

My Secret Struggle

Many christians never talk about their quite battles with same-sex attraction. I decided that I had to be honest in order to find healing.

Her name was Stephanie. Though much remains unexplained today about what I felt at that time, this much I've figured out—she had everything I didn't.

She was cute, with long, dark hair and stylish clothes. She was athletic, at least more so than an awkward kid like me. Most of all she was popular. I was not.

We were only 7. But I vividly remember. It was my first crush on a girl.

It is possible that my attraction was born of loneliness. My family had just moved for the eighth or ninth time. My parents married at 19, then moved here and there while my father went to college, medical school, medical residency, Vietnam for a year.

My older sister took it all in stride. I did not.

By 7, I had become extremely shy. I had no friends. I still see, feel and smell what it was like to stand outside the back door of my school during recess, shivering in the cold. I had no one to play with, and I'd wait there for someone to open the door so a blast of air would momentarily warm me. You'd see me hunched, hands shoved in pockets, right beside the other outcast—an Indian girl named Abha.

We never spoke.

I'm sure many girls and boys went through something similar. But as I grew older some things changed with my peers, but not with me. They were boy-crazy. I was not. They obsessed over their hair, their dresses and their dolls. I couldn't have cared less.

My mother bought me dolls—and she laughs about it now. My Barbies were always naked victims of neglect. Since all you could do with them was change their clothes—so boring to me—I crafted plastic parachutes for them and hurled them up into the trees.

My mother bought me black Barbie dolls, hoping they'd spark some interest. They ended up flying into the trees too.

Struggling in Silence

Looking back, I can't see any red flags—just a wispy hint or two that I was different from most girls. There was nothing particularly unusual about my upbringing.

My parents were loving and generally attentive, despite the tensions in their own relationship. (They would divorce when I was a young adult.) They took their Christian faith seriously, and I was raised in a succession of Bible-believing churches.

At age 4 I invited Jesus Christ into my heart. That commitment deepened when my mother nearly died of ovarian cancer. Those weeks she was in the hospital when I was about 9 were an extraordinarily lonely, uncertain time for me.

When I reached adolescence this lack of interest in “girl”

things took a sharp turn. I began feeling a strong attraction for other girls.

It had nothing to do with sex—I craved affection and comfort. I was interested in boys, too, but the draw was mostly sexual, albeit not acted upon. This duality of desire was inward, powerful and so frightening to me that I didn't dare put words to it, much less confide in anyone.

Around the same time, I began to experience depression—a darkness that seemed to rest on me, to envelop me for days at a time. At one despondent point I wrote a letter to my mother, explaining that I needed her help combating these terrifying feelings of sexual ambivalence. I ran outside and stuck it in the mailbox. Within minutes I ran back outside and plucked it out.

I had no one to talk to. I didn't even tell Jesus—to do so would have acknowledged that these forbidden attractions existed.

To complicate matters, the churches I was raised in taught nothing about intimacy with God or the power of the Holy Spirit. I certainly never heard anyone confess a struggle with same-sex attraction.

Spiritually, I had just a few scraps of knowledge to guide me. I understood the fear of God and I understood sin. All sex outside of marriage was sin to me. Homosexuality was out of the question.

Today I thank God for this doctrinal foundation, however incomplete. Though it didn't offer a solution to same-sex

attraction, it kept me from going deeper into sin.

Hell was very real to me. As a teenager I had a dream, or a vision in a semiconscious state, of being pulled in a vortex to hell. I was terrified and tried to mouth Jesus' name, but I couldn't get the words out. Eventually the force released me.

Surely, there was an intense spiritual battle whirling around me, but I didn't know how to fight back. I knew somehow that my struggles with depression and same-sex attraction were spiritually rooted, even demonic in nature. My soul was at stake.

In my early 20s, I was sexually conflicted but also abstinent. I dated a few men, one seriously. I also suffered depression at times, but it wasn't a continual state.

Although I never had a sexual relationship with a woman, adopted a lesbian identity or participated in that lifestyle, the desire for a woman's love and affection remained, compounded by fantasizing and continued loneliness.

I also had a tendency to form possessive, emotionally dependent relationships with women. I guess it was my way of attempting to meet that need without plunging into sin.

Today I can see in that a likeness of the same dynamic I had with Stephanie. Those friends, who all were heterosexual, possessed qualities I envied: beauty, social ease, popularity. It was as if I thought I could absorb these traits via friendship.

At age 23 I read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic, uncompromising book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. It left me naked before God. I knew I needed to be freed from my sin and brokenness, including in my sexuality.

I began a desperate search for a real relationship with Jesus, something different from the empty religion I'd seen.

Two years later, while being water baptized at age 25, I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It happened while I was pulling off my wet baptismal robe in a basement room—I didn't even understand what was going on.

All I knew was that I felt joy for the first time. It came from within and was the most extraordinary thing I'd ever experienced.

My deliverance from depression and a lesbian spirit came in quick succession about two years later. Some dear friends from Northern Ireland and Ireland—one Protestant, two Catholic—broke the spirit of depression off my life one evening through prayer. Nothing spectacular happened, but I knew I was free and started to live it.

Then, shortly before I got married at 27, a wise, Spirit-filled Christian counselor broke off me a curse of "sexual perversion" in my family. I didn't tell her about my struggle—we met only once—but I knew she'd attacked the root of it.

