

“Will And Grace”: The Role Of Faith In The Healing Of Lesbianism

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Speaking As A Fellow Struggler

I speak to you today as Christian woman who has struggled with same-sex attraction and who is now a national director for a Christian “ex-gay” ministry within the Presbyterian Church USA -- a denomination that is divided over gay ordination. I have a bachelor’s degree in secondary education and English, a master’s degree from Columbia University Teachers College, and a Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. I never pursued this field – whatever field this is -- speaking to audiences about homosexuality. You don’t go to school for this! I’m not a psychiatrist or counselor, rather, I speak to you today as a teacher, theologian and fellow struggler.

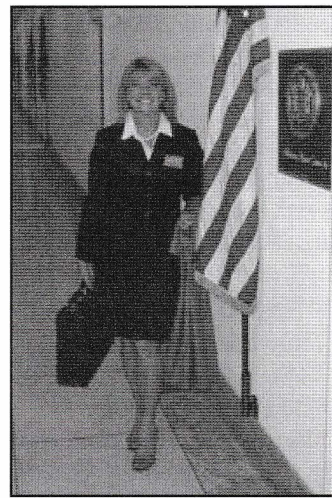
My Background

I remember when I first heard the word “gay.” I was sitting with my fellow 6th graders at a lunch table at my Christian elementary school, eating awful canned cafeteria food. A boy named Greg announced that he knew another definition of the word “gay”; he informed us that this word did not just mean to be happy and carefree. We were all very quiet and a little nervous listening to this alternative definition. When he told us, we all looked at each other and went “eeuw.” Not very politically correct.

I grew up in the 1970’s and although homosexuality was not talked about as overtly as it is today, it was being promoted subliminally in the media and in pop culture. Being a tomboy was very fashionable in the 1970’s, and I remember idolizing girls that were boyish and self-assured. When I was around 10 years old in 1978, girls were being portrayed and glorified as tomboys in movies and TV, and adult women were discarding femininity and motherhood within the women’s rights movement. Even clothing trends were more masculine during 70’s and 80’s.

I remember being confused during my adolescence. My mother grew up in the 50’s and I grew up in the 70’s; two completely different eras. I remember my mother being anxious about my hair and clothes. I felt ugly and overweight and wanted so badly to fit in at school (by dressing more masculine and cool – wearing jeans with a zipper!) and yet I wanted to be beautiful and feminine to please my mother and to be more like my beautiful, petite, graceful sister.

At the same time that I was struggling with my own identity, I observed my mother being constantly critical of her own appearance and femininity. At an age when I should have wanted to emulate my mother, I began to emotionally detach from her – not wanting to be her if being insecure, unhappy, unloved, and angry was what it meant to be female. However, I still tried to be fem-



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inine. I tried to please my Mom, and I hoped that boys would find me as attractive and desirable as they found my sister.

A lot of women who struggle with lesbianism also struggle with self-acceptance as it relates to their femininity and beauty – as do women in general. (It is a curse – this constant quest for beauty, youth, and desirability!) Mothers who struggle with insecurity and an innate sense of worthlessness will pass this negative self-image on to their daughters.

Defensive Detachment From Mother And Femininity

Melissa Fryrear, a woman who struggled with same-sex attraction and now works for Focus on the Family, teaches how important a daughter’s relationship to both her mother and father is in cultivating a sense of healthy gender identity. She also emphasizes that the parent’s marital relationship also affects the daughter’s sense of gender identity and security.

For example, if a mother is “dispassionate, a doormat, manipulative, domineering, a ‘my best friend’ mother, or self-consumed, the daughter will be unable to form an emotionally connected relationship with her and may defensively detach herself emotionally from her mother and from femininity.” [1]

If a father is “unprotecting, inattentive, unadoring, or unsupportive, the daughter will develop an insecurity in her sense of worth. She will also be inhibited from effectively relating to men.” [2] In a husband-wife relationship, if the couple is indifferent to each other, if the wife is critical of her husband, if the husband is selfish and degrading of women, “the daughter may develop strongly negative attitudes toward men and women in general, the role of husbands and wives, and marriage in general.” [3]

Absorbing A Mother’s Pain

My mother and I were close when I was growing up (though we did have a love/hate relationship in junior high and high school, as many mothers and daughters do). I truly loved my mother and my mother truly loved me and demonstrated it in the only way she knew how. She affirmed me and wanted the best for me, but she had a very negative self-image. Being sensitive, I absorbed her pain as my own – her rejection as my own. Sometimes I had such love and empathy for her, and then other times I resented her because I felt the need to take care of her when she needed to be taking care of me.

