

Where Does the Journey Begin? – Dan Hitz, Director

This article highlights a son or daughter's journey from the beginning of his/her same-sex attractions, through the disclosure to his/her parents, and beyond. It is meant to be a general overview for both parents and those struggling with same-sex attraction.



When a son or daughter announces that he/she is gay, most Christian parents go through a time of turmoil. They are riddled with guilt, shame, anger, and confusion. This newsletter will help explain many of the issues that a son or daughter probably wrestled with for years, and help Christian parents respond in the most productive way possible. Not everyone who experiences same-sex attraction is exactly the same, but these are the most common traits that are noticed throughout the years of ministry. You will have to decide what the best course of action is for your particular family. One of the most important things to remember is that sexual sin is sexual sin. Acts 17:30 reads, "God calls all men, everywhere to repent." Those involved in heterosexual sin are in need of repentance just as those who are involved in homosexual sin.

Before you found out your son or daughter is gay, they most likely...

wrestled with unwanted same-sex attraction for years.

Most people dealing with homosexuality will say that they have always felt "different" from other boys and girls. When the hormones begin to flow in junior high school, they are often filled with shame and fear when they realize they are attracted to the same sex. Most young kids don't know how to express their feelings so they keep them to themselves and struggle in silence.



prayed many times, "Lord, take these feelings away!" This is a prayer most of my clients have prayed countless times. We learn from our early Sunday school classes that Jesus always hears and answers our prayers. We hope that one day we will wake up and our homosexual attractions will be gone. After years of praying and waking up the same, many teens give up on God. Others get angry because they assume God made them this way, yet condemns the very way He made them. Many walk away from God altogether and give themselves to their feelings. God does answer our prayers, but He requires action on our part.

assumed they were born this way because it feels natural to them. Those who have never struggled with homosexuality may not understand this but to those of us who have,

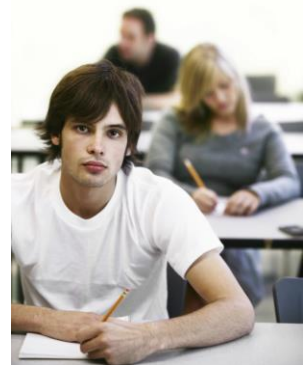


same-sex attractions feel as natural as breathing. Our personality is largely formed by the time we are five by things we had nothing to do with – things we can't even remember. Those things have influenced our attractions, and since we can't remember most of them we assume we have always been that way. None of us have lain awake in bed at night trying to decide which besetting sin we want to wrestle with. Anger is "natural" to a rageaholic. We may not choose our temptations; however, we can choose how to respond to the temptations we face.

will think they have "tried everything" in order to change, but have probably told no one about their struggle until they have given up. During our first meeting, many of my clients will tell me that they have tried everything to change. When I ask them if they have

ever talked to an ex-gay minister before, they say no. When I ask them if they have ever talked to a pastor or counselor, they say no. In reality, they have usually tried to work through their feelings on their own. Many of us have struggled with issues we can't conquer on our own, and unwanted homosexuality is one of them. We need the Body of Christ.

told many of their friends, most of whom will support their homosexuality – even in the church. Unfortunately, there are many gay-affirming churches today. Youth group kids are exposed to so much liberal thinking in our culture that even many Christian kids have a hard time clearly delineating God's intent for sexuality. Strugglers also seem to have an uncanny built-in radar system to know who will support them and who will reject them. Obviously, they aren't likely to open their hearts up to someone who will shame them.



talked to a gay affirming organization, counselor, or teacher. Many high schools have Gay-Straight Alliance groups that encourage students to embrace homosexuality. Many other community groups and high school counselors promote homosexuality. In their latest position statement, the American Psychological Association acknowledged that one's sexuality may fluctuate between heterosexuality and homosexuality during one's adolescences. When a student experiments with homosexual activities, he/she teaches his/her body to respond to the stimulation in ways which he/she would not have if they did not perform the sexual activities. Students may condition themselves to have homosexual attractions through experimentation even if they didn't lean that way in the past.

