

Churches Have Something to Offer the Gay Community

I've been out of the gay life for more than 20 years, am secure in who I am and don't struggle with either temptation or rejection. When people learn of my background, they respond in a variety of ways, from discomfort and distance to what sometimes strikes me as an invasive interest. Many have questions, and one of the most important ones is, "What does the church have to offer the struggling homosexual?"

It's important to note the word struggling. Many gay men and women are not struggling. They have made peace with their orientation and have found ways of fitting into the broader society either by staying in the closet or owning their preferences and finding acceptance among those who open their hearts to them. However, others do struggle for a variety of reasons. Some yearn for what they see as normal social relationships. Others can't accept themselves as they are. Still others want to leave their same-sex attraction behind because of their love for their heterosexual spouse. There are almost as many reasons for struggling as there are people who struggle.

A growing number of people say sexual orientation cannot be changed. I know where they are coming from, but I don't agree. Christians are to walk in newness of life, something different from the way we walked in the past, regardless of what that might have been. It is good for all believers to remember that God is in the business of changing us—transforming us "into [His] image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). And we have His promise in this regard: "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Few would argue that it is impossible for a liar to become a

truth-teller, for a thief to become honest, for a hateful person to become loving, for a violent person to become peaceful, for a misogynist to learn to appreciate and value women and so on. Where there is real desire on the part of a person and supportive people to walk with him or her through the process, we can expect change to happen in the sexual area as well.

Those who have fallen into the trap of objectifying people sexually can learn to look at others as whole persons, not just life-support systems for their sexual organs. The fact that the courts don't label everyone who commits a sexual crime as a dangerous sex-offender suggests that society accepts that while some people may be un-reformable in their sexual expression (and society needs perpetual protection from them), others are capable of controlling the way they act out.

Whether or not a person can be reoriented from homosexual to heterosexual or heterosexual to homosexual is secondary to the Christian because, quite simply, the Bible makes no specific claims regarding this. What is possible is a reorientation from indiscriminate sexual expression of any kind to sexual purity. Many men and women at all ages and stages of life choose to live celibate lives for the love of God. No one would claim it is easy, but it is being done by many committed believers even as you are reading this.

All Christians who seek to follow the biblical pattern for sexual expression (within heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong marriage) have the power of the Holy Spirit resident in them to do the will of God regardless of their "natural" tendencies and preferences. I believe all fallen people are oriented toward sin and away from God, regardless of the particular way they manifest it. In Christ, we become new creatures with an orientation away from sin and toward God. Although the temptations of the flesh may be strong, I can nevertheless say, based on the authority of the Bible and my own experience, that no temptation we might experience is

irresistible (1 Cor. 10:13).

Operating only in the power of the human will, we are doomed to failure, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can find both strength for today and hope for tomorrow. There is no substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, regardless of what his or her personal struggle might be.

At the same time, I wouldn't want to suggest that success in the Christian life is solely a partnership between God and an individual. Other Christians play a crucial role of encouragement and support. My own life bears witness to this fact. I couldn't begin to imagine how I would have managed in the early days of transition without the friends who walked with me through my times of frustration and loneliness.

I believe when a gay person is exposed to the truth of God presented in an appropriately loving way, and when he (or she) truly understands it and embraces it, he will want to experience the inner change God wants to effect in his life because it will bring him closer to the God who made him, loved him and died for him.

As long as the struggler confesses his sin to God and to those he has hurt and purposes to move on, he is on the right track and needs the embrace of his fellow Christians. This is true for all of us, because we are all in exactly this position. Yet I often fail to see the church extend the same grace to the sexual sinner that it extends to almost every other kind of offender.

We are called to show Christ's love. He knew the weaknesses of his disciples, their slowness to understand, their stumbling faith, and He kept working with them anyway. Given our own tendency to fail, especially in self-righteous ways, we need to raise the bar for ourselves and drop it for others. We need to speak the truth, but always in love. As Paul said to the

Christians in Galatia, “Brothers, if a man is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, watching yourselves, lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Restoration is a process, and while some people make amazingly rapid progress, others take longer. We need to work with people through the process at whatever pace they go, not abandon them when we decide they’ve used up their chances. That is a human construct. As long as people keep repenting, God keeps forgiving.

Expressions of care and love are crucial. Will the whole church accept this? Probably not. But perhaps some individual Christians can receive it and start building into the lives of people who are struggling with homosexuality, promiscuity, sex addiction and other sexual issues. When we begin to understand church fellowship as parallel to biblical marriage, we’ll remain committed to each other—in bad times as well as good. {eoa}

Bob Fife is an Ontario-area businessman and has been out of the gay lifestyle for more than 20 years. Now reconnected with the church, he hopes his story points a way to grace and redemption. Today he devotes his time to mentoring men and women who are looking for alternative ways to deal with same-sex attraction. Fife’s book, *Out: One Christian’s Experience of Leaving the Gay Community* (Kregel Publications), is the story of his descent into homosexual practices and out again. Learn more at [.](#)