

When Darkness Isn't Dark Enough

By

Bob Van Domelen

When Darkness Isn't Dark Enough

Introduction

"A local teacher was arrested and charged today with molesting one of his students. The alleged contact was said to have taken place over several months and might not have surfaced had the victim not confided in a friend. The friend reported the abuse to a school counselor who contacted the police."

Announcements of this nature are heard almost daily in cities across the country. The response of the communities is almost always one of shock, followed by intense anger. The offenders are teachers, ministers, youth leaders, next-door neighbors, relatives, or friends. On occasion the offender is a stranger to the victim, but statistically this is very unlikely. The idea that someone jumps out from behind a bush is less common than abuse as part of a relationship.

What are not seen or heard of are the struggles of individuals with an attraction toward children but who have not acted out. No one praises them for their self-control. In truth, were these individuals to share openly with most people the nature of their struggle, they would be cast aside as perverts. "If they think it, they have to be molesting" would be the common response.

How do we get past the anger associated with those adults who are attracted to children? How do even discuss a road to healing when righteous retribution dominates the minds of those asked to reach out? The solution most commonly offered today is confinement or civil commitment. . .and the longer the better.

In the past 31 years, I have had to focus intensely on the topic of adults who are attracted to children because I was one of them. Arrested in 1985 and sentenced to time in prison followed by 10 years of probation, I have since completed the mandate of that court. Recent legislation known as Megan's Law, however, originally added another 15 years of "probation" to my sentence, and state legislation was drawn that resulted in my having a mandatory lifetime registration. Such laws are not the foundation of healing. They are meant to provide some peace of mind to the public.

Part of my own healing has been found in reaching out to others, offering hope and encouragement, despite the animosity and discouragement offenders and those who have never acted out alike face because of their struggles. In just the past few years, I have written thousands of letters to individuals who have contacted Broken Yoke Ministries seeking help. Out of those letters came the idea of a bimonthly newsletter, *Into the Light*, which began in 1997 and one that discusses various aspects of adult/child attractions and the road to life-changing choices. Those same letters formed much of the foundation for this booklet.

It is not the intent of this brief work to be an authoritative legal or medical response to the complex questions facing society with regard to this topic. The booklet is meant to be a vehicle which promotes at least a measure of understanding while providing a common tool for all of us who face this most difficult subject. Because I have seen God as the center of my own healing journey, I believe that God will also be at the very core of what I share with you.

Discussion

- At the heart of any change must be a desire to change. Discuss the goals you might have for your own life. Note: Think in terms of immediate, short-term, and long-term goals.
- What was your reaction to "If they *think it*, they have to be molesting?"
- To what extent is it your job to change the views of society?

Most people know or have heard the first four lines of the Serenity Prayer, but I think that the best stuff follows, so I'll include the prayer here. Maybe you will find it a useful daily prayer to help you get through things and work through this booklet.

The Serenity Prayer

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.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.
--Reinhold Niebuhr

© 2016 Robert J Van Domelen
All rights reserved

Let's Get Started

Writing about pedophilia (ped-o-fill-e-ah) and ephebophilia (e-feb-o-fill-e-ah) could be seen as trying to find a way to excuse or minimize my past thoughts and actions. Normally rational people might stiffen with anger at the mere mention of knowing or reading about an adult who is or has been attracted to children. Distancing themselves is often the first order of business followed by righteous indignation.

I am writing with the hope that the reader is either in a position to care enough to help bring about change for someone else or is a struggler wanting to see words that describe feelings which they are too shame-filled to share. I have learned in my own life that secrecy or silence made possible the kind of abuse no child should have to endure. In the depth of my prayer life, I feel God speaking the words, "No more secrets, no more abusing."

Discussion

- Those with sex-related offenses often consider themselves 'modern day lepers.' How is this description accurate or inaccurate?
- ² *A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*
³ *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.* ⁴ *Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."* (Matthew 8.2-4 NIV)

In light of the first question, how do you see the love of Jesus working in your life, in your issues?

Some Basic Definitions. . .As I Understand Them

Adults who have an *addictive* attraction to children are clinically diagnosed as pedophile or ephebophile. The difference between the two words is a matter of the age and sexual development of the child they are attracted to. "Pedophile," however, seems to be a universally accepted term for *all* adults who have an attraction to children and almost automatically defines those guilty of molestation.

Pedophiles are interested in *pre-pubescent* children of either gender. This includes all those from young babies to young teens, linked by the fact that those children have not yet reached puberty. The ephebophile focuses on boys and/or girls who have reached puberty, have experienced some of the physiological changes common to puberty, yet are still more childlike than adult.

Since the original printing of this booklet, a fifth edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) has been in use with a sixth edition to be announced. There is, however, considerable discussion about the accuracy of changes made from the DSM-IV. While not the most current definition, DSM IV offers the following criteria for diagnosing pedophilia:

Repeatedly for at least 6 months, the patient has intense sexual desires, fantasies or behaviors concerning sexual activity with a sexually immature child (usually age 13 or under). This causes clinically important distress or impairs work, social or personal functioning. The patient is 16 or older and at least 5 years older than the child.

According to Dr Fred Berlin, a member of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online, actually acting out on desires is not required for a diagnosis of pedophilia.

Based on the hundreds of letters I have received in my ministry from men currently in prison for child molestation, there is a marked difference in the intensity of their sexual desires for children. Some inmates reported having had very little interest and/or sexual desire for children before they actually acted out. Others shared that they thought of little else every day.