made plans to tell the family during the family holiday celebration or a visit home from college. Parents often feel like their son/daughter is just plain being selfish when they come

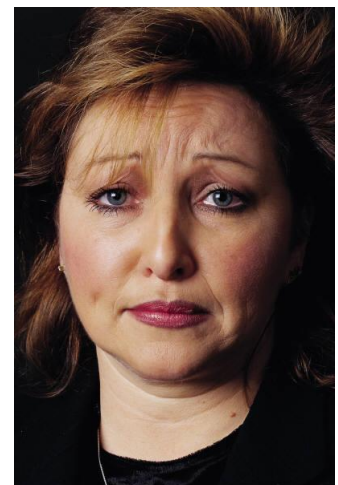


home and tell the whole family that they're gay in the middle of the family reunion. Most don't actually mean to spoil the holiday. They are simply taking the opportunity to make one announcement while everyone is together, rather than several smaller announcements. They usually don't really have the understanding of the emotional impact their announcement makes on the parent.

Helpful advice to parents when they have to discuss the subject with their son/daughter.

Pray. This may sound obvious, but it is critical to pray and seek God's heart in order to avoid a knee-jerk reaction which may push your child away. Most of the time, our initial reaction comes from the pain, fear, and guilt in our own hearts. Prayer helps us to lay down our hurt and seek God's heart in the matter. You will need to seek the Lord to help you truly understand where He stands on this issue. Pray for the grace to speak the truth in love.

Don't react with panic or anger – cool down. This goes hand in hand with the suggestion to pray. If time permits, it is best to wait until the initial reaction dies down and you can discuss the issue more calmly. If you did react in anger and say things you regret, admit your wrong and ask for forgiveness. This will go a long way to keep the lines of communication open.





Don't make it about you – there will be time to deal with your feelings later. Many parents react out of their own sense of shame. “What will everyone think of me for having a gay child?” “How could you do this to the family?” It is important to remember that this issue is about your son or daughter – not you. You will need to take time to process your own feelings later, but the initial conversations are about them.

Don't bombard them with Scripture. If they have grown up in the church, they will know what you think. Many parents have pushed their children away by emotionally hitting them over the head with Romans, Chapter One. Pray for a time when you can discuss their spirituality and sexuality productively. Usually church kids have their defenses up against the Bible at this point and you will be speaking to an emotional brick wall.

You can let them know of your unconditional love, yet let them know that you don't approve of their behavior. The initial conversations are a time for reassuring your son or daughter that you love them unconditionally. Loving them does not mean that you condone their homosexual activities. Calmly state that you believe that homosexual activities are a sin. Usually conversations about what behaviors you will and will not accept in your house will occur in a later discussion, but be ready for the subject at the beginning. A special note to dad's... Sometimes a father will remain silent because they simply don't know how to respond. In these situations, it is best to be honest with your son/daughter and just let him/her know that you don't know what to say but you love him/her.

Graciously let them know that there are many opinions out there, and there are many people who believe they can change. They will probably be resistant to this option, but offer it anyway. If your kids are adults, you can't force them into counseling. If they are younger, you can tell them that you want them to meet with a Restored Hope Network counselor or minister so that they can hear the side that they won't hear in school. Restored Hope ministries don't try to brainwash or manipulate someone into change. They simply share their story of change and the negative truth of homosexuality. They can also offer to help the person with other life issues aside from homosexuality. Be careful when choosing a therapist or minister who is not a Restored Hope referral. Unfortunately, even many Christian counselors will tell the person to embrace his/her homosexual attractions. It is important that whatever counselor the parents choose truly believes that one can overcome same-sex attractions.



After the revelation or conversation...

Continue to pray for your kids and your family.

