

Prison & Homosexuality

By Bob Van Domelen

Introduction

As of this writing, I have been out of prison for 22 years and completely off parole for twelve. In that time God has opened opportunities for me to stand by and support others still in prison through newsletters and personal correspondence. No matter how many times I visit a prison, however, the experience is always a humbling one—memories (good and bad) are always very close to the surface.

Scott is the type of man I would feel proud to call a friend and may yet do so given time. He resides in a prison community I have visited and until recently was very involved in many levels of prison life. Enthusiastic in attending chapel activities, a willing and vulnerable participant in a voluntary support group, and the type of man who looked at others with an openness that was far from judgmental, Scott suddenly found himself isolated.

He had unknowingly broken an institution rule that resulted in the loss of a good job and time in segregation. The experience had a profound effect on him; he saw himself as always doing for others while neglecting his own needs. Foremost among those needs was a desire to deal with his homosexuality. However, occasional efforts to talk about homosexuality with others showed him that they either could not handle the topic or thought him foolish for not accepting himself. Even his support group appeared to lack a welcoming attitude to any revelation on his part. So Scott stepped away . . . first from the group and then from chapel activities.

To the outsider, homosexual behavior and prison might seem to have a natural connection, something almost expected and tolerated given the prison environment. Heterosexual inmates boast that they are not homosexuals. Rather, they claim they are simply meeting what they feel are physical needs. Many of those who consider themselves homosexual or who struggle with homosexuality attempt to keep such information a secret. “Heterosexuals” see homosexuals as fair targets for sexual activity with or without consent, and rapes are not uncommon.

The consequences, therefore, of dealing with homosexuality openly in a prison setting can be difficult if not dangerous. Scott has decided that he wants to deal with the issue because his heart and his relationship with God tell him he must. For him and for countless others with the same desire, this booklet is written much as a conversation between them and me. God willing, the conversation will be shared with others—maybe even face to face.

What is Homosexuality?

If you were asked to define homosexuality, you might say, “It’s being sexually attracted to people of the same sex” and stop there. Dr. Lawrence Hatterer, author of *Changing Homosexuality in the Male*, defines the word as follows:

“One who is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually, but not necessarily, engages in overt sexual relations with them.”

There are three words included in this definition that are normally missing from the definitions offered by others: "in adult life." You may argue whether or not teenaged boys or younger, for example, could be defined as homosexual if they have not yet reached adulthood. Certainly there are no concrete definitions for all variations of homosexuality, but behavioral specialists point to the changing nature of sexual preferences when studying human development.

Kinsey's landmark 1948 study, "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male," reported that 10 percent of the population is homosexual. Despite continued conflict regarding Kinsey's research methods, people use this percentage to validate the notion that homosexuality is quite common and therefore normal. According to the authors of *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (1994), the figures are actually closer to 2.8 percent for male homosexuality and 1.4 percent for female homosexuality.

Development of Homosexuality

Dr Joseph Nicolosi (NARTH) and others are developing and refining techniques of treatment for those seeking freedom of their homosexual condition based on a reparative therapy model. Loosely stated, there is a brokenness or lack of a completed process of bonding or identifying with a same sex parent. The reasons for this separation or lack of completion can be real or perceived in the mind of the struggler. In light of this situation, homosexuality is seen as the conscious or subconscious attempt to repair that break. I often share a phrase with others that I heard years ago at an Exodus International conference: ***Homosexuality is not the problem; it's seen as an attempted solution to the problem.***

We are born with a gender ("male and female he created them" Gen.1.27) but our sexual identity is a process of transition or change, of moving from one level of understanding and acceptance to the next. This would mean that there is a stage of same-sex focus (especially during the time of puberty) that really is normal to the process of moving toward a completed or heterosexual stage.

If, as Dr. Nicolosi and others maintain, a break occurs in the early stages of sexual identification, an individual might literally be "arrested" in his or her overall development. The body will continue to mature physically into adulthood but emotional and sexual levels of understanding do not. This is not so much a regression or falling back as it is a fixation or locking in on a particular need.

