boy smiled weakly and for a time believed the words others shared. Still, there was loneliness unlike the other kinds of being lonely that he had known as a child. No matter how hard he tried, he could not quiet the voice within him that disagreed with the things he did.

Church was still a special place, but things were different for the boy now becoming a young man. He couldn't talk to Jesus without feeling the shame of his actions, so he busied himself with church activities hoping that his friend might someday invite him to visit again. Rather than improving, things worsened for the young man until one day. It was a day when he knew he could take no more, and in his frustration, he screamed out, "Why have you left me, Jesus?"

Jesus answered the young man with loving silence, and the young man knew that Jesus had not left him. Deep inside, he saw a young boy -- a boy who liked baseball, climbing trees, eating green apples, and racing down the sidewalk on his bicycle. He knew at that moment that it was okay to visit his friend again. More importantly, he knew that Jesus would not ask him to leave if what he shared was a confession of sinful behavior.

The boy is a man now, but he remembers the little boy he once was. There are still people trying to convince him that he is being untrue to his natural self. Sometimes he gets angry at their unwillingness to believe him when he describes the man he feels called to be. It saddens him to see others choose what

the world sees as good -- especially if their choice means setting aside their friend, Jesus.

Stories should have happy endings and this one will. The man, the child within, and Jesus walk together every day. The man and the child share many things in their private conversations, and one day they both know that they'll spend the rest of eternity speaking of the love they have for Jesus, their friend.

With Hope – 2012

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.* ¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!* ¹⁸ *Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand — when I awake, I am still with you.* (Psalm 139.16-18)

Years ago, it was not uncommon to hear someone say “If I could do it all over, I’d change a lot of things.” I haven’t heard anyone make the statement lately and I find myself wondering if people think that way anymore or if they have rationalized the direction their lives have taken.

Perhaps the phrase “It is what it is” has taken the place of retrospection though I think that this more recent offering is rather lame. It implies changes are not possible. Where you are is where you are, so live with it.

Reading “Once Upon A Time” twenty years later, I tried to remember if I was writing about myself and about my own growth into adulthood or if the article was really a little of the many people I had met to that point while in this ministry. I have decided that the boy is a composite and is not solely me but I can personally identify with a lot of the situations I shared back then. Most importantly, reading the boy’s relationship with Jesus felt pretty personal and pretty close to home, so maybe that part was my story.

Toward the end of the article, I saw that I wrote of the child and the man being two people yet the same person. My memory of that final paragraph is a little cloudy but it is not difficult to speculate that we are always the person we are in a given moment as well as the sum of the various stages of our lives. We cannot set aside the not-so-good memories as unimportant any more that we can define our lives solely by things positive or negative.

My own dreams as a boy have not all been realized. As a matter of fact, my life has gone in directions I could never have guessed would happen back then. Some have asked me if I would be writing and doing this kind of ministry if things had not turned out as they have and my answer is “Probably not.”

The choices I made as a young man were *my* choices, the failings were *my* failings. God did not desire that I make some of those choices just so that I could be in this ministry, but I am pretty sure that He was just waiting for me to call out for help. Once I did, once I surrendered, God used me *because I was willing to be used in whatever manner God chose*. In other words, God does not cause us to sin in order to bring about some future good for others.

Now that I am a gray-haired senior citizen (well, there is still *some* gray hair growing), I recognize that I view most people with a little more patience than I once did. It is not a matter of condoning what others think, do, or say as much as understanding that, whether I agree or not, *they* make their choices.

I will acknowledge, however, that some days I can be just as judgmental as the next person and even tempted to toss someone aside whose belief system is not compatible with mine. Then I think “Where would I be today if others had not continued to witness to me back when *I was the one out of sync with them?*” They did not approve of my choices but they did continue to love me into God’s presence. I thank God for them!

I can state without hesitation that the journey of change is *always* a process and one that demands our permission. Knowing that some still see me just as they did 25 years ago is sobering because they have locked me into what I would call the “old me.” They have denied me the possibility of ever being anything but what they want to believe about me. Probably worst of all, they have locked me into an identity of sin.

