

Youth and Homosexuality-An Alternative Response by Don Corne

Sexuality is a difficult topic sometimes to talk about. It's had its own share of controversy. Homosexuality, or same-sex attractions, even more so. This article is written to help bridge the gap between the questions and concerns youth face in today's culture and the confusion often associated with a Christian response.

This topic is particularly exciting for me as I reflect upon my own youth and struggle with sexual identity; I am reminded of the power of the printed word with regards to my decisions and understanding of homosexuality. It was an article in a student magazine that led to my initial acceptance of being homosexual, and my college newspaper that helped begin my journey of overcoming my identity confusion. We all know that our society, especially youth, are inundated with the message that it's okay to be gay, that there's no other choice if you have same-sex attractions, and that anyone to suggest otherwise is a narrow minded homophobe. Just investigate the information out there being promoted in our public schools. It's astonishing how aggressive the pro-gay agenda is settling into the belief system of many teachers and school administration. Thus, we have the urgent need to proclaim an alternate point of view for those who desire not to accept a homosexual identity. To present this view is not an attack on any specific persons, as many gays and lesbians perceive, but a rational alternative that deserves to be heard. A homosexual orientation is not THE only resolve of same-sex attractions.

My story

In my early teens I remember asking myself a lot about whether I was a homosexual or not. Years of labeling and same-sex attractions led to an intense desire to resolve this question. One day I received in the mail a magazine for youth. The cover story: Homosexuality-Are You Really Gay? (Or something to that effect). The article defined a homosexual in very clear terms, including a list of indicators. It concluded by stating that if this describes you, then you are a homosexual. It went on to explain how this is a good, acceptable identity to embrace, along with encouragement to tell someone else of your decision. I contemplated for hours that afternoon and decided to accept that I was a homosexual. "What a relief! I've taken a big step to resolve my dilemma", I thought. It had a name, and finally I felt like I was finding a niche where I belonged. There were people out there who understood how I felt and accepted me. At the same time, I had mixed emotions and still unanswered questions. "I really don't want to be this way", "Why Me?" and "Do I tell my family?" were still unresolved concerns. I mailed my anonymous survey in that day stating that I too was a homosexual, yet remained in silent isolation.

A few years later I went away to college that had an on-campus gay organization.

I entered with the desire to decide if I was going to enter the gay lifestyle. Yet I also wanted to learn more specifically about God's perspective on the subject. During the first several weeks of school, a big controversy and debate broke out because the Catholic Newman Center was allowing the gay club to meet at their facilities. The school newspaper was loaded with articles and letters. As I read the arguments from gay students who proclaimed God's acceptance of their homosexuality, I began to feel that perhaps that was the answer. Then, a letter to the editor from four men, whom I had just met at a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting, hit the press. The words were written with truth and compassion.

While explaining that homosexuality was not God's plan, they also spoke about God's desire to help someone overcome these feelings. WOW! It pierced me like an arrow. This felt like an answer to my prayers. Providentially, a few minutes after reading this, one of those guys knocked on my door. He was following up on my visit to Campus Crusade and invited me to be in his weekly Bible study. In the back of my mind I kept asking, "Why does this normal looking, straight, football player have any interest in me?" Up until that point I had experienced much rejection and thought people could tell superficially that I had same-sex attractions. Several months later I shared in fear with him about my struggle - the first time I had ever disclosed to anyone of my homosexual feelings. To my surprise he didn't reject me, but offered encouragement and support as I began my journey of freedom from struggling with same-sex attractions. It has been a long and often difficult journey, but well worth the fight, which I will talk about later. Before I move forward, I would like to address some questions you may have at this point.

To Be or Not To Be?

As I read the information being disseminated to youth and others regarding sexuality, there are several things I would like to challenge. Today, the idea that people are born gay is a presupposition to most people's worldview, despite the lack of scientific evidence. Many have bought into the deceitful campaign launched by gay activists to make those of us who promote "overcoming" homosexuality as crazy, fundamentalist, and mean spirited people. Professional psychological and psychiatric associations have been influenced significantly by this political pressure. Therefore, I'd like to propose some questions common among those struggling with same-sex feelings and a set of alternative answers.

1. Why do I have these feelings ? First, we are all created as sexual beings. Having sexual feelings is not wrong or shameful. They were created to help us address some very powerful and legitimate needs, like feeling loved, accepted, & secure. Unfortunately, we all live in a world where every aspect of our identity is affected by spiritual separation from God. Therefore, these basic needs can find many avenues that appear to satisfy. Think of a raging river that, when encountering an obstacle, flows in other directions. Similarly, since sexual feelings are based on meeting needs, they cannot be stopped. If obstacles are in the way, those desires will naturally begin to flow in other directions. In fact, EVERYONE has obstacles, which means we all have to seek God to help us experience what will bring true fulfillment of our sexuality.