While a physical focus can be common to both men and women, the attraction to physically acting out applies more to men. Women focus more on establishing strong emotional bonding and are often seen as being excessively codependent.

A Time of Decision

At some point, usually in the later teen years or early twenties (although much younger in many cases due to current social attitudes and a positive attitude toward being gay as an alternative), an individual who seeks to find a bonding with one of the same gender will make a conscious decision to give up and accept the label "homosexual" or "lesbian" as a self-identification, ultimately accepting "gay" as a simple self-descriptive word. Those who continue the struggle against their homosexual feelings and desires are unwilling to

concede what they believe to be a God-given design for their lives or the lives of those they love.

It should be noted that many attributes or qualities normally given to homosexuality (artistic, creative, sensitive, etc.) are, in fact, available to ALL men and women to one degree or another. Being homosexual is not a prerequisite for being in the ballet or having a career on stage as an actor. Nor are all those who are involved in the arts homosexual merely because of their choice of profession.

Wasn't I Born That Way?

There have been a number of studies focusing on this very question, but not one of them has shown an exclusive cause and effect between genetics and homosexuality. If genetics determine whether or not you are homosexual, then there might be justification, some say, for feeling that you have no choice in the matter.

According to Dr. Nicolosi, “. . .two major gay-affirming groups now publicly admit that homosexuality is not a simple matter of genetics. They are the American Psychological Association and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG). Both groups say that social, psychological and biological factors most likely work together to produce homosexuality. But such a belated acknowledgment may have come too little and too late to undo the widespread public misunderstanding.” [from the bulletin *Q & A: Homosexuality, Part II* published by NARTH]

Most researchers do not discount the possibility of a genetic connection in the issue of homosexuality, but they usually include environment as a dominant factor that must be considered.

Dr. Nicolosi also addressed the question of “feeling that way for as long as I can remember” in the Q & A informational bulletin. “The foundation for homosexuality is laid in early childhood. As far back as they can remember, gay men said that they’ve felt an ‘excitement’ around other men. But this excitement indicates a longstanding emotional deficit in their relationships with males, not an inborn homoeroticism.”

Abuse

There can be little doubt that sexual abuse is a contributing factor in the lesbian condition as most studies report that 85 percent (or higher) of all lesbians were abused. Men, on the other hand, are slow to see the potential or reality of sexual behavior at an inappropriate age as being abuse or as being a contributing factor in their homosexuality. They prefer instead to label what happened as mere sexual exploration. Such behavior, however, created a sexual identity confusion. A boy might think to himself, “*If he is doing this to me and I like it, then there must be something about me. Maybe I am gay.*”

Rick was in third grade when a neighbor who was the family babysitter sexually abused him. Whenever his mother worked a second shift, Rick could not wait for the sitter to come because the sitter made Rick feel loved, and Rick loved the sitter.

Some three years later, the sitter was arrested for molesting his nephew and went to prison.

A month later, a friend of Rick's older brother came to his bedroom and began to touch him the same as the sitter had done. By the time Rick was a senior in high school, he had been involved sexually with over 30 others and eventually was arrested himself for sexually abusing a younger student.

Not all homosexuals molest children, but for those homosexuals who have molested, molestation often played a major role in their own childhoods.

Public Opinion and Change

Jerry is a man who struggles with homosexuality in a prison where homosexual behavior is all around him. He has managed to avoid acting out by spending a lot of time reading the Bible, attending chapel activities, and letting others know that he is not interested in a sexual relationship. The most difficult part of his struggle, however, is more with the outside world than what he sees around him in prison.

Jerry's decision to reject homosexual behavior is itself rejected in the media where there is more emphasis on making sure everyone feels good about whatever choices they make than on maintaining values. He sees the world growing more and more in favor of elevating homosexuality and, having been in prison for several years, wonders whether his position will make a return to the world even more difficult.

