

## The Role of Counselling & Support Groups

Part of Exodus' message is that God has a plan for change. Most of Exodus' member ministries provide counselling and support groups to people looking for change. In this article we explain the place that counselling and support groups have in God's plan for change.

Let's begin by considering some things about growth and recovery that apply to everyone. Since the fall, not one person has grown straight and true according to God's design. We all experience three things:

- 1) Trauma happens and leaves us wounded. Our wounds in our sense of identity render us less than what God had in mind when He created us. Our wounds block growth. They block or slow proper maturity. We can be wounded by receiving something we shouldn't or by missing something God designed us to need.
- 2) Misdirected growth. People may mature in crooked ways. Sometimes we choose this. Sometimes those who guide our growth choose a twisted path for us to follow.
- 3) Sin adds to our lives things that should not be there and takes away things that should be there. There are three sources we have to deal with; the world, our flesh and evil spirit beings.

How do we grow straight and recover from these? Most Christians agree that people need God in order to grow straight and recover. But it can get complicated and messed up when Christians confuse what is God's part and what is our part.

God's part includes all the redemptive areas. Salvation, sanctification, deliverance, healing and spiritual adoption are all "God territory." God is the only one who can save us, sanctify us, deliver us from evil and spiritually adopt us into His family.

But the work of maturity is another matter. While God is instrumental in guiding and blessing our growth into maturity, it is our job, bestowed on us a long time ago in the Garden of Eden, to mature. Maturity is not a spiritual gift nor is it a by-product of salvation. It is something we have to work at. Immaturity is addressed as a problem in 1 Cor 3:1-3 and Heb 5:11-14. Eph 4:11-15 says that says we are to grow up in every way into Him... to become mature. Our work will not save us but it will express that we are new creations. It is our work to grow and reach maturity together with all the saints.

Another thing that we often misunderstand is that people need people to recover. Referring again to Eph 4:11-15, the gifts of Jesus are the people in His body that will bring us to maturity. God has designed growth and recovery to come through people. Wounded people heal in relationships. Growth, repair, maturity and faith development are all intimately tied to relationships. People need people to achieve wholeness in a fractured world. You've heard the phrase 'Hurt people, *hurt* people.' It is also true that 'Healed people, *heal* people.'

Lastly, wholeness is not achieved quickly. God is not the Great Magician but the Great Physician. People usually seek the quickest way out of pain – this is understandable. Pain, after all, demands immediate attention. But when we ask God to bring healing into our wounds, we find God uses a slower process. God does his work in us, even while we are in pain. But it is not simply His work; it is our work too.

For more about growth and recovery, we recommend [Living From](#)

[the Heart Jesus Gave You](#), by James Friesen et al, published by Shepherd's House.

Now let's consider some things about the nature and roots of homosexuality. Exodus has a developmental view of the roots of homosexuality. You are not born with same-sex attractions. They develop as a result of the 3 things mentioned above, traumas, misdirected growth and our sinful reactions to these. Very briefly, some 2 year-old children become cut off from their same-sex parent because of a psychological process called defensive detachment. As a result, they miss something God designed us to need. Their needs for same-sex love from their parents go unmet. This interrupts the process of gender identity development. Now consider children 4 & 5 years old. The absence of affirming same-sex peer-peer friendships may leave a child feeling confused, insecure and vulnerable to unhealthy relationships that seem to hold out the promise of acceptance. Physical growth continues but growth in other areas is stalled. Now a boy who is 8-12 years old may experience sexual abuse, usually by older teens or men, or girls by a close male family member, friend, or authority figure. This brings shameful confusion when sexual abuse was the only context in which a young boy's thirst for male-parent love and connection was seemingly quenched. It leaves the deceptive impression that sex and love always go hand in hand. At adolescence, the time when sexual desires start to emerge, the buried yet growing unmet desire for same-sex love and connection can subtly merge with sexual desires. This leads to the confusing and often unwanted experience of same-sex attractions. And since they are misunderstood and driven by unmet needs, they only become stronger until resistance is no longer possible and active steps into homosexuality begin. Similar events are common in the roots for girls and women but there is no room in this article for both. For more information about the roots of homosexuality we have a list of books and articles at the end of this article.

As we consider the nature of homosexuality and that it is really a state of incomplete growth, we need to also consider the nature of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is not just a sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex. Heterosexuality is the ability to relate to both sexes as a psychologically complete member of one's own sex. It is not just a matter of sexuality but of gender identity and the fulfilment of psychological needs. Homosexuals relate to the same sex and the opposite sex as incomplete members of their own sex.

Using the words of Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, the solution to homosexuality is not embracing sexual activity. Neither is abstinence from sexual activity the solution. One should neither ignore unmet needs (the "conservative" mistake) nor eroticise them (the "liberal" mistake). The solution begins by realising that homosexuality is all about psychological growth that was prematurely stopped or suspended. It involves both a state of incompleteness and a drive towards completion. The normal process of psychological growth has been stopped in a significant respect. But it can be restarted. The end result of this process of growth is heterosexuality – which is the ability to relate to people (of both sexes) as a psychologically complete member of one's own sex. The end result is not sexual activity with someone of the opposite sex.