2. But my same-sex desires feel so natural. This is understandable, but more is going on than merely desires for sex:

- Feelings to be close, loved, accepted, and affirmed by others is natural. (From the same & opposite sex).
- Sexual desires are natural. They begin to come alive during adolescence when God knows we are now able to accept the responsibility of learning how to nurture and direct them.
- Our identities, those things that lend shape and form to who we are, begin from the time we were born. How one relates to the same and opposite sex, feels about themselves, understands the world, discovers his/her personality, gifts & talents, etc. all have been interacting with our environment - shaping our sexual identities from an early age.

With all of these interacting with one another, our sexual orientation begins to flow in a particular direction.

Here's one example from my own life:

I always felt and was labeled different than other boys. I remember having intense desires for intimacy and affection from men long before I was a teenager. Around age 10 I even wished for a sexual relationship with men. I was taught that men don't get close to one another, and so I assumed that my emotional desires were really sexual in nature. My legitimate feelings became more sexualized as I grew older, especially since I had no models for expressing my desires in a different manner. All of this, of course, was happening sub-consciously. I wasn't choosing to have a homosexual orientation.

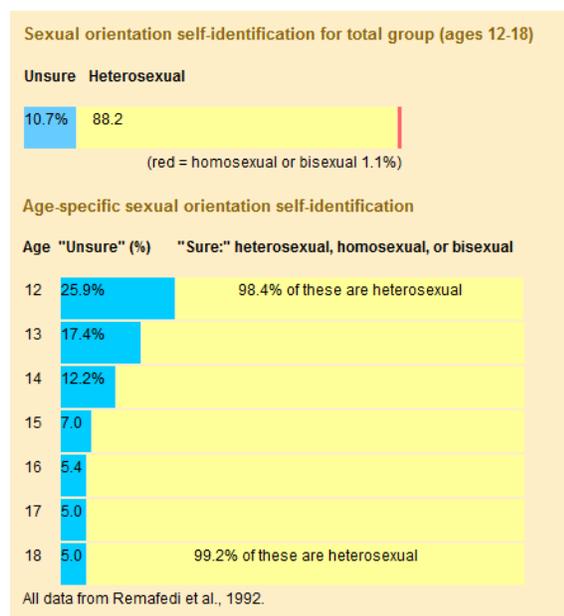
Furthermore many men especially will associate early feelings to bond with other men as their first homosexual feelings. However, upon further examination, we discover that the feelings were not sexual. A child in kindergarten, for example, has not developed sexual feelings. If natural longings to bond with older same-sex people are ignored, those feelings can become sexualized at puberty. Thus, one wrongly concludes that they were homosexual all along.

3. Does having sexual feelings toward the same sex mean that I am gay?

No. Being gay is a label someone accepts for themselves if they choose to embrace and act upon their feelings. Remember - our sexuality does not define who we are. It is only one aspect of our identity.

4. So, where do I fit in then? I feel awkward and confused.

The following chart may help by showing that there are others who question their sexual orientation. What it does not show, however, is that just because someone is heterosexual doesn't mean they have it all together.



The percentage of young people who are unsure about their sexual orientation decreases with age. This suggests that, in younger teens, uncertainty about sexual orientation is a normal part of development. It is also clear that in most cases, those who are unsure resolve their uncertainty in the direction of heterosexuality.

Wherever you are in your sexual identity questions, it is important to get clear facts about the choices that lie ahead. Sometimes the reasons that cause one to conclude that they are gay are based on wrong assumptions and misinformation. While there is plenty of gay affirming information available, here are some resources you may find helpful if you have unwanted same-sex attractions:

<http://www.exodusyouth.net>

<http://www.mytruefreedom.com>

<http://www.freetobeme.com>

<http://www.exodus-international.org/resources>

My peers have labeled me, how do I respond?

Peer relating can be very difficult at times. It's easy to get labeled and have to face those labels all during our growing up years. That's why it's so important for parents and adults to be involved in kids lives'. Who else can speak into and challenge the way kids are shaping one another. As adolescence occurs, those negative labels become more focused on one's sexuality. If you have been ridiculed, teased, or labeled in this way, please take note of some comments I would like to share.

Admitting that the negative labels, name-calling, teasing, etc. affects us can be difficult. We may find acceptance and success in certain areas or circles of people and pretend that it doesn't matter. Or, we are in touch with the hurt caused by others and get very down on ourselves, even suicidal. There are a couple of things I would like to say regarding peer relationships.

It may not bring much comfort when you have to face the rejection every day, but I still want to say it. **THOSE WHO TEASE AND RIDICULE OTHERS ARE JUST AS INSECURE AS THEY TRY TO MAKE YOU FEEL!** If I have learned anything as an adult, it would be this. We are all searching for security and affirmation, even the person who appears to have it all. Some internalize the feelings while others assert them onto others. Were my words of wisdom strong enough to eradicate this type of behavior, I would immediately give the command. However, I hope if this applies to you that you find some comfort in reading me say that you don't deserve the ridicule, the labeling, or the teasing. And no, I don't know you personally, but I still know that you are worth proclaiming that you are not as bad as all that.

