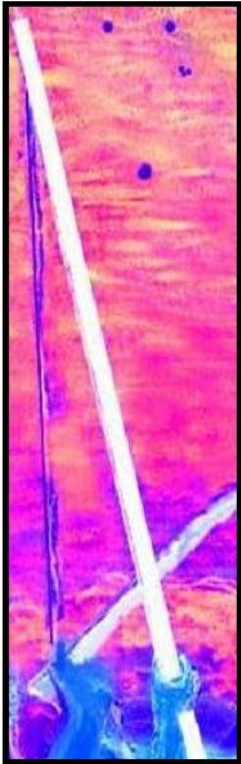


Relational Orientation Counseling



For years, homosexuals were told to just ‘change.’ They were told to just ‘come to Jesus’ and He would ‘take away’ any remaining same-sex attraction. While this is true for some, it is not true for the majority of homosexuals who personally know, love and experience the power of Christ. For most GLBT persons, letting go of their sexuality will look more like ‘surrender’ than ‘deliverance.’

For me personally, what I have been delivered from – fully – is any notion that my identity equates to sexual, romantic or emotional attractions and needs. These are important parts of my spirit, psyche and flesh – but they do not equate to my personal identity. I used to believe they totally defined ‘who’ I was. Because of what Christ has done for me, I no longer believe that. I have been delivered from a ‘gay’ identity. My identity solely rests in Christ, the One who saves and loves me.

But that’s my story – and something that I only realized “after” I surrendered my sexuality to Jesus. It was not always so. I mean, don’t you remember how strong your romantic and sexual urges were when you were a teen or young adult? I do! We should all be able to understand how a teenager or young adult would think that their attractions and romantic needs ‘define’ who they are. That phase of life is a time in which hormones and emotions rage to the forefront of our personal being. So while I was delivered from gay identity at age 29, I fully understand how the 14 or 19 or 24 year old would think their identity is based on their sexual orientation. That is totally understandable.

God’s Spirit, and not a demand to change, ultimately brought me into this more holistic awareness of my true identity in Christ. Yet even after all these years, I still have not received a final, total deliverance or release from same-sex attraction or SSA. I meet hundreds of men who have surrendered homosexuality – few report full deliverance from SSA. That said, many can go days or weeks or months or longer without these attractions being a dominant force in their lives. That is my personal experience. Yet because I cannot claim a ‘full healing’ in the way that those in the gay community define it (absolutely no remaining SSA ever, ever again), I feel it is important to honestly admit that I am un-healed. Yet I am healed enough to have peace from the old and dangerous forms of repression that I knew as a teen and young adult before I came out.

The point is this: your child, your teen, or your adult child – if they ever surrender their homosexuality to God, it is more likely to look like ‘surrender’ rather than ‘deliverance.’ This implies that they will need a network of very trustworthy, unconditionally loving support from those who love them most. Why? It’s simple - because this may be the ‘thorn in the flesh’ that they have to deal with for the rest of their lives. They will need us to be there for them.

Imagine what kind of friendship, what kind of pastoral care, and what kind of parental connection is needed for such a person. I see patience, kindness, understanding, mercy, longsuffering, forgiveness, encouragement, physical affection and unconditional love.

Now compare that to the kind of response that we as evangelicals have often given to homosexual friends and loved ones. Thinking they just needed to ‘repent’ and Jesus would take this all away, it was quite easy to encounter them with all kinds of easy-isms:

“Just repent.” “Just change.” (and far worse examples)

My friends, there are no easy-isms when it comes to the complexity of homosexuality. Even my closest GLBT friends who believe in the potential glory of same-sex love rooted in a shared love for Christ will freely admit that most forms of expressed homosexuality are unhealthy and sinful. The roots that drive SSA run very, very deep. These roots are not easily solved or even contained within a healthy framework – yet we have treated homosexuals as if all they need is ‘change.’

It’s not surprising that at Christian concert festivals, I get teens and young adults and some parents who come up to me and say, “You just want people to change!” It’s also not surprising that many parents who contact FOTOS want me to help ‘change’ their child’s sexual orientation. I have no power to do any such thing...

The focus is always on the homosexual. The focus is always on ‘changing’ them. There is no peace. There is no patience. There is no longsuffering. There is no tolerance. There is no mercy. There is no relationship. There are only desperate cries to stop homosexuals from acting out.

My friends, it is impossible to give the kind of friendship, pastoral care and parental connection that is needed when ‘changing’ the homosexual son or daughter is the #1 priority. All of that anxiety is based in fear – instead of bathed in love.

