

Pray Away the Gay?

By Bob Honeysett

“Pray the Gay Away?” is a 2011 episode of the American television series *Our America with Lisa Ling*. The episode, hosted by Ling, profiles several people as they seek to reconcile their homosexuality with their Christianity. I’ve been captivated by the thought ever since I heard the premise of the program.

Can someone say a prayer or make an altar trip that will ultimately change sexual identity and make them heterosexual? Sadly, while prayer and the altar trip may be a wonderful event and a breakthrough for someone seeking Jesus, seldom, if at all, is anyone changed by prayer or altar trips alone.

Ministry to broken people involves setting a realistic expectation of what lies ahead and what is to come. Too often, the goal is to take an individual from a “gay” orientation to a “straight” orientation which results in failed expectations, hurt feelings and an overall feeling that God either doesn’t care or that He has failed when our behavior, feelings, and desires fail to change the way we expected them to.

The goal of the person struggling with sexual identity should have nothing to do with changing sexual orientation. The ultimate goal should have to do with growing closer to Jesus Christ and following that road wherever it leads. I believe from God’s perspective, he is not so much concerned about sexual orientation as He is in His power to transform the lost. In other words, He is more concerned with moving us from whatever our sexual orientation is to a place of HOLINESS before Him.

What does this mean for the struggler? It means that you no longer have to be focused on self-based efforts to try to change your behavior to become acceptable in God’s sight. If you have come to God through faith in the finished work of Jesus, then you are already acceptable to Him regardless of your struggle. His work on the Cross finished self-based efforts once and for all.

The choice we have to make is toward holiness. It means we have to purpose to follow God regardless of what passions we may struggle with. Our feelings don’t pull the wagon, and in fact are often an unreliable gauge of what’s happening in our inner lives. God’s goal for our lives has nothing to do with how we feel.

What is His expectation? Holiness! He expects that you and I live according to the Word of God, while He works to transform our wayward hearts through that very same Word.

If you keep bringing your struggles to Him with a broken and contrite heart, He will keep working on your behalf to transform you. You may not always be aware of it, you may not feel it, but his work continues in you ALWAYS. *“He who began a good work in you is faithful to perform it even unto the day of Christ Jesus.”*

ONCE AGAIN, feelings are not an indicator of your progress in God.

We live in a feelings based culture, never taking into consideration that our feelings lie to us all the time. It is very sad for me to hear about the folks that have been touched by God, but end up going back to the gay lifestyle because they relied on their feelings to be the measure of what God has done in their lives.

Feelings are a measure of NOTHING. Our hope is based on the finished work of Christ whether we feel it or not. I’ve ministered to many men along the way who had the notion that the goal of their salvation was to move from GAY to HETEROSEXUAL ALPHA-MALE. The outward sign of this “completed” work, in their minds, is that God will give them a wife and children, their same-sex desires are completely erased, and sexuality is never again an issue. Life should be so simple!

Holiness happens by evolution, not revolution. It is a learning process that comes about as we draw closer to Him. No quick fix, no ZAP from the HOLY SPIRIT ZAPPER! Just plain, old fashioned walking with the Lord and drawing closer to Him. That's the process that moves mountains. It's all based on Jesus! Take away Jesus, or remove Jesus from the equation, and all you're left with is a religious impossibility. Programs that point to pop-psychology rather than Jesus, are doomed from the start. You can take 12 Steps or 1,200 Steps, but if they are not in the direction of Jesus Christ, then you might as well be on a treadmill – working hard but going nowhere.

I've read many accounts of people who consider themselves to be ex-ex-gay. Ex-ex-gay people are those who formerly participated in the ex-gay movement in an attempt to change their sexual orientation to heterosexual, but then went on to publicly accept a sexual orientation that falls under the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender category. Not one, that I've read, makes mention of following Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The stories are all about CHANGE, but few of them mention the CHANGER. Could it be that the lack of Jesus is the root of the issue that led them to give up and decide that they were unchangeable?

In 33 years, I have never hesitated to tell people what the Lord has done in my life. I was gay, but I got saved and fell in love with Jesus, lock, stock and barrel. I was obsessed with following Him and being more like him. My goal was not to become STRAIGHT, it was to become more like Jesus. I never concentrated on pursuing straight behavior and stopping gay behavior, I didn't even know if such a thing was possible. I just made up my mind that I was going to follow the Lord no matter what. I resolved the life I was living was miserable and that Jesus was the only way out of the misery.

It worked!

As time went on, I discovered that as I focused on the Lord, everything else took care of itself. If I was faced with a question, I used the Word of God as my only point of reference. I didn't consult friends, or family. I trusted the Spirit of the Lord to speak to me through His Word. If there was something that wasn't specifically clear in the Word, I trusted the Spirit of the Word. In other words, what would Jesus do?

This is not to say I lived like an altar boy without spot or wrinkle all the time. I made some colossal screw-ups. I fell into sin, I didn't always make the right choices, and in some things, I was an idiot, plain and simple. The beauty of it was, that every time I fell, God did not dismiss me with an impatient wave of the hand. He sat in the trench with me and constantly reassured me of His love. Each time, that love set me back on my feet and encouraged me to keep following Jesus.

The Goal is Holiness

The Bible has little to nothing to say about changing sexual orientation. The only close reference we have is found in I Corinthians 6:9-11 where it states:

“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

...and that is what some of you **WERE**. You WERE that, but you are not **THAT** anymore. A change took place. Why? Because you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified. By Whom? The Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God! It doesn't say these Corinthian people pursued CHANGE. It says that they were changed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. So, as we follow this thought pattern we see that nothing is going to happen apart from Jesus and the Spirit of God.

