

Is There Really Such A Thing As Ex-Gay?

An Evaluation of the Evangelical Ex-Gay Movement in America based on the author's own experiences as an "ex-gay,"¹ and upon the writings of the leaders of the ex-gay movement.

by Stephen Parelli, ThB, MDiv
Executive Director, Other Sheep
www.othersheepexecsite.com
www.othersheep.org
June, 2006

Tears coursed down my cheeks as I drove toward my destination. For the first time in my life I believed I had found someone who could help me with my same-sex attractions.

I was right on-time for the first of the three prerequisite sessions that would allow me to enter the gay-lesbian self-help group. At the close of the first session, however, the counselor waived the remaining two. I was in. Why? Because for years I had been rigorously practicing a criteria of spiritual disciplines the group leader advocated.² The counselor had found me more than spiritually qualified. No surprise here, after all I was a Baptist pastor in my early forties.

In addition to the regular ex-gay group meetings, I began weekly private phone sessions with therapist Joseph Nicolosi³ (I was in New Jersey, and he was in California) which continued for nine months.⁴ Nicolosi is co-founder of the controversial National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH)⁵. Upon his counsel, I became involved

¹ ". . . people who step foot in the door [of a support group for want-to-be ex-homosexuals] are *immediately counted as ex-gay* [emphasis mine]. . . 'I think the label in most cases precedes the change,' said Davis, recalling her undercover experiences. . . The reasoning? Gay is only an 'identity,' and if [gay] people identify as heterosexual, they are not [or, no longer] gay, even if they still have intense homosexual yearnings." Wayne R. Besen, *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003), p. 38.

² Since my early teen years I would spend as much as two hours a day in "devotional" Bible study. Davies and Wilkins, in their following comments, represent what was my goal and attitude for thirty years: "Our deliverance from homosexuality comes from a Person, rather than a method . . . Change is what *results* as we pursue a far more important and compelling goal: knowing, loving and 'beholding' Jesus." Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out Of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women* (Inter Varsity Press, 1993), page 29. ". . . still tempted with same-sex attractions! I do not deny it! . . . I will devote an additional two hours and fourteen minutes to my time with God . . ." Tim Wilkins, "Why I Won't See Brokeback Mountain" (<http://www.crossministry.org/brokeback.htm>)

³ While a client of Joseph Nicolosi (1996-1997) I purchased and read two books he authored: *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach* (Jason Aronson Inc., 1991), and *Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy* (Jason Aronson Inc., 1993).

⁴ I believe "nine months" is correct. However, much of my personal records have not been returned to me since my separation (1997) and subsequent divorce (2003). I must reconstruct facts like these from memory alone. I terminated counseling with Nicolosi when I learned my medical insurance would not cover costs because the counseling was by phone and not in person.

⁵ "In December of 1998, the Board of Trustees issued a position statement that the American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative" or conversion therapy, which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that a patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation. In doing so, the APA joined many other professional organizations that either oppose or are critical of "reparative" therapies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the

and was initiated into New Warriors, an international straight organization that mentors and brings men together into small groups while employing dynamic, therapeutic methods for healing woundedness.¹ Upon two different occasions I attended the Exodus northeastern regional ex-gay conference. On an almost day-to-day basis I networked and spent hours and even days with an ex-gay leader and with ex-gay clients of Joseph Nicolosi. I created new friendships with area clergy, opening up to three of them about my homosexual struggles.² I worked out at the gym adjacent to my home often twice daily, and took up tennis lessons.³ As if all this was not enough I read, meditated upon, and applied all the ex-gay material I could obtain.

"Some day you may be a poster boy for reparative therapy and ex-gay ministries," my therapist told me. But instead, nine years later, I'm asking "*Is there really such a thing as ex-gay*" and I find myself answering "*No, I don't believe there is.*"

What follows is my personal evaluation of the evangelical ex-gay movement as I experienced it and have come to understand it. In all, I make eight observations.

First, the ex-gay movement's origin is rooted in traditional cultural norms rather than good Bible exegesis and the social sciences.

Evangelical ex-gay ministries began in the mid 70's as a faith-based knee-jerk reaction to the exploding gay culture on the American scene. The movement entered upon a rescue mission to save homosexuals without first doing it's homework in two essential and practical areas: (a) sound exegesis⁴ and (b) the social and psychological sciences related to homosexuality. In place of sound exegesis, ex-gay ministries mindlessly prooftexted everything to support their claims. And, in place of expert studies in the social sciences, evangelicals focused on and popularized stereotypical myths about gays.⁵

American Psychological Association, The American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers." From the American Psychiatric Association web site (http://www.psych.org/psych_pract/copptherapyaddendum83100.cfm).

¹ "Homosexuality is . . . an emotional disorientation caused by arrested or blocked emotional development." "He will have learned how to recognize and manage these wounded emotions." William Consiglio, *Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming Homosexuality* (Victor Books, 1991), pages 22, 36.

² "And so the process of the development of homosexuality and change comes full circle. The problem started in a relationship and is resolved through relationships. I can't overemphasize this point . . ." Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict* (Harvest Home, 1991), page 123.

³ "I have passed the ultimate test of recovery - engaging in casual conversation in a locker room with a naked man while maintaining eye contact." William Consiglio, *Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming Homosexuality* (Victor Books, 1991), page 192.

