

Reclamation News

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NEW LOOK, SAME FOCUS

Our third year of ministry has led to several cosmetic changes, but the heart of our ministry is still the same – proclaiming freedom from homosexuality

We've changed our name and logo, but we still desire to extend God's grace by sharing with all who will listen that real and lasting change is available from homosexuality. God has been faithful in opening doors to reach many in His church with this message of hope. He is now raising leaders so we can reach outside the church into the community, and so



Reclamation's new logo

we have made some changes.

We felt that "resource center" describes our mission. With the many aspects of our ministry, we certainly are a resource center for the sexually broken. We want to remain faithful to God's calling on this ministry to reach not only those who are sexually broken, but also their friends and loved ones; as well as equip the church to be the healing place God desires it to become.

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Change, the Bible & homosexuality

By Mike Levenhagen
(Second of three parts)

We previously explored how living in a fallen world causes us to view the wondrous, God-given longings at the core of our soul as obstacles to overcome. We also saw as relational beings, our sexuality and spirituality are different and yet inseparable.

It is at the core of our sexual identity we see the greatest potential for personal pain and destruction. We fear being vulnerable with our longings because it could result in the pain of inadequacy, rejection or victimization.

Everyone born into this world (except Jesus) is threatened to fully embrace their longings for relationship and significance and move into their world as God designed them.

"... our sinful commitment to control and safety keeps us from legitimately finding wholeness in Christ ..."

These longings are intended to draw us into a dependent relationship with our Creator; and out of that relationship with Him, move towards others in relational maturity.

Unfortunately, our sinful commitment to control and safety keeps us from legitimately finding wholeness in Christ and relating to each other in maturity. But these longings are

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Remember:

- All persons bear the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity, regardless of their choices.
- Homosexual behavior is sin, vulnerability to homosexual temptations is not.
- Lasting change is a process not an event.
- Change doesn't come from a program or religious system, it comes from a person—JESUS!

Exodus regional conference update

Over 60 people attended the Exodus North Central Tier Regional Conference held at the American Baptist Assembly Grounds in Green Lake November 10-12. The theme of the weekend was "I Have Called You By Name."

There was a lot packed into the weekend, but not too much! Many found the time to relax, fellowship and still pray, share, and minister to others. For many it was their first time at any type of Exodus conference.



Pictured above are the ministry leaders who attended the Exodus Regional Con-

Regional Director, Bob Van Domelen and his wife Cathie did a tremendous job coordinating the entire conference. We are hoping to have another Regional Conference in 2001; if you couldn't attend this year, prayerfully consider next year's conference. Also, please pray that those who attended this year would let God continue the work He began!

Truth in love seminar encourages and equips

Our third annual seminar titled "Reflecting the Truth in Love" was held October 20 – 21. While attendance was down from last year's seminar, the impact the seminar had on those present made the event well worth the effort!

This year's seminar was not focused only on the issue of homosexuality, but on sexual brokenness as a whole. Workshop topics included: Internet Pornography, Sexual

Abuse, Sexual Addiction, Parenting for Healthy Gender Identity and others.

Once again those that attended consisted of strugglers, loved ones and others interested in learning how to minister. Several people made commitments to pray for and reach out to the sexually broken, while others were given hope and direction for the change they desire.

Fourth Year of Ministry Brought Many Open Doors

By Mike Levenhagen

Our fourth year of ministry has given us many opportunities to share the message of change and hope. Here are some of the open doors we've experienced this year:

Salt and Light Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. I was invited to give a workshop titled: Addressing Pro-Gay Theology. The conference included keynote speakers from Focus on the Family's "Love One Out" seminar series including John Paulk and Mike Haley.

We were able to distribute a lot of resource materials at the book table as well as share the clear message that there is real and lasting change available through Jesus.

Lutherans for Life State Convention in Neenah, Wisconsin. I did two workshops with Marge Christiansen. One was on "Addressing the Pro-Gay Agenda." Marge spoke first and did an excellent job of discuss-

ing the gay agenda to elevate homosexual behavior to that of heterosexual marriage. I followed up with my testimony. I also explained how those involved with homosexuality don't choose to have the attractions and many feel they have no choice on how to deal with them.

We were told that the workshop was a great 1-2 punch with Marge giving the hard facts balanced by my personal story. It helped many see that as threatening as the "Gay Agenda" might seem, there are real people behind the fray that need to hear and see the truth.