For my part, I cannot condemn anyone. I can grieve situations others find themselves in (maybe even willingly so) but I cannot take upon myself the role of judge for their eternal souls. That decision belongs to God and God alone. My job, as I understand it, is to pray and witness—not with criticism but with attention to my own choices.

When I awake, I am still with you

Psalm 139 is filled with powerful images, images that remind us that God really *does* know us and is intimately involved in *every* aspect of our lives. He knows the healthy choices we make as well as those that are not so healthy and His love is unchanging.

One of the realities of ministry is the ongoing blessing of knowing that people are trusting enough to

share not only that they continue to struggle but more importantly that they continue to have hope. I sometimes think people feel a sense of shame because they cannot claim total victory. They cannot say that they are no longer tempted. And if they are still tempted, is there not the larger question they ask: "What am I doing wrong that I still struggle?"

One of the joys I experience is the simple act of faith. Temptation can feel like sin but it is *not* sin, it is an invitation to sin. Faith reminds me that when I wake in the morning, I am His. Faith reminds me that throughout the day filled with choices, I am His. And Faith reminds me that when I close my eyes at night, I am still His. If that is not reason to be thankful, then I am not sure what is.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (verse 24). I know my weaknesses and my strengths—well, at least most of them—but most of all I know that I cannot witness to others from a position of superiority.

There is nothing simple about some of the choices we make but as I have shared in the past, we make a choice based on what we *believe* to be our in our best interests. Another way of saying that is we recognize a need we have and then choose how we can meet that need.

As much as we might wish to always claim high moral ground, sometimes our choices do clash with the will of God. After we make the choice we sometimes say "Father, forgive me for I have sinned" and sometimes we say "This seems so right, it must be of God's design, God's blessing." Given the current social thinking, I would suggest that it is easier to redefine God's will than to even consider the notion of sin.

Things were not any easier in 1992 than they are today or even than they were in 1952 for that matter—as much as some might say "Back in the day, we didn't have to deal with. . ." The reality is that the choice is the same. The opposing thought, however, has been gaining strength and, if not popularity, acceptance. Why? It's easier.

When the Perfect Comes, the Imperfect Will Pass Away—a Reprise

October 2012

[There might be some among you who have been following Wellspring since 1998, so at least the first part of this offering will look familiar. It was written in October 1998 and still strikes me as valid. There will, however, be an epilogue with maybe a thought or two for your consideration.]

“Dear Lord, I want to love you and I want to feel your love. I try. . . I really do, but despite my best intentions I am always doing something that is not in your will. Please, Lord, please help me!”

My prayer reminds me of the day I looked down on the tie I was wearing (one of my favorites), and all I could see was a big stain from some meal I had finished. I had not noticed the stain before, and it could have been there for weeks, but the moment I saw the stain all I could think about was taking off the tie.

The analogy I am using is a simple one. My wife would say, “All analogies limp,” because something in them falls short or misses the mark, and she’s right. My tie isn’t the same as some of the serious issues I face and have faced, but I can understand a stained tie far easier than some of the other issues.

This morning I had coffee with a man who is deeply in love with the Lord, so much so that his voice almost trembles when he says “Jesus” or “God.”

His life has become a commitment to telling the world that there can be freedom from homosexual behavior, yet he doesn’t offer a specific treatment system, he offers Jesus.

When I consider what has happened in my life over the past tens years, I am overwhelmed by the presence of God. No matter where I was at any given point in time God was there loving me just as much then as He does now.

Every good and perfect gift comes from God above with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration (James 1.17).

When I pray to the Lord while wearing a stained tie around my soul, God doesn’t stare at the stained tie and demand I take it off before we can continue. We both know the tie is stained, and I am embarrassed because I want to wear better things in God’s presence. But the eyes of the Lord of lords and King of kings are fixed on mine, beckoning me to surrender more of myself in order to be more completely filled with His good and perfect gifts.