⁴ Davies admits in his 1993 book *Coming Out Of Homosexuality* that: "However, pro-gay theologians are correct in saying that this passage [Gen. 19, Sodom and Gomorrah] does not provide a strong argument against prohibiting all homosexual acts." Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out Of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women* (Inter Varsity Press, 1993), page 184. To my knowledge, no ex-gay ministry was side-stepping Sodom and Gomorrah in the 1970s, but would have employed the passage to justify their ex-gay activities. In 1973 Frank Worthen started Love In Action, an ex-gay organization that Davies came to in June, 1979. What was Davies' view of Sodom and Gomorrah in 1979?

Second, their use of psychology is selective and appears overly dominant for a religious movement that otherwise rejects most of modern psychology's findings on homosexuality.

In stark contrast to the movement's overly simplistic use of Bible texts like Gen. 19 in order to establish and maintain its *raison d'être*, the movement, in promoting itself as a vehicle of "change" and "healing," has become extremely dependant upon and intricately involved with expounding the principles of reparative therapy at its conferences, in its popular writings and through avid supporters like James Dobson. Their selective use of psychology upon the heels of their inadequate exegesis of Bible texts is indicative of the movement's culturally-based bias. The movement's non-critical use of Scripture, while expounding carefully upon the elements of reparative or conversion therapy, hints at a bit of religious hypocrisy in light of the fact that evangelicals make their boast in doing the hard exegetical work that is incumbent upon them as self-professed Bible students.

Third, while the movement promises "change" and "healing" on the surface, its leaders readily admit that these changes are external and behavioral only.

The ex-gay movement misleads the average layperson with its highly visual use of words and phrases like "ex-gay" and "change" and "healing" and "coming out of homosexuality." The movement promotes this image of "change" on the cover of its books, in its sound bytes, in its newsletters and in its public relations. However, a closer look at the movement's own writings reveal the nuances of meanings implied. "Change" and "healing" is change in behavior and lifestyle, not in sexual orientation. "Coming out of homosexuality" is to enter into a sexual no man's land, not to enter into heterosexuality. And "ex-gay" is a lifelong process rather than a radical change at one's core being.¹

⁵ Tim LaHay, *The Unhappy Gays*, 1978. I read this book more than twenty-five years ago while in my late twenties. The complete happiness I have found with my partner of eight years shatters LaHay's account of gays and reduces his claims about gays to mere myths. Today these same myths are still being popularized by other leaders from the religious right like Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family (www.DearDrDobson.com).

¹ How ex-gay leaders speak of "change:" **Tim Wilkins**, in his article "Why I Won't See Brokeback Mountain," says "[I'm] still tempted with same-sex attractions! I do not deny it." **Bob Davies**, in his book *Coming Out of Homosexuality*, says, "A strong, even passionate, lust when looking at an attractive member of the opposite sex on the beach . . . this certainly is not our goal in being healed," page 27. **William Consiglio**, in his book *Homosexual No More*, says "What do I mean by recovery? . . . Recovery is able to go on . . . with minimally bothersome homosexual feelings . . . avoiding all homosexual behavior . . . recovery means the ability to manage . . .," page 34. **Consiglio** also says, "My experience as a Christian therapist . . . is that overcomers . . . still experience . . . homosexual feelings . . . temptations . . . tension, conflict, or difficulty," page 85. **Andrew Comiskey**, in his book *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness*, says, "While giving a series of lectures . . . I felt consumed with a longing for distinctly masculine love . . . I ached for it. I felt frustrated . . . I felt tempted to entertain lustful masculine images. And I resented God . . . While walking to my lecture on 'healing' (laugh track, please), I finally broke," page 190. **Comiskey**, fifteen years after publishing *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness* (1989), reports in an article by Christian Broadcasting Network in their column "Guest Bio" that "he still struggles." The article goes on to say, "Recently, Andrew and his wife, Annette, celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary [in] New York City. While they were there, they . . . reflected on how God healed each of them . . . -- Andrew of

Written ex-gay testimonies of "change" by in large fall into one of two categories. Some ex-gay stories of "change" give such an indifferent account of their homosexual preferences before the change that their orientation is no doubt somewhere on the mid-point of the Kinsey scale,¹ leaning more towards the heterosexual end of the continuum. The "change" experienced by these ex-gays is more an opting for their more dominant heterosexual orientation over their less dominant homosexual orientation.

In contrast to these of the first category, most ex-gays testifying to glowing "changes" are talking about behavioral or lifestyle changes, not a change from their homosexual orientation. And the fact of the matter is this: The movement's leaders, repeatedly in their writings and conferences, insist that "change" is a lifelong process, that even in marriage the ex-gay will again and again experience extreme desires for same-sex relationships.²

For additional referenced quotes from ex-gay leaders showing how the movement defines such words and phrases as "change" and "healing" and "ex-gay" and "coming out of homosexuality" visit "Ex-Gay Ministries In Their Very Own (Sorry) Words" a web page from the author's website at: http://www.othersheepexecsite.com/Ex-Gay_Ministries_In_Their_Own_Words.html

Fourth, the movement maintains a strong stereotypical male/female view of gender roles and sees the cause of homosexuality, in part, as the individual's failure to embrace his or her gender.

homosexuality. . . . However, Andrew found himself being seduced by homosexuality in the New York City culture. . . . Andrew says of this incident and the ongoing process that the healing comes from firmly making choices" ("Ex-Gay Encourages the Church to Welcome the Sexually Broken," August 25, 2004). For additional quotes from ex-gay leaders on "change" go to the following web page on my website:

http://www.othersheepexecsite.com/Ex-Gay_Ministries_In_Their_Own_Words.html .

