

# Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn't

*July 17, 2013*

Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven't needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical "us/them" dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted "gay to straight" change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but "flesh management," using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding

values, which until recently was still found on their “About Us” page:

*While we have never met anyone who “chose” to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. **Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.*

*We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God’s creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)*

What I see here is a statement pointing to God’s standards, God’s intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one’s sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can’t stop being sinners and can’t stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, “I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader’s Conference except this past year, and have always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God’s truth, and encouraging people not so much to be “straight” but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: ‘Proclaim

God's Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.' Nothing has changed for us."

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you what it *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It doesn't mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It doesn't mean that there isn't any help for those dealing with this issue, either for themselves or a loved one.
- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.
- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-

control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt)

---

## When Ex-Gays Return to a Gay

# Identity

I recently received an envelope in the mail with no return address and no personal note, just copies of three articles about men who used to be part of Exodus International, who used to identify themselves as “ex-gay,” and now repudiate that part of their histories. It is consistent with emails and [blog comments](#) I have received pointing this out, and asking if that doesn’t negate [my position that homosexuality is changeable](#).

No. The fact that some people, denouncing something they used to support, now represent themselves as proud gays and lesbians, doesn’t change anything. Just as people who lived in sobriety from alcohol and drugs for years have been known to get sucked back into their addictions, it isn’t surprising that some would get weary of the struggle against their temptations and stop fighting.

Some people gave up earlier than others, hoping and expecting that if they just kept living “the straight life,” their feelings would catch up with their resolutions. They kept waiting for homosexual desires and temptations to disappear, and they didn’t. So they decided that they were done with trying to pretend to be something they weren’t. I’m good with not pretending; I’m a huge believer in [authenticity and transparency](#).

But if someone continues to experience same-sex attraction even if they don’t act on it, does it mean they’re gay, as the culture insists?

What the culture says—if you ever have same-sex feelings, it means you’re gay—doesn’t matter compared to what God says.

God calls us to make choices every day that contradict and violate our feelings and temptations, but which we choose because they are the right thing to do. From the basics of the

Ten Commandments to the ultimate example of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, He calls us to choose obedience and behavior that honors Him and other people despite our feelings. What if we don't *feel* like telling the truth? Don't lie anyway. What if we don't *feel* like not killing the person who really ticks us off? Don't murder anyway. What if we don't *feel* like remaining faithful to our spouse? Don't commit adultery anyway.

So what if someone doesn't *feel* like stewarding their sexuality in purity and self-control? Regardless of the nature of the temptation, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, God calls us to possess our own body in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:4).

Sadly, some men who had come out of homosexuality have left their wives and children to return to living as gay men. This isn't really much different from men who leave their wives and children for another woman. Succumbing to temptation, regardless of who tempts us, is still sin. Heartbreaking, home-breaking sin.

We're hearing people saying, "I'm not ex-gay anymore because trying to be ex-gay doesn't work. 'Pray away the gay' (a rather offensive term used by scoffers) doesn't work. Trying hard to be straight doesn't work. 'Claiming my healing' doesn't work. I'm done."

And they're right.

### **What doesn't work:**

*Name-it-and-claim-it theology*, the religious version of "wishing will make it so." Trying to speak reality into existence, as in "I am no longer gay because I'm a Christian," doesn't work because we don't create reality through our words. Only the Creator God can do that.

*Casting out the demon of homosexuality.* While there is always

a demonic component to idolatry and unrepentant sin, homosexuality is not caused by a demon, any more than bigotry, selfishness or gossip are.

*Trying harder, praying harder, reading the Bible, [begging God to make the gay feelings to go away](#).* These human efforts are the religious equivalent of mowing the grass to get rid of dandelions. (For a completely different approach—grace—check out [True-Faced](#).)

### **What does work:**

*Laying aside one's sexuality as the measure of identity.* “Who I really am” according to our flesh is always going to be at odds with “who God says I am” according to His word. Seeking a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the spiritual disciplines moves us toward reframing our faulty identity, no matter who we are or what we struggle with. We need to choose to find our identity in what God says about us—most importantly, receiving and owning the truth that He says, “You are My beloved child in whom I am well pleased.”

*Looking at the contributing factors* that shaped the same-sex “hole” in one's heart (and the lies connected to them) to process them in light of God's love and sovereignty, and then forgive the people who inflicted the wounds.

*Choosing to learn to live with a tension:* our flesh wants things that are dishonoring to God, dysfunctional and dangerous, but God calls us to do the right thing anyway. Regardless of our desires and feelings. Right from the beginning, He told Cain, “[I]f you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it” (Gen 4:7). God didn't say to Cain, “I know, you're angry because I didn't accept your offering. That's who you are, an angry soul. Go and let your anger explode!” In the New Testament, we read, “The thief must no

longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need" (Eph. 4:28). God didn't say to the thief, "I know, you feel compelled to take what doesn't belong to you. That's who you are, a stealing soul. Go and act on your desires to steal!"

Now we have people saying, "I am attracted to the same sex. Since everyone says I am defined by my feelings, I now realize that's just who I am." And God does not say to them, "I know, you are gay/lesbian/transgender/bi-sexual. That's who you are, so go act on it!" God calls everyone to the same standard: sexual holiness and integrity, which means keeping all sex within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman.

*Adjusting one's expectations.* Accepting the truth that one's attractions and desires may always be warped to some degree; they may always remain an area of weakness that can drive the disciple to a deeper level of dependence on God, which is essential for growing in relationship with Him. That may mean learning to live with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-10) instead of insisting that the only culturally acceptable change is a 180-degree shift in attractions from homosexual to heterosexual.