A world that strives to make all things good for all people will ultimately face the conflict of having to deal with your desire for freedom from homosexual behavior. You have embarked on a healing journey and journeys take time. There is a growing "to each his or her own" attitude in the people of the world which will tolerate you but at the same time will wonder why you don't just go with the flow. "What's so wrong with being gay?" they will ask. Then someone will point to historical figures that were homosexual, as though making that connection is supposed to put the whole question to rest. It will for them but not for you.

Being Sexual

There is a feeling of despair that attends the clanging sound of a cell door being closed for the first time on an inmate. The reality of prison is that one's definition of freedom gets turned inside out. According to the prison manuals, the institution dictates freedom of movement, speech, and the expression of one's sexuality--but that is according to the prison manuals. Inmates willing to take some risk can and do make their own freedoms, legal or not.

Jason considers himself a heterosexual without a normal outlet for his sexual needs; Scott is an inmate who considers himself homosexual but seeks to be free of those behaviors and temptations; and James, a gay man, has found prison an ideal environment for sexual encounters.

The three men represent the full range of attitudes toward homosexuality in prisons across the country. There are, of course, heterosexual men and women who refuse to consider homosexual behavior as acceptable behavior under any circumstances.

It is important for those of you in prison or jail to remember that God created you with a foundation of healthy sexual drives. When the cell door clanged shut, these sexual drives and attitudes did not disappear like something not needed for a set period of time. Rather, your sex drive probably awakened once the shock of being in prison passed—much to your concern because you no longer had the freedom to respond as you had in the past.

You may have attempted to shut down any and all sexual expression in your new life in confinement only to feel considerable anger or depression when you found yourself unable to do so. And if after your arrest you had promised God and those you love that you would no longer abuse your sexual appetite, *any* fall will result in intense feelings of your failure to control yourself and, far worse in some ways, a feeling of having let God and loved ones down.

Relationships

In the early stages of prison life, I wasn't sure whom I could trust. Conversations were rarely personal and most often one-sided, especially when in the company of someone loudly protesting his innocence of any wrongdoing. Some cellmates were better than others, more willing to let me do my time in my own fashion, yet I knew that I would not survive intact without being able to share more than just the time of day with someone.

I had entered prison having strong homosexual tendencies despite a year of freedom from any homosexual behavior while on bail. It didn't take long to realize that guards might prevent some sexual contact from occurring but they couldn't stop all of it. Nor could they control the invitations for sex sent out by inmates with little more than a look or head gesture any more than they could a direct request made in casual conversation.

I felt the fear of potential violence when out in general population, but it was not long before I was assigned a cell with just one other inmate and in time transferred to different cells with different cellmates. That was a different matter. Not all cellmates were compatible with me any more than I with them, but there were some I believed I could trust. We got along. They shared some of their lives with me and I did the same with them.

God taught me something very valuable during my early days of incarceration that helped me establish appropriate relationships. He reminded me that even though I had enjoyed some victory in refraining from homosexual behavior, I was still broken sexually. I still had much to learn about healthy relationships. Left to my own past patterns of choice, there was little doubt that I might engage in sex as an expression of "friendship" just as I had always done.

God taught me that I had to draw a line separating healthy choice from unhealthy choice and that I was not to cross it. It wasn't a case of God saying "This is your last

chance, Bob, don't fail." Rather, it was as if God was giving me a clearly marked road to take if I wanted the freedom I told God I wanted.

Healthy Relationships

You are not a robot with a computer chip imbedded in your brain. If you were, each time you felt a legitimate need or emotion surface, your brain would analyze the moment and help you make an appropriate choice. You are a human with human needs, and on occasion you *can* recognize what is happening and what you need to meet that need. Some times, the choice you make is wrong.

Karl was very attracted to his buddy, Stan. Not only was Stan young and cute, but very affectionate, and Karl loved and craved affection more than anything else—even more than sex. But when they got a chance to hug, they both got sexually aroused and that created a problem. Neither of them wanted to ruin their friendship or the God-centered love they felt for one another by having sex.