¹ Ex-gay leader Joe Dallas in his book *Desires in Conflict* explains, accepts and works by the Kinsey scale (pages 117 - 118). He states: "If [Since] homosexual attractions exist by degrees, I believe they also change by degrees. So a person who rates a Kinsey 6 [exclusively homosexual] is not likely to jump right into Point 1 or 0 [exclusively heterosexual] . . . but will instead change more gradually, point by point." Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict* (Harvest Home, 1991), page 118. The Kinsey scale supports bi-sexuality as an orientation. An "ex-gay" bi-sexual is someone who has opted to pursue and nurture his heterosexual desires over his homosexual desires. A bi-sexual who claims to be "ex-gay" is an example of the first category of "change."

² Bob Davies says, "Many former homosexuals eventually go on to experience marriage. . . . We have talked to many [ex-gay] people who are married and still struggling with homosexual feelings and behavior. They live . . . feeling trapped in a heterosexual facade while secretly longing for same-gender sexual intimacy." Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out Of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women* (Inter Varsity Press, 1993), page 27. From my own marital experience, the ex-gay movement, in my opinion, by encouraging ex-gays to marry, sexually cheats the heterosexual spouse in the bedroom. I never once desired my spouse like I do my same-sex partner. I never once undressed her with my eyes. She had to know and feel this at some sad, confused level. It must have been painful for her.

The ex-gay movement's emphasis on reparative therapy and traditional, stereotypical male/female gender roles³ fails to allow for the question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" The boy who fails to embrace accepted masculine traits and interests is, according to the ex-gay movement, rejecting his maleness and will, by his own fault and by default, fail to bond with his peers and male role models. In turn, due to a lack of male connectedness, he will, during his adolescent years, homoeroticize his growing male hunger which will lead to homosexual acts.

This theoretical process of boy-rejects-masculinity-and-male-society fails to ask the obvious. Is the *boy* rejecting society's culturally-"correct" definition of masculinity, or has *society* rejected the boy for his culturally-"incorrect" style of masculinity? In other words, does the boy decidedly reject society's prescribed masculinity by purposefully choosing interests society deems inappropriate, or has the boy just naturally followed his own interests, though widely different from society's prescribed norms for boys? The ex-gay movement opts for the former without considering the latter. The movement never asks the most obvious of all questions, "Who is rejecting who?" Perhaps the boy's "less-than-masculine" interests give rise to society's intolerance and rejection of the boy.²

And that's the catch. Anyone can observe the data - (1) the boy and his "less-than-masculine" interests and pursuits; (2) society's prescribed gender roles; and (3) the boy standing outside of the circle of society's approval. However, in interpreting any data one must be aware of his premises and biases so that the conclusions are not skewed. The evangelical ex-gay movement has told us where their biases lie.³ It should come as no surprise, then, that the ex-gay movement interprets the data to indicate that homosexuality develops, in part, due to the boy's rejection of masculinity and male gender roles. On the other hand, one could just as easily interpret the data to mean society is rigid and unrelenting in its norms, holding it's male/female gender roles as absolutes so that the boy has not in the least bit rejected masculinity nor male role models, but rather society, in its intolerance or ignorance, is unforgiving and therefore has rejected and marginalized the boy. The ex-gay movement fails to explore this alternate interpretation.

Fifth, honesty from group members is often the missing factor in the dynamics of ex-gay meetings.

³ ". . . gender realities are somehow rooted in God and His creation. Gender isn't merely a cultural prescription." ". . . strugglers often reveal to us the grave problems that arise out of an unaffirmed gender identity." Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual* (Creation House, 1989), page 112.

² "A major study conducted in 1981 cites one significant, recurring theme among the hundreds of homosexual adults who were interviewed: a recollection of being 'different' from one's own gender peer group in childhood. The study gives no reasons for this difference; that wasn't its intent." Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual* (Creation House, 1989), page 119.

³ ". . . gender realities are somehow rooted in God and His creation. Gender isn't merely a cultural prescription." Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual* (Creation House, 1989), page 112.

While attending the weekly meetings of an ex-gay group in New Jersey, I remember how surprised I was the first time it dawned on me that members were not being totally honest about their setbacks.¹ I had arranged to meet up with a group member about an hour before the meeting to get a bite to eat and talk. He was twenty minutes late to our rendezvous. He had been cruising and he was completely racked with guilt. He confessed as to why he was late and with tears asked me how God could ever accept him.

At the meeting that evening, when the leader specifically asked if anyone had setbacks during the past week I was certain my friend would respond. He said nothing. Not even a hint. I realized that evening that the ex-gay movement's "religious" expectation of "healing" was encroaching upon the realities and honesty of the various individuals present in that room so that to share setbacks was to admit spiritual defeat or spiritual failure. Yet, this was supposed to be a place where one felt safe enough to be honest. I didn't experience that.

Instead, it was upon meeting José, my domestic partner-to-be, and going with him to the secular self-help groups he attended, that I first experienced real honesty between group members.² José was attending a different sex-related twelve step group in Manhattan almost nightly in order to keep from acting out. He attended the evangelical ex-gay group for a Christian perspective on recovery. I soon learned why he preferred the secular groups. There, there was honesty. There, there was safety because of the no-cross-talk policy.³ The honesty and openness I saw in the secular groups and the positive energy that was released because of it gravely highlighted the ineptness and ineffectiveness of the silent exchange between members in the evangelical ex-gay groups I was attending.