The other members of your family will be affected as well. Some siblings will be accepting of homosexuality – others will be shamed. Some have been afraid that they will be harassed at school because of their gay brother or sister. Others may be fearful of their sibling's eternal destiny and may not know how to handle the fear. Parents can pray

Matthew 12:20 for their gay-identified children. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.” Pray that the Lord will strengthen the godly areas that remain in your loved one’s heart and bring him/her to repentance. Parents can also pray that the Lord will send someone to their son/daughter that he/she can receive from. God knows what personality will reach your child and His people are all over the world. No one is beyond His reach.

Your child may demand that you immediately accept what has taken them years to reconcile. Many parents have been frustrated by their son/daughter’s demands that they fully accept their homosexual orientation even though he/she took many years to come to terms with their sexuality. It is okay for the parent to remind his/her child that he/she will need some time to process his/her emotions.

Your kids may experience a time of euphoria because a weight they have carried around for many years is finally off their shoulders. If you have ever carried a huge emotional burden and had the chance to talk to someone and get it off of your chest, you can relate to the relief your son/daughter is feeling now that his/her secret is finally known. Many strugglers



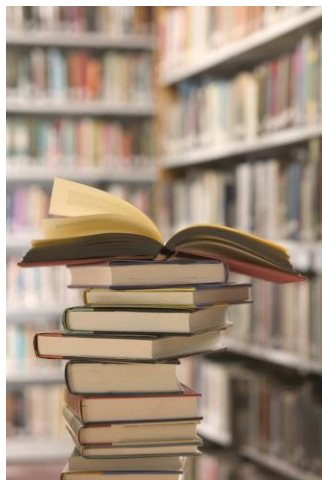
say that they felt like nobody knew the real them prior to their coming out. Regardless of the response, your son/daughter has finally shared his/her heart and gotten a huge burden off his/her chest. He/she may also be giving into activities that he/she has wanted to experience for a long time and are enjoying the initial pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25). If you respond properly in the beginning stages of the revelation, you will increase the chances that he/she will feel safe discussing the pain of the sin with you later on down the road.

You may feel a wide range of emotions. Most dads will want to “fix this problem” right away. Moms want to “make it all better”. It will take time. Christian parents often vacillate between despair, numbness, guilt, anger, disgust, and hope. Many times they begin to question Scripturally and scientifically what seemed so clear before homosexuality touched their own family. They will experience a sense of loss as they remind themselves that they didn’t raise their kids to live like this, and they realize that their son/daughter won’t be giving them grandchildren. It is alright to let your kids know how you feel about their choice to embrace homosexuality at the appropriate time, just remember to speak the truth in love.

Remember that you are talking to your son/daughter after he/she has completed his/her grief cycle and accepted his/her homosexuality. In the mind of someone now embracing his/her gay or lesbian identity, you are asking him/her to return to a painful time of intense soul searching that he/she has already endured, resolved, and made peace with. You as the parent are now just beginning to enter that painful time of soul searching. In light of this, it will take a move of the Holy Spirit to convince your son or daughter to revisit the struggle he or she is convinced has already been resolved.



Get some help from a trusted church leader and from someone with experience in this area. The *Healing Hearts* group for parents of gay-identified persons frequently says, “When kids come out of the closet, most parents go into the closet.” This is especially true for Christians. Don’t get stuck in depression and isolation – reach out for help. Your local church should be a source of strength and encouragement for you. There are many ministries, therapists, and resources for Christian parents and families of gay-identified children who can help them love their son/daughter without condoning his/her sin.



Study the subject – there are godly resources available. The Reconciliation Ministries website at www.recmin.org has articles on a variety of sexual issues on the “life stories” section of the website. Mothers usually spend many hours studying the subject and hand the father a huge stack of materials to read. If one parent isn’t the type to read on the subject, it is best to pick one resource which seems to be the most helpful and ask him/her to read it. That way he/she won’t become overwhelmed and not read anything. Other helpful websites are listed below.

