

Viewpoint
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A redemptive approach
By Jeff Winter

The PCUSA and the mainline church have been debating the issue of homosexuality for over thirty years. Lost in this debate is ministry to those who have same-sex attraction. I have found that the most effective route to real, lasting change for those caught in same-gender attraction is a redemptive approach. This means discipleship, being taught, encouraged and held accountable to develop intimacy with Christ. Read the words of Jack who found hope, healing and a growing relationship with Christ at a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia.

My life in homosexuality began in 1962. It ended in 1985. I never really wanted to be gay. I don't think, initially, it was something that I chose, but, rather, something I became aware of. I felt attracted to men long before I got involved in the lifestyle. I suppressed my feelings for years and hoped they would just go away. I thought my attractions were just a passing phase. By the time I was 26 I knew they were not.

I moved to center city Philly, just to 'test' myself to find out if I really were gay. As a result, I was drawn into it all very quickly. At first it felt like a fresh, new thrill. I actually felt quite free. To justify my decisions, I deliberately adopted a tolerant position on just about everything. This new position looked and sounded really good. It was the mind set of everyone I ran with - my new community. There were times I thought about trying to change, but after a while I just resigned myself to the fact that I was gay and nothing would ever be different.

Surprisingly, the most distressful time of my life came when I began to be drawn to Jesus Christ. It caused a whole new disruption in my life. When I was in my mid-twenties a Christian co-worker shared Christ with me. I sensed I needed help and asked the Lord to save me. I began to attend church. My struggle with homosexuality, however, continued. I didn't know what to do about it. I prayed constantly. Nothing happened. At church no one seemed to talk about this. It all just left me disillusioned. I left the church in the late 60's and resumed my life in the gay community. It was comprised of others who shared my disenchantment and disappointment with church.

Sixteen years later, in 1985, I saw an article about ex-gay ministry on the front page of a local paper. I was surprised that there was actually a ministry dealing with homosexuality. I was even more astonished to find that it was my old church, Tenth Presbyterian, which now sponsored this new outreach. Even though I had wished there had been some kind of help years ago, the mere fact that something was happening now intrigued me.

I began attending one of the support groups. It addressed the very issues I had wrestled with for so many years. In that group I found other people like myself who had given up hope. But I was also inspired as I heard how some were finding freedom from the control homosexuality had over their lives. This became my new community. Through some initial one-to-one mentoring by staff and then by attending the meetings, I slowly began to experience internal changes.

For the very first time, Jesus Christ and the Word of God became very real to me; practical for my life and struggles. I was letting important spiritual truths into my heart in a new way. I slowly came to see that the same Jesus, who had shed His blood for me on the cross to take away my guilt and shame, was the one who could be the very source of my wholeness and healing. Jesus wanted to be intimately involved with me - struggles and all. In fact, He had already laid the foundation for it all by His perfect sacrifice on my behalf. Now He wanted to do business with me. This all hit me in a different way than ever before.

Realizing that the Bible really did apply to the problem of homosexuality, and that my sin was no greater and required no other solution than any other sin was a new revelation. Knowing that Jesus died for me and that He truly loved me gave me the incentive to want to live for Him. The Lord began to turn my life around. First, He gave me the desire to follow Him and, then, the will and the power to begin to obey. The result has been that the last nine years of my life have been completely different from all that went on before.

Through the power of God, I have been able to discard many of the elements that had formerly held my life together. He gave me the ability to walk away from much of my past life. Gone is the continuous comparing myself to other men, the cruising, use of pornography, and attending gay clubs and social groups. A few months after I began to attend a HARVEST USA support group. I was even able to move out and leave the man I had been living with for sixteen years. Although it was obvious that the nature of our relationship had to change, I do still care for this man. I have shared my new found faith with him. Occasionally, I have dinner with him, sharing what God is doing in my life and inviting him to consider knowing Christ.

All these changes did not happen in a vacuum. The void left by these things had to be replaced. That void was filled by my relationship with Jesus Christ, God's Word, a new and vial prayer life - and a whole new social life that revolved around other Christians. As my relationship with the Lord developed, my church attendance became regular and my time of worship was enriched. I actually joined Tenth Presbyterian Church and became very involved in the church.

I now see the Lord working through so many aspects of my life. I have realized that he never really had His hand off me, even in my years of rebellion. It has not been an easy walk, by any means, but one He's enabled me to walk.

Although the changes have occurred late in my life (I came to HARVEST USA at age 48), it is something for which I thank the Lord. Psalm 40 sums up what God had done for me: "I waited patiently for the Lord, He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."

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