

When You Discover Your Child Is Gay

✖ One day a mother was sharing her heart with a friend, telling about a daughter who had gone astray. “If she were my daughter,” replied the friend determinedly, “I would kick her out.”

The mother thought for a moment and then said, “Yes, if she were your daughter, so would I. But she’s mine, and I can’t do that.”

That’s how we moms are. We don’t always like the job of parenting, but we’re stuck with it—bad days and all. We pray for God’s guidance, do the best we can—and then trust the results to Him.

Having raised four sons, my husband, Bill, and I know all about the ups—and the downs—of parenting. We’ve had plenty of both. And we’ve endured three heartbreaking tragedies: burying one son who died in Vietnam and another who was killed by a drunk driver, and living 11 years in a vacuum after another disappeared into the homosexual lifestyle.

I often say that those 11 years were the hardest—even harder than the deaths of our sons, Steven and Tim. They were harder because we knew Steven and Tim were in heaven. They were Christians, and we believed without a doubt that they were safe in the arms of God.

But with Larry it was different. As a result of the hurtful things I said to him when I discovered he was a homosexual, he moved out, changed his name, disowned us and disappeared. For 11 years we didn’t know where he was or whether he was alive or dead.

I thought Larry couldn't be a homosexual because he was a Christian. I also thought I could "fix" him by quoting Scriptures to him and warning him he was steering a course straight for hell. But I didn't fix him; I drove him away.

As a result, there was no closure, no sense of peace from knowing that this child we loved was with God. There was only despair and worry. And you know what they say about worry: It's like sitting in a rocking chair—you may be moving, but you're not going anywhere.

During the first year Larry was gone, I didn't go anywhere—except to funerals. They were my favorite events because I could cry unrestrained and no one would wonder why. Most of the time I just stayed in my bedroom, counting the flowers on the wallpaper, and sinking deeper and deeper into despair.

Finally, realization struck: I couldn't change Larry, and I couldn't bring him back, no matter how much or how long I grieved. All I could do was keep on loving him—and turn the rest over to God.

I had learned the lesson I now share with parents all over the country: As parents of adult, wayward children, our job is simply to love our kids unconditionally, the way our heavenly Father loves us. It is God's job to change them. While we wait for Him to do so, we can take comfort in a basic fact: Where there is no control, there is no responsibility.

Accepting this truth helps parents rid themselves of the guilt they take on by believing that their child's homosexuality is their fault. We have to acknowledge that, once they reach a certain age, our children are responsible for making their own choices. We can't prevent them from making bad ones. Even God, the perfect parent, allows for free will—and look at the mess He had with Adam!

Steps to Healing

It is also important to remember that no trial is ever wasted. Bill and I now know that while we were struggling with our own pain we were being fine-tuned so that we could see and feel others' pain more readily and could share with them more effectively our testimony to God's faithfulness. Since the moment I gave Larry to God to worry about, Bill and I have stayed busy encouraging other parents in pain. And what a boomerang blessing our work has been to us!

It sounds impossible, but it's true: To help yourself, help others. When you're in such misery that you feel unable to do anything for yourself—even breathe!—that's the time to reach out and help someone else. Believe it or not, an amazing transformation takes place when you do.

The boomerang principle became so ingrained in my life, I wrote a book called *Boomerang Joy* urging readers to nurture their ability to scatter joy everywhere they go. This principle works, even if your own heart is breaking—perhaps especially if your own heart is breaking—because God uses our brokenness to help us minister more effectively to others. In return, we are blessed by their joy.

Besides reaching out to others, there are several additional steps you can take to facilitate healing:

1. *Find a trusted person you can talk to.* Even if the person is a long distance away, it is important for you to have someone with whom you can share—preferably a Christian parent of a homosexual child who has walked the same road and who has not only survived but also learned to laugh again. Having a confidante will help to eliminate the feeling of isolation most parents of homosexuals experience—the sense that they are the only ones who have this problem and the fear that no one else will understand.

2. *Start a support group for parents or families of homosexuals.* Unfortunately, the church has been one of the

last organizations to offer the kind of help families of homosexuals—or of AIDS victims—need. If your local body has no program in place to do this, start one of your own. My book, *I'm So Glad You Told Me What I Didn't Want to Hear*, offers suggestions for how parents can start a support group in their church or community.

It's not easy, but this kind of Christian support can be life-changing for those involved. And it's needed so badly!

A friend of mine, the parent of a homosexual, once said, "When my child came out of the closet, I went in." What I encourage these closeted parents to do is help each other out of that isolation, work together to get rid of their guilt, resolve to forget the hurtful past and focus on a future that's bright with hope. In the support groups I work with, new parents come in wounded, dazed and troubled, but after a while they learn how to drain the abscess of pain and begin the healing process.

3. *Learn to love.* I know it's hard for Christians to open up about this issue. But we have to ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" Knowing the answer to that question makes it a whole lot easier to get involved in helping others who are also mired in this situation.

What would Jesus do? He would love!

We're to love not only the hurting parents of homosexuals but also the homosexuals themselves. After all, Jesus told us, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13, NIV).

By His example Jesus taught us to reach out to the hurting, the sinner, the torn. He held up the Samaritan as a role model, shared a meal with the hated tax collector, blessed the prostitute and healed the leper. How can we do any less?

I cherish the way Billy Graham answered a question on the news

program 20/20 when host Hugh Downs asked him, "If you had a son who was gay, could you still love that child?"

Without hesitating, Billy Graham answered, "Oh, I'd love him *more!*"

You see, Billy knew that because a gay child would have suffered much more pain, he would need much more love. And he knew what Jesus would do: He would reach out to that hurting child and wrap him or her in those loving, everlasting arms.

Restoration

I had an opportunity to do that when our son, Larry, finally came home: We had a restoration, a word that means to "pop back in place." God did that for us. Larry still wasn't "fixed," but his heart had changed, and more important, over those 11 years while he was gone I had changed.

God changed my heart of stone into a heart of flesh. He gave me the ability to accept, adapt, understand and above all, love my son unconditionally. I didn't love what he was doing, but I let him know I would always love him.

During that time God spoke to Larry's heart as well. Larry told me later that as he lay in bed at night, many times the phrase "The entrance of Thy Word bringeth light," would come into his heart. That line was on a little plaque we always had in our home. Larry remembered it, and he realized there was no light in his life.

You see, the seeds planted in his heart during his many childhood years of church and Sunday school and youth group had created a reservoir of God's love deep within him. And during the darkest days of Larry's life, springs of Living Water flowed from that reservoir to refresh his spirit again.

Later, he said on a nationwide broadcast, "If we as Christians can purpose in our hearts to be kind and loving in all that we

do and put away a condemning spirit and learn the fear of the Lord, then surely the light of Christ will be able to shine in our disbelieving world, and restoration and revival will take root in the lives that we touch on a daily basis.”

I play a tape of his words every time I tell my story around the country.

As Christians, we all try our best to be the parents God wants us to be. When our children become adults and we no longer have any control, all we can do is pray that their decisions and behavior will be regulated by their commitment to the Lord and trust that He knows more than we do about the hard places in their lives. And we can love them unconditionally.

That’s really all we can do. Yelling, preaching, crying, worrying and condemning won’t change them. I’ve learned that from experience.

Today, Bill and I enjoy a close relationship with Larry and also with our son, Barney, and his family. We are living proof of God’s boomerang promise, the wisdom shared in Proverbs 11:25: “He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (NIV).

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