The times when I didn't get what I needed from her, I attempted to go to my Dad. I wanted to be Daddy's girl. I wanted to be like Laura on Little House on the Prairie and to have my Dad refer to me in endearing terms like "half-pint." But my Father was not able to be emotionally available to me (and to my mother). He escaped conflict in the home and spent too many hours as a pastor at church – taking care of other people besides his family.

So I found myself in a kind of limbo, at times feeling emotionally detached from both my mother and my father. The masculine world was not an unsafe place; it was more of an uneventful, unemotional place. The feminine world, on the other hand, was fraught with conflict and high emotion.

Many girls who eventually become tomboys or become overly masculine (which did not happen in my case) have detached in varying degrees from the feminine and have bonded emotionally to the masculine by identifying with their fathers and other boys. They have cultivated their gender identity within the context of the masculine world, which may be easier for them to relate to than the world of the feminine, which for them may be unsafe, competitive, and critical.

Chastity Bono describes her gender confusion within the context of her parents' broken marriage:

"In a way, I think I was the son my father never had.... When my father encouraged my tomboyishness, my mother would get annoyed. I think in some ways they acted out their frustrations with each other through me: my father would aggravate my mother by encouraging my boyish behavior, and my mother would become more uncomfortable with me because she saw me mimicking my father"[4]

Chastity also discusses her relationship to her mother. She says, "My Mom wasn't always around, since she was working.... At the time I wasn't able to rationalize that my mom was thinking of me and my needs by working; I just focused on the fact that I wasn't getting enough attention, and I often felt lonely or abandoned." [5]

Sacrificing Femininity For Safety

Also, many women who eventually struggle with lesbianism have been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused, so many women will take on masculine characteristics for fear of making themselves vulnerable. The actual definition of "vulnerability" is "the ability to be wounded." [6] Women who have been abused do not want to be wounded like that again, so they sacrifice femininity for safety. Their false masculinity is a protection from being hurt again.

Rosie O'Donnell confesses, "I was a kid who had no mom. We were five children, and my dad was struggling to keep us all fed. It was a hard childhood and I had to take control. I think a lot of my success was because I drove the bus, I made the rules and I told people what to do," she explains. [7] O'Donnell also speaks about her disturbing childhood. Having gone to therapy since she was 16, she says, "[I] went over and over the disturbing things

that happened to me ... [but] I never felt much better." She said the gloom was "constant" [and that] despite "moments of joy ... happy days and career success, the dark cloud that arrived in [her] childhood did not leave until I was 37 and started taking medication." [8]

Mother's Inability To Protect Her Daughter

Ellen DeGeneres has confessed to the sexual abuse that occurred in her own life. She said that she and her mother "still don't talk about it [the abuse] much because she [her mother] feels really, really guilty," says DeGeneres, her eyes welling with tears. "The fact is that it was a horrible situation for me." DeGeneres said the abuse continued on and off. "My grandmother was sick, and my mom was having to fly back to New Orleans and leave me alone with him [mother's second husband]." Eventually she told her mother. "She was shocked and upset and she was going to leave him," says DeGeneres. "But then she stayed [with the abuser] another 10 or 12 years. [9]

In ministries such as OneByOne and Exodus, we help women realize that their same-sex attraction is fueled by their legitimate need to be loved and affirmed by women – by a protective mother figure – and by their peers who may have rejected them. Same-sex attraction is the result of an emotional deficit that has not been filled.

And so very "butch" women who despise being female can be sexually attracted to very feminine women. It is as if they are trying to have and experience the feminine love and acceptance and femininity that for one reason or another they did not receive or could not achieve in adolescence and childhood.

Christian ex-gay ministries such as Exodus International, OneByOne, and Love Won Out attempt to help women fill this void with the love and nurture of Christ. Why is this their approach?

Why bring God into the equation? Why not rely solely on psychotherapy, medication, and support groups?

Why are the majority of "ex-gay" programs faith-based, and why are almost all of these faith-based ministries exclusively Christian? What does faith have to offer those who want to overcome same-sex attraction? In particular, what does Christianity offer those who want to overcome same-sex attraction? And even more specifically, how does Christianity help a woman who wants to overcome same-sex attraction?

What does faith have to offer those who want to overcome same-sex attraction?

Spirituality vs. Christianity

There is a theological distinction between spirituality and Christianity, and this distinction plays a role in psychotherapy. The incorporation of the spiritual within the practice of psychology is nothing new. Jung acknowledged that "in the dark atom-

ic age of ours' [we] are once more groping for God; and without knowing it, [we] are always concerned with God." [10]

However, Jung's view of "God" or rather what he called the "God-image within the human psyche" [11] is vastly different than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the Christian God whose own flesh and blood - whose own Son - went to a cross to save and reconcile humanity to himself.