Sixth, the evangelical ex-gay movement makes claims of success that go unsubstantiated.⁴

¹ "Judy, a faithful Desert Stream participant . . . had fallen into sexual sin with an old lover. . . . She had vowed not to confess her failure to the group. But . . . she broke . . . [and] teary-eyed, [she] initiated the sharing time by confessing her fall. Some knew her vulnerabilities *only in the abstract*, so they were a little startled. All were sobered, for in Judy they glimpsed *their own failures that had gone unconfessed*." [Emphasise mine.] Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness* (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1989), p. 169-170.

² Concerning compulsive sexual behavior, the following is taken from *Hope And Recovery: A Twelve Step Guide for Healing from Compulsive Sexual Behavior* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: CompCare Publishers, 1987), pages 319-323. Under "Meeting Suggestions" the book instructs that the following should be read at the beginning of each meeting: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who . . . are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands *rigorous honesty*. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have *the capacity to be honest*." [Emphasis mine.]

³ " . . . everyone makes a concerted effort not to tell others what to do and not to allow the meeting to become a therapy group." [Emphasis mine.] *Hope And Recovery: A Twelve Step Guide for Healing from Compulsive Sexual Behavior*, page 322.

⁴ Bob Davies infers great claims of recovery for *thousands, hundreds* and *numerous*. However, his claims are so qualified that the numbers become meaningless. When he speaks of *thousands*, he qualifies them as being on the road *towards recovery*, that is, they have not yet arrived *at recovery*. When he speaks of *hundreds*, he qualifies them as having *left the gay lifestyle*, not as having arrived at a *heterosexual lifestyle* (in terms of fantasy, sexual desire, or real change at the *orientation* level).

"Over the years, we have seen many lives turned around and have been greatly encouraged by so many individuals who have won the victory and gained a new freedom. We do believe that Jesus Christ is the healer and worker of miracles and we have seen many of those miracles of change among us." Quite a claim!

HOPE, the ex-gay support group of Calvary Baptist Church, Manhattan, New York, makes the foregoing claim on their website.¹ Yet nothing on the website substantiates their claim. My now domestic partner José and I attended this group for eight months in 1997, two and a half years after the group's inception. Never once did the leader introduce or cite a former attendee as an example of "change among us."

On the contrary, and years later, while at a gay bar, we ran into someone who had formerly attended HOPE who said he was done attending ex-gay meetings. On another occasion, also at a gay bar, another HOPE attendee told us he needed to be in the company of gay people. One married HOPE member stayed in touch long enough to inform us he was going through a divorce. A fourth HOPE attendee who kept in touch by phone and in person, goes back and forth with accepting his homosexual orientation and then thinking he might someday marry the opposite sex to answer to his loneliness. Of course, our findings are not conclusive on the effectiveness of HOPE for the simple reason that we have not been in touch with any of these individuals for at least three years now, and we haven't been in touch at all with the majority of attendees that have attended HOPE from 1993 to the present, 2006. Our findings are incomplete and unscientific. But that's the point. Has *HOPE* validated its claim of "miracles" and "changes among us"? According to their website, apparently not. Their website doesn't report any findings and José and I have never participated in a survey conducted by HOPE. Nor, as we have said, did the group leader ever cite, either by name or otherwise, a former attendee as an example "of change among us."²

When he speaks of the *numerous* he qualifies them by speaking of the *tremendous benefit* they obtained. When he speaks of the ex-gays who have married, he does not quantify it even with the word *many* or *few*. "During the past fourteen years, we have become personally acquainted with *hundreds* of men and women who have left behind the gay and lesbian *lifestyle*. We will be sharing more of their experiences in the coming chapters" [p. 18]. "We have known *numerous* former homosexuals who have found *tremendous benefit* from a season of one-on-one counseling with a trained Christian professional" [p. 92]. "We know [*how many?*] men and women formerly involved in homosexuality who left that lifestyle and have now been happily married for over twenty or thirty years" [p. 151]. "May God give you strength and perseverance to pursue the same new freedom that is being discovered by Jeff, Starla and Mike -- as *thousands* of other men and women who are walking ahead of you on the path *to homosexual recovery*" [p.182]. Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1993). [Emphasis mine.]

¹ Visit HOPE website at <http://www.hopenyc.org/page3.html> .

² In addition to the Calvary Baptist Church ex-gay recovery group, we personally know three other former ex-gays in New York City where we reside, one of whom was an ex-gay leader for many years who visited New York City churches with his ex-gay group testifying to change; the second is a seminary grad and was a pastor; the third presently has a gay partner. As far as my therapy with Joséph Nicolosi, two of the three clients who were put into contact with me have "failed" at reparative therapy, the first having divorced his wife and opted for the gay lifestyle having embraced his homosexual orientation, the second having discontinued his therapy and renounced its claims of

I remember a college professor [identity changed] and personal friend who upon my coming out to him shared with me - - in a very concerned and caring manner - - the *second-hand* story of a homosexual Christian who was *suddenly* "healed" through a charismatic ministry. I was skeptical and left his office wondering to myself why there wasn't any more material on the unnamed man other than the testimony he had given about three or four days after his so-called deliverance: Who was he? Where is he now? How do you know he's changed? In what way is he changed? What's the test? Is he still changed?¹