Homosexuality isn't cured. It is outgrown. Once the homosexual's needs for same-sex love have been met, the attachment through which they have been met is made redundant. A child's needs for attachment to its parent are outgrown when the child grows up.

# opening doors

Two things are required for the healing of same-sex defensive detachment and its results. The first is undoing of the defensive detachment because it separates us from our same-sex parent and from our own masculinity or femininity. The second is meeting the unmet needs to make up for the missing growth consequent on the defensive barrier. This is done through healthy relationships with the same sex.

## Counsellors

Now, let's turn to the role of counsellors. There would be no need for counsellors except for the damage caused to all people by sin and the fall. God goes so far as to call the Holy Spirit our Counsellor. Generally, the godly counsellor, participates with God in helping others put their lives right again – the day-to-day expression of our salvation. They help us face and embrace the pain in our lives so that we can grow: learning lessons, gaining strength, becoming mature.

In the specific case of homosexuality, the counsellor works to undo the defensive detachment and guide the client through the process of setting up healthy same-sex relationships and learning from them. They use their training in psychology and counselling to identify the particular unmet needs of each person. In some ways they become a substitute parent, providing the 'parental' affirmation & direction a struggler needs as they work through the process of growing up a second time, this time in a way that satisfies the struggler's needs for same-sex parent love and affirmation.

Counsellors help wounded people identify the missing things in their lives that brought damage to them. Counsellors help with the traumatising effects of these missing things. And they guide people in developing the loving relationships with other people – loving relationships that provide the presence of those things so that healing can take place.

Counsellors also help wounded people deal with the bad things that have happened to them such as the physical or sexual abuse that has happened to some of those struggle with same-sex attractions. The counsellor helps safely uncover the bad events of the past, the person's reactions to them and feelings about them, and helps the struggler seek God's healing for these wounds.

## Support groups

Earlier we said that God has designed growth and recovery to happen through relationships with people. People need people to recover. Wounded people heal in relationships. Maturity, recovery and belonging work together. They cannot be understood or work as God intended apart from one another.

A support group provides a place where men and women who want to leave homosexuality can:

- Speak freely in a safe and confidential place about struggles, thoughts, ideas, and feelings without fear of rejection;
- Be encouraged by hearing how others are dealing with their struggles;

- Hear about the love of God for them and about their true identity in Him;
- Learn about homosexuality and the process of healing and change; and
- Because homosexuality wreaks havoc upon an individual's relationships with others, a support group is a place to begin the difficult and painful process of re-connecting with other people.

Given that God's plan for change involves counsellors and support group to help us recover, mature and belong, most Exodus member ministries provide counselling and support groups to people who come to them for help. Many of the people in Exodus and its member ministries have themselves received the help of counsellors and support groups. And so personal experience reinforces the truth of Scripture about the place for these kinds of help.

Two more thoughts before closing... First, Counselling and support groups are not the only forms of help that people need. They also need the encouragement and friendship of family and friends. Other Exodus articles have dealt with the role of Christians and churches in helping and encouraging people seeking freedom from homosexuality and change in their sexual attractions.

Second, change is not a formula. Sometimes it is necessary to promote stronger relationships in a family and community before trauma recovery can proceed. Other times trauma recovery needs to take place before strong relationships can be established. Sometimes there is a need to be more maturity before trauma recovery can be effective. Other times, trauma resolution needs to be achieved before growth into maturity can be unstuck. God leads the process of change. Change works when you follow.

In closing, we want to encourage you to move forward in the work of becoming mature. This includes dealing with the traumas that have left you wounded, the sins that adds things to our lives that should not be there and takes away things that should be there, and your misdirected growth. Make use of the help that a good counsellor can provide. Become part of a support group. Receive encouragement from godly friends and follow God as He leads you to become the person He designed you to be. Press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of you. Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.

## Resources (a partial list)

My Genes Made Me Do It by Neil Whitehead  
Homosexuality, a New Christian Ethic by Elizabeth Moberly  
Desires in Conflict by Joe Dallas  
Growth Into ManHood: Resuming the Journey by Alan Medinger  
Lessons Learned video series 1 and 2 by Sy Rogers  
Changes That Heal by Henry Cloud  
Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach by Joe Nicolosi

By Bryan Kliever

## What Can I Do?

**Pray.** Pray for the counselors and support group leaders in Exodus ministries around the world. Pray for yourself – that God will do His work and lead you forward in your work of becoming mature.

**Give.** The counselors, group leaders and others in Exodus depend on the financial support of individuals like you to enable them to provide help, not institutions, company sponsors or government grants. Will you give as God directs you?

**Invite Us to Your Church.** That's right, invite us to your church. Exodus representatives regularly speak in churches or lead seminars that introduce the need for ministry to people affected by homosexuality, explain what ministry involves, and explain how the church can support such a ministry. Afterwards, many people often say they have never attended a service so understanding, so full of substance and so full of hope. We would love to be able to speak to your church. You can take the first step by contacting us to say you would like us to speak in your church. We'll take the next step of contacting your pastor.