

Reflections of a Changed and Grateful Traveler

Samuel

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“Certain bodies are lobbying for an end to therapy for men who want to overcome these struggles. How dare they! As a man who has been on the receiving end of it, and a medical professional myself, I say we should give it greater support.”

“I shall be telling this with a sigh, Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -- I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference.”

Robert Frost

When I was asked to write something about my journey, I thought it would be easy. Surely something that I have faced, struggled, and battled with for years should be easy to put into words. It wasn't, and I spent days avoiding it. With reflection on what has gone before, here, finally, is my story.

My journey to change started in the summer of 2008, when I made an effort to find someone who could help me. I had been aware of my struggle with same sex attraction for a number of years, but it had become more pronounced in my late teens and as I started university. Living a homosexually orientated lifestyle was not something I wanted. It went against my Christian beliefs, and it did not allow for the wife and family that I longed for when I was older.

One afternoon in August, I had a meeting with a man who was experienced in this field and, for the first time sharing with anyone, I opened up about my life and the struggles I faced. It was an emotional meeting. Something I had kept to myself for so many years, I suddenly made known to a man I had never met before. It all came out, along with the tears and heartache. He did a lot of listening, but he also told me that I wasn't alone. That there were many men who struggled with these attractions and who, like me, wanted nothing to do with them. I was encouraged. He told me that some of these men found it useful to talk with people about their struggles in an attempt to better understand. This was one thing I wanted - better understanding. Why did I, a young man who grew up in a Christian home, who wanted nothing more than to be in a loving heterosexual relationship, have these attractions?

I was then put in contact with a therapist who had particular expertise that was relevant to my needs. Over the next eighteen months, I met with him fairly regularly. I explained my struggles and that it was not the way in which I wanted to live my life. I wanted to change. We looked at different aspects of my life: my friends, family, my past. It helped me to better understand why I was the person I was. I could see that for a lot of my life, although I was never a loner and had a loving father, I did lack a strong male influence, with my mother taking a leading role in caring for my brother and me.

After a few months, the therapist suggested I join a group that he ran, of men who like myself struggled with same-sex attraction, but did not want to live a homosexual lifestyle. For the first time, I met others who were going through the very same thing I had battled with for so long. Men from all sorts of backgrounds, all of whom shared a common struggle. The group met every two weeks, and was a safe place in which we could share the things on our hearts, and together could help one another deal with the hardships we faced.

Over three years later, I am a different man. Being part of the men's group has given me an immense understanding around the issue of same-sex attraction, but more importantly has shown me why I might struggle and how I might better meet the needs in my life, which if left unattended can often make things worse. I came to realise that close male friendships were something I was lacking. I brought this before God, asking him to provide me with men who would love and encourage me. How he answered that prayer! I moved in to share a house with several guys, and embarked on friendships which I have no doubt helped to build me up into the man I am today – more confident and assured of my masculinity and worth. I now realise that authentic relationships with other men were something I lacked, and are now proving a great blessing in my life.

However, does meeting a therapist, attending a group, and having good friends mean that I don't struggle with same-sex attraction anymore? No. It's still an issue in my life, and one which I've come to accept might not fully go away, but it has certainly lessened. I can now say it is not my identity and it doesn't have to determine my life. Last year I entered into a relationship with a woman, something I was never confident to do before. I could never have imagined that before I began on this journey. Although that relationship has now ended, I can see that a heterosexual relationship is something I am capable of having, and excited to have again.

Often I wonder what my life would be like now if I hadn't made that effort to seek help four years ago. I hope that I would still have been fighting the struggle against same-sex attraction and avoiding the temptation of that sort of lifestyle – but how much more difficult that fight would be! Therapy has allowed me to understand better the battle I face. It has empowered me, and given me the encouragement I need, as I share with other people who have the same issues. I

have met people who live with these attractions, some of whom have been in homosexual relationships and others who haven't, but who are now married and have children. There is hope! Certain bodies are lobbying for an end to therapy for men who want to overcome these struggles. How dare they! As a man who has been on the receiving end of this kind of help, and a medical professional myself, I say we should give it greater support. There are many men in my position, who are looking for the support offered by therapists and support groups currently under attack. It is surely at the discretion of the one reaching out for that support, whether or not to avail themselves of it. Why should they be denied such a lifeline?

I am eternally thankful for the support I have received through therapy, and for the men in the group who have been integral in the change I have seen in my life. Although I may have taken the road less travelled, I was not alone. They were there, walking alongside me.