So what is the test? Three years without a sexual encounter -- how's that for the test? In the late mid-nineties I attended an Exodus ex-gay northeastern regional conference in the state of Massachusetts. The conference leaders announced a group photo op of all "ex-gays" who had been "healed." The group photo would be placed in leading US newspapers as a showcase of individuals who were "set free" from homosexuality. The one criterion for being in the photo was this: the leaders announced that a participant had to be three years without any same-sex sexual activity. That was it. Again I wondered, why three years? Why not four years, or two for that matter? Is abstinence the acid test? What is the acid test? Shouldn't it be one's change in sexual orientation? Isn't to be "set free" from homosexuality to be heterosexual, that is, to be just as sex-crazed about women as one was about men? But this wasn't the test. Abstinence was the test. I failed to see any "truth in advertising" in promoting the northeastern ex-gay conference group picture as "set free" from homosexuality.²

recovery; a third client has not kept in touch and therefore I have no way of knowing his progress or lack thereof, though at the time he was discouraged with the whole counseling process.

¹ "This phase [of repentance and insight] is so energizing that many people mistake it for a complete deliverance from sexual temptations. . . It's a legitimate high. But it's also, sad to say, a temporary stage. Sooner or later temptations will come . . ." Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), p. 126. "Some ex-gay men and women have been deeply wounded by counselors who have tried to cast out 'a spirit of homosexuality,' presenting this deliverance as an instant solution to struggles with homosexuality. Later, when the person experiences same-sex attractions, there can be great discouragement and overwhelming despair." Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women*, p. 76.

² "The national leaders concede that Exodus doesn't keep statistics. Thus, individual ministry leaders can offer differing results, producing wildly inflated and inconsistent numbers that give vulnerable people false hope." Wayne R. Besen, *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003), pp. 31-32.

Seventh, a "realignment of the will"¹ and the regulation of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance,² accountability³ and more⁴ are all essential tasks to be observed religiously in the unending process of overcoming.

Upon learning in ex-gay group meetings that the basic answer to resolving one's homosexual self was found in one's personal day-by-day choices born out of one's moment-by-moment relationship with Jesus Christ, I had one critical thought: I've been wholeheartedly doing that right along for thirty years and it isn't working.

A personal walk with Jesus is, of course, essentially what evangelicalism is all about.⁵ Evangelical ex-gay groups have become an all-time American, Religious Right experience to prove that Christianity, as evangelicals define it, works.⁶ And, instead of adjusting their Biblical view on homosexual acts as sinful,⁷ evangelicals have become all the more determined to demonstrate that "life in Christ" is the answer to homosexuality.

¹ "This allegiance involves a fundamental realignment of the will. And it's usually a painful, sobering decision that each individual must make alone. . . . Whom will one serve, Jesus or the powerful lure of homosexual desire? One must bravely face one's options, then decide." Andrew Comiskey, *Pursing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual* (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1989), p. 85.

² ". . . and the regulation of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance . . ." Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict - Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), pp. 70-76.

³ "I also recommend that you find an older, same-sex person to be a special friend. This person should be someone in whom you can confide; who will encourage and support you, and one to whom you can be accountable on a regular basis." William Consiglio, *Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming Homosexuality* (US: SP Publications, Inc., 1991), p. 97.

⁴ "Problems can also occur when our mind enters 'neutral,' such as when we are driving a familiar route to work or performing repetitious tasks at work. I (Bob) have found it helpful to install a cassette player in my car, and I constantly have sermons, lectures or music tapes playing to keep my mind occupied while I drive. At other times I record favorite Christian radio programs, which I can replay during my commute to work and back home." Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 86.

⁵ A look at the lyrics of common evangelical hymns will effectively demonstrate this. For example, "He walks with me and He talks with, and He tells me I am his own . . .;" ". . . You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart;" "What a friend we have in Jesus . . .;" "I must tell Jesus, I must tell Jesus . . .;" etc.

⁶ Cf. James Dobson's Focus on the Family and the Love Won Out regional conferences; D. James Kennedy and Coral Ridge Ministries: Truths that Transform; Donald E. Wildmon and American Family Association.

⁷ More and more there are exceptions, like Jack Rogers, a heterosexual evangelical Presbyterian (USA) leader, who has changed his view and is openly sharing his view on what the Bible says about homosexuality. In his book he clearly states his evangelical beliefs: "Those of us in his communicants class understood that we were lost in sin and that Christ had paid the penalty for our sins and that by trust in Christ we received our salvation. I believed it then, and I believe it now." Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 4.

Under the influence of evangelicalism, and driven by my homosexual longings, as unusual as it sounds, I had cultivated a regular two-hour "quiet time" during my teen years.¹ For me, this "other-world" focus was all I could find to address my "real-world" needs. I was a teenage homosexual and I needed a friend who would listen, understand and help me. After all, this was the late 1960s. To whom could I go but to Jesus?

Coupled to my teenage evangelical faith was my Calvinist theology. I had learned well that "once saved, always saved," that "nothing could separate me from the love of Christ," not even my homosexual longings or acts.²

Thus, enveloped in this unconditional love as an evangelical gay teenage Christian of the late 1960s, and with no one to talk to about my homosexual orientation, I did the obvious, I wedded my evangelical faith and my Calvinistic theology to my homosexual "temptations" *in order to make sense of it all* -- just like the yet-future ex-gay movement would. My evangelical "life in Christ" would prove to be the answer, I thought, so much so that I applied my faith to every aspect of my life on a moment-by-moment basis for the next thirty years.