Stan's sensitivity and big heart made Karl feel loved, special, attractive, accepted and in very positive ways, Stan's friendship made Karl feel very good about himself. They talked about significant issues in their lives and came to the conclusion that it was wrong for them to be sexually involved, so they made the choice to be friends only—no sex.

Friendships are not to be shunned while in prison. At the same time, you need to be realistic about what is happening in your relationship with another inmate. Both Stan and Karl recognized the risks as well as the danger signs in their friendship. Both admitted that while their determination was clear, maintaining their decision was, at times, very difficult.

If you and your cellmate have a relationship like that of Stan and Karl, at all costs avoid using the excuse that you have no choice but to become sexually involved. Homosexual behavior IS going to feel good. Touch feels good. Feeling that someone cares about you and maybe loves you feels good. But these things are don't last too long in prison. Long-term, one-on-one relationships are the exception rather than the rule, and you won't find yourself being someone's *only* love. It doesn't happen that way, and when you come to realize that your hopes for a meaningful relationship don't match those of someone else, you *will* feel used.

Emotions and Sexual Expression

Existing in prison without being sexual is *not* impossible despite what some might tell you. Some inmates will encourage you to have sex so that they will feel better about themselves for having already done so. If you believe you need something, eventually you will give yourself permission to have it. Remember, this statement can work for wanting God's grace as well as for surrendering to sin.

God created us as sexual beings able to communicate intimately with persons of the opposite sex. Homosexuality is a sexual communication between people of the same sex but not a communication that is part of God's design. In marriage as well as in the single life, there are times for sexual restraint or celibacy—times when the

desire for sexual satisfaction must be set aside as inappropriate. If you are in prison, sexual desire can be very frustrating, even aggravating.

Recognize, however, that not all sexual desire is sexual in nature. All too often, you have acted sexually (alone or with others) as a response to and/or a solution for other legitimate needs. Sex brought temporary relief to a situation and eventually came to be used as *the* solution for that and other needs.

- **Loneliness:** *“I am all alone. I have no family, no one who loves me.”* Loneliness is a hunger many inmates deal with each and every day. It consumes. I was with Johnny the day he received his first letter in 14 years of confinement. His hands shook as he held the envelope and tears rolled down his cheeks. Eventually he handed it to me and asked me to read it to him because he felt unable to do so himself. His hunger to be remembered and to be loved was real and is impossible for me to minimize.
- **Frustration/Low Self-Esteem:** *“Everything I do falls apart on me. Maybe my dad was right. Maybe I’m not good for anything.”* It isn’t difficult to see how frustration over an inability to be successful at something and the feelings of low self-esteem generated by a parent might open the door to a homosexual relationship. Some of you might be hearing positive and encouraging comments from other inmates for the first time in your life. If being sexual with that person is the cost of hearing them, such consent might feel like a small price to pay.
- **Depression:** *“This place is so depressing. Day after day, nothing changes.”* There are levels of depression that are definitely more painful than simple boredom, and in your state of depression you might be looking for anything to bring you up into the light of day. If your depression feels like an incredible weight on your mind and you contemplate thoughts of suicide, you need medical attention and should get it. If, on the other hand, your depression is the boredom brought on by prison routine, you might be tempted to be sexual with another inmate just to relieve that boredom. It is not worth it and will add to your problems—not solve them.
- **Anger:** *“My attorney could have gotten me off but didn’t.” “My wife just wants me out of the way so she can spend my money and get it on with someone else.”* Allowed to simmer and then boil, anger out of control can be lethal. Anger can also bring about self-fulfilling prophecy such as *“If I’m bad enough to be in prison, then whatever I do in here is no more than what they expect of me.”* In some ways, anger is most closely related to not being in control of situations, others, or yourself. If you act out sexually with others, you *will* be justifying the opinions you think others have of you. Whatever it takes, try to rise above your anger by being better than the image held of you.
- **Touch Deprivation:** *“I can’t explain it, but when my cellie touches me it’s like millions of volts of electricity running through every part of my body.”* Mark really didn’t want a sexual relationship as much as he just wanted to lie next