The first group, therefore, would not necessarily meet the DSM-IV frequency requirement and by definition should not be defined as pedophiles. In my own case, the attraction and desire to be with boys surfaced most often during times of stress and isolation yet was almost nonexistent when life was relatively stress free. If, however, others have defined me as such because of my actions, I refuse to wear the label as a mandate that *I continue to act out in some fashion* – using the dark side of the internet, fanaticizing, etc. *I still have the power to choose.*

The diagnostic label of pedophile, however, is generally placed on *anyone* who suggests or initiates an inappropriate sexual contact with a child – often regardless of the age of the child. If restoration and change is a desired outcome of treatment, the current practice of labeling makes the process more difficult and in some cases impossible. I offer that comment because the medical world currently believes that no change is possible for a clinically diagnosed pedophile. This belief system also forms the nucleus of many treatment programs with an eventual treatment goal of relapse prevention rather than the elimination of attractions.

If the label accurately describes an individual, however, should that diagnosis dictate a life of no hope for change? Should one who has not acted out become an offender merely because he or she has no other choice given such a diagnosis? Having met some who have not acted out, I have a great deal of respect for them and have strongly encouraged them to continue on the path they have chosen.

Discussion

- It is reasonable to presume that labels such as pedophilia and ephebophilia will continue to be freely used despite the possible misuse of that clinical diagnosis. Discuss how the terms can be both helpful *and* damaging.
- For some, denial and self-defense can be pretty similar. "If I deny accusations or labels, then maybe others will believe me and will not think poorly of me. My reputation is at stake." Discuss how the defensive walls we construct can actually make change more difficult.
- "*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*" (2 Chronicles 7.14) Discuss the underlined words in light of change.

Why Me?

No matter how much I read on the subject of age-inappropriate attractions, no matter how much understanding I feel I am gaining, the basic question remains, "Why me?" Most of the letters I receive and the conversations I share with other strugglers eventually include that question. Perhaps what others and I really are hoping is that answers will make the struggle disappear. The answers themselves will not bring on this freedom but they will make the journey easier.

Discussion

- Discuss how knowledge of the 'why' may or may not eliminate or at least substantially bring about change.
- *"Why then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me. (Job 10.18)* Discuss how you might feel as Job did but look for the differences as well.

So How Did I Get This Way?

In the heart of every person who is attracted to children is a lost child. Something happened to that child which should not have happened. I do not believe that pedophilia or ephebophilia are genetic conditions. I do not believe anyone with age-inappropriate attraction is "born that way." The conditions are the byproducts of what others have chosen to *do to us* as well as what we have chosen to *do to ourselves*. All choices are solutions, sometimes good and sometimes bad, but always a response to a legitimate need.

As a young child, I was taught that God made me in His image and likeness. That connection with God ruled out any possibility that He would create a condition/person with no choice but to harm others. Accepting this basic belief allowed me to see God as the source of change because it was never God's intent that I should become a molester in the first place.

In my opinion, the root of pedophilia and ephebophilia is essentially the same:

A child is somehow separated from him- or herself during childhood, growing into biological adulthood yet drawn to (either or both)

- *a need to find connection with children (as a means to find his or her own lost childhood) or*
- *an inability to exist in the adult world.*

"No normal man (or woman) would do such a thing!" is a comment I hear from people expressing disgust over the latest reported case of child molestation. If I take that comment at face value, I must look at what would make the individual not normal.

Discussion

- ¹³ *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* (Psalm 139.13-14) How do these words fit with your goals of change, of being made whole? Do you believe them?
- How would you describe a child separated from him- or herself during childhood?
- Discuss in general terms how you might feel shut out from the 'normal' adult world.

Violent Separation

“B”

“B” wrote: *“My entire childhood was filled with fear. My father controlled me with anger and intimidation. He never physically forced me to submit to him, but he did force me to pretend that I liked what he was doing to me and that I wanted him to do it.*

“I believe that my inability to express my true feelings about what was happening to me and my being forced to act as though I enjoyed it left me with many deep-seated emotional wounds. The few times I timidly attempted to speak out in honesty about my situation were devastating. My father’s violent reaction, his ranting and raving was so frightening to me that I soon learned just to do whatever he said without objection.

Fear was my constant companion: fear of my father, fear of being exposed, fear of my mother finding out about what was happening, fear of having and then losing friends and being lonely.”

Separated from his own masculinity because of his father’s sexual abuse, this man became isolated from his peer group as well. He became disconnected and eventually became a molester himself. Others like “B” eventually see themselves as soiled and unlovable, having lost their innocence to someone with power over them.

Note: I recently learned that the quote from “B” is actually from “Beauty to Ashes” by Joyce Meyer. My apologies for this oversight.

Discussion

- In your own words and based on what “B” shared, why did he feel so hopeless about his situation?
- How would you have described your reaction to the father’s behavior if “B” had shared this story with you? How did his story make *you* feel?
- ⁹ *“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”* (Matthew 7.9-11) Describe B’s father in light of Jesus’ words here.

“R”

“R” once explained to me how he crossed the line of merely being attracted to children to abusing them in this way:

“When I would look at her, all I could see was her innocence. Just being with her made me feel good. But that didn’t last. I found that after a while I was angry because she was innocent and I was not. God didn’t protect me when I needed protection, so I decided that I would do to her what was done to me.”

Discussion

- Describe, if you are able, when or how you felt you lost your innocence. Did your relationship with God change?
- In the beginning “R” sought what he felt he had lost by being near innocence but grew to hate the child for having what he did not. Discuss in terms of how you see friends in your life. Do they have qualities you feel you lack?

“E”

“E” shared *“Having lived in hell all of my life, it’s difficult to imagine any sort of paradise at all. Both parents were alcoholics. My father severely abused me physically, mentally, and emotionally from my infancy until my mother separated from him when I was seven. She entered into a sexual relationship with me when I was eight years of age. This ‘relationship’ was progressive and went on for fourteen years until her death from alcohol-related liver disease.”*

Discussion

- In what ways would you say “B”, “R” and “E” were similar?
- Describe some of the ways in which they each felt a disconnect with God? A lack of protection?