However, my thirty-year "life in Christ" ended in utter failure. I found I had a need that Christ could not meet *personally*. Without being able to articulate it at the time, I had subconsciously come to the realization that Christ had created me with certain human relational needs that He never intended to meet *personally* but rather through *instrumental means*. For three years, with a broken spirit, I rose daily from my bed and immediately left the house unnoticed to enter upon my prayer walk. Whatever else my thoughts and meditations, this one prayer, with unceasing tears, was repeatedly uttered: "Lord, send me loving male arms to hold me; I cannot wait 'til I see Jesus." I needed non-sexual male physical touch which not even the sense of Jesus' spiritual presence could fulfill.

No heterosexual Christian holds to a "life in Christ" theology that translates into unilateral, universal celibacy for all heterosexuals. Yet, it is the heterosexual Christian who, unwilling to re-examine Scripture in light of present day findings, propagates the fallacy that "life in Christ" is all the single homosexual will ever need in order to live a

¹ "For a season, some former homosexuals choose to devote a major portion of their time and energy to their recovery process. For example, one former lesbian joined a support group for recovering homosexuals, then *spent many hours each day* pouring over the handouts and her Bible, entering insights into her journal . . ." [emphasis mine]. Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out of Homosexuality*, p. 26.

² I grew up in the First Baptist Church of East Syracuse, New York, a church in fellowship with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches. Regular Baptist Churches are often Calvinistic when it comes to the doctrine of salvation; in fact, that is the association's theological roots historically. The Sunday School of First Baptist Church of East Syracuse faithfully used Regular Baptist Press instructional materials which integrates throughout its curriculum the "four points" of Calvinism, including "unconditional election" and "the perseverance of the saints" (or, "eternal security"). These teachings grounded me in the knowledge that I was a recipient of the unconditional, everlasting love of God in Christ Jesus.

full and satisfying life. My thirty-year evangelical experience "in Christ" proved just the opposite to me.

In the late mid-nineties, I remember hearing an "ex-gay" Christian lesbian speak at a northeastern regional Exodus conference. She was expounding passages from Romans on dying to self. Her exegesis was amazing. She was so accomplished as a speaker and so thorough in her study of the topic that she could have been speaking in chapel to a Bible college audience. As I listened, I became numb with the stark realization that there wasn't a principle she had unearthed for herself that I hadn't heard and applied for more than twenty years since my Bible college days. While I did not question her sincerity, or determination, or her "dying in Christ" theology, I did question her overall personal testimony in this sense: What would she claim thirty years from now? It was my feeling that her "in Christ" experience as a *new* "ex-gay" was prematurely being set before us as the model or standard. There is often a whole world of difference between belief and reality that only time can test.

Incidentally, upon my first screening for my first ex-gay group involvement as an attendee, the counselor upon hearing my life-long "walk with Jesus" immediately recommended that I begin counseling with reparative therapist Joseph Nicolosi. Maybe that was standard procedure. I don't know. For me it was a breath of fresh air. "Walking with Jesus" for thirty years had not succeeded in keeping my homosexual yearnings at bay. "Perhaps reparative therapy will," I thought as I clutched to the hope.

*Eighth, the ex-gay movement views non-sexual close male relationships as essential for "healing."*¹

¹ Andrew Comiskey says, "I underscore the need for real [male] intimacy . . . I think of Jonathan, a good friend who called forth in me a flood of deep longing for bonding with the masculine" [p. 171]. "My own journey in identifying the deep need for same-sex love, then meeting that need in whole friendships, has been difficult but exhilarating" [p. 175]. . . . Prior to an intensive ministry time, Jonathan and I were praying together [when] the love I felt for him in that moment was but a glimpse of the awesome glory of God that encamped about us" [p. 177]. Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual*. Joe Dallas says, "All of the prayer, insight, and effort you can muster won't change your sexual desires one bit if you don't establish the kind of relationships you need. Homosexuality is an attempt to satisfy yourself through an unhealthy relationship. Now is the time to learn how to satisfy yourself through healthy ones!" Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict -- Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity*, p. 123.

"Read this book!"¹ said my friend, a fellow client of Joseph Nicolosi. "Even heterosexuals have 'male hunger'," he said.² "So why is it we're gay and they aren't?" he argued. I took the book and read it.

His point was well taken. Homosexuals do not have a corner on male woundedness. What can be observed in homosexual adult men as unmet childhood needs for male bonding and intimacy, can also be observed to the same extent in heterosexual men. Just as homosexual men need "healing" from childhood wounds inflicted upon them by emotionally absent fathers, so do heterosexuals.³

I asked my therapist why my heterosexual brother -- only two years and five months younger than me -- did not "become" a homosexual like me. "We've both experienced the same kind of woundings from our father," I stated. I had anticipated his answer from my readings on recovery: "Yes," said my therapist, "the difference is your brother did not emotionally internalize his woundings whereas you did." His answer kept his theory in tack but lacked persuasion.