There is no "easy button." Submitting to the process of sanctification means crucifying the flesh, and that's *hard*. For any Christ-follower. And that's where lasting change happens—as we are made into the image of Christ (Gal. 4:19), as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). And that might, or might not, extend to our feelings. Regardless of who we are.

This blog post originally appeared at  
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue\\_bohlin/when\\_ex-gays\\_return\\_to\\_a\\_gay\\_identity](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/when_ex-gays_return_to_a_gay_identity) on May 7, 2013.



---

# When Someone In Your Congregation Says “I’m Gay”

## Things to Remember

1. **No one is born gay**, and no one chooses to be gay. Because of relational brokenness in families and among peers, some people experience emotional needs that they try to meet in ungodly ways. Many of them are uncomfortable with their own gender; later, they discover they are attracted to others of the same sex, but this is not their choice. Acting on it, however, is.
2. **Change is possible.** Even going back to the first-century church, the apostle Paul wrote to former homosexuals in the Corinthian church, “and such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11).
3. Because we live in a fallen world, **we are all broken.** Many people in our churches are sexually broken—victims of incest, pornography and masturbation addicts, and compulsive sex addiction. Homosexuality is only one form of brokenness.
4. **Homosexuality grows out of broken relationships and is healed in healthy relationships**, especially same-sex relationships. This is one of the reasons it is essential for recovering homosexuals and lesbians to be actively involved in the church, because this is where they can find healthy, God-honoring friendships. Their homosexuality is not contagious!
5. **Treat them with respect like you would anyone else.** They are people made in the image of God for whom Christ died—they are not their sexuality. Many people trying to come out of the gay lifestyle expect to find respect and acceptance only in

the gay community. Finding it in church is immensely healing to their souls.

6. **Accept them where they are, just as Jesus did.** Choose to accept the person, but not sinful behavior. People don't change unless they experience the grace of acceptance first. But once they know they are loved and accepted, many of them are willing to do what it takes to live a life of holiness.

7. **Seek to see them with God's eyes** of love and acceptance, with His intention for their wholeness, healing and freedom. This means depending on the Holy Spirit for divine perspective and exercising humility to recognize that first impressions are often incomplete and inaccurate.

8. This is a great opportunity to lead people to an understanding of **what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ**. Some homosexual strugglers, especially men, feel that they have committed the unpardonable sin. They've heard they are going to hell no matter what they do, so they are permanently separated from God. They need to know this is a lie, because when we confess our sins, the blood of Jesus covers them ALL and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

9. Because of abuse issues, most **strugglers seem to have an especially hard time relating to Father God** and to receiving His love. Yet it is the masculine voice (first in earthly fathers, and ultimately in our Heavenly Father) that calls gender out from both men and women, and it is the Father's personal and powerful love that is the most important healing agent in human hearts.

10. Because most pastors are men in authority, **most strugglers (men and women) are INCREDIBLY intimidated** by them. Pastors need to know this and really understand in order to minister to strugglers. This means respecting the fragility of strugglers' relationships with pastors and choosing to be

deliberately tender and gentle. They really need “good shepherds.” Verbalize to them that God can not only change them, but He is very proud of them (as you are) for sharing this with you and desiring to change.

**11. Most same-sex strugglers have very weak and broken boundaries.** Their deep neediness causes them to lapse into emotionally dependent relationships with everyone who gets close. We encourage you to only counsel these folks at your office during regular business hours where others can be aware of your activities. This gives a sense of security to the struggler and a protection for you as the pastor.

**12.** The most success in overcoming same-gender attraction has occurred when strugglers experienced **God as Healer through heterosexual people who were willing to come alongside them** in their journeys—men helping men, and women helping women. It would be helpful for you to find someone willing to befriend and mentor the struggler. This takes a person willing to seriously invest in the life of a very needy person. They will need to be available and accessible. Their presence in the struggler’s life can be powerful and healing.

**13. If someone comes in with an agenda** of arrogance, demanding acceptance of their sexual sin, don’t let them bully you. There is a difference between welcoming the sinner and allowing him to continue in his rebellion. Homosexuality is sin. Lev. 18:22-23; Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-11. Note that these verses condemn homosexual behavior, not feelings.

## **Five DON'TS:**

**1. Don't panic.** An excellent resource for understanding the issue of homosexuality is *Someone I Love is Gay* by Bob Davies and Anita Worthen (published by InterVarsity Press). Also Exodus International ([exodusinternational.org/](http://exodusinternational.org/)), a Christ-centered ministry that helps people deal with unwanted homosexuality, has numerous resources. Living Hope Ministries

([www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org)) is an Exodus referral ministry in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area with excellent online forums for parents, spouses, men and women, and youth (ages 13+) who struggle with homosexuality

**2. Don't make false assumptions or accusations.** For example, please do not assume he is HIV positive. Many aren't. And if he is, AIDS is sexually transmitted; the people in your congregation are safer than many fear. Respect the seriousness of HIV with commonsense precautions (such as contact with bodily fluids), but don't ostracize the person. Handshakes and hugs are perfectly safe.

**3. Don't shut down pastorally or emotionally.** The person coming to you has known a lifetime of rejection and desperately needs to know that a representative of Jesus Christ will extend grace to him. Hug them when they leave. It may be the first positive touch they have had in years.

**4. Don't pass judgment.** All of us have besetting sins! As Billy Graham said, "Don't take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place."

**5. Don't disclose this person's secret without permission,** even among church staff. There is nothing safe about the gay lifestyle; people struggling with same-sex attraction need to find safety in the church.

*This is the text of a brochure from Living Hope Ministries, written by Sue Bohlin, who serves on the Board of Directors of Living Hope and moderates one of the online forums. A PDF version of this brochure is also available for download [here](#); you will need the free Adobe Acrobat reader to see it.*

© 2003 Living Hope Ministries. Used by permission. All rights reserved.