The three examples I have shared with you all have one thing in common—lost childhood. Not one of these individuals expects to be forgiven for their own acts of molestation simply because they themselves were abused, yet all three have learned to recognize the extent of the harm done to them was significant in their own abusive patterns.

Non-Violent Separation

It would be incorrect and grossly misleading to state that all those who are attracted to children were products of abuse and extreme neglect. I have met parents of men with sex-related offenses currently in prison—parents who have stood by their sons when everyone else turned a deaf ear to any kind of request for support. In general, many of these parents carry a burden of guilt that may or may not be valid. No parent, however, is a flawless parent; all parents make mistakes; and all mistakes have consequences.

One comment I occasionally hear when I speak of parental mistakes is “Yes, all parents make mistakes but not all kids grow up to be child molesters.” In other words, the background of one who has molested is in some ways unimportant to those who rigidly condemn them. Should I offer any kind of defense such as speaking of an offender’s own childhood abuse, they respond “Then why didn’t they get help?”

Every child is rejected or feels rejected at some point or another while growing up - whether at home, on the playground, or in the classroom. One has only to watch children at play to see that children themselves are capable of harming other children and of rejecting and ostracizing others if for no other reason than as a sign of dislike. The child who is an object of scorn is pushed to the outside of childhood society along with others who have been rejected. Years later, memories evoke pain and perhaps anger or even rage.

“M”

“M” faced physical challenges as a young boy and underwent surgery on a number of occasions to correct an assortment of problems. He bore his physical limitations and survived all those surgeries but survival came at a cost. He wasn’t like the boys around him. He couldn’t do all the things they could do.

He began smoking at a young age and progressed to drugs. Before long, “M” was having difficulties at school, eventually being expelled for a time. “M” wrote that he was sexually intimate with both boys and girls but that his main sexual interest was for boys. As in the case of so many others, “M” grew older while his sexual attractions and occasions of intimacy fixed themselves on young boys. Arrest and prison were only a matter of time.

In my own case, inappropriate sexual activity initiated by older boys started occurring when I was seven years old and continued into my teen years where I more willingly participated in or initiated the activity.

My freshman year of high school was spent at a seminary and was, in many respects, one of the happiest years of my youth. With one week remaining to the school year, however, I was expelled for masturbating with other students, seen as the initiator of the activity, and asked to leave. My father cried—a memory that stays with me even to this day.

As an adult, my victims were generally 14-16 years old—a focus that therapists have told me is directly related to the events I have just described though I would not fit everything I did as a result of that time frame. My parents did not abuse me or fail to meet my needs, but because of that expulsion from school, I saw my behavior and the shame I brought them as a silent but to me, at least, an ever present wedge between us.

I was sixteen when my father died. In some ways, my disgrace was like a stain I could not clean away, and his death closed the door to the kind of communication I so much needed from him.

Discussion

- It would be very easy to point a finger of blame at parents or school bullies as being responsible for crimes we commit. After all, we reason, “if it hadn’t been for <insert name>, I wouldn’t be in prison right now.” Discuss.
- The difficulties “M” faced as a child were not of his doing, yet in the eyes of some school mates he not only didn’t fit in, he had no right to fit in with ‘normal’ kids. Discuss
- ⁶ *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matthew 18.6)* Offenders frequently see themselves as having a millstone around their neck, yet those who abused them fall into the same category. Discuss why this verse is not a forever condemning. Discuss the hope that lies beyond this verse.

Relating in the Adult World

There are variations in the kind of separations I have already described, but most of the differences can be attributed to circumstances peculiar to an individual child. Other separations become evident when the child seeks to take his or her place in the world of adults. As long as life is bright and tensions are at a minimum, being an adult is not bad.

“W”

“W” came from a fairly dysfunctional home, had made some mistakes as a teen but believed that being married would finally give him the respectability as a person that he wanted so badly.

The first years of his marriage went well. He and his wife became the parents of a little girl whose needs were insistent and beyond what either parent thought they could meet. Arguments were a daily event and “W” started drinking to escape. His wife had wanted a knight in shining armor, a man who would work hard so that she could have a little home in the country. His drinking disgusted her; his advances in the bedroom were increasingly unwanted.

One night when their daughter was about five years old, his wife went out for the evening and told him to take care of the child until she returned. A few beers wouldn’t hurt, he told himself, and he settled back to watch TV—his daughter on his lap. That was the night when it all started. That was the night that would continue for more than a year until the girl told her mother.

Free of the continual effects of alcohol, “W” finally recognized the damage he had done to his daughter and his wife. He saw his inappropriate behavior with his daughter as getting back at his wife for rejecting his sexual advances. And in his sober state, he agonized.

Discussion

- The reason we do something can never excuse the fact that we did it. To what extent should the ‘reason’ be considered valid? Invalid? How can “W” use the ‘reason’ as a tool for change?

“I didn’t do anything!”

When I was a boy, a teacher took me aside, pointing out something others said I had done wrong. When I protested that I had not done what he suggested, he responded, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” It has been many years since that day, but the comment remains a powerful statement about the attitudes people have based on little more than the visual observations of others.

Sometimes when I am speaking to a group about child molestation, I make the statement that there are men who write to me for help who have never acted on their sexual feelings toward children. Only a few in the audience have no reaction. The remaining will raise an eyebrow, shift in their chairs, look at one another, or give me that look which clearly states, “That’s just not possible.” But I would stand by my statement because I believe in those strugglers.

“C”

“C” first spoke to me several years ago at a conference we were both attending. As I sat next to him on the front stoop of a building waiting for him to begin, it looked to me as though he were summoning up the necessary courage. When he finally did so, his story came out in a rush of words.