We also did a second workshop that was a round-table discussion with teens. We dealt a lot with worldviews and how teens need to know why they believe what they believe.



Salt and Light Conference speakers. From left to right: Mike, John Paulk, Bob Van Domelen, Ron Greer, and Mike Haley.

The Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Chicago, Illinois. I

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Fourth Year of Ministry (cont'd)

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joined over 40 other ministry leaders to demonstrate for the acceptance of Reparative Therapy as a viable treatment for those desiring to change from unwanted homosexual attractions. In the past few years the APA has condemned such therapy and any other attempts to help individuals overcome unwanted homosexual feelings.

How Should the Church Minister to Homosexuals? in Neenah, Wisconsin and Wausau, Wisconsin. This two-day event was sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) East Central Synod of Wisconsin. Bishop Beem organized the seminar to prepare the pastors of the synod to determine which stand the synod would take concerning homosexuality. The one-day seminar was repeated in two locations to cover the 148 congregations in the synod.

Each day long seminar consisted of four speakers sharing how they minister to those dealing with homosexuality and why. The seminar was meant solely to expose the pastors to different views on how the church should reach out to homosexuals. Each day was moderated to ensure there wasn't any debating.

Two speakers were gay-affirming and advocating same-sex blessings and the ordination of openly gay and lesbian pastors. One of those speakers was a lesbian seeking to be the first ordained lesbian in the ELCA.

Joining me to present the traditional view was a very humble, scholarly pastor from New Jersey. For many present at the seminars (including the pastor from New Jersey), it was the first time they heard the message of change that is possible through a personal relationship with Jesus. The pastor from New Jersey had taken the approach of abstinence, not knowing the possibility of true change.

I was publicly given a complement by the synod's intellectual, deep thinking philosopher. After my presentation he told me that I had dispelled his image of the ex-gay experience. He went on to say that I was not the Bible thumping, judgmental fundamentalist he had read was typical of ex-gays.

Lifest 2000 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. This Christian music festival held July 14 – 16 drew 1000's of youth over three days. We gave a workshop on internet pornography and had a display booth at the vendors' expo. We were able to have good personal contact with 100's of youth and adults as well as distribute literature to many others.

I also was invited to speak on two radio talkshows; one Christian and the other secular. The experience on secular radio was positive and again the message of hope and change through Jesus was shared. Both the interviewer (who was supportive of our message) and the sound engineer remarked that I shared many things they had never heard before.

In addition to these opportunities we were able to minister to others through growth groups and drop-in support groups:

- ◆ We did a sexual addictions growth group for men this spring and most of the men involved formed an on-going accountability group.
- ◆ We started a New Directions growth group this summer and are beginning our next session this month.
- ◆ We assumed responsibility for Broken Yoke's drop-in group that meets at Faith United Methodist in Neenah. We are seeing people start to come on a regular basis.
- ◆ Renewed Hope, our family and friends support group, has blossomed. We needed to change the meeting room to accommodate the bigger group. But size isn't what matters! It has been so rewarding and so humbling to see God at work restoring marriages and moving in people's lives. The personal growth that is taking place truly is a tribute to God that He can take something as destructive as homosexuality and use it to bring people into a deeper, more abundant life in Him!

My prayer is that others would experience God's goodness and mercy in their lives. My challenge to each of us is that we would see that no matter how broken and wounded we may be that Jesus is even greater. I heard a neat insight that I could really relate to my life: When Jesus fed the five thousand, He told the disciples to gather the scraps so that none would go to waste. And that is how it was in my life: Jesus didn't want to waste any scraps, which is exactly what my life was before He entered it!

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Change, the Bible & homosexuality (cont'd)

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still crying out to be fulfilled. As the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 42:1 "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." (NIV) With diminished opportunities to fulfill these needs legitimately, they become distorted into desires for pleasure and control.

We are all born with a sin nature into families that love and nurture us imperfectly. It is like we are a bottle with our necks pointed away from God. The way we are parented only determines the compass direction to which we point. Because our God-given dignity is damaged, we see our legitimate longings as something either in need of compensation or protection rather than something to be embraced. The level at which we are threatened is due largely, then, to our victimization.

One last reference to parenting will set the ground work for seeing how change is possible for those struggling with homosexuality. Proverbs 22:6 says to "Train a child in the way he should go." Every child needs to understand who he/she is and how to relate to the world in the ways God designed. To understand the way each child should go, then, requires involvement from his parents. A child is dependent on his parents to receive loving, involved direction for his life. The importance of parenting should not be seen as a way to shift blame but should simply emphasize the vulnerability of a growing child.

