

Breaking the Chains: From LGBT to Freedom in Christ

Despite what the mainstream media may report about the rise of the LGBTQ movement, the Freedom March proves that homosexuality doesn't have to hold anyone hostage. This remnant of believers knows freedom in Christ is possible for those who call upon the name of the Lord.

"These ex-LGBTQ testimonies need to be heard," says Freedom March founder Jeffrey McCall. "I wanted to do it publicly in the streets of major cities like the Lord Jesus would have done. I believe my testimony plays into it because I once lived the homosexual and transgender life. I can relate to many of these testimonies of leaving the LGBTQ lifestyle and how that feels."

McCall himself is a living lesson not to judge a book by its cover. On first glance, the founder of the Freedom March looks intimidating. When he walks into a room, he strides with purpose and towers over most of its occupants, instantly commanding everyone's attention. But when he speaks, he does so not with gruffness but with gentleness, humility and compassion. He freely hugs and greets his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. McCall is the loving leader of this movement.

But the man who lights up the room didn't always think he was a man. And now he's on a God-given mission to show the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community that freedom is possible.

McCall, now 32, lived as a woman named Scarlet for two years before having a supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit. Based on media rhetoric, McCall thought he was the only one who knew it was possible to be set free by Jesus. But when he

connected with the documentary *Here's My Heart*, which shares the testimonies of multiple people who have left the LGBTQ community, he realized those people needed to share their stories on a larger platform.

Led by a vision, McCall and a select group of “overcomers”—men and women who have repented of homosexuality and surrendered their lives to Jesus—marched on Washington, D.C., in May 2018. The collective was mocked around the country. McCall and his friends were called liars and told to come out of the closet again and abandon their newfound Christian values. Nevertheless, he persisted.

“I continued with the march, even through persecution, because I knew Jesus went through persecution, as did other great leaders in the faith,” McCall says. “I believe when you stand up for righteousness, you will be persecuted.”

His faith paid off, and the movement grew.

In November 2018, the Freedom March traveled to the West Coast, and participants praised Jesus through the streets of Los Angeles. In 2019, McCall returned to D.C.’s National Sylvan Theater with nearly three times as many overcomers, a definitive sign of the growing contingent of “ex-gays.” Other marches were scheduled for St. Paul, Minnesota, and Orlando, Florida.

When the Saints Go Marching In

The Orlando march holds specific spiritual significance due to a tragedy that rocked the area just three years ago. On June 12, 2016, Luis Javier Ruiz and Angel Colon were partying at Pulse, a gay nightclub in the heart of Orlando. The friends were celebrating Ruiz’s birthday and having what they thought was the time of their lives when Omar Mateen entered the club.

What happened next would shock not only Central Florida but the entire world. The Pulse massacre became known as one of

the worst mass shootings in U.S. history, with 49 dead and another 49 injured.

“I tried to run, but it was too late,” Colon recalls of the shooting. “The moment I realized it was a gunman, he was only a few feet away from me and took aim at my body. Shots riddled my frame.

“I was petrified, knowing I was next. I heard the shooter behind me, gauging his next move. That’s when I asked the Lord for forgiveness—to forgive me for failing Him, for turning my back on Him. I wanted to be at peace with God, but at that moment, my prayer changed to prophecy. I prophetically claimed my life for the Lord. I told Him I would not leave that building dead, that I had a purpose and He would fulfill all the promises He made over my life. I knew in that moment that I was chosen, and God had something big for me. I promised Him I would worship Him for the rest of my days.”

Colon was shot that night—but both his life and soul were saved.

“The very moment I said, ‘Amen,’ I felt the bullet,” Colon says. “Heat swelled through my abdomen, and I was certain I was dead. But when I opened my eyes, I knew the Lord spared me.”

Ruiz and Colon are taking God’s prophetic promise to a new level by using their stories to impact their home through the Freedom March.

“Hosting a Freedom March here is a great way to unite churches, unite the body of Christ for such a time as this,” Ruiz says. “We’re Pulse survivors. There’s still a lot of brokenness, a lot of hurt people in our own backyard. So many people are still grieving, and this is a great opportunity to usher in hope and restoration. We can tell grieving friends and families that we’re here, we’re grieving with you, we love you, but there is an option for change.”

Ruiz connected with McCall after watching *Here's My Heart*. He jokes, "I literally went on stalker mode on Facebook." He friended each cast member and sent them messages about how their testimonies encouraged him when he thought he and Colon were the only "ex-gays" around.

Documentary director M.J. Nixon interviewed Ruiz, and McCall called him the next day. That's when Ruiz pledged to attend the inaugural Freedom March in D.C. and tell the world the truth about his story. It went viral, with major mainstream media outlets sharing his testimony on the evening news.

Ruiz fondly quotes a common mantra among members of the ex-homosexual community: "I chose Him over him."

"I had fun [as a gay man]," Ruiz says. "I can't say it was terribly bad. I met good people in the LGBTQ lifestyle. But I ran into a biblical wall, and I realized the life that I was living was going to take me straight to hell. I was not allowed to enter into the kingdom of God. I had to make a choice, I had to respond to that in order to have a relationship and fall in love with Jesus."