While in his late teens, he was asked to help with the youth of his church and to teach a Bible study to the younger children. The little ones, he said, were trusting and loving, throwing their arms around his neck or wanting to sit on his lap. To his great distress, he often found himself physically aroused during these times. He told the minister what was happening and agreed to separate himself from his involvement with the children.

“C” had not done anything but that was only part of the problem, a small part. Of major concern to him was the fact that he even had the unwanted feelings at all. His greatest fear, however, was that he might abuse a child. It has been years since I have heard from “C” but when I think of him, my prayer is that God grant him sufficient grace to withstand any unwanted temptation.

“D”

I’ve known another man, “D,” on and off for several years now. We aren’t in close contact anymore but do manage to touch base now and then. My first question of him is usually, “How are you doing?” and we both understand that question to mean, “Have you crossed the boundaries you have set for yourself?” His answer is a firm “No,” but there follows a brief description of the good times and the not so good times in his life. Like “C,” this gentle man cringes at the mere thought that he could abuse a child.

“D” sees a therapist he trusts on a regular basis and feels he is making progress. A major breakthrough occurred as the result of a relationship he established with a senior member of his church. The elder man (described as a “grandfather type,” full of wisdom and nonjudgmental of others) paid “D” a compliment in one of their conversations. The effect was unlike anything “D” had known before. The elder man had affirmed his place as a man in their relationship, chipping away at “D”’s inability to accept himself as a man.

Discussion

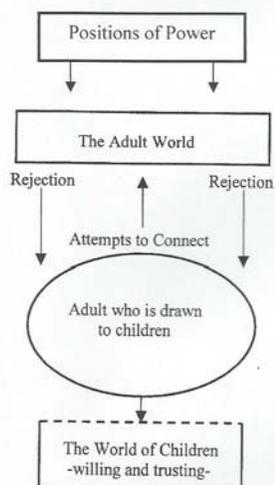
- At the core of each of these (me, “C” and “D”) lies a secret that is not easily shared with anyone else. Yet once that barrier is torn down, opportunities for growth and change become evident or at least possible. Discuss how things might have been better had someone listened to your story.
- “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5.16) Notice that the key element in the verse is not that others are to fix you but to pray for you. Discuss how this might bring about change.

Is There A Pattern?

Whatever the root cause of pedophilia or ephhebophilia, I do see a pattern that exists in those of us who deal with an attraction to children (see diagram below). The more I look at this pattern the more convinced I am that in its design lies the answer for significant healing and change.

An adult who is attracted to children is not born with an aversion to adults but over time comes to feel rejected in their world. This might be due to the kinds of abuse and separation mentioned earlier. It is also possible that efforts made to become an integral part of the adult world are met with rejection—real or perceived. This rejection is nothing new; its roots can be firmly anchored in an individual's childhood.

The box surrounding the adult world is an imposing structure to such a person (all solid lines or barriers); there won't be that many efforts to break through. The world of children has its boundaries as well, but because of an adult's position in that world, it is possible to enter without too much difficulty (the dotted ceiling line). Children trust adults for protection and recognize that having their needs met often means surrendering to the authority of an adult.



It doesn't take long for the adult to realize that his or her needs are met in the world of children far easier than they ever would be in the world of adults. The trust betrayed by such adults, however, is a trust that will be difficult to restore.

I added another box, "Positions of Power" a year or so ago because based on my story and the stories of many who write, an individual who doesn't feel comfortable with the Adult World can still be a part of it. They find their way into positions of power or authority, however, as a defensive tool. It would take special circumstances for those subject to that power to challenge it.

In this manner, the adult drawn to children continues to live that secret life from within the walls of power or authority. This diagram is not meant to identify every person dealing with age-inappropriate attraction, but it does offer food for thought. Additionally, the diagram could also be used in terms of peer relationships though Positions of Power are less likely in that setting.

Discussion

- Rejection can be life-altering. Some forms of rejection are direct and brutal while other forms can be felt without a word being spoken. Either way, rejection tends to define how we identify ourselves, a condition we all share. Discuss
- Viewing the world as you see it, discuss how you would define your position as being inside the boundaries of the Adult World, at the edges, or distantly removed?
- Discuss the same point but in terms of your peer relationships while growing up.
- A person in authority can be likened to a butterfly wrapped within the protective walls of its cocoon. Discuss
- “O God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?” (Psalm 74.1) Many who struggle with age-inappropriate attraction easily feel rejection in the world in which they live and most connect the world's rejection with God's rejection. Discuss

Facing the Past

Of all the barriers to the healing of an adult attracted to children, none is more difficult to deal with than facing the past whether as a victim or as an abuser. An offender failing to do so is said to be in denial, refusing to accept responsibility for the damage done to his or her victim. For those in prison treatment programs, the law requires that an offender be made to acknowledge the child abused, seek ways to avoid a relapse, and recognize signs of potential risk in every day living. There is not, unfortunately, uniform treatment that acknowledges the abuse an offender may have suffered as a child. Indeed, any recognition within treatment by an offender of that abuse is often labeled denial.

As shared earlier, Scripture says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other *so that you may be healed.*” (James 5.16 *Italics mine*) The moment one person confesses wrongdoing to another, the bond of secrecy is broken and the weight of shame is lifted. I am not suggesting that such a confession is ever an easy thing to do, because it is not. I am suggesting, however, that this kind of confession in a prison setting should be done with care. A confession to a cell mate might feel very liberating but it can also be a weapon used against you.

Few behaviors or conditions are held so much in personal darkness and secrecy as that of being sexually attracted to children. Reasons for maintaining this secret may include:

Fear of rejection and alienation by family, friends, and society in general

Those who share their struggle with a family member with the hope of getting help fear they will be looked upon with suspicion and treated as though incapable of maintaining appropriate boundaries. Without professional guidance, however, not many families would be able to work through their own issues about this topic sufficiently to provide the help being sought.