I didn't divulge my secret to anyone, in fact, until I'd been married 10 years and told my husband one day! I'd been so ashamed all my life. I broke down in tears.

My husband's constant, unconditional love for me, though, has been instrumental in my wholeness. I had rejected myself in some ways, but he has always loved me as I am.

My confession was prompted after I had joined a Christian women's group. The first night we met, I heard the Holy Spirit nudging me to talk about my struggle in this group. I told my pastor's wife, who was extremely supportive.

I made the decision then to bare my past. One evening I told the group that I'd "struggled with a lesbian spirit" in my youth.

No sooner had the words left my mouth than several women said, "Me too." I knew then I wasn't alone in my struggle to stay free.

Only Jesus

I have wondered many times about the origins of my same-sex attraction, and I just can't find a smoking gun.

Some Christian counselors who have ministered successfully to gay men and women have found there is almost always a very early breach in the relationship with the same-sex parent. As far as I can remember, though, my mother was attentive to me. I idolized her, in fact, and clung to her in my childhood loneliness.

Yet there was a hole in my soul for a woman's affection. But I don't think it was a hole she could fill. I was that

emotionally needy. Only Jesus could fill it.

Growing up, I wasn't as close to my father, but we did have a relationship. As a teenager I sensed that I didn't measure up to his ideal of femininity. I responded at some level by rejecting myself, by viewing myself as unattractive and undesirable. It was reflected in my manner, my dress and how I carried myself. I lacked confidence.

That said, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment to say my parents were very good parents. There is something deeper going on here that we don't fully understand.

First, both parents play an essential role in a child's healthy sexual development. How tragic it is that we live in a daddy-optional society, where the mother and father are viewed as interchangeable parts. It should be no surprise today that such a great number of people, including Christians, struggle with same-sex attraction.

Second, sexual orientation is a mystery. How is it formed? Why is it that as early as age 7, long before I had any knowledge of sex, I felt a strong attraction to girls, and then in adolescence a sexual attraction to boys? My experience doesn't fit neatly into any category.

Finally, one thing we all have in common is that we are born broken because of the legacy of sin—especially in our sexuality, which touches the root of who we are and what we were created to be. This sexual brokenness takes many forms, from the lesbian to the pornography addict to the middle-aged man who pursues younger women. All are born broken and desperately in need of a Savior to make them whole.

It frustrates me greatly when Christians describe homosexuality as a “sexual preference.” I know why they say it. They’re trying to undercut the theory that homosexuality is genetically ordained. But they really don’t know what they’re talking about.

I’ve never met one person who “chose” as a child to feel an unhealthy attraction for the same sex. I certainly didn’t!

Does “choice” play any role in homosexuality? Yes. You do choose as an adolescent and young adult whether or not to dwell on these attractions and feed an unhealthy fantasy life that will eventually manifest in sinful relationships.

For a Christian—empowered by the Holy Spirit to do what’s right—that is indeed a choice. And, for me, making a choice at 23 to search for freedom ultimately led to my deliverance.

I have since written about my experience in the secular newspaper I edit, the Dallas Observer. Many people have either contacted me or taken me aside to say, “I can totally relate to what you’re saying.”

You see, thousands of men and women are like I was, trapped with these powerful feelings. They’re sitting in the pew right next to you. Some are in your youth group, afraid to talk about their conflicted sexual identity. Others are crying out to God in desperation and brokenness during public prayer.

They want to be free, but they wonder, as I did: Whom can I talk to? Why didn’t the attractions disappear right away when I received Jesus Christ or the baptism in the Holy Spirit? Who can handle my confession—and who can walk with me to

wholeness?

Many ministers and Christian teachers arrogantly assume there are easy answers to these questions. There aren't.

But one thing is certain: Even if much remains unexplained in our experience, Jesus can heal and heal completely—and He longs to do so. I know from my own life this is true.

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Are people born gay?

Some psychologists insist that gays can't change their sexuality. The church, however, must offer hope for those who want freedom.

Evangelicals and gays actually have something in common. Each fixates on the question of whether homosexuality has genetic origins.

The scientific evidence is inconclusive, but no study has shown that homosexuality "is an inborn and unchanging trait," as S. Michael Craven writes in his helpful booklet *Thinking Critically, Acting Compassionately: A Christian Perspective on Homosexuality*.

It is important, however, to respectfully look at some

arguments gays make. Foremost, accept that few if any people can recall making a conscious choice about being attracted to the same sex. If being gay is not genetic, then clearly there is spiritual damage that occurs so early in sexual development that it seems to the person as if he or she was born with same-sex attraction.

Gays often point to a 1991 study that compared sets of identical male twins with sets of fraternal twins. Identical twins share the same genetic code. In 52 percent of the sets of identical twins, both twins were gay, but only 22 percent of the fraternal twins were both homosexual. Voilà! Proof that nature trumps nurture!

Well, not so fast. What about the 48 percent of identical-twin sets in which only one twin was gay? Since both twins have the same genetic code, why was only one homosexual? Isn't that a strong indication that environmental influences play an even greater role?

I won't be surprised if researchers find a predisposition for homosexuality in certain families. However, the truth we must hold to is that we become new creations in Christ—transformed by the renewing of our minds through praying, studying the Word and fellowshiping with other believers.