



## Ministering Hope to the Homosexual

by Mike Johnston

Few issues have the potential to be more vexing to the modern church than the growing acceptance of homosexuality in the general culture and even within religious institutions. Some mainline denominations with a proud heritage of standing for God are selling their birthright at the altar of post-modern thinking and embracing what they believe to be a more “enlightened” view of sexuality—going so far as to ordain openly “gay” leaders.

Public sentiment has shifted at an astonishing pace from one of almost universal condemnation to widespread acceptance, if not outright celebration of a behavior the Bible unambiguously identifies as sin. Those who attempt to stem the tide of moral decline are branded as bigoted hate-mongers who deserve to be punished and silenced.

With that backdrop, it’s understandable that many Christians struggle to know how to respond. We’re no longer talking about a small group of radical homosexual activists hidden away somewhere in San Francisco.

Increasingly, believers are confronted with how to respond to a co-worker, a lifetime friend or even the painful dilemma of what to say to a son or daughter who suddenly proclaims they are “gay.” A good friend who has a homosexual couple living next door to him recently acknowledged, “I don’t know what to say to them. They are some of the friendliest and kindest people I know.”

As ambassadors for Christ, we simply have to come to terms with the fact that we will be called upon to share the inconvenient truth with people.

Some situations will require us to choose between competing priorities, between maintaining a conflict-free, but superficial relationship, or saving a friend or loved one from hell. That’s not to say we should go about beating people over the head with our Bibles. But we can’t avoid discussing the difficult eternal issues either. Like the Samaritan woman with whom Jesus conversed at the well (John 4:4-26), there will be those who welcome the truth. But there will be others, like the religious leaders Jesus repeatedly tried to reach, who will reject the truth at their own peril.

In my experience, those involved in homosexuality also fall into those two general categories. On the one hand, there is the man or woman who has fully embraced a “gay” identity, and has fashioned their lives around what they perceive to be their innate and immutable identity as a homosexual person, including how that impacts their emotions, concept of sexuality and intimacy, associations, and, in fact, their entire worldview. They rarely have a genuine desire to know the truth.

When approached, their response will usually take one of two forms: truth will be met with wrath, or they will feed on their own folly as they counter the truth with a seemingly unlimited array of well-rehearsed arguments from which only a mature Christian will be able to extricate themselves. For these individuals, prayer is usually the only productive course while leaving them to their folly “so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:5 NIV)

On the other hand, the “struggler” is an individual who knows at some level that the behavior is wrong and has some genuine desire to turn from it, even though they experience same-sex attraction and may have even engaged in homosexual behavior. For this individual, there is an opportunity to provide hope, lead them to salvation if they have never been converted, and disciple them in the things of God as they begin to pursue a path of sanctification.

We have in the Gospel of Mark a story that reveals some basic principles that can help us in our ministry to this struggling soul:

“A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. ‘If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean,’ he said. Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be healed!’ Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed.” (Mark 1:40-41 NIV)

First, this man was with *leprosy*. This dreaded disease first appears as spots on the skin but it is not a superficial disease, finding its roots in the bones, marrow and joints of the body. Likewise, those struggling with homosexuality have great need to understand that homosexual lust is only a symptom of a much greater heart problem. They are not sinners because of homosexual lust. The opposite is actually true; they experience homosexual lust because they are sinners.

Second, we see that the man *came* to Jesus. This man at least had a clear sight of his physical need and came of his own free will. Those struggling with homosexuality cannot be driven to Christ. They must be drawn to Him and that drawing can only be accomplished by the Father through the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” (John 6:65b NIV) Any other inducement—fear, the desire to please others, dissatisfaction with their current circumstances, or even a temporary sense of shame or guilt—will eventually pass, leaving them without the inner motivation to stay the course which, by all measures will be a difficult one.

Third, he *knelt in front of Jesus*. “He kneeled and inclined his face to the ground, in token of deep humiliation and earnest entreaty.” So says the learned Bible commentator Albert Barnes. So it is that all genuine penitents must come—with a humble and contrite heart. Can you imagine this man saying to Jesus, “Hey Jesus, I’ve got this little spot here on my skin. You think you can help me out?” He was covered with rotten, stinking flesh! In a similar fashion, the individual struggling with homosexuality would be foolish to come to Jesus with his “little” problem, thinking proudly that the rest of his life must be very pleasing to God. A man or woman who is ready for the Lord to do the needed deep work in their heart will instead come like the prodigal son who exclaimed upon returning to his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (Luke 15:21 NIV)

Fourth, the man said to Jesus, “*If you are willing you can heal me and make me clean.*” From this statement, we learn two important things. First, that he had hope and second, that his hope was well-placed.

It is of profound importance that these precious souls be encouraged to have hope. Many sincere Christians have struggled for years with same-sex attraction before finally being overcome by their lust. Others have a long history of failure that has killed any hope they might have had that things could be different.

Undoubtedly, the leper had heard the words of Jesus and had seen Him heal others. I know of no better way to engender hope in the hearts of the hopeless than to share the promises of God and to testify to the faithfulness of those promises in our own lives. Peter, a man who knew something about hopelessness, exhorts us, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

We also learn that that small amount of hope the leper had was placed entirely in Jesus. Like the woman with the issue of blood, he had evidently concluded that no one else could meet his need. Likewise, those with homosexual lust must come to believe that Jesus is the only one that can give them new life and cure their condition...not Jesus plus works, Jesus plus psychotherapy, Jesus plus positive thinking or Jesus plus anything else. Their faith, their trust must be placed in Jesus alone to forgive, cleanse, transform and eventually to bring them into Glory.

Lastly, we see that this man was *instantly healed*. This begs the question: what does “healing” really mean to one struggling with homosexuality? Does it mean that God will remove same-sex attraction when one turns to Jesus? In my many years of dealing with the issue of homosexuality, I have met a handful of men and women who have experienced a complete release from same-sex attraction. I must say that has not been the case in my own life, nor in the lives of most people I know. For most, the experience is one of a diminished intensity over time as God does a deeper sanctifying work in the heart.

When the abatement of any same-sex attraction becomes the single focus, it’s sad to see some conclude that God has somehow failed them when it doesn’t happen. This discouraging way of thinking can be avoided if one considers biblical truths concerning the nature of the flesh and temptation.

First, it is critical that the struggler understand that they do not have a “special” problem that requires some unique solution. Paul reminds us, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV) Second, he must understand that as long as we remain in these mortal bodies, our flesh will remain fleshly, and we will have to do battle against it.

This brings us to our third and final point. Those who desire to overcome homosexual lust must become fighters with the understanding that this battle cannot be waged in their own strength. No, the battle henceforth must be waged and won in the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, Paul states, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” (Galatians 5:16-18 NIV)

To walk in the Spirit demands communion with Him through daily time spent in His word, in prayer and in fellowship with other believers.

Ultimately, as with anyone who claims the name of Jesus Christ, the sincere Christian who struggles with homosexuality must count the cost and decide whom they will serve. Once this decision has been firmly made, victory is assured. Jesus said, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. (Revelation 21:6-7 NIV)

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