Despite intense verbal persecution and backlash from their former "friends"—Pulse survivors were collectively named *The Advocate's* "People of the Year"—Colon and Ruiz decided to pursue ministry at all costs. Their tragedy gave them a platform, and they used the opportunity to glorify God. They and other overcomers often return to the site of the shooting, where they pray and prophesy over members of the LGBTQ community.

Stories to Share

Every member of the Freedom March has a remarkable story of Spirit-filled transformation. Luca Groppoli, who hosted the St. Paul march in June, says she was a transsexual for 30 years.

“As an ex-gay, I understand there is a need for society to see people can and do come out of the LGBTQ,” Groppoli says. “With so much happening to our children, becoming more and more lost in this way, it seemed imperative we do something.”

When Groppoli saw the 2018 Freedom March on Facebook, she knew she had to contact McCall. Together, McCall and Groppoli chose the date for the St. Paul Freedom March to be June 23, the same day as St. Paul Pride.

“The LGBTQ community is about to get their faces rocked off by the love of Christ!” Groppoli says. “The tide is turning. The ex-gay community has their faces set like flint. We have our eyes on the prize—to see Jesus receive the reward of His suffering: His people.”

Edward Byrd is the co-founder of the Freedom March and chose its name. Byrd’s testimony begins at conception. He was born to a teenage mother and raped, abused and abandoned by his biological father. Seeking affection and fulfillment, Byrd transformed into an androgynous, gender-fluid performer who even acquired a record deal.

“All those things just created this sadness, brokenness, emptiness and abandonment in me,” Byrd says. “So I totally started to create a whole other person. I changed my name. I lost a lot of weight. I started dressing more feminine and becoming more gender-fluid. My name was Remi at the time.”

Byrd was 20 when he began embracing the androgynous identity.

“I started wearing makeup,” Byrd says. “My hair was long; I had long eyelashes. I was doing the whole thing. And I was just out here having this whole persona, being very promiscuous in the clubs, [partying in] the club from Sunday to Sunday.”

But God has a way of shining His light into the darkest places.

"This lady came into the club, and she touched me and prophesies to me," Byrd says. "And she says, 'You know that there's a light inside of you. And God has a purpose and a plan for you.'"

At 25, Byrd accepted Christ as his Savior, and he is now celebrating his seventh year of freedom.

"A life I thought was impossible became possible in Jesus," Byrd says. "In my desperation and brokenness, I would use men to cope with my pain. But His love healed me and saved me. Now my only desire is Him."

Barely a year after the inaugural Freedom March in Washington, overcomers flocked again to the Sylvan Theater. This year, they had more than 150 participants, including speaker Janet Boynes, show up. While most of the Freedom March participants are in their 20s and 30s, Boynes, 61, serves as a mother figure who can guide and mentor the younger members of the Freedom March, affectionately known as the "freedom family," because of her testimony.

At 13, her stepfather began raping and molesting her, so she developed same-sex attraction. But in 1980, she accepted Christ. By 1985, she thought she'd stuffed all her lesbian feelings away so she could marry the man of her dreams. But three months before the wedding, Boynes fell into same-sex sin with a close friend.

"The next day, I went to my pastor, and that was three months before I was supposed to walk down the aisle in 1985," Boynes says. "After I confessed, he told me three things—which he was correct [about]—to do: 'Call off your wedding, tell your fiancée and get some help.' I called off my wedding. I told my fiancée. And I walked away from the Lord for 14 years."

She returned to Christ in 1999. She chronicled her experience in the books *Called Out* and *God and Sexuality*. Twenty years later, she marvels at how the Lord is working miracles within

the freedom family at the 2019 Freedom March.

“They stood together, each one with their own story of how Christ came into their hearts and gave them a brand-new life,” Boynes says. “These young people were vibrant and energetic. Their enthusiasm was clearly visible as they shared their testimonies of coming out of darkness into the marvelous light of Christ. While they had no qualms reminding me that I was part of the ‘older generation’ and spoke of my ‘mothering heart,’ I couldn’t help but be amazed as I watched them speak boldly and with much assurance that it was only Jesus who kept them and brought them to this point.

“They did not hesitate to let everyone know that change is possible, hope is tangible and love is available. This march represented so much more than just a group of people gathering to share their thoughts. This was a march in the capital of the United States, Washington, D.C. This was a true declaration that Jesus is not dormant or dead. He is very much alive and able to change lives.”

Though the LGBTQ pride movement may make headlines and be all the rage, Boynes says the Lord is doing something different among His people.

“While the LGBTQ community has no hesitation in parading its doctrines and agendas before anyone, this Freedom March gave the ex-homosexual [community] a clear voice,” Boynes says. “They were able to declare openly, right in our nation’s capital, that the lifestyle they once embraced was not God’s will for their life or anyone else’s life. They were able to freely stand up and say they chose Christ and holiness over all of their sins.”

Read more: For more on overcomers who have left the LGBTQ lifestyle, read more stories at .

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