For Jung, God mirrored the Gnostic god - a god who is both good and bad "supreme light and abysmal darkness" [12] - a God who in the Old Testament was limited and had to evolve (via humanity's assistance) into a higher supreme being as described in the New Testament. And yet, Jung "considered that [even] the God of the New Testament, though characterized as all loving, was still as vengeful, citing the cruel, sacrificial death of Christ as superfluous, adding that [he, Jung] would not allow his own son to be killed in order to be reconciled to his disobedient children." [13]

Therefore, Jung's view of God became limited to an internal force within the human psyche. He stated: "God is to be considered as the representative of a certain sum of energy... God is the supreme force in a person's psychology, the supreme and ultimately decisive factor." In other words, according to Donald Dyer in *Jung's Thoughts on God*, Jung believed that "one worships the psychic force within the psyche as something divine and that the psychic energy of libido creates the God-image by making use of archetypal patterns." [14]

In other words, Jung acknowledged and valued the human need for God, but his God was a force within the psyche of the person. He openly confessed that he took issue with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the God who called himself the "I AM" - the Judeo-Christian God who is not an impersonal spirit from within our individual psyches but who is an historical, personal entity outside of us who created us in all our complexity, and who comes to us willingly, desiring to relate intimately with us.

Why is having a God with whom we can relate, important for healing emotional and sexual problems?

Just as healthy interpersonal relationships are critical to healthy developmental growth, healthy relationships are critical to the healing of same-sex attraction as well as other forms of relational brokenness. Moreover, Christians contend that having a healthy relationship with God is paramount to a patient's healing and wholeness and paves the way for healthy relationships with others.

The God Within Is No God At All

A God who merely emanates from us is no God at all. A God who is confined to our own experience is one with whom we can have no relationship. Relationship requires an "other" with whom we can relate. If God is simply a force within our psyche, then we can only love ourselves. According to Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Phil, loving ourselves is the greatest love of all. However, I would contend that it is not love at all. Love requires plurality.

We cannot love alone. We cannot love without another to love.

Unlike other faiths, the Judeo-Christian faith professes a personal relationship with God based on historical events and direct intervention in human lives on the human planet within the span of human history. No other religion can claim that kind of activity and revelation.

Moreover, no other religion can claim a God who loves his creatures so much that when they fail him and ask for mercy, he takes the blame upon himself. J.I. Packer writes, "The Greek and Roman world of the New Testament times had never dreamed of such love; its gods were often credited with lusting after women, but never with loving sinners; and the New Testament writers had to introduce what was virtually a new Greek word, *agape*, to express the love of God as they knew it." [15]

Why aren't good relationships with people or our experienced counselors enough?

Human relationships and human counsel (even the best and most devoted) never fully satisfy and never fully rescue people from our fallible natures. We cannot fully save people from themselves or their demons. We do not counsel perfectly. We do not theorize and think perfectly. We don't have all the answers. We can only guide, advise, love, and point people to the truth: and the truth is there is only One who can truly "save" and love humanity unconditionally.

Have you not experienced this dilemma in your own relationships? You reach out to help someone and that person latches on to you like a nursing infant - sucking the life out of you. He or she is what we call "needy," or in other words, he or she needs you to give what you cannot and should not be required to give. You become that person's sole source of security and affirmation and love. It's suffocating, isn't it? You want to run from people like this. Why is this? Because we were not meant to be God. Perhaps *we* have been the needy party. Why have we been? Because we *are* needy - we need someone to be our sole source of security and affirmation and love. However, the only person who can be that for us is God - the source of all life - our Creator - our Perfect Parent.

What Does Christianity Offer Those Who Want To Overcome Same-Sex Attraction?

Renowned psychiatrist Irvin Yalom says, "Therapy is enhanced if the therapist enters accurately into the patient's world. Patients profit enormously simply from the experience of being fully seen and fully understood." [16]

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob relates to us personally so that he might save us from the effects of our free will - a free will that he graciously gave to us. We as humans do evil things. We

abuse, we neglect, we take revenge, and we meet legitimate needs in very illegitimate ways. And God lets us. He is no dictator. He is also a compassionate Father who does not want us to suffer and die. So he interferes with our lives so that we might be saved from the very evil we have embraced.

Why is this love so important as it relates to the healing of same-sex attraction? Last month, I went to the Gay Pride Parade here in Orlando, and I passed out this tract with three other Christians. (Believe me, this was not easy for us. We had never passed out tracts before nor had we wanted to.) The title is: A Love Worth Finding. This is how it starts: "Psychologists have long known that every person has two great longings and inward needs. The first is to be loved, and the second is to love."