Reconciliation Ministries www.recmin.org

Restored Hope Network www.restoredhopenetwork.org

National Association for Research and
Treatment of Homosexuality – www.narth.com

Make sure that you and your spouse are on the same page and stick together. Don’t get stuck in the blame game. There will be time to make adjustments to the family dynamics later, but right now you will need each other’s support. You will both need to decide what behavior you will and will not accept in your home and/or allow your child to participate in. Try to do this before the situations arise. Sometimes with a resistant teenager, it is best to put a behavior contract on paper and have both parents and the son/daughter sign it. Remember, kids seem to know instinctively which parent to ask about different situations. Both parents need to be on the same page as much as possible. It is difficult if the parents are divorced with one being permissive and the other having Biblical boundaries. If this is the case in your family, seek the assistance of your local church leadership, determine which boundaries you will have at your house, and stick to it regardless of the other parent. Your son/daughter may resist your boundaries now, but they will know who to go to if they ever choose to repent and seek help.



Realize that this is a process and there will be many peaks and valleys. There is no quick fix. Many parents get all excited when their child takes some steps forward and then become utterly devastated when he/she takes some steps back. Remember, this is a process and even when the son/daughter is trying to change there will be good seasons and challenging seasons. Realistic expectations can help you avoid being crushed by false hope.

If your son or daughter still professes faith in Christ... Unfortunately, there has been an increase in the number of gay-affirming churches in the past few years. When these churches encourage people to embrace their homosexuality, they keep them away from the Biblical truth that can set them free and bring healing. However, it is much easier for God to touch someone’s heart when he/she is open to Him. There have been a number of ex-gay leaders who have been convicted of the sin of homosexuality while attending a gay-affirming church.



Therefore, I always tell parents to speak the truth in love and tell their son/daughter that homosexuality is a sin, but to encourage him/her to continue to pursue God. Jeremiah 29:13 reads, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Encourage your son/daughter to seek God with all their heart, and continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will convict him/her of his/her sin, and that the kindness of God will lead him/her to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Remember – The journey is not over yet! God is with the prodigal even in the pig pen leading him to repentance. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

If you or a loved one needs help, call Reconciliation Ministries at 586.739.5114, or visit us on the internet at www.recmin.org. There is hope in Christ.

Ten Steps for the Parent with a Healing Heart

This list was written by a father on our Healing Hearts e-mail list and reprinted with his permission. It contains practical helps he has learned while processing through the emotions that he feels in relating to his son who is struggling with homosexuality. If you would like to join the Healing Hearts e-group, send a paragraph explaining why to dhitz@recmin.org. Membership information may be obtained from the same address.

1. Love our children unconditionally. For us, this means we don't judge one sin over another.
2. State the truth, but once it is stated, no need to keep hitting him with a rock. Our message is, "We think you can change with the power of Jesus Christ. I know you don't think you can. We will respect your feelings, but we also expect you to respect ours."
3. Love their new friend as Jesus would. This doesn't mean that we like the relationship. As my wife says, "I see his new friend as just that – his best friend. I don't want them to focus on our sex lives, so why should we focus on theirs."
4. Pray, Pray and Pray. As we turn to God for strength, He gives us peace beyond our own understanding. Sometimes I have to do this daily, and sometimes hourly.
5. Read, Read, Read. I am reading on the topic and realizing that I don't know much about this.
6. Talk with others that have gone through this. The Healing Hearts e-group is great.
7. Ignore the Pharisees in the church. I know it sounds bad, but most people in the church have been taught to condemn homosexuality and not love the person. I will never say, "Love the sinner, and hate the sin," this just pushes those with same sex attraction away, but I will reach out to them like Jesus does – without condoning their sin.
8. Read the Bible. God talks about a lot about all sin, not just homosexuality.
9. Breathe... and live one day at a time. None of us know what tomorrow will bring.
10. Let go and let God. I just think if I can get this issue resolved life would be perfect, that is when I am realizing I am playing God.

If you would like more information about Reconciliation Ministries, or any of the ministries we offer, visit us on the Web at www.recmin.org, or call (586) 739-5114. You may also e-mail us at info@recmin.org. All correspondence will be kept strictly confidential.

Our office is located at 11174 East 13 Mile Road, Warren, MI 48093.

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