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With this foundation of sexuality, let's look at the idea of a scale of threatened sexuality (some call this sexual brokenness), how it relates to homosexuality and personal accountability. There is a full spectrum or scale of threatened sexuality on which we all fall. Attached along that scale is a vulnerability to a sexual deviance (or sexual sin).

The greater the degree a person is threatened to embrace his or her God-given sexuality, the more he/she will resist moving into the world as God designed. This will lead the person to find safe, controllable ways to ease the pain of those unmet longings. Unfortunately, this sets the stage for a those legitimate longings to become distorted into unwanted desires and attractions.

It's important to remember here, that we are only looking at a simple way of thinking about human sexuality. This is not meant to be an absolute, iron-clad model or theory. It is merely intended as a way to think about our sexuality, sin, and what real change is about. God has made us so wondrously that to simplify

His creation to a simple model would be folly.

The following is a description of the distortions (deviations from God's design) that a person becomes vulnerable to at each respective level of threat:

L1	L2	L3	L4	L5
LEVEL 1 (L1) — HETEROSEXUAL DYSFUNCTION (heterosexual lust, premature ejaculation, etc.), MASTURBATION				
LEVEL 2 (L2) — VOYEURISM, EXHIBITIONISM				
LEVEL 3 (L3) — FETISHISM, TRANSVESTISM				
LEVEL 4 (L4) — HOMOSEXUALITY, LESBIANISM, BISEXUALITY				
LEVEL 5 (L5) — TRANSSEXUALISM (sex-change)				
Levels of threat and descriptions of brokenness				

While the straight line spectrum helps explain threatened sexuality and the corresponding vulnerability to sexual sin, it does not indicate personal accountability or spiritual maturity. Another element needs to be added, which is a person's response to situations that impact his area of threatened sexuality. Not everyone falls into a sexual deviance simply because he is at a certain level of

threat; the level of threat should be seen as a condition of vulnerability to rather than a predisposition for a sexual sin. (Just because the stage is set does not mean the play will go on).

Rather than a straight line, a wheel is a more accurate way to visualize threatened sexuality. Here, the hub of

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Change, the Bible & homosexuality (cont'd)

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the wheel is our true sexual identity, which is experienced only in relationship with Christ. The different levels of threat on the straight line illustration are now the spokes coming from the hub. The distance from the hub at any particular level is an indication of our maturity. (See Figure 1).

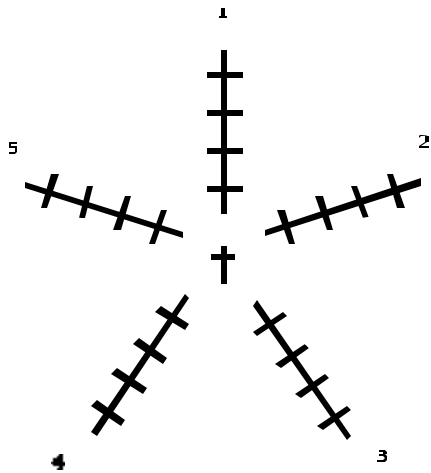


Fig. 1 - Scale of Threat

Now we can see that maturity is not related to the **area** of struggle but to how we respond at that level of threat. God does not require anything more from those dealing with same gender attractions than He does for those dealing with heterosexual lust. **It is not our responsibility to move from one level of threat to another level.** (See figure 2).

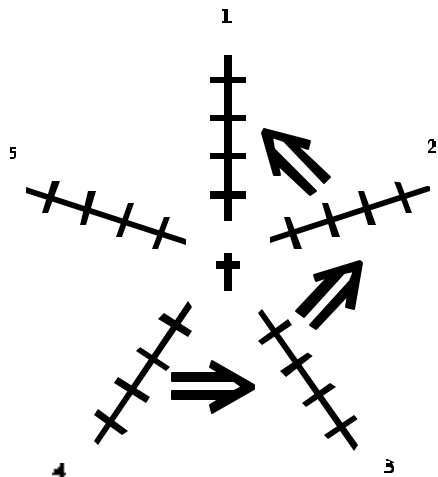


Fig. 2 - Spurious Change

It is interesting to note that the distance between each spoke decreases as you get closer to the hub. The closer we draw into dependence on Christ and walk in our true sexual identity, the closer we all are in relating to each other the way we were designed, regardless of the level of threat.