In my mid-forties, my brother shared with me some of the particulars of his father woundings that he had experienced throughout his teen years and young adult life, and then, speaking of our father, he strongly advised, "He will destroy you unless you completely cut yourself off from him emotionally." My brother told me how, at around age twenty, he had "lost it" and had cried a flood of tears like a broken cistern because of the inflicting wounds he had received from our father; and because of the father hunger he was deeply experiencing without any hope of satisfying it, he had decidedly and emotionally (though not physically) broken himself off from our father.

My heterosexual brother appeared no different to me than the heterosexual author of the book my friend had given me. Both the author and my brother had suffered father woundings like other heterosexual and homosexual men. It appeared to me that one's "internalizing" of father woundings had nothing to do with one's sexual orientation. But my therapist wanted me to believe that my brother had wisely chosen again and again, upon the occurrence of each father wounding over the years, to detach himself from our father; and that my brother had done this during the

¹ Steven Farmer, *The Wounded Male* (RGA Publishing Group, Inc. and Steven Farmer, 1991).

² Steven Farmer, a heterosexual author, says, "Through my own awakening process it became apparent that there were some ways in which I [a heterosexual male] was wounded . . . and that this was true for most other [heterosexual] men" [p. xiii]. "Most of us [heterosexual] men bear deep wounds from our relationships with our fathers. We did not experience having them available and accessible as we were growing up" [p.24]. "Not only did they not know their fathers, the fathers never knew their [heterosexual] sons. This 'father hunger' that most [heterosexual] men experienced as a child continues on into adulthood" [p. 25]. *The Wounded Male* (RGA Publishing Group, Inc. and Steven Farmer, 1991).

³ Steven Farmer, speaking to wounded heterosexual men, writes, "Although you will never replace the missing father, other men now can give you the kind of male energy and attention that you never got from your father when you were a boy. There is a 'mutual fathering' that goes on between men . . . that can deeply satisfy this unmet yearning for genuine male energy and companionship." *The Wounded Male*, p. 112-113.

crucial stages of his early development so that he escaped becoming a homosexual. A remarkable accomplishment for any boy.

By my mid-forties, I was experiencing a chronic need for appropriately affectionate male touch. It was so acute I could think of nothing else. Every cell of my body seemed relationally isolated and emotionally starved. Life was so completely and fatally ebbing out of my being that my internal life-saving system kicked in and put out a high-alert call for help. I desperately needed to be held by loving, human, male arms. Not a prolonged bear hug; not a shoulder to cry on; but rather to have every cell of my body merged with every cell of his body, whoever he may be. To be infused with male life-giving touch, face to face, body along the body of the other, foot over foot, palm against palm. Two bodies, yet one healing, holding, intertwining.¹ That was my need and I told my therapist, Joseph Nicolosi.

My therapist understood my male hunger. He understood! I cannot express how much validation and hope I felt when my therapist not only affirmed me but expanded upon the parameters of my request. "Yes," he said, "Jose can hold you all through Friday night, into Saturday night and right through to Monday morning." I had asked for a single night of holding. My therapist had given me three days in a row, night and day, day and night, uninterrupted.²

I reported to Jose, my domestic partner-to-be, my findings. "I need to be held," I said. "My therapist agrees it will be part of my healing. I want you to hold me," I explained. Jose gave a response I've never forgotten. "How much holding is enough?" he stated more than asked, which is perhaps the searching question of every wounded male, heterosexual or homosexual.

Jose did hold me. For nights at a time. So that my soul and spirit began to come alive again, yet by degrees so minute that one could have wondered at times if the healing process was even happening. I was like parched ground without water. He held me and I drew in his life-giving water as though the rain had never fallen, parched and thirsting still. But to answer the question "how much holding is enough," for me, it was all of five or six years. That's how long it took for me! At last I'm filled. So, do we hold now? Yes, continuously, but for me more out of completeness rather than male hunger, more out of being "at home" and "happily coupled" than because of childhood yearnings long unfulfilled.³

I suppose I should be heterosexual by now. That is, with all my male hunger needs satisfied, my sexual passions should be heterosexual. After all, I have more than

¹ Steven Farmer quotes Robert Bly, author of *Iron John*, in "A Gathering of Men," a PBS program in which Robert Bly is interviewed by Bill Moyers: "When we stand *physically close* to our father, something -- something moves over that can't be described in material terms, . . . of receiving a *food* from him . . . Now, when the father went out of the house in the Industrial Revolution, that *food* ended . . ." [emphasis mine]. *The Wounded Male*, p. 29-30.

² " . . . whether it's *physical* or not, we [heterosexual males] need intimate contact with other men" [emphasis mine]. *The Wounded Male*, p. 130.

³ José reports that he still *needs* to be held. Steve reports that he *wants* to be held.

eight years of male holding with Jose, my domestic partner since October, 1997. The intrigue of woman as a sexual being and as other-than-male should be running wild in me by now -- now that my male hunger needs have been met. Anyway, that's the argument the ex-gay movement makes. But happily, my sexual orientation hasn't changed . . . I'm in love as much now as ever!¹

Conclusion: *Is There Really Such A Thing As Ex-Gay?*

When all is said and done -- the male emotional needs met, the gender roles analyzed and understood and even acted upon,² the "walk with Jesus" maintained and even enlarged -- and whatever else the ex-gay movement may prescribe for "healing," no one turns my head like José (except for other great looking guys; oops!).³ And by that I mean, wow! isn't José hot! I've not read one ex-gay testimony where the so-called ex-gay male refers to sex with women with the same exciting and earth-shattering, sexy-hot terminology that he had used when speaking of his same-sex attractions prior to his "conversion." That should say it all as far as any real "change" goes.