to someone, to feel connected and alive. *“I didn’t really care that much about doing the things he wanted me to do, but when I was near him things seemed to be okay. Prison didn’t really exist in those moments.”* From the time you were a baby, your skin has remembered the touch of your mother—a manner of showing love and protection. As you grew, the opportunities for this kind of contact may have lessened or even become non-existent. Just because you are in prison does not mean that the sensory perception of your skin has died, but it would be a mistake to believe that homosexual contact is a legitimate answer to that need.

- **Self-Destruction:** *There is no hope in this place and no hope of getting out.* Lara sees great despair all around her. Those who have given up hope dull the pain and the loneliness by taking whatever medications they can get their hands on. Others attach themselves emotionally to someone and then sacrifice their own well-being as they seek ways to show their love. Some rape other women in order to feel “something” while others engage in sexual acts with those known to have STDs or known to be HIV+. Lara reaches out as much as she is able in offering hope to those who don’t believe in hope, yet her frustration grows daily as the institution seemingly ignores what is happening.

Masturbation and Homosexuality

Steve knew that it would only be a matter of time before even his best intentions would not be good enough. Where once his masturbating was an isolated, once-in-a-while behavior, it was becoming compulsive, often several times a day. Surrounded by men, his fantasies turned more and more toward including various inmates to whom he felt attracted. Eventually Steve crossed the boundary he told himself he would not cross. He engaged in sex with another man in the shower room.

Most inmates see masturbation as a legitimate sexual practice and as a behavior that the prison system cannot regulate or restrict. Although some inmates offer absence of a “normal” sexual outlet as justification, allowing masturbation to become addictively compulsive will eventually cripple healthy sexuality.

You will meet individuals in prison to whom you will be drawn because they will appear to have many of the qualities you think are important in life. Ironically, those most attractive to you will be the most distant, and your attraction to them will take on the nature of Romeo and Juliet, two masked individuals seeing each other for the first time yet reciting words of undying love.

Same-sex fantasies rarely reflect reality, and if you allow those images you create to grow and become linked with masturbation, you will come to believe the myths you create. The next time you start your cycle of fantasy, look at your surroundings. Look at your own situation as a convicted felon and realize that nothing you see is as perfect as you imagine or want it to be.

The System

When Mike was 11 years old, a next-door neighbor who was 12-13 years older than Mike molested him and continued to do so for a period of years. Mike came to know the Lord as his personal Savior when he was 17. By the time he was 18 he was seeing psychiatrists and counselors because of unresolved feelings and emotions resulting from the abuse.

These professionals all told him that what happened to him as an 11-year old was okay. They told him he was all right and that it was great to be gay. And finally, they told him God didn't exist and was not of any importance. Brought up in a Christian home, Mike knew better.

His counselor in prison told him he could read twelve or thirteen different Bibles and that those Bibles couldn't and wouldn't help him or change him. He was again told that he was born gay and would always be gay. Mike is a good example of an individual trying to make sense out of his life and finding only contradiction within the secular system.

Another Story

Tim has been under attack with homosexual feelings and desires off and on for some time, but over the past few months they have been pretty intense. In his group, his psychologist tells him to accept and embrace his homosexual feelings by saying that they are part of his learned behavior from childhood experiences. Like Mike, he is told that he should not be ashamed of those feelings. Tim, however, knows what the Bible says about homosexuality but sees his psychologist as one of the world and not God-centered.

Despite his spiritual sense about homosexuality, Tim occasionally wonders if he would just be better off embracing homosexuality as his therapist says he should. And because Tim has had some falls, he worries about his confidence and ability to continue his struggle.

