

Helping People Step Out Of Homosexuality

Frank Worthen

Frank Worthen came out of the gay lifestyle at age 44 when he recommitted life to Jesus Christ. He is the founder of Love in Action, one of the largest ex-gay ministries in the world, and a co-founder of Exodus International, a worldwide umbrella ministry. He is founder and current director of New Hope Ministries in San Rafael, California, and has written several books on coming out of homosexuality. This is his personal testimony.

I had the family background of the majority of homosexual people, absent father, controlling mother. When my father was present, there was no peace, only chaos. I grew up fearful and isolated. At 13 my father died and I lost the chance to ever know him.

My pastor took up the role of father, and he was everything my father was not. He took a great interest in my life, hugged me and instructed the church to help us financially. One day near my fourteenth birthday, my pastor called me into his office and said: "Frank, you are a homosexual." I had never heard the word, having grown up in a small farm town, but I was sure that it wasn't good. When he explained homosexuality to me, I had the sinking feeling that he was right, he had read me correctly. But, he then went on to say that my homosexuality was a gift from God, that he himself was homosexual and that many of our denominations' pastors were also homosexual. I knew I was different, but I sure didn't want to be different, and this was not good news. I asked God to change me, but I still was attracted to other males. My one hope was that I was just late in developing an interest in the opposite sex and that soon change would occur.

At 18, I fell in love with a young lady and was overjoyed that my homosexuality was gone. At last, I had matured into heterosexuality. After a one year relationship, I took my lady friend to a fine restaurant and asked her to marry me. Her reply was: "There are only two things I can love, horses and other women." By this time, I knew I was not alone in my struggle with homosexuality, but I had never thought about women also being homosexual. She left, and I have never seen her again.

I returned to my pastor and he comforted me, saying: "Why don't you listen to me? I have told you over and over you are homosexual. You were not in love with a woman, but in love with the man inside the woman. You've got to face it, you're homosexual." That day, at 19, I entered the gay lifestyle. I spent twenty-five years as an active gay in San Francisco. I have lived through a lot of history in the gay movement.

At 44 I was suicidal and wanted out, but I had never seen anyone leave the gay lifestyle, except by death. Everyone said: "Once gay, always gay." I was so miserable that I took a desperate leap of faith, I returned to the faith of my youth. I realized that it hadn't helped me when I was young, but I had no other choice outside of suicide. I had only the smallest degree of faith that anything would happen, but to my surprise, that thimble of faith was enough to work miraculous change. I am now in my 23rd year of helping people escape the gay lifestyle. I have been married for 11 years and would never go back to the misery and lies of the gay lifestyle. I am thankful every day for my new life. There is more happiness now in one day of my life than all the twenty-five years I spent in that lifestyle of treachery and deceit.

All Homosexuals Can Change

The first issue I would like to address is that there is no one, no matter if they have had a sex-change operation, or have lived crossed dressed for years that cannot change. Change is available to every person struggling with homosexuality. There are no special classes of inverts and perverts.

Any motivated person can change. Age may play a factor in motivation. Contrary to the apparent findings of Lawrence Hatterer (*Changing Homosexuality in the Male*) I have found that the older person is more motivated toward change. He has seen all the aspects of the lifestyle and it no longer holds any mystery for him. By 40, many are ready and willing for change, they are completely disillusioned with the lifestyle.

Motivation

Uh, you might say: "There is the rub. The unmotivated homosexual cannot change, so not all homosexuals can change." Let me remind you that the unmotivated person cannot accomplish anything whether he is learning the computer or attempting to drive a truck. There are unmotivated homosexuals, a high percentage of them, but this does not mean if they find the motivation that they cannot change.

It is the work of the psychological community to instill hope, this is one of the most basic premises of counseling. If the counselor or therapist does not offer hope, where will the counselee find hope? The field of psychology is for the most part telling the person struggling with homosexuality that change is impossible and unnecessary. Most of the mainline churches are in agreement with the psychological community. Without hope the people perish.

Faith

Strangely, the psychological community has overlooked one of the most powerful tools available to them, that is faith. Mankind was created to worship. If man will not worship God, then man will worship man. Is it any surprise that gays often call a hunky man, "A Greek God"? A look through past history will show that until recently, worship of the Creator was a central theme in man's daily life. Faith and worship are the greatest motivational factors that can be found. How is it possible to help a counselee if you work only with the body and the soul and ignore the spirit?

People marvel at the success of Alcoholics Anonymous. What is their central theme? Faith in a "Higher Power." To Christians, this higher power is Jesus Christ. I am often asked about the method I use. Yes, to some degree, there is a structured program or method, but it is not this structure that brings the change, it is faith that changes lives.

Change Is Extremely Difficult

None of this is to say that because one has faith and a structured program that leaving the gay lifestyle is easy. It may be one of the most difficult adjustments ever required of a person. There are a number of misbeliefs or lies that must be challenged. The foremost of these is that change is impossible. The one thing that breaks through this deeply embedded belief is that while much may be impossible for man, nothing is impossible for God. Many would like to continue on in their contacts with the gay world. Unless a complete break is made, change will be impeded. This reluctance to break with friends, move from a gay ghetto area, perhaps quit a job and leave behind clothing and all articles connected with the gay lifestyle, prevents change from taking place, the old continues to reinforce itself and the new has no chance of developing.