After looking at what the Bible has to say about change, we have to look at what the Bible says about pursuing holiness:

"Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I THE LORD your GOD AM holy.'" Leviticus 19:2

"Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I [AM] THE LORD your GOD." Leviticus 20:7

"And you shall be holy to ME, for I THE LORD [AM] holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be MINE." Leviticus 20:26

"For you [are] a holy people to THE LORD your GOD; the LORD your GOD has chosen you to be a people for HIMSELF, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2

"For THE LORD your GOD walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that HE may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you." Deuteronomy 23:14

"...but as HE [JESUS] who called you [is] holy, you also be holy in all [your] conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I AM holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16

Powerful words! Living Words! As Jesus is HOLY, you also be holy in your conduct. That's the mirror to hold up in times of doubt. When the fork in the road comes (and it always does) make a commitment to do the right thing and trust the Lord for the rest. The Word of God specifically states that the temptation over any given situation won't kill you. He has promised the way of escape, if we hold on, and He gives us the ability to pursue righteous choice-making as we pursue Him.

Pursuing Holiness

Nothing frustrates me more than someone who makes a point about the way things should be, but doesn't tell me how to get there in my life. Towards that end, here are a few points to get all of us moving in that direction.

- **Be Sold Out for God**

If you have any desire for God, God Himself put it there. We are not naturally drawn to the ways of God. In fact, left to ourselves we will always run in the opposite direction. If the desire for Him is there, then trust that He has a plan to get you from point A to point B. REVEL IN THAT KNOWLEDGE! The God of the universe wants to have a relationship with you! That knowledge should cause you to take radical steps to pursue His will for your life no matter what.

- **Be Willing to Walk Away From Sin**

If you're really sold out to God, this step shouldn't present a problem.

Nothing moves forward if we're not willing to leave behind those things we know pull us away from God. If it's a sexual relationship, it needs to end. If it's a porn habit, it needs to end. If it is anything that does not follow God's requirement for holiness, it has to end. So many people claim to be confused about what God really wants from them when much of it is already stated in His Word. If it doesn't fit the parameter of "*Be Holy for I am Holy*", then there is nothing to struggle over. It needs to end! You can't sow to the flesh and reap spiritual benefits, or hope to draw closer to Jesus.

- **Be Willing to Walk Away From Anything Or Anyone That Hinders Your Walk With the Lord**

Lay the axe to the roots of anything or anyone that doesn't draw you closer to God. EVEN IF IT MEANS A SEASON OF SOLITUDE that involves only you and the Lord. That's the risk that needs to be taken, trusting that the Lord will restore all that you have left behind. I left behind an acting career that was starting to bloom, I left behind relationships with people I considered friends, I cut myself off from sexual relationships, I cut myself off from New York City nightlife...I cut it all off. What did I get in return? Loneliness! There was no instant influx of hip Christian friends, there was no change in my sexual desires or habits. In fact, nothing happened that made this stage of my life any easier. I was alone, and had to learn how to draw on the resources of an invisible God who loved me and sent His son to die for me. I HATED THE DISCIPLINE, but it was a big part of the process the Lord walked me through.

- **Be Willing to Suffer**

Yup! You're going to suffer! I guess some have found a brand of theology that doesn't include the process of suffering because we don't hear too many messages about it anymore. Yet, there is no way around it. If the goal is to be Holy, then dying to the flesh is part of that process. Dying is painful, so it's reasonable to believe that there will be some level or degree of suffering. The difference with this brand of suffering is that it's not suffering for the sake of suffering. Many years ago I read something to the effect of suffering being a process with a purpose, the purpose being to make us more like Christ. No one likes to suffer, but suffering in Christ is a little easier to swallow knowing that the purpose of God allowing it in my life is to make me more like Jesus. In my early journey, I felt like I was suffering like one of the great Christian martyrs. Then I found a word in Hebrews 12:4 that gave me perspective and shut my mouth once and for all: "*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*" Enough said!

- **Be Accountable**

No one makes it through the battle alone. You need to have someone who can walk you through the process of transformation. Preferably this is someone who doesn't share the same struggle as you. Yes, they might understand what you are going through to a greater degree, but you don't want your source of help to become a stumbling block. I believe if you ask God sincerely for a trusted other person, He will provide that for you. If He doesn't right away, then assume it's a season of solitude and take advantage of the time you have to draw closer to Him. Don't blame God because you didn't get your way. Move on and pursue Him until He's the one who moves you to the next step.

- **Let the Word of God Be Your Guide**

A). Close your ears to the chatter of this world! The ex-gays, ex-ex-gays, the political activists, the gay marriage proponents, the news media, the gay church, the bar crowd, and anyone else in all creation (who is not following hard after Jesus) has nothing to say that you need to hear. Close yourself off from it and don't put yourself in places of temptation or confusion. God has your plan, not the world. Focus on hearing Him and forget about the rest. This world is always going to be screaming about something in opposition to God. That doesn't mean you have to stand for it, entertain it, or buy into it.

B). If the Word of God says it, THAT SETTLES IT! Don't twist or bend His word to try to make it mean what you want it to mean. Some people would have you believe the Bible is silent on many issues, especially when it comes to the area of sexuality. However, the last time I checked, the subject of sexuality (hetero or homo) is addressed quite clearly:

"The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh. But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." (I Cor.11:13b-20-emphasis mine)

With that being said, put everything else to rest and follow the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.

Pray away the gay? Probably not! But God is still in the business of transforming lives into His image. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, so nothing is impossible.

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