A Catch-22

The system is a hybrid creation that grows and expands without evident rhyme or reason. The positions an institution holds regarding homosexuality are not so unusual given its secular, politically correct posture. Before you consider condemning the system outright, it might not be a bad idea to take another look. This booklet cannot begin to cover every aspect of the "system" in society as it relates to homosexuality and will only scratch the surface of the prison "system." Nor is this section meant to excuse abuses or justify policies that infringe on the right of individuals seeking freedom from homosexuality. But if you look at some of these things objectively, however, it really does help.

- ***The system cannot "discriminate" against gay or lesbian inmates.*** You might feel a chuckle here because your experience has been that prisons do indeed discriminate. Much of the discrimination you've experienced, however, was most likely at the hands of an individual or the result of rules written without concern for your feelings.

- ***The system claims to be a strong advocate of the “separation of church and state.”*** In their haste to maintain that separation, many institutions provide little spiritual support beyond basic chapel services and Bible studies. Recognition of your right to participate in chapel services is usually restricted to the chapel and to your cell. Any inmate professing a belief in God while participating in a state treatment program will be told that such a belief is not only inappropriate but also possible grounds for dismissal from that group.
- ***IF an institution practices non-discrimination against gays and lesbians, it will usually follow that homosexuality is NOT something considered a choice but a genetic given.*** Most counselors/employees will not support your desire for change. To do so would be seen as supporting the idea that homosexuality is morally wrong or less good than heterosexuality and would open them to possible charges of discrimination. You know in your heart, however, that their position of non-discrimination against gays and lesbian results in a discrimination against your belief system.
- ***The prison system sees its primary responsibility as being one of overseeing prison populations and maintaining order.*** Every institution has employees who will be sympathetic to your desire for change, and those individuals are a blessing. Every institution has employees who do their job to the best of their ability within the framework of policy. You will find some frustration in dealing with this kind of individual because policy is often very unbending and almost always impersonal. Finally, every institution has employees who themselves are very broken individuals. This type of person might well see you as a necessary part of the job, but no more or less than that, and they might go out of their way to make life more difficult for you. Rather than hate them, pray for them.

Change is something only you can do for yourself and then only by the grace of God. The Serenity Prayer states the following:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference. --Reinhold Niebuhr*

If you are able to see and accept the fact that the system as being beyond your power to control or change, you will be releasing some self-imposed aggravation and will find the healing process easier.

Guilt by Association

The prison community is often the best and worst of life all in one cellblock. Unlike being on the outside, there are few places where you can go to avoid problems and problem people. If you have told anyone that you are trying to turn your life around or trying to reject homosexual behavior, everything you say or do will be under the watchful eyes of those with whom you live.

I recall a conversation with one of the few men I trusted while I was in the county jail awaiting transfer to the prison. He told me, “Watch who you are seen with. If a guy is gay or a molester and someone sees you talking with him, the word will be out that you must be either gay or a molester.” For him it was not an issue of showing a

Christian response to a fellow inmate but more of an issue of self-protection. While I chose to ignore his advice on more than one occasion, I considered his words to be the words of someone who had been in prison before and a token of sincere friendship.

Stuff Happens With or Without Your Permission

Bill returned from recreation to see his cellmate and another inmate being taken to the hole. When Bill asked the guard what had happened, he was told that the two had been caught engaging in homosexual behavior. Bill was stunned, hurt, disappointed, and angry. He and his cellmate were good friends and often talked about their hopes and goals. To make matters more difficult for Bill, the guards questioned him—a fact not unnoticed by other inmates. The rumors *about him* were sure to start.

For the rest of the day, Bill found himself on an emotional roller coaster. He had been doing well in his personal walk and had been having victory over temptations. Now he found himself regretting his move to this particular unit, wondering if there was anyone he could trust, any person with whom he could be himself.

Deciding he would not survive if he simply held all of these feelings inside, he put in a request to speak to the chaplain. It took two days for the visit to take place and in that time, Bill recognized that the events had triggered his masturbation cycle—his comfort zone of sex and self-gratification that he used to ease the stress in his life.

