

Pulse Survivor: I'm in Such a Lovesick Relationship With Jesus

Talk with Luis Javier Ruiz today, and you'll encounter a man whose passion for the living God emanates from his every word. He speaks of Jesus with such reverence, such emotion that there's no denying he's a man in love, a man who desires to share this newfound freedom with everyone he knows.

"I love Christ so much, I love him so much that it will overflow, that it just like provokes me to want to live a life of purity," Ruiz says.

Nearly two years ago, Ruiz was injured in what was one of the worst massacres in U.S. history, the Pulse nightclub shooting.

As he entered the club that night, he thought his identity was exactly what the world told him: He was a perverted, HIV-positive gay man who leaned heavily on drinking to numb his pain.

The morning of June 12, 2016, Ruiz was shot and his friends were murdered at the hands of an Islamic State wannabe, Omar Mateen. Ruiz's journey to physical recovery led him on a spiritual path that now has him embracing a new identity, one in which he's bursting at the seams to share the love of God and what the Creator has done for him.

Ruiz spoke with Charisma News this week to share his testimony and open up about how he believes the church can minister to the LGBT community.

"It's not a gay to straight thing, it's a lost to saved thing," Ruiz says.

Ruiz is the son of Texas pastors, and although he knew the

Word of God, he wasn't in a relationship with Jesus. Ruiz spent years on and off the Christian bandwagon, trying to build his faith in his own strength.

He says the change came when someone presented the gospel in a new format, telling him he just needed to fall in love with Jesus, and the Holy Spirit would take care of the rest.

"That's what stirred me up to come to Christ, just knowing that I can fall deeply in love with Him and through that love, it would provoke me to love his Word because He is the Word. And because He is the Word, it does not lie," Ruiz says. "Reading the Word of God in that, I started to realize, things started to happen in my mind: *Well, OK, this is wrong. Oh, I'm in a lie.* It wasn't only a homosexual lie, it was a whole bunch of things also that I was falling short of."

Ruiz says he doesn't have a specific date of salvation because it was a process of renewal and recommitment. He revealed his faith recently on Facebook to promote the Freedom March, a rally on May 5 to celebrate the freedom Jesus offers from homosexuality.

"I'm in such a lovesick relationship with Jesus right now that that's what provokes me, helps me to put that on there to just show people, 'Hey I'm coming in love, I love you guys,'" Ruiz says. "At the same time this is a story [about] how I found Christ, and He can change, He can deliver and set you free. Not only from homosexuality, but everything else that comes along the line."

Ruiz's revelation was met with mixed reactions.

As the hateful messages flooded his inbox following his announcement, Ruiz noticed something else: a chance to preach the gospel on a new scale. He recognizes the daunting task of sharing God with the LGBT community, as many members have been hurt by Christians and the church. He says many people have responded in bitterness to his salvation, but others are

asking him about his newfound freedom.

"[When] I look at my story, I'm just like, 'Wow!'" Ruiz says. "In reality, it's not really my story, it's Jesus' name and everybody's seeing it. Jesus is still making miracles, Jesus is still saving lives that He transforms. So when people ask me, 'Hey, what is this?' and I just tell them, 'Hey, I just challenge you to fall deep in love with God. I challenge you to find Jesus. I challenge you on yourself, stop believing what you see on media and all this other stuff. Find out for yourself through the Word of God through a relationship with Him, and then you'll figure it out.'"

As part of his discipleship, Ruiz says he's been basking in worship music and watching hours of videos with Dan Moehler and Todd White of Lifestyle Christianity.

"For this generation. I felt that if we can operate in that, the way they live it, the way they talk, the world would change," Ruiz says. "I love them. I'm always listening to Bethel music. They put me in such a mood that I literally feel like they are connecting with heaven and grabbing God's hands with my hand, just putting it together for worship. Such an agreement there. I love it. I love Bethel. I've just been surrounding myself with things like worship and just teaching and stuff like that, not because I have to, not because I wanted to get out of homosexuality, but because I wanted a relationship with Christ, because I wanted to learn about my Christ, my Jesus, my Savior. I wanted to learn what His heart was. I wanted to know how He shows up today."

He says he's also learning to listen to the Holy Spirit and follow His prompting.

"I just feel that He's just like, 'I'm going to put words in your mouth, just go, go in love,' so that's what I feel the Holy Spirit is doing through me right now," Ruiz says. "I just feel that lately, that I feel that He is equipping me to go to

churches and kind of spread the message of hope and at the same time, equip the churches on how to approach this kind of new generation.”

To speak to the LGBT community, he says the church needs to change its game plan. Churches need to develop specific ministries for LGBT people and learn how to dialogue with them without hate. He also recommends the church follows in the steps of Christ and love unconditionally.

“I feel that if we learn how to walk in unconditional love, then that will also change the game,” Ruiz says. “That will change somebody’s heart, regardless of if they’re a prostitute, into drugs, whatever that may be, that love will outburst. Let it overflow out of your body. It will attract somebody, it will attract me to want to do what you do.”