The First Step: A Decisive Decision

As we have said, motivation for change is a difficult thing to find. Generally, the trials of the gay lifestyle will not produce sufficient motivation for change even though there has been great suffering. A desire to conform to the standards of society and to be well thought of will not produce sufficient motivation to carry the person through the rapids of the change process. Only a deep abiding faith in God is strong enough to produce the motivation to make a decisive decision that will hold up through times of temptation and ridicule from fellow gays.

Working Through The Primary And Secondary Issues

The homosexual person will come to you because his attempts at finding peace and happiness have failed. He comes because he is in pain. He usually comes because the secondary issues have become overwhelming and he can no longer function. He has come to hate himself and everything about his life. Yet, his concern is only with the product or symptoms of his abnormal lifestyle and he has no knowledge of the root causes of his problem. If you attend to his presenting problems, he may go away temporarily happy, but this relief will not last. What are some of the presenting problems? Rejection, a lover just left, someone significant has discovered his homosexual nature and broke relationship with him, he may be addicted to alcohol or drugs which he uses to escape the trials of his lifestyle. He may have become very irresponsible, abandoning his responsibilities, like paying rent, meeting credit card payments, keeping old friendships alive,

feeling guilty for letting down his parents and friends, there can be a number of discomfoting problems that have caused his unhappiness. But none of these are his root problems and unless they are addressed discomfort will return. The primary issues that counselors seldom address are those long term issues that cannot be quickly resolved. These are the issues that berthed homosexuality in the first place. Lack of affirmation, lack of a sense of belonging, abuse/molestation, the effects of labeling, unfairness, victimization, and fear.

The immediate family of the counselee may be non-existent, dysfunctional, or hostile. The very people that should have supplied him with the affirmation needed to mature into a heterosexual person have instead, robbed him of these primary ingredients to a healthy life. He has sought to find these things in the gay lifestyle, but the results were similar, there is no rejection stronger than gay to gay. I know of no better family replacement than the church. An enlightened church group can supply the things that have been missing since early childhood, the affirmation, sense of belonging, concern for his victimization, release of his guilt feelings, and general love and acceptance. The wise counselor will realize that counsel alone is inadequate, there must be an affirming group outside of the counseling session that can supply what the counselor cannot.

How Ex-Gay Ministries Fill The Gap

Because the church may be less than it should be, ex-gay ministries fill the gap, and prepare the way for entry into the church. Some ministries, like New Hope have year-long residential programs. Here, the needs for affirmation and a sense of belonging are met. There are now somewhere around 200 ex-gay ministries around the world. Only a few, however offer a residential program, but it remains the most effective program for change.

A Long Journey

The gay person seeking help will be embarking on a long journey. We are not talking weeks or months, but years. Since everyone proceeds at their own speed, it is difficult to project the amount of time for change to take place. The minimum times span I have seen has been three years, maximum can be a lifetime. It largely depends on the willingness to make hard choices and to hold to the initial decision for change. Every failure pushes victory further into the future. He must not lose sight of his goal.

After giving up sexual acting out, many homosexual strugglers move on to the next step, which is developing emotionally dependent relationships. In fact, many main-line churches who disapprove of homosexual acts encourage these kinds of relationships, however, necessary step that it might be, it is still unhealthy and must be worked through. We often refer to these relationships as emotional vampirism. These relationships suck the live-blood out of the person who feels the need to minister to the homosexual struggler. Sadly, some Christian counselors still cling to the belief that one person can meet all the needs of the struggler, this just isn't so. It is a set-up for disappointment and failure. It is too great a burden for any one person to carry and results in unrealistic expectations. The struggler needs at least three or four people that are willing to become friends and offer their help. These dependent relationships are unhealthy for the struggler and the care giver.

Is Heterosexuality Possible?

Yes, there is something beyond celibate homosexuality. Same-sex attractions do fade and opposite attractions do emerge as a result from a clean break from the old lifestyle. It is of vital importance that the counselee hold to the belief that change is possible. Proverbs 23:7 reads: "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." This is a wise proverb. We are today where our thoughts of yesterday have brought us. The one that can view the change process as an adventure filled with excitement and challenge will find change developing at a consistent rate. The one who still believes that change may be impossible will not see the change he desires.

Certainly no one should entertain the idea of marriage until sufficient healing has taken place. I would never suggest marriage for anyone who has not had at least three years of absolute celibacy. Because the process of change is a long process, there may come times of deep disappointment when old desires and fantasies return. Often change is a three steps forward, two

steps backward kind of process. The counselor must allow for times of failure but view the overall progress. Are the failures coming further and further apart, despite the failures are their still signs of progress. Are the failures met with guilt feelings and despair? Is the person growing through their failures?

I am a pastor of a small church and I see many straight men fearful of marriage and commitment, so it is to be expected that an ex-gay person might be doubly fearful of marriage and sexual performance in marriage. We must not make marriage the ultimate goal for every ex-gay person. Yes, we are delighted when our men marry and raise a family, and it is healthy and good, but success can also be a responsible, fulfilling single life as well. We must not assume that if a person is still single, change has not taken place. We must be aware that marriage alone is no sign of change.

New Life

All homosexual people can enjoy a new life. None are excluded from entering into a healthy, wholesome new lifestyle. Almost none make it alone, it requires the help of others along the way. I find that those whose faith is weak or non-existent generally do not make it. Those with a strong, abiding faith have the motivating force to carry them through years of difficulties and into a wonderful new existence they never thought possible.

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