Bill felt like hiding but had done nothing wrong to justify hiding. He felt everyone was watching him and talking about him behind his back. Worse, Bill sensed that those who were his friends were now avoiding him. The very source of acceptance among other men that Bill sought in his life had, he felt, dried up in a sea of rejection.

The chaplain's visit gave him the opportunity to unload everything in his heart. It was during this conversation Bill learned that the chaplain had spoken to several staff members and that staff had only good things to say about him. There had been no reports of his possible involvement in *any* homosexual activity. The chaplain also put to rest the feeling that "everyone" was talking about him by confirming that only a few inmates in Bill's unit actually had been doing so. Bill certainly felt better but recognized that it would be some time before the suspicions of others were laid to rest if at all.

Support

Bill's chaplain is a remarkable individual in that he was willing to take the time to investigate on Bill's behalf before coming to see him.

Not all chaplains would have or even could have done so, but that doesn't make them less effective. Bill's story does, however, point to the need to be honest and vulnerable, to break through the walls of self-imposed isolation, and to reach out for whatever support might be available from others.

The roots of homosexuality include intense feelings of separation and rejection, so it should not be a surprise that stepping out in search of help will be difficult at best.

Men and women on the outside who fear being “found out” as living a double life tend to contact ministries in cities distant from their own to insure anonymity. Your situation is more complicated.

Sources of Help

Whatever you decide in your search for freedom from homosexuality, there will be risks that you will face. Privacy is almost nonexistent in prison and cellmates will often carefully and secretly scrutinize your personal property. Finding help *will* mean reaching beyond your “safety zone” and will probably expose your situation to at least one other person. Should you reach out, God’s protection can be counted upon, but be careful in thinking that a surrender to God will mean the absence of potential problems. *“We say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”* (Hebrews 13.6) The truth is that there *will* be times when you will be afraid, but God’s word reminds us that He is the source of our strength through all situations.

You will notice that the following list actually starts by going to others on the outside and only later looks at support right in your institution. Given your situation, you might find just the reverse to be more effective with more security/protection for you in *not* reaching beyond the prison walls for your initial contacts.

Most importantly, no person or organization should ever be elevated to idol status or be seen to have all your answers. God is the *only* perfect source. *“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well.”* (Mt 6.33) As you surrender to God’s plan for your life, you will notice those people and organizations placed in your path to assist you on your journey of healing. You might find help in considering the following:

- **Correspondence** can be an effective means of seeking information about homosexuality from ministries such as member groups of Exodus International. Many of the more reputable Christian newsletters/newspapers that focus on prison ministry provide a list of organizations or individuals willing to correspond.
- **Bible Study:** You might consider starting with a one-on-one correspondence Bible study where you are writing a specific individual. As you get to know the person writing you, share your desire for freedom from homosexuality and allow them time to respond in the fashion God will encourage from them.
- **Home Church Support:** Write your home church if you are still connected with them and ask the pastor if anyone would be willing to write. In my case, there were individuals trying to understand what had happened while at the same time wanting to do what they could to help.
- **An Accountability Partner:** Ask God to give you a pen pal who can serve as an accountability partner from a distance. One of the ground rules of this kind of connection should be that the letters you write will be saved for you

and given to you when you are released. You will find significant self-study in seeing the progression of your thoughts and attitudes over a period of time.

Important: Decide how you would handle someone coming across a piece of mail accidentally left on your desk that might contain a discussion of a sensitive topic. Becoming angry or making up some story about someone putting you on a list without your permission will only make matters worse. Most often, a simple acknowledgment without much explanation will work. You may, however, have to prayerfully consider being up front about your heart's goal.