Some might think I have just made a point for the pro-gay position. “God loves all of His creation,” they’d say, “and if two people of the same gender are committed to one another in love, then there God is, too.”

I can’t argue with that logic in so far as it goes because who am I to say that God restricts His presence? But there is still the issue of the stained tie to consider.

God loves me, yet I know that there are things I once wore in His presence that I no longer wear. I didn’t change because I would have been denied access to God but because something stirred in my heart telling me I *could* change.

Why is it presumed that change demands some form of perfection? Why do people feel that God must take away a condition to prove His love? And if God doesn’t completely remove every trace of a condition, is that a sign He approves of it?

When I look at someone I admire and respect, I often wonder if it’s the *presence* or the *absence* of some quality in that individual that attracts me? Probably a combination of both. Whatever the quality might be, good or bad, it is worn in the presence of God.

Too many see their struggle with homosexual behavior as a barrier to the intimate relationship they want with Jesus. I suspect, however, that if all homosexual temptations were to vanish, the struggle with another sin would take its place. The issue is not one of sin getting in the way of the relationship but of an inability to see beyond sin.

We are called to walk in the light and not in the darkness. God knows every dark place within us, and He knows that left to our own choices we probably will choose something other than what would be God’s will for us. We choose what we do because it *appears* to be the best choice.

Every parent knows the look on a child’s face when he or she is told to go to bed and the child is not yet done playing. The choices for the child seem simple enough—to continue having a good time or set

aside having a good time for a bed. Some children would call that decision a no-brainer despite the fact that other adults would see the wisdom of the parent's request.

How often do our spiritual faces look the same way as the child surrendering play for bed? How often does God patiently wait for us to set aside what we *think* is a good choice for one which will bear lasting fruit?

I have sinned exceedingly, my friends, and I am only beginning to learn that it is I and not God who holds my sins against me. I will not be free of human failing despite my best efforts, nor will I be able to determine the extent of temptation I may yet face.

When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away (1 Cor.13.10). Maranatha - Lord, come! And when Jesus comes again, I doubt that I will hear others say "See, I told you that you were wrong," for each one of us will see clearly what is imperfect in ourselves. And in acknowledgment of our human condition and in the presence of the Perfect One, we will bow our heads.

Epilogue

It was interesting to me that one of the readings at our morning service today included 1 Cor 6.9-10 because I have been thinking about this a lot as of late. The verses reminded me that people struggle with all sorts of things that are not in God's design for them in their lives (and even includes a good-sized list), yet those who choose the issue as an idol *to replace* God do not see heaven. Some years back, I came to believe that if temptation to "old" sinning ways continued despite a desire for complete freedom, then the focus must be more on God than on the issue because for many, the issue was not going away.

The current debate seems to underscore a thought that says "Those who believe themselves to be gay have rejected God and are therefore doomed to hell." I have met too many over the years who seek God afresh each and every day, celebrate His presence in their lives, yet have reconciled for themselves the belief that God ordained their sexual attractions to the same gender. I don't agree with that but have developed a very simple response: I am not God and therefore I am not in a position to define eternity for anyone.

There are lots of people who cannot accept the fact people with certain sins should be allowed a fresh start or feel that they are merely waiting for the next opportunity to act out the same sins. Some of these people have been condemned to hell with no chance of redemption.

Having been in a position of speaking in public venues, I know how easy it is to say something that will be rejected by others. In the situation of Alan Chambers (Exodus International), he could have sidestepped the question; he could have said "In my personal opinion and not speaking for Exodus. . ." but he didn't. He said what he believed. And I fear that for some, the response to his statements has been to elevate homosexuality or more specifically accepting a gay identity to condemnation without redemption.

I cannot simplify what is not simple. I cannot say that *all* things are either black or white, right or wrong. In the end, I hope to have the humility to believe in God's mercy, the power of the cross, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to help me define my decisions. And I pray that if I get off track, God's grace will bring me back.