What a great opening line. So, why is this love important? Because it is our greatest need. Not everyone finds satisfying human love, and we all know that even the best human love doesn't completely satisfy and often disappoints us in varying degrees.

The tract goes on to say: "But when pressures and heartaches come into our lives, many give up any hope of ever finding love. The tragedy is that we often look in the wrong places to fill this deep, deep need and longing. Some substitute lust for love. Others pursue material things or superficial relationships -- all in the futile attempt to fill a God-shaped vacuum in the human heart."

This God-shaped vacuum cannot be filled with an idea, a philosophy, a force, a form of self-awareness, an achievement, a medication, or even a human relationship -- for these things, helpful as they are, were not meant to fill this space. The God-shaped vacuum can only be filled by God, himself.

How does Christianity help a woman who wants to overcome same-sex attraction?

It offers her the one thing she desires the most: perfect love.

In her book: *For Women Only: What You Need To Know About the Inner Lives of Men*, Shuanti Feldham conducted a survey which asked over 400 men this question: "If they had to make a choice between being alone and unloved or being inadequate and disrespected, what would they choose?" The majority (76%) said they would rather be alone and unloved. The opposite was found true for women.

A woman's greatest need is to be chosen -- to be loved and cherished. Christianity, or rather, a relationship with Jesus Christ offers a woman the very thing she most desires -- passionate, relentless, sacrificial love.

The proof of this reality (that women respond to love) is found in our Christian churches. Over 70 percent of Christian congregations are made up of women. I've heard Christian men sadly refer to this as the "feminization" of the church. But the reality is that the Church by nature is referred to as feminine (we are the

Bride of Christ) and there is nothing substandard about the feminine. God says that he created us in his image -- male and female. That means that God's image reflects masculinity and femininity.

A woman walked into my office a while back and asked me this question: "What does it mean to be feminine?" I had to pause and think about that. Yes, I thought, what does it mean to be feminine? I responded by saying, "I think the essence of being feminine is having the ability to receive."

Christ calls us all (men and women) to come to him and receive his love and forgiveness. We cannot come to him in any other way. Yet, if we come to God in a feminine posture, then God approaches us in a masculine posture. This is hard for women to accept -- particularly those who have been abused by men. Considering a large percentage of lesbian women have been abused and rejected by men, calling God "Father" can be a challenge. [17]

I struggled with rejection from men and emotional detachment from my own father, so I had my share of issues as it relates to men. As a single woman who desires to marry and be a mother (at the age of 38), I continue to struggle with the male population.

On those tough days when I watch more babies be baptized and more friends get married, and more men take no interest in me, I have heard God speak to my heart: He says, "Kristin, only I am worthy to be called a real man -- a truly good man -- a man on a white horse -- a man who truly loves you."

Remember the song "Try a Little Tenderness"?

It's not just sentimental.
She has her grief and her care.
But a word soft and gentle;
makes it easier to bear.
You won't regret it; women don't forget it.
Love is their whole happiness.
And it's so easy; try a little tenderness.

This is how God through Jesus has been to me: tender. In his tenderness, he is never condescending or belittling. On the contrary, he lifts me up and calls me to be a warrior for him. He knows that it is this very tenderness that gives me strength to be mighty. Unlike many men, God does not see women as assistants. He sees women as heirs in his Kingdom -- sitting at the roundtable with him.

Jesus spoke directly into the lives of sexually broken women.

To the woman at the well he said, "You are right when you said that you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true.... If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he

would have given you living water...I who speak to you am he [the Messiah]" (John 4).

To the woman caught in adultery, Jesus said: "Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11).

To the prostitute who interrupted the Pharisees' dinner, Jesus said: "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Matt. 26:10-13)

No wonder the women were at the cross and at the tomb – when most of the men had fled. Jesus was everything they had ever hoped for in a man but never got. In Christ they found their hero, their savior, their husband, their father, their lover.

I share this with you because this is how I overcame same-sex attraction – by following Jesus. Yes, as time passed I went to a good Christian counselor, and God provided friends and eventually a supportive church, and books and testimonies, and prayer support groups, but in the initial stages of healing there was no Exodus or OneByOne. It was just God and me. My Will and His Grace.

'Will' And 'Grace' -- The Human Will And The Grace Of God

Are you willing? This is the question we must ask ourselves, our patients, and those to whom we minister. Are you willing? The human will plays a decisive role in the outcome of overcoming same-sex attraction. Many people, especially Christians, believe that God will just zap them and heal them instantaneously. But God requires our steadfast cooperation and our willingness to suffer – because that what it takes to overcome.