To Parents

If your child has disclosed to you that he/she is homosexual, or thinks he/she might be, here are some thoughts I would like to share with you.

A disclosure about your child's same-sex attractions may cause you to become upset, hurt, angry, and a combination of other emotions. There are horror stories of parents reacting with extreme emotions. So, if you feel that you are going to burst, excuse yourself and let your child know that you would like some time to process this and get back with them later. Lashing out will help no one.

I have witnessed too often a common scenario when a son discloses his homosexuality. Mom gets overly involved and wants to fix her son. She will be the one who calls the pastor, counselor, or ministry seeking help for him. In some situations, the Mom has brought her son in for a counseling session and communicated quite clearly that she wants me to fix him - NOW. Common phrases I have heard include the following:

"But he is so talented, attractive, & smart; I don't understand how this can happen"; "But he seems so normal, he is the perfect son", "This is just a phase he's going through; he is being influenced by friends". She may also want detailed information about our private conversations. Confidentiality is very important, even between a child and parent.

In these situations, Mom needs to cut the apron strings. Yes, Moms are protective and want to help, but when the bond between her and the adolescent is too strong, it can be a hindrance to his growth. It is important for a mother to find a good support system. Many ministries to homosexual "overcomers" have support groups and counseling for parents. Strength is gained when parents are able to lean on others going through similar circumstances.

Dads generally need to get more involved when it involves the son. Too often, in male homosexuality, the father just shuts down and either ignores the problem, or stays too busy to get involved. This is a tragedy. Boys and girls both benefit from the masculine authority that proclaims and affirms them in their gender. The challenge for fathers is to address personal issues that hinder their ability to bond, communicate with, and affirm their child. Often the father has a history of shutting down and being aloof. This is often a sign that it is a break down in bonding that has led to the child struggling with their sexual identity. Many criticize this point of view and feel it meant to cast guilt and blame. However, it is far from the truth. If we are to honestly tackle the problem, we must be honest and forthright. This does not mean that the parent has done nothing right in parenting their child. It simply points out part of the problem and thereby the solution. We're all influenced by those around us in positive and negative ways, including our sexual identity.

Does this mean it is the parent's entire fault, or that you are the worst parents on earth? NO! There are many factors that affect each of us while our identities are developing, not just the parents. I will discuss others later. However, this is not simply a problem your child needs to get fixed, nor is it simply about poor parenting skills. It is about gaining security in one's gender identity and learning to relate to others in that security. If this is to happen, all factors must be considered. Other family members, peer relationships, other caregivers, society, etc. may have a role to play. Ultimately, I believe it is up to the "overcomer" to determine what factors contributed to their struggle. What I have shared related to parents are things we hear over and over in this type of ministry.

Lastly, for parents, here is one way to help. I recently read an article that gave some great advice. It suggested asking your child, "Why do you feel this way?". This can open a door for discussion. Like anything else, if you wish to be involved, support, or provide help, then you need to know where they are coming from and how they have drawn their conclusions. This next section can be helpful to parents as well.

Pastors, Youth Leaders & Counselors

So what do you do when an adolescent discloses to you that they have same-sex attractions? If they have disclosed this to you, then one important factor appears in place - trust. As I shared from my own story earlier, talking about this to someone else was frightening, but my fear was lessened by trusting the other person involved. They didn't jump to conclusions or react strongly or judgmentally.

It is also imperative to remain as objective as possible by respecting the young person's decisions. When I meet with a teen, it is a great compliment to see them breathe a sigh of relief and state: "Wow, I'm glad you didn't preach about how bad a person I am, or how I'm going to hell." I always let them know that if they decide to pursue homosexuality or, it is a choice they have to make. My purpose is to share the perspective of those who have chosen not to embrace a gay identity, and why we believe homosexual feelings are not set in stone.

Another scenario Pastors and Youth Leaders may face is being asked to "intervene" when a child has disclosed to a parent about their homosexual feelings. I find it helpful and necessary to establish some formal boundaries when contacted by the parent(s). First, I will meet with a teen only if they consent. If they come at their parents' request, I will meet once, but state clearly to the adolescent that any future meetings must be desired and initiated by them. It's important to remember that we can change no one. Even youth can decide what path they will take. Second, confidentiality is highly valued. What is shared with me is not disclosed to the parents, except that which is required by law (i.e. intent to harm oneself or another and sexual abuse or incest).

Many times those who are counseling or discipling someone overcoming homosexuality will ask how to respond to sexual attractions from the other person. This will probably occur less than you think. However, it's important to remember that as mentioned earlier, same-sex attractions have less to do with sex and more with meeting emotional and psychological needs. Based on my experience, when these needs are being met, the sexual desires lessen or disappear. If this becomes a problem, boundaries need to be established and communicated. For males, this may involve communicating strongly that sexual intimacy is not an option. Females can become emotionally dependent as opposed to sexually attracted, thus the boundaries might include the development of other supportive relationships.

There's much more that could be discussed on this topic. For now, I encourage you to review the resources noted throughout this article, as well as the OneByOne Pastoral Care Guide.