- **Books/Tapes:** There are some publishers/ministries willing to provide books or tapes to inmates free or at a reduced cost that will advertise in various prison outreach newsletters/newspapers. If purchasing a book or tape is not possible and you are in a non-cash institution (no monetary funds allowed you), keep a list of titles that might be helpful to you later when you are either released or transferred to an institution which does allow purchases. Many inmates write for every free publication available and that might be a good thing *if* the inmate is not merely building a personal library for the sake of having a library. If you are able to purchase books or tapes, write the publisher and ask what kind of rate you would be charged. Then start saving for that purchase. In most cases, it will be more cherished and better read or listened to if the article cost you something. Remember that ministries and Christian publishers do not necessarily have deep pockets. Many just get by and offer discounts or free items because they feel led to do so, not because they are financially well off.
- **Chaplains:** No chaplain is an expert on every human condition but most have seen their fair share. A good chaplain will listen to you and possibly share from his or her own experience dealing with other homosexual strugglers and, having done so, will always point your heart and mind in the direction of God. Most chaplains will know of support systems or resource materials that will be of value to you, but you have to be able to ask and that means being vulnerable.
- **Prison Fellowship etc:** The level of chapel activities depends upon the chaplain and the institutional support (or sometimes lack of it) for a healthy variety of programs for inmates. Most groups coming on a regular basis will be offering Bible study. Slowly, a growing number of ministries whose focus is support for the homosexual struggler are being allowed regular access to inmates. Your chaplain will know the groups/individuals coming in as well as how your participation might be beneficial to you.
- **Cellmates/Friends:** Some of the best support I received while in prison came from an association with others who shared a desire for freedom from homosexuality. We walked together, prayed together, and studied the Word together. They knew when all was not well and offered quiet and realistic support just as I tried to do the same for them.

- ***Be Honest With Yourself:*** One of the dangers of inmate to inmate disclosure is the very real possibility of both parties being needful and weak at the same time. You need to recognize your homosexual behavior cycle—the times you acted out in the past and what encouraged the acting out—and the fact that you are sharing with another who struggles with the same issues. When both parties are vulnerable and needing, what started as a relationship to encourage one another could easily end in a fall.
- ***There Are No Secrets:*** If you share with a cellmate or a friend in the institution, consider that what you say in confidence might be shared with others. Transfers and arguments have a way of breaking the code of confidentiality established in your conversations.
- ***A Prayer Journal:*** More than a diary of daily events, a prayer journal can be an intimate spiritual time of communication with God. In your journal, you can be free to write the desires of your heart and soul, a means of expression that allows you to “verbalize” the things you feel and then look at those writings later on as a means of assessing your life. As with anything that is written, take care of the manner in which you store your journal.

Your Real Identity

The healing process is a daily walk with God, a continual conversation with Jesus, and a willingness to allow the Holy Spirit access and freedom to your entire being. Like any process, there will be good days and not-so-good days, successes and failures. Your steps will more often feel like “baby” steps than huge strides and you may feel that nothing at all is happening the way you think it should happen. On the other hand, some changes will be noticeable.

- Rather than always thinking about homosexual things, you will sense yourself thinking about life beyond your immediate needs.
- Homosexual temptations will diminish for longer periods of time if not completely.
- You will wake each day with anticipation for what new blessings the Lord will give you.
- You will find others drawn to you for the witness your life as become. Remember, however, that your witness to others is not your goal but a result of your relationship with God.
- You will feel a hunger for the presence of God in your life and a freedom from a fear or dread of God based on shame. And in the center of this relationship with God you will find an incredible freedom.

Whatever happens to you will be a unique gift designed for you by God. As you fill your life with that relationship, there will be no room for darkness. God created you in His image and likeness, and He calls you.

A Final Prayer

Dear God. Help me to remember that nothing is impossible to prayer. Because when I pray, I bring You close and when You are close, I am not alone or afraid. I call on You, and the world eases around me. There is comfort for my hurt . . . and peace from my worries. As one door closes, I see another open wide before me. So, let my whispered voice start each day with the promise of prayer – certain that with Your name on my lips, Your love in my heart, that all things are ever possible. (An inmate with hope)