2013

Be Transformed

February 2013

Wellspring May 1991

Recently I was asked to speak on the homosexual reconciliation issue at a church not too far from here. It was stated that I would be speaking from the transformation position. That word “transformation” stayed with me for several days and is, I think, what this is really all about.

In sharing with others about my life, I often speak of changing, or of making new choices in terms of my behavior. But that word, transformation, is such a beautiful word, gentle yet moving in a new direction with confidence and purpose.

My volume of *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* only gave two examples under the word “transformed.” Both were quite correct but the passage that best applies comes from Romans 12.2:

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

There are two distinct issues involved here: First, don't conform yourself to this age and second, be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

I often tell people that the only person I can speak for is me, so that's what I will share here. I can clearly recall the feelings of alienation back in the days of my youth, times when I didn't feel that I could ever share the secret of homosexuality with anyone. I would go to the library and, when no one was looking, take a book off the shelf that dealt with the subject. Books back then, however, didn't offer me much hope of any kind.

College brought the revelation that I wasn't the only one who felt this way. Meetings were still secretive but I no longer felt so all alone. Society seemed to be changing as it entered what some called a sexual revolution— if it feels good, do it.

1974 brought some light into the darkness as the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove homosexuality from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* and instead classified homosexuality as a “sexual orientation disturbance.” I share all of these things because they are solutions for attitudes “of this age” that Paul speaks of. In each instance, society's remedy brought me only temporary relief—nothing long-term or satisfying. Well-meaning friends told me that I would be happier if I accepted the way things were if I just stopped fighting it. Their solution to internal conflict was surrender.

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

I am not so naïve as to think that all homosexuals would choose an alternative to that lifestyle. I am also aware that there are many who have battled their sexual attractions for years without success. In my own searching I have accepted the fact that there is no single method of transformation devised by people. I have also discovered that the method which does produce results, Jesus, is one which comes about in His time and not mine. It is a transforming process, a series of plateaus in understanding and a willingness to feel a little adrift at times believing Jesus to be piloting my life.

The whole process of transformation is a gradual renewing of my mind and not merely a flash of inspiration or rush of the warm fuzzies. I know now that there was an ignorance regarding my choices in the past that no longer exists, and that more sharply defines the boundaries of my sinful nature. But I do believe that we all must come to understand that such definition allows us to better see the goal of our journey— Jesus Christ. He beckons us, encourages us, loves us, and yes, transforms us.

Wellspring 1997

I will lead the blind on their journey; by paths unknown I will guide them. I will turn darkness into light before them, and make crooked ways straight. These things I do for them, and I will not forsake them (Isaiah 42.16)

Every now and then, I have the opportunity to spend time with someone, to listen to his or her story, and at its conclusion be left without anything to say. It is a humbling experience but one which teaches me by a not so gentle reminder that it is not I who heals anyone.

People endure much that is not understood. They purchase self-help books, seek clinical advice, and storm heaven with their prayers. They do all these things so that the situation causing pain or confusion in their lives can be “fixed.” Somehow that seems to be the goal—to be “fixed.”

Two men I greatly respected have recently died. Both were young. Both loved the Lord with every fiber of their beings. And yet both died having suffered pain. They weren't fixed in the sense that prayers for wholeness of their bodies were answered, but they were both healed.

I will lead the blind on their journey; by paths unknown I will guide them.

Anyone who has struggled with homosexuality or some other in-your-face problem imagines what life would be like without that problem. As a teen, I recognized that I was “different” from other guys in school in terms of my sexual attractions. Too often I would hunger for the life they seemed to have, a life void of homosexuality, because anything had to be better than the life I was living.

As much as my heart sought God, Satan used my sins to convince me that I was too wicked. People often asked, “How could you ever believe that God would abandon you?” My lips said “He didn't” but my heart often felt otherwise.

Left on my own, I tried to learn everything I could about homosexuality from books and from people I considered wise and close-lipped. There was not much available, the road to change was a path at best.