Prison/jail

While I am in full agreement with the rights of society and a just sentence of confinement for those who molest, people who *have not* acted on their feelings fear sharing their struggles with *anyone* because of the potential for unjustified accusations. Those who *have* acted out have only to read the paper or listen to the news to learn what is probably in store for them. Help comes in a distant second when faced with those realities.

The fear of coming face to face with one's own abused childhood

Adults who have been abused as children are never completely free of the effects of that abuse, and facing the abuse can be extremely painful. A trust they had in someone in their own past had been destroyed; their bodies had been violated; and their right to a healthy sense of sexuality was placed in jeopardy. When they themselves struggle with inappropriate thoughts toward children, the child within is never far from the center of those thoughts, although they might not be aware that this is so.

The belief that a pedophile/ephebophile “can’t change”

To one who fights an inappropriate attraction to children, the attraction to them is not like waking up with the flu. A trip to the doctor and some medication from the pharmacy might bring back health, but no universal drug is advertised for this condition. The attractions they feel are frightening in their ramifications—disclosure is seen as adding to the problem instead of solving it. Because the media and the medical world alike pronounce, “Nothing can be done,” the struggler asks, “Why aggravate things by being publicly known as ‘one of those disgusting people.’”

The misguided belief that such attractions are normal

I really wanted to omit this as a reason but could not do so. The North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), for example, publicly states that adult-child sexual relationships are “healthy.” Their goal is to “end the oppression of men and boys who have mutually consensual relationships.” I would like to believe that such individuals do not exist, but they do, although they generally do not announce their beliefs to others.

Discussion

- Discuss the five reasons for maintaining secrecy just listed.
- Select one that best represents your situation or add what you feel does so but is not listed above. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer. It is how *you* see things.

A Personal Example

The very first time I molested a boy, I could not believe what I had done. Nor could I erase the sick feeling I had in my stomach. At the time the abuse happened, I could not tell my wife-to-be even though I very much wanted to do so. Her image of me was the one I created for her and others to see; what I had done was the other part of me, "my secret." The two sides fought for control but both were actually places of darkness, and the only light I "saw" was found in the panic I felt. It was a light, however, but could just as well have been described as an inner voice. It called me to reject what was I was doing.

I did confess the sin but the confession bore the stamp of secrecy. With time, the fear and panic I had that day gave way to an almost casual "that won't happen again" attitude. There was, however, a basic goodness to the things I sought in my life. I wanted to be a man who was a dedicated teacher, a faithful churchgoer, and a loving husband/father. At times I know I succeeded in these areas but more often than not I did good things in order to receive recognition and acceptance. In other words, too often what I said and did was for public show and personal gain.

Unable to relate to other men, driven by an addiction to pornography, and manipulating others to meet what I believed were my legitimate needs, my life went into a downward spiral. The light was still there, showing me what I was doing with painful clarity. Instead of looking, I shielded my eyes and wiped away tears.

The very last thing I wanted to do was to admit to anyone the depths of my depravity. When I was arrested in 1985, the two images of me collided in the press, in my church, and most painfully in my family. The secret was no longer a secret, yet the road to healing had begun even though it did not feel very healing at first. Since I had not been able to openly confess my sins on my own, others made that initial confession for me.

Painful as it might be, frightening as the consequences might be, disclosure is the door through which all who have an inappropriate attraction to children must pass. The secret is the bond which must be broken, and facing the past is the mirror God will use to bring truth and healing.

My attorney suggested a therapist - a man who was a respected member of the medical community and who also had some court experience. I had, however, seen a different therapist a few years earlier, but he was a pleasant and encouraging person too willing to let me hang on to attitudes I knew had to be dropped. When it became clear to me that things would not really change, my sessions with that man lost much of their meaning and were discontinued some months later.

Discussion

- The example of what happened in my life includes many of the elements discussed in the previous section "Facing the Past." My mail also tells me that there are similarities in my story that they shared as well. Discuss from both points of view – "Facing the Past" and your experiences.
- *"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."* (Luke 15.20) Consider "A Personal Example" in light of the story of the prodigal son. Perhaps we didn't demand half of our inheritance from our father but we did turn our backs. Discuss

What to do – some suggestions

Based on my own experiences and those of others who have written, I would offer the following suggestions *to those who have not acted out* but are seeking help for the first time:

- Ask people you trust (pastors, medical doctors, etc.) who *they* would recommend. You don't have to say any more than you have been experiencing some serious stress in your life and would like to get help from a psychologist or psychiatrist. A professional would never treat such a request lightly and most will attempt to give you a name they have relied upon in the past.
- Most therapists offer a "breaking ground" consultation session—a time for you to ask questions and for the therapist to learn what it is you need. I recommend that a statement of your goals be presented followed by a simple question.

For example, you might share "*I have struggled for some time with an inappropriate attraction to children and want freedom from that. I believe that with God all things are possible yet I know that the roots of this condition might be deep. I have not acted upon these feelings. Can you help me achieve my goal?*" If the answer points to a 'no change' attitude, listen to what is said but look for another therapist. My own therapist often admitted that he did not agree with everything I believe, but he stood by me and assisted in doing what he could to help me achieve those goals.

- Senior citizens have seen a lot of life and know the reality of struggle and how to get through it. Consider establishing a relationship with someone you respect; spend time with that person without pushing your struggle to the surface too quickly. Given time together, you might feel led by the Lord to probe for a reaction to this sensitive subject. You might remember "D" in an earlier section of this booklet and the hope he has been experiencing through such a relationship.

Note: Many reading this booklet might wonder why I included the above section when they themselves have already stepped over the line. I believe, however, that there are people who do fit the 'never acted out' description. I also believe that those of us who have might one day meet someone who hasn't – and we will be able to point them in a healing direction.