In relation to homosexuality, then, real change should not be seen as a shift to heterosexual lust. Remember, being at Level 1 is still a distortion of God's creational intent. Change should be viewed in light of how one responds to temptation and grows toward dependence on the grace of Christ. (See Figure 3).

Dependence on Christ will free anyone from their fear of moving into their world as sexual beings. That freedom will direct their energy not only to abstinence from sexual sin, but also to loving God and others. with Christ. In our next issue we will explore what we mean when we say real and lasting change is available through relationship with Christ and some practical applications of that truth.

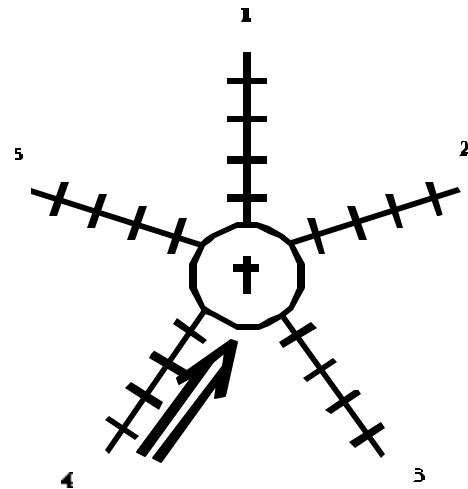


Fig. 3 - True Change

“... maturity is not related to the **area** of struggle but to how we respond at that level of threat. God does not require anything more from those dealing with same gender attractions than He does for those dealing with heterosexual lust. . . .”

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Ministry and support to those on the journey to sexual wholeness in Christ.



Reflections

Ex-gay ministries are sometimes accused of relying on psychology rather than the Bible for helping people deal with homosexuality. Is this accusation accurate? Perhaps, but maybe it's the perception that isn't accurate.

You see, I don't believe there is anything wrong with looking to psychology to understand a problem. Psychologists have done much research into human behavior. The problem will come when we try to use psychology to get to the root problem and the true solution to that problem.

Our problems are NEVER our parents fault or God's fault. Our problems aren't simply a result of our lack of understanding. We need to see that the root of every problem is sin. Sin is that part within everyone of us that rebels against how God created us—dependent on Him. A Biblical understanding of man, God and problems needs to be the framework for everything we do in ministry.

I think we need to be careful, then, when we talk about things like defensive detachment. Defensive detachment helps explain how a young boy will make his father unimportant to cope with the pain of rejection. When we put that into a Biblical framework we see that sin already operating in a 2-3 year old boy.

God intended us to run to Him in times of pain and confusion. It is totally understandable when a young, sensitive, introverted child deals with rejection by protecting himself. Understandable, yes; yet totally foolish when you consider that young boy has a heavenly Father who longs to affirm and cherish him.

Prayer Requests:

Pray that . . .

- . . . **God would continue to open doors to share His message of hope and change**
- . . . **more leaders and co-leaders would step forward, especially for Renewed Hope.**
- . . . **those participating in the various ministries at Reclamation would find the healing and restoration they are seeking.**
- . . . **Kathy and I would keep pace with what God is doing and calling us into.**

And finally, thank God for His wonderful provisions this past year, including the many opened doors and the many people that have heard the Gospel message of grace and salvation.

The child, of course, is blinded to the fact that a caring, loving God is waiting for him to crawl up on His lap. You see, the Bible teaches that since Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden, every part of man is affected by sin. Even a young child's thinking is bent away from God and determined to find ways to live independently.

Everything we do makes sense when we understand the reasoning (even if it's subconscious) behind it. But we need to see that coping mechanisms such as defensive detachment lead to self-sufficiency. They lead us away from dependence on God to meet our legitimate needs. They indicate a foolish, impatient and arrogant heart.

True healing is really about forgiveness. That means receiving forgiveness for our clenched fist that says to God, "I know what is best for me, you don't!" It also means extending forgiveness to those who have hurt us. (The Bible teaches when we receive forgiveness, we can then forgive others).

If we just need insight and strong motivation for change, Jesus would not have needed to die on the cross. Jesus saw our problem as having a sinful and rebellious heart. He knew the only solution was the cross. Psychology lacks that understanding of our human condition.

We don't need to mix Christianity with psychology for solutions to our problems, but we don't need to avoid psychology to help us understand how our foolish, sinful hearts lead us into problems. We need to be careful and avoid anything that moves us away from the centrality of the cross.