Today my shelves are filled with Christian books on homosexuality, and Broken Yoke is but one of many ministries seeking to help people who struggle. We use books, videos, and other resources to help in our understanding, but it is becoming all too clear to me that such things are pointers, not miracles in themselves.

Resources are often at least partially successful because we see ourselves in them. Someone else has been where we are and is no longer there but in a better place. The danger comes in trying to copy the path of another because we are not exactly like others, nor are they exactly like us. That is why we can be referred to as “the blind.” That is why the paths are unknown.

I will turn darkness into light before them, and make crooked ways straight. These things I do for them, and I will not forsake them.

Flashbacks. Remembered conversations. That's where I have been lately. I wrote that my two friends died experiencing pain, and yet I said they were healed. To some that might sound like a contradiction, but it isn't.

My friends may have questioned God in their hearts but they both came to the same conclusion: God loved them and they loved God. Period. It was the daily relationship they had with Jesus, the manner in which they recognized the Holy Spirit within them that was the healing they sought. This is not to say that they prayed for the pain they endured, but that they prayed to endure the pain. God's presence and not the absence of pain had become the goal.

I recently wrote a friend that if I see the Apostle Paul's pain as a means of disciplining the body, of living and doing *despite* physical inconvenience, then God's refusal to change things might be seen as helping Paul to move *beyond* himself and closer to God. I think that's what I want in my life. I want to move beyond this shell which doesn't cooperate.

It concerns me how caught up in myself I tend to get. I want resolution to situations but in my design. I want to help everyone and end up being too busy to do what might really need doing. I want freedom from the temptations I hate but continue to believe that I am the one in control when I am not. I want to be close to God but find going to my knees difficult. Pride? Probably more than I want to admit. The bottom line is that by myself I am nothing, yet even knowing that, I still elevate myself and become puffed beyond recognition. Forgive me, Lord, and help me to stay focused on you.

We are all human and therefore we all try to plan the course our lives take. That's natural. But it IS the Lord who directs our steps and that is the truth behind healing. Change is not the absence of a problem like homosexuality. Change comes in understanding that no problem can separate us from the love of God. For where the light of God's love shines, there can be no darkness. *Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His face continually* (Ps.105.4)

Wellspring 2013

I don't know how many have the luxury of reading something they wrote 22 or 15 years previously, but this article has been my opportunity to do so. Years ago someone said to me "Just wait. You'll think differently when you get older." Well, I *am* older now but I still think much the same as I did in 1991.

Perhaps the most significant change, however, has come in the way in which both society and, more importantly I think, the church have come to view the transformation possible for a person with unwanted same-sex attractions.

Some conservative churches still condemn and reject anyone who openly confesses to these attractions. More liberal churches have bonded with psychology in elevating the "born that way" thinking into "God created" thinking. And in the middle are the majority, I think, who are not sure what to believe. At the same time, many of them fear being labeled homophobic, so they say nothing and leave whatever questions or doubts they may have hidden. And because they do so, they help to create a liberal majority.

I have changed over the past 22 years and I believe I have an attitude about life that recognizes the seasons of choices we all make. Friends have heard me say that I wish I could always make the right choice in all situations, the choice that gives God glory, but I fail most days in one way or another. Failure, however, is an opportunity to submit to God's transforming love.

In 1991 I wrote "The whole process of transformation is a *gradual* renewing of my mind and not merely a flash of inspiration or rush of the warm fuzzies." I still have work to do on patience, though, because "gradual" can seem like the movement of a glacier at times.

I don't believe God created same-sex attractions nor do I believe transformation is impossible for one who has them. But the goal of life is to finish the race we are all called to run, and the prize we seek is an eternity in God's presence. If transformation is a gradual process, the race I run will end without every issue I have being resolved.

If my goal in this ministry focuses more on drawing a line in the sand for those who accept and endorse same-sex attractions than on God's love, I do a grave disservice. God knows why we choose as we do; God knows the depth of our love for His way; and God calls *all* of us. The path we run and how we run it, however, is by our choice. Be transformed.