Anything You Say Can and Will Be. . .

"F"

To my knowledge, there are no states where knowledge of child molestation can be withheld without legal consequences. "F" wrote, "If I had known that my pastor would call the police on me, I never would have told him a thing." In my answering letter, I tried to get "F" to understand the law in such matters, and I tried to get him to focus on the cycle of abuse that had to be stopped.

Getting help comes in a distant second when faced with the reality of an arrest and possible time in confinement for those who have acted out. Being reported for any admission of sexual contact with a child might even have felt like a betrayal of trust. One most unfortunate reality of disclosure is that there is no guarantee of long term support from anyone (therapist, family, friends, or church members) should an arrest occur. Yet when no one seems to be there, God is. "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" (Isaiah 41.10)

Discussion

- Given how society feels about anyone caught molesting a child, fear of arrest, of prison, and of an uncertain future are valid fears, discuss "the cycle of abuse" in light of those fears.
- Discuss how "F" felt after being reported by his pastor and, if possible, compare those feelings with those of any victim.
- "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28.20) God will never turn His back on you. Though your situation and the consequences of your actions might be severe, He *will* always be with you. Discuss

“It’s Too Much”

I received a call late one evening. The man identified himself and began telling me about his younger brother’s recent arrest for child molesting. He also spoke about the deep despair felt by everyone in the family. We talked for about an hour—mostly about what his brother was feeling, about the lack of any apparent clues that this was an issue for his brother, and about my own background. The conversation ended in prayer and the hope that his brother would call the next day. He didn’t.

A few days later the man called again to tell me that his brother had committed suicide. I wanted words to flow that might make sense to him but they were not there. I felt like a hypocrite to my calling in this ministry because no prayer followed. We both merely said we would pray for one another and then hung up.

Anger. Confusion. Deep sadness. These emotions and others intermingled as I thought of the young man who didn’t believe he could survive what he believed would become of his life. Others have made the same unalterable choice and thousands more, me included, contemplated suicide in the wake of having our most secret shame exposed.

Even after deciding that suicide was not an option, the journey ahead seemed almost too much. For example, every time I contemplated the need to paint my house when chipping and fading had occurred, the job almost overwhelmed me. So much work. So much precious free time that could be put to better use relaxing or doing what I wanted to do.

There was the ladder to deal with and the hours I would be pressing my body tightly against rungs, a white-knuckled grip with one hand while the other first dipped into the pail and then spread as much paint as I could before repeating the process. But as much as I wanted an easier job, it was one board at a time, one side at a time, until the job was done.

There is not one person I know of who struggles against an inappropriate attraction to children who does not wish that the issue would just go away. Some see treatment and steps to change, however, as a reason to shove everything and everyone aside because they would get in the way of their goal. Normal life and connections would not matter until they feel that their goal has been reached. Interestingly, some even avoided church attendance because they felt a need to be ‘fixed’ first.

Life is not like that. Life goes on. If I have learned anything in my own walk it is that God creates pockets of healing time when I am best able to participate. Some times as I write a letter to an inmate the Lord opens my eyes to something in my own life I had not understood before. On occasion the image of one of my victims comes before me and I want to run from it. There is too much pain evident in the eyes of that victim, too much of a need for me to acknowledge that I was the cause of that pain. In those moments, God gives me the courage to confess my guilt and then reminds me that while He has forgiven me, my victim bears the consequences of my actions. I cannot change that, but I can pray for that victim.

Discussion

- *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future* (Jeremiah 29:11). Suicide might be thought of as a way to save those we love from the disgrace of an offender’s actions or as a means of putting a final period to one’s life that ended in shame. But the verse from Jeremiah speaks beyond either of those reasons. Discuss.
- I mentioned experiencing the emotions of anger, confusion, and sadness yet I have never met the man who took his life. Though thoughts of suicide passed through my mind, it was not an option. Discuss how you understand the emotions listed and how they might apply to anyone who chooses life.
- Share how you see God’s timing in your life as you work through the process of change.
- My wife once told me during a visit “This is your time to deal with the issues you have. Make the most of it because when you come home, you won’t have it like you do now.” Some share with me that they will start working on issues once they get out. How is this realistic or unrealistic?

What Now?

One of the most frustrating aspects of this kind of struggle is the almost complete sense of isolation surrounding the one with the struggle. Every now and then someone reminds me that in the early years Bill W and AA faced the derision of sober people. His dream for sobriety needed to become reality, and against overwhelming odds the dream prevailed. There is an AA meeting in every major city, and every minute of every day somewhere around the world there is an alcoholic struggler seeking help connecting with a sponsor.

For one who struggles with an inappropriate attraction to children, a fall is more than just a “slip” that can be set aside with an “I really didn’t mean to do that. Let’s just forget it happened” kind of response. At the same time, treatment is often based on the idea that a fall is inevitable and that behavior maintenance, not change, is the goal.

My belief system also sees change coming from traditional treatment: establishing proper boundaries, defining and implementing a relapse prevention plan, and establishing accountability. All of these require brutal self-honesty. At the same time, faith gives me the belief that my identity is *not* that of a child molester but as a man *capable* of child molesting. The current worldview, in my opinion, defines me as the same man arrested in 1985 with no hope of ever having a separate identity.

Given that disheartening label, those of us who struggle with inappropriate attraction to children (whether we have acted on the attraction or not) must cling to the truth of God’s transforming love, the forgiveness of our sins made possible by Jesus’ death on the cross, and reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; *I have called you by name; you are mine.*” (Isaiah 43.1)

In the moments when frustration and despair seek to invade my heart, God reminds me of His love. He also reminds me that the change I believe in will not happen without active participation on my part. Scripture confirms this. Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” (John 8.31-32)

Discussion

- For some, faith is God demands a rejection of secular treatment programs. Treatment facilitators, however, often reject any statement of faith as denial. Discuss if faith can and/or should coexist with secular treatment.
- The label ‘sex offender’ defines something those of us who molested have done, not who we are. Discuss in light of Isaiah 43.1 and John 8.31-32.
- Ideally, faith communities should reach out to any member of their church body in need of support and encouragement, but this is unlikely to happen in most congregations for someone with sex-related offenses. Discuss options for reentry support and accountability.