Human sexuality is a powerful dynamic, and while domestic relationships are also built on understanding and meeting each other's emotional needs (and even "wants" when able) -- along with commitment and mutual support and whatever else a given couple might consider -- there is still this in the relationship: sex -- whether

¹ On two separate occasions, adult heterosexual strangers have told us that while observing us they have greatly enjoyed watching the spirit of love and affection between us. José and I are either stuck in pre-adolescence as "best buddies" full of fun-loving playfulness (as the ex-gay movement would view our relationship, as consisting of deep male hunger, boyhood needs) or, like our happily coupled heterosexual counterparts, we are mature homosexual adults who are fortunate enough to have found one another and value our relationship enough to invest in each other in loving and affectionate ways.

² I attended a northeastern regional ex-gay weekend conference in which the gay men were shown how to play touch football and the lesbians how to do make-up. Actively affirming gender roles in this manner is viewed by the ex-gay movement as part of one's recovery.

³ ". . . no one turns my head like José (except for other great looking guys; oops!)." My point is this: homosexual males are just like heterosexual males, both are aroused by sight. The ex-gay movement totally sidesteps this issue when talking about "healing." Bob Davies says, "Many people strive for our cultural norm, rather than seeking the level of sexual purity to which God calls us. For example, you may wonder if you will ever experience a strong, even passionate, lust when looking at an attractive member of the opposite sex on the beach. It is possible, but this certainly is not our goal in being healed," p. 27 [emphasis mine]. "In general, men are primarily excited by visual stimulation, say the experts. Women are stimulated primarily by touch. Ex-gay men may find that this common pattern is untrue for their marital relationship. Even if the ex-gay man continues to be vulnerable to sexual stimulation toward other men through sight, he may find that the principle turn-on in marriage is touch. . . . He may never have the same level of raw sensuality in looking at his fiancée/wife that he had with stimulation toward other men which was fueled by lust, not love," p.159 [emphasis mine]. Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, *Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Woman* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InverVarsity Press, 1993).

opposite-sex attraction or same-sex attraction, it is still sex. It is one's sexual orientation that determines the focus and flow of sex attraction, not anything else. And whatever I may attempt, and however long I may persist, it is my conclusion that my sexual orientation is not going to change. I am exclusively homosexual; that's *my* sexual orientation.¹

I only hope sex (not to forget love) is as hot and fulfilling for heterosexuals as it is for me, a homosexual. I kind of think it is, so why the fuss? I don't really know. We could ask the ex-gay movement what the fuss is all about, but I think we already know the answer. We're back to our first observation. The evangelical ex-gay movement is a reactionary, religious counter-culture movement that began in the early 1970s (Love In Action, 1973²). The movement, blinded by its cultural biases, has failed to examine its religious, theological and traditional presuppositions, and therefore has also failed to seriously consider the on-going findings of the social sciences on homosexuality.

The church will rue the day it valiantly rode off to save America from homosexuals and homosexuals from themselves. With time, mainline denominations -- and yes, even evangelicals, upon a second and full consideration of Scripture -- will value civil rights for all homosexuals without conflict of personal conscience. In the words of Mark Twain, "The world has corrected the Bible. The church never corrects it; and also never fails to drop in at the tail of the procession -- and take the credit of the correction."³

I suppose Mark Twain is right if we understand *church* to mean the great majority of leaders within the church. There are, however, the very few within the church (whether culturally driven or not) who early on questioned and challenged the church on its position on homosexuality.⁴ It seems it has always been the few in church

¹ A homosexual once commented to me, "Does it really matter, 'nature or nurture'? I *am* gay." To my parents, who insisted it is 'choice' and not 'nature,' I explained: "Gays testify of themselves that it isn't 'choice' and must be 'nature' *because that's how they experience it.*" Nothing seems more natural to a person -- gay or straight -- than his or her sexual orientation.

² "Enter the birth of Love in Action (LIA), the world's first official ex-gay ministry." "Through this historic exchange, Love in Action was born in 1973." Wayne R. Besen, *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth* (New York: Harrington Press, 2003), p. 62, 63.

³ Mark Twain, "Bible Teaching and Religious Practice," *Europe and Elsewhere*.

⁴ For example: Troy Perry (Founder, Metropolitan Community Church, 1968), Ralph Blair (Founder, Evangelicals Concerned, 1975), John McNeill (Roman Catholic, a Jesuit, author of *The Church and the Homosexual*, 1976).

history who have "corrected the Bible."⁵ And with that observation, I believe we can let Mark Twain's comment stand.

Oh yes, and this comment, too: "The church will rue the day!"

Copyright © 2006 Other Sheep, sparelli2002@yahoo.com. All Other Sheep articles remain the property of each individual author. This article may be printed, distributed, posted, as long full credit is given and no charge is made.

⁵ One of the more recent writings of an evangelical who has "corrected the Bible" is Jack Rogers with his book *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*, (Louisville, Kentucky, 2006). Mel White, Founder of Soulforce, says on the back cover of the book: "This book offers a rare opportunity to see why one of America's leading evangelical scholars and a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) changed his mind about homosexuality. What Jack Rogers discovered by reviewing the biblical, creedal, and historical evidence for himself just might change your mind as well."