

My Testimony

Brett

I was a sensitive, emotional kid. The second son of a young couple who divorced by the time I was 4 years old. Mom did the best she could as a single-mom in the late 70's, working 2nd and 3rd shift jobs. We saw our Dad about one weekend a month; he was always faithful in picking us up, and eager to spend time with us when we were staying with him.

Both of my Grandfathers had passed away by the time I was seven. My older brother and I were not close and I don't remember having any significant male friends during those years. Mom worked very hard but, in struggling to deal with her own issues, was not emotionally available to me.

At around 10 years old both my Mom and my Dad got remarried. My step-Mother and my step-Father were caring people who treated me the same as any natural parent would. I looked to my new step-father for the male affection that I had been starved of so far in life. And while he cared and provided for his new family; he did not seem to understand me. I was talkative, not sports oriented, read a lot of books, and generally found odd bits of information fascinating—almost as fascinating as being able to share those newfound bits with the adults around me. In Junior High, I struggled to be accepted in the small Christian school I was attending. I struggled at home to live up to the expectations of becoming a good Christian boy. And in the midst of this, I also struggled with a growing sexual interest in the guys around me.

Escapism and fantasy were not foreign concepts to me. I had learned to utilize them to occupy myself in the years since the divorce. I could play endlessly with Lego's, read books till I was nearly cross-eyed, and dream about far-away places for hours. I can't tell you a specific date or instance that I remember as the turning point in my sexual development, but my craving for male affirmation, coupled with the sexual discoveries of puberty, has fueled my struggle with same-sex attraction ever since.

I identified as a Christian from 5th grade on but still wondered how I could think and/or do the stuff I was doing and actually be a Christian. My desperate need for approval even colored how I approached God. I never internalized that I was accepted just as I was, not because of what I did. My stated beliefs were that God is all-loving, all-powerful, kind, and accepts me just as I am. My operational beliefs told me that I needed to be good in order to have God really bless me, that the things I struggled with were 'different', and that God did not view them the same as other sins.

Jr. and Sr. High were not my most memorable years. Suffice it to say, I was not popular, and my attempts at sports were not encouraging. Even though I was involved in theater, and attended our church youth group, I never felt fully accepted. I was very alone and desperately wanted NOT to be. The thought patterns, experiences, and habits formed during that time hardened into deeply imbedded attractions, patterns of coping, and a set of false beliefs that would undermine any efforts of self-will to overcome.

After graduating high school, I attended a very conservative, Christian college in Virginia. I had hoped that something I could learn or do there would be the key to overcoming these unwanted attractions. Despite those high hopes, my lusting and struggles continued the entire time. For my sophomore year, I left Virginia and attended UW-Milwaukee. I was diagnosed with clinical depression during that same year. I turned again to lust, fantasy, and sex (with other guys) to escape the reality that life was hard, and I wasn't able to handle it on my own.

The following year I began attending a large church, a church where I would eventually find some connection, get involved in peer ministries, and even become a volunteer youth leader. As a youth leader, I thought I had found my calling, my purpose in life. The uncool kid was now the cool guy to hang out with. I was able to connect, to relate, to listen, and to speak. And as I did

well in ministry, the affirmations flowed. I began to think that this is what would make God and others proud of me.

Even though I had stopped having sex, my struggles with pornography and masturbation continued, and I dared not tell anyone. I could and did share about other stuff, but I always withheld that last bit of information, the true nature of my struggle. I agonized over it; cried over it, pleaded with God to heal me, take it away, take me away, something, anything! But still the attraction remained. Here I was trying to do HIS work, what I thought HE asked me to, what others told me I was gifted for, and yet He appeared unwilling to heal me of this hated part of me that I was sure would cause everyone to reject me once they found out. So I hid, I kept silent, and I continued to die inside.

My inner life was in chaos. Attempting to bear the weight of it alone – the shame, guilt, fear, self-loathing – was too much. I wanted to perform well, to please God and the people around me. I wanted to be accepted and loved in a way that touched the deep longings I felt inside but didn't know how. For many years I believed that I was a failure as a Christian, I obviously didn't pray enough, love God enough, or try hard enough. The chaos continued. Depression, addiction to pornography, and hopelessness characterized my life, the severity of which I hid from nearly everyone.

The depths of my failures, the crushing weight of shame, and the full story of how God has worked to draw me close to Him again would take hours to share. But I will at least tell you how God has brought me here, sharing my story with you.

In the summer of 2006 I attended a men's group where I learned the name of a counselor. That counselor encouraged me to pursue recovery in a 12 step group for sexual addiction and later pointed me toward an Exodus-affiliated ministry called Broken Yoke, places where I was able to receive support in my struggle with SSA. It is within those safe environments that I have begun to accept that I am a beloved man of God who happens to struggle with SSA. I have learned that, as a young kid, I tried to satisfy legitimate emotional and spiritual needs in ways that I could never have known would further entrench this struggle in my life. It is the acceptance of my condition and the hope that God can and does work – even in this area - that has turned the tide in my life.

Am I "healed"? No. I am still in process, but even on my worst days this is far better than the shell of a life I used to live. I don't have all the answers to questions like why do I still struggle, will I ever be married, or will I struggle with this my whole life? I don't know. But what I do know is that I have to place my trust in the only one who has the power to raise the dead to life again. If death is no obstacle for Him, then I can have hope that my struggles are not either.

³³*Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free.'* Acts 7:33-34a (NIV)

God sees our oppression. God hears our groaning. God has come to set us free. Freedom, for me, is not the absence of SSA. It is that I am now free to admit that this is my struggle, that I am now free to share that fact with others, and that I now know that this struggle does not define me. Nor does my struggle disqualify me from all of the love, grace, and forgiveness that God has pre-apportioned for my life.