Personal Perspectives

I am a firm believer in the unique ways in which the Lord brings healing to His children. None of us is exactly like anyone else, so it should not really be a surprise when I see something work for someone else but which does not work for me. At the same time, sharing gives birth to hope, and hope is a direct result of faith. So here are some things that continue to be important in my own healing journey.

- ***Believe the best for yourself***
By God’s grace, I wake each morning with a positive self-image. This is not the same as saying, “I’m fixed, let’s get on with life.” Nor have I stopped the process of surrender that finally began the day of my arrest. It is, however, looking in the mirror and seeing the reflection of God’s love. I can choose to believe in the world, or I can choose to believe in God. Believing in God’s design is to believe in the finished product without knowing exactly how that design will come to be. Nor is one who believes in God in denial. God will never allow me to run from the consequences of my sins; God will help me face them.

Discussion

- Your belief system is the most important weapon against your past world because it is a focus on relationship with God. Discuss
- ***Temptation is not sin, it’s temptation***

The goal of any treatment is not the absence of temptation but the ability to handle temptation. Many years ago, I chose to act on fantasies rather than to reject or deal with them. Someone wrote, “When you commit any sin for the first time, you make that sin an option for the rest of your life,” and that is what I have been dealing with ever since—learning to make appropriate choices.

Having overconfidence in self, however, can be very dangerous. In my life that might occur if I were to tell myself I could indulge in fantasy or be in places where fantasy could be fueled. “L” for example, wrote that he wasn’t really acting out when he gave in to fantasies because he wasn’t actually touching the child. My response to that comment was to tell him that he was only an opportunity away from doing so.

Temptation forces me to make a choice between what I *think* is good for me (usually a decision that takes only my needs at a particular moment into account) and what I *know* is good for me (a decision made only after I look at the consequences of the choice I am about to make and match them with God’s word). I am realistic enough to know, however, that unless I train myself on a daily basis, I will not be prepared to handle the temptation when it comes. Daily training includes but is not limited to:

- Time spent learning about God through His Word
- An active prayer life
- Journaling my thoughts in some fashion (a prayer journal, letters, etc.)
- Listening to others when they offer advice
- Asking questions of others as they occur
- Being transparent before God and man

Discussion

How would you respond to “L” about fantasy being victimless activity?

We are all spiritual ‘superstars’ during times of little or no temptation. How can such a self-image make times of temptation more difficult?

Consider the ‘daily training’ list above and discuss which might be easier to achieve than others. Add any daily exercises not listed that might be helpful.

- ***Acknowledging that I am “in process”***

Sometimes I get letters from men in prison announcing that they have been set free—no more temptation and no more inappropriate desire for children. They express great joy and I celebrate with them the elation that they experience. Months later there is a second letter filled with remorse and even self-loathing because the individual gave in to inappropriate fantasy or masturbated to the memory of an occasion of abuse. I share the sadness they feel but encourage them to ask forgiveness of the Lord.

What I am sharing here is not meant to emphasize the futility of achieving the goal of change as much as it is to show that freedom is not won by merely telling others of victory. Freedom is won in the daily decisions I make to reject any inappropriate fantasies and to believe that each decision I make strengthens my resolve for the future. Freedom is accepting the fact that I am a work in process rather than a finished product. Shout for joy, rather, because you are still in the battle! One who has given up the battle is destined for a life of confinement, personal or institutional, as well as sentencing a victim to the same fate.

Discuss

- Freedom from age-inappropriate attraction is much more possible in prison than out in the world, so sometimes the absence of our personal triggers to temptation can make it feel as though we have completely overcome them. Discuss ways to encourage others (or self) when any kind of fall occurs. Why is our sin not a deal breaker for God?
- *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” Luke 4.18* Discuss this verse in light of the comments in this section.

And All God's People Said, "Amen!"

There is nothing simple about this issue, no quick fixes for the struggler, and certainly nothing easy for those who support them in their struggle. It is about believing in the power of God to bring new life where death is often preferred. And in my experience so far, it is most definitely about seeing beyond limitations—our own and those of others—and moving into the light one step at a time.

One of my favorite psalms states, *"I have waited, I have waited for the Lord, and He stooped toward me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on solid ground and gave my heart a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."* (Psalm 40.1-3) That is what the Lord is doing for me and for all those who seek Him. There is no joy in having such a struggle, no comfort in feeling so alone in this world. But I am never truly alone, am I. And *there* is the joy.

I'd like to close by including an article I wrote for *Into the Light* (November, 2004) that is worth considering. I hope that you will be blessed by it.

The Bulletin Board

¹⁴ *And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right—¹⁵ if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live."* (Ezekiel 33.14-16)

Crescentville is a town small enough for folks to know one another yet large enough that it supports a few successful businesses. There is a small main street with the usual assortment of stores, a pleasant park near the center of the town, and a church that faces the park in that town square.

There is a large bulletin board on the front lawn of the church. The board does not appear to be of human design and, much to the occasional dismay of those who attend the church, the information posted appears fresh each Monday morning. This is no ordinary board containing simple announcements of church activities. It is a board that lists various sins by category. Member anxiety stems from the fact that nearly everyone at some point or another has seen his or her name on that board under some specific sin category.