Healing requires a choice. Embarking upon a relationship requires a choice. Listen to Joshua as he speaks to the Israelites: "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your fathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Jos. 24:15).

The beginning of my healing began on my knees on a hard wood floor in an apartment in Savannah, GA. At that time I was involved in an intimate relationship with a woman, and I had to decide whether I would continue this relationship.

I prayed these words: "Dear Jesus, I love you, but I do not know what to do. But, Lord, even though I don't know what to do, I ask

that your will be done. Let your will be done."

Honestly, in that prayer I still I hoped that his will was my will – the will to live with this woman...but it wasn't. The relationship came to a sudden end, and I was crushed. I knew God allowed it, but I was still angry. I was angry at her, but what God had to show me was how angry I was at God. I was angry at him because I thought that by obeying him he had deprived me of love.

One day I was driving on an unfamiliar street, distracted. I was smoking and listening to the soothing sounds of Alanis Morissette. I didn't see the stop light mounted on the side of the road, so I went right through it, and a pick-up truck slammed right into me.

I remember sitting in that car, with the airbag in my face, a crooked cigarette hanging out of my mouth, dust and smoke swirling into my eyes. My car was completely totaled, but Alanis was still singing from my CD player. It was comical, but at the time I wasn't laughing. I remember thinking as I sat there, "My God, will this ever end...will this misery ever end? When will you relent, Oh Lord?" I remember wishing God would have taken my life in that accident.

Amazingly, I crashed right in front of an apartment where I had prayed with a small group of Christians and confessed my struggle with homosexuality. The girls with whom I had prayed came out of the house, and I remember getting out of my car and seeing them run into the street to meet me. I couldn't believe they were there. And I was a basket case. I remember one of the girls held me in her arms -- and I held on to her. As I held her, I thought, "Oh no, she probably knows about my 'issue.'" I don't want to give her the wrong impression." So I pulled my arm away from hers.

Without hesitating, she drew my arm right back around her, and she kept holding me. It was as if God were holding me through her and saying, "I have not come to deprive you of love, but to give it to you -- in my way."

Those girls were God's messengers sent to me that day. When I think of that crash, I don't see it as God's wrath but as God's great mercy to me. It was through that crash and subsequent financial difficulties that God taught me what I needed to know to be able to do his will.

The first thing he taught me was that there was no way I could do his will if I did not trust him. I had believed in God all of my life. Before and during my struggle, I never lost my faith in God's existence or Christ's love for the world or of his justice.

But what I struggled with was trusting God to provide for me. When temptations came and hardships, it was always there that I faltered. I did not trust God to provide for me – to rescue me – to defend me in crises and to give me what I needed, so I got it on my own. I took care of myself.

It was during this time of brokenness – during and after the car accident– when I could not take care of myself that I had to recklessly let God take care of me. And in so doing, he took care of the greatest longing of my heart: He told me: “My dear little girl – you can trust me to provide for you. I am your Father.”

There is no therapeutic technique, no human counsel, no man or woman who can say that to me and mean it. Only God can deliver me. And he has delivered me.

What I do know is that God and this journey of faith is not safe, but it is good. And God is right there beside me to help me up when I fall. He has promised to never leave my side. Knowing this keeps me from frantically looking to women or men or to myself to fill my need for unconditional love and acceptance. I know who I am in Christ; I am his beloved – and through this knowledge, I am healed.

Summary

What does Christianity offer those who want to overcome same-sex attraction?

It offers a God who desires an intimate relationship with his creation. It offers a God who empathizes with human need and provides a way to meet these needs. Moreover, it offers a God who has taken upon himself the role of savior and deliverer, so that we might be reconciled to God and our neighbor.

How does Christianity help a woman who wants to overcome same-sex attraction? It offers her the one thing she desires the most: perfect love. A relationship with Jesus Christ offers a woman the very thing she most desires – passionate, relentless, sacrificial love.

The same-sex drive is an unmet need for unconditional acceptance and nurturing from women that has become a sexual hunger. The only way to assuage the craving is to feed on God’s love and to digest his Word, which tells us how unique and beautiful and loved we are in his eyes.

How does the human will and God’s grace help a woman overcome same-sex attraction?

God does not force himself upon his creation. He allows us choice. Therefore, we must choose to meet our deepest needs in the perfect arms of God or we must choose to meet our deepest needs in the arms of fallible human beings.

The paradox is that when we go to God’s arms first, we end up surrounded by the arms of others. But when we go to man’s arms first, we find that we have let go of God and those human arms eventually fall away.

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End Notes:

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