So when parents come to me and want help, I always respond: “I cannot change your child’s sexual orientation. But I can help your family heal in its ‘relational orientation.’ ” Think of it this way: without getting into a culture war argument over the causes of homosexuality, it is clear that the majority of gay men and lesbian women have significant events in their family histories that have caused relational disconnection and damage.

Tell a young adult who has a history of wounding that all they need to do is change: there is no healing that will come from such a demand. Remember: homosexual urges are much more likely to be surrendered rather than delivered. For this reason, an entirely different counseling approach is needed.

That is why our Relational Orientation Counseling focuses on repairing, rebuilding and renewing the relationship between parents and their gay teen or adult children. This counseling is NOT done separately: this kind of counseling is done together; fathers with sons; mothers with daughters. Of course it can work with mothers and sons or fathers and daughters.

The goal is not to prevent, heal or change homosexual desires. The goal is to ‘change’ the parent-child (or adult child) relationship to allow a ‘relational healing’ to take place so that families can become healthy. Healed ‘relational orientation’ in families is the platform upon which safety, unconditional love, understanding, and mercy can invite homosexual children to surrender their sexuality to Christ – “knowing” with confidence that they will have our love and support to comfort them along such a difficult path. It will be needed.

Allow me to brag about my Dad for a moment. Many Dads would ‘write off’ the past life of their sons if they ever surrendered their sexuality to God. “Good, that phase is over. On forward!” My Dad is not that way: he still calls me up to ask, “Son, how’s the struggle?” Can you imagine how nourishing it is for me to have a father who understands the broken parts of being humanity? His willingness to engage me on this basis – even after I am married with kids – is powerful.

To those in the gay community, I simply want to say one thing: this may not be what you want! (smile) No one is forcing you to surrender your sexuality. As your friend, I leave that between you and God.

But even if you never surrender your sexuality to God, will it not be better to have a healed 'family orientation' with your parents rather than a broken one?

And this is why I can safely say to teens that I am NOT out to change them. Theologically, we might see things differently. But in Relational Orientation Counseling, theology NEVER comes up unless the GLBT person brings up the subject and desires to discuss it. Otherwise, we focus exclusively on repairing, rebuilding, and renewing the parent-child relationship. That is the only objective of this kind of counseling.

You see, there is a problem if we do not pursue healing with our parents. If we do not work through the 'issues' and 'wounds' that have left their mark on us: those 'issues' and 'wounds' will continue to flow into our future romantic relationships. And so the question I have for you is this: how healthy do you want to be? How healthy do you want your romantic relationships to be?

Do you want to wake up years down the road to realize that you have ended up pursuing one dead-end relationship after another all because of the continual flowing of these 'issues' and 'wounds' in and through your life and relationships? Or do you want to have the best chance at healthy relationships well into the future?

NOTE: Unrelated to homosexuality, the vast majority of adults in recovery have only come to face recovery after experiencing exactly the situation I describe in the preceding paragraph. Unhealed relationships are seeds that spread until the day we make a decision to pursue healing from our past hurts.

I don't know about you, but I want to maximize the health of all my relationships now and into the future. That's why I highly recommend Relational Orientation Counseling. It's not to change your sexual orientation; it's to heal your family's relational orientation.

To parents, and particularly Dads, I say this: relational orientation counseling cannot occur without you! We, as fathers, tend to run from our past errors. We tend to feel shamed and blamed very easily. We tend to try to outrun guilt and regret. As a male and a father, I understand these urges to run or defend myself when I feel that I am being blamed or shamed. The problem is that in doing so, we never gain the health we need: and we never have health to offer our children.

There is another way: it is the way of our Savior, the One who took all our disobedience, all our rebellion, all our sin and filth, all our accusations, all our stones...and absorbed them all in order to supernaturally reveal God's love for the whole world. Dad, I say to you what I say to myself: I cannot control who my children become and I cannot force change upon them; but there is one thing and ONLY one thing that I can do.

I can do my part. We, as fathers, can do our part.

Christ calls us to take up our crosses and do our part so that HE can supernaturally reveal HIS love for our children. It may take a father old, gray, stooped over, wounded and barely standing from the shame and blame and accusations and rebellion and rage thrown at him in order for a son or daughter to finally experience the kind of mercy that brings Prodigals back home; the kind of patience, tolerance, and kindness that leads us toward surrender (Romans 2:1-4).

For more information about Relational Orientation Counseling, contact Bill Henson today.