There is only one way that people can have their names removed from the board. They must find someone in the church willing to support and pray for them. Obviously, this means that a named individual basically confesses to another person that the board tells the truth and that he or she needs help to break the bonds of that particular sin.

Out of shame, some try to ignore the board, but only a handful have lasted more than a few weeks in that kind of denial. Sooner or later, friends in the church approach them and ask why they are unwilling to receive help. The few too stubborn to resist this final confrontation quietly leave the church.

This is a story. If Crescentville exists, I doubt it has a church bulletin board of the kind described above, yet I rather wish that such a board *did* exist. In this ideal place, people in the church have learned how to admit that they sin, their friends all sin, and if they want help walking away from a particular sin, there is always someone willing to help them.

I want to return to the story for a bit, however, and ask you to allow me a little leeway in its continuation. I want to place a sex offender (Mike) in this small town—a man who spent time in prison for his crimes and is now trying to start over. Mike used his time in prison trying to understand why he did the things he did. A mandated sex offender treatment program helped provide understanding in some areas; the many chapel activities he attended took care of the rest. Mike's wife had divorced him and took the family across country. His room above the garage of an old house at the edge of town was all he could find but it served his purposes. Most important to Mike had been to find a church family, so when a friend told him about Crescentville's small and unusual church, that was where he headed.

It was somewhat of a surprise for Mike to see the bulletin board on the front lawn of the church. It was even more of a surprise to see his name listed, the only name in a column labeled 'Child molestation.'

Entering the church, he saw heads turn his way and then just as quickly turn back, huddled conversations taking place on either side of the main aisle. Feeling color come to his cheeks, he slid into an available spot at the end of a pew.

Just before the end of the service, a small group of individuals whose names were on the board stood and asked for prayer partners. Mike stood among them, head bowed, his weight shifting from foot to foot. One by one, others left their pews, approached a standing individual, and went into prayer with that person. Before long, Mike was alone, wondering why he ever thought this church would be able to help him. He thought of sitting down. He thought of leaving. Before he could do either, he became aware of someone standing next to him.

She was at least 80 years old, a face filled with wrinkles formed in both good and bad times. She looked up at him and said, "My name is Alice. When I was a little girl, a neighbor molested me. I wanted him to rot in hell. I wanted to kill him. He took my happiness and I wanted to hate him for as long as I lived.

"When he was arrested, I learned that I was not his only victim. In the investigation that followed, I also learned he had killed a little girl in another state who threatened to tell on him. The judge sentenced him to life without parole. Her parents wanted him executed." She paused for a moment before softly adding, "And so did I."

"I'm an old woman now and I have decided the time for my sadness cannot end unless I will it to end. When I saw your name and your sin on the bulletin board today, I knew God was telling me to stop hating. And here you are. And here I am standing next to you. Who would have thought that such a thing would even be possible?"

In that moment, Mike felt his knees go weak; a wave of some deep emotion passing through him as she gently invited him to sit beside her. "Why don't we start with a prayer?"

Offenders in prison will read this story and call it a dream, a fantasy that will never happen. Readers not in prison might agree with the idea of reconciliation for sex offenders but would disagree with the idea of a victim serving an offender in the manner Alice did. What victims are encouraged to have is a healthy hate for those who molested them. Given the trauma victims endure, such a hate would be understandable but it will, I think, do little for them in terms of healing.

The opening verses from Ezekiel are a ray of hope for those of us who have molested. He wrote, *And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right- if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die.*

In my story, Mike is just such a man. He turned from his sin and did all that was expected of him and more. His prison sentence behind him, he went out of his way to seek reconciliation and restoration; he stood with the others who were willing to stand, admitting by his action the truth posted on the bulletin board. He could have sought a church in another town, a church without such a bulletin board. But he didn't.

Alice didn't have to say yes to God's prompting. The hate she bore her offender and all offenders could have been preserved and others would not have thought any the less of her for that. Yet when no others showed a willingness to approach Mike for prayer, she knew that she must.

Ezekiel wrote, *None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him* and this is hard to understand. Surely every time Alice looks at Mike, she will be reminded of the abuse that happened to her. She will be reminded that her offender molested others as well. And she certainly might wonder if Mike will molest again.

So I don't think it comes down to the idea of remembering versus forgetting as we generally understand those words. I can easily remember, for example, the first time I was molested and that was fifty-two years ago. What I believe remembering means is that the memory itself of what someone has done should not be used to hold that person in the same condition or in that same point of time in history.

Remembering should not be used to deny any sinner the forgiveness won by Christ's death on the cross. Remembering also means encouraging God's healing in the lives of others (and ourselves as well) so as to move beyond those past actions and into choices that bring God honor and glory.

The story as I have shared it is far from over. This was meant to be but one moment of sharing that will either continue in its healing potential or die based on fear of what might happen. If the relationship continues, the journey Alice and Mike make will not always be easy but when centered on God it will always be blessed.

The story also echoes a deep desire I have for the church, because the church is sorely tempted to look like the secular world. And when it looks like the secular world, the church is lessened and will eventually cease to draw a flock in search of a shepherd. We all, sinners and saints alike, are children of God, and few of us have no need of restoration. We all need to pray, "Lord, forgive me for my sins. Have mercy on me!" And God will and He does.

Contact Information:

**Bob Van Domelen
Broken Yoke Ministries
PO Box 5824
De Pere, WI 54115-5824**

**www.brokenyoke.org
Bob@brokenyoke.org**

Other Booklets by Bob Van Domelen

**The Church, the Sex Offender, and Reconciliation
Prison and Homosexuality
Darkness Now Light**

Into the Light, a bi-monthly newsletter for those with sex-related offenses is available free of charge. I will only add a name to the mailing list after receiving a *personal* request to be on the list. The subject matter can be and sometimes is a problem in correctional institutions, so those who receive the newsletter do so with that understanding.