

When Darkness Isn't Dark Enough

Help for Adults Attracted to Children

By Bob Van Domelen

Introduction

“A local teacher was arrested and charged today with molesting one of his students. The alleged contact was said to have taken place over several months and might not have surfaced had the victim not confided in a friend. The friend reported the abuse to a school counselor who contacted the police.”

Announcements of this nature are heard almost daily in cities across the country. The response of the communities is almost always one of shock, followed by intense anger. The offenders are teachers, ministers, youth leaders, next-door neighbors, relatives, or friends. On occasion the offender is a stranger to the victim, but statistically this is very unlikely. The idea that someone jumps out from behind a bush is less common than abuse as part of a relationship.

What are not seen or heard of are the struggles of individuals with an attraction toward children but who have not acted out. No one praises them for their self-control. In truth, were these individuals to share openly with most people the nature of their struggle, they would be cast aside as perverts. “If they think it, they have to be molesting” would be the common response.

How do we get past the anger associated with those adults who are attracted to children? How do we even discuss a road to healing when righteous retribution dominates the minds of those asked to reach out? The solution most commonly offered today is confinement or civil commitment. . .and the longer the better.

In the past 15 years, I have had to focus intensely on the topic of adults who are attracted to children because I was one of them. Arrested in 1985 and sentenced to time in prison followed by 10 years of probation, I have since completed the mandate of that court. Recent legislation known as Megan's Law, however, has added another 15 years of “probation” to my sentence, and it would not surprise me to see the 15 turn to a lifetime, given the social climate we live in. Such laws are not the foundation of healing. They are meant to provide some peace of mind to the public.

Part of my own healing has been found in reaching out to others, offering hope and encouragement, despite the animosity and discouragement offenders and those who have never acted out alike face because of their struggles. In just the past few years, I have written thousands of letters to individuals who have contacted Broken Yoke Ministries seeking help. Out of the letters came the idea of a bimonthly newsletter, *Into the Light*, which discusses various aspects of adult/child attractions and the road to freedom. These same letters form much of the foundation for this booklet.

It is not the intent of this brief work to be an authoritative legal or medical response to the complex questions facing society with regard to this topic. The booklet is meant to be a vehicle which promotes at least a measure of understanding while providing a common tool for all of us who face this most

difficult subject. Because I have seen God as the center of my own healing journey, God will also be at the very core of what I share with you.

Let's Get Started

Writing about pedophilia and ephebophilia could be seen as trying to find a way to excuse or minimize my past thoughts and actions. Normally rational people might stiffen with anger at the mere mention of knowing or reading about an adult who is or has been attracted to children. Distancing themselves is often the first order of business followed by righteous indignation.

I am writing with the hope that the reader is either in a position to care enough to help bring about change for someone else or is a struggler wanting to see words that describe feelings which they are too shame-filled to share. I have learned in my own life that secrecy or silence made possible the kind of abuse no child should have to endure. In the depth of my prayer life, I feel God speaking the words, "No more secrets, no more abusing."

Some Basic Definitions. . .As I Understand Them

Adults who have an addictive attraction to children are clinically diagnosed as pedophile or ephebophile. The difference between the two words is a matter of the age and sexual development of the child they are attracted to. "Pedophile," however, seems to be a universally accepted term for all adults who have an attraction to children.

Pedophiles are interested in pre-pubescent children. This includes all those from young babies to young teens, linked by the fact that those children have not yet reached puberty. The ephebophile focuses on boys and/or girls who have reached puberty, have experienced some of the physiological changes common to puberty, yet are still more childlike than adult.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) offers the following criteria for diagnosing pedophilia:

Repeatedly for at least 6 months, the patient has intense sexual desires, fantasies or behaviors concerning sexual activity with a sexually immature child (usually age 13 or under). This causes clinically important distress or impairs work, social or personal functioning. The patient is 16 or older and at least 5 years older than the child.

Based on the hundreds of letters I have received in my ministry from men currently in prison for child molestation, there is a marked difference in the intensity of their sexual desires for children. Some inmates reported having had very little interest and/or sexual desire for children before they actually acted out. Others shared that they thought of little else every day.

The first group, therefore, would not necessarily meet the DSM-IV frequency requirement and by definition should not be defined as pedophiles. In my own case, the attraction and desire to be with boys surfaced most often during times of stress and isolation yet was almost nonexistent when life was going well.

The diagnostic label of pedophile, however, is generally placed on anyone who suggests or initiates an inappropriate sexual contact with a child. If restoration and change is a desired outcome of treatment, the current practice of

labeling makes the process more difficult and in some cases impossible. I offer that comment because the medical world currently believes that no change is possible for the clinically diagnosed pedophile. This belief system forms the nucleus of many treatment programs.

If the label accurately describes an individual, however, should that diagnosis dictate a life of no hope for change? Should one who has not acted out become an offender merely because he or she has no other choice given such a diagnosis? Having met some who have not acted out, I have a great deal of respect for them and have strongly encouraged them to continue on the path they have chosen.

Bruce McCutcheon has written an excellent booklet in this series produced by Exodus International titled "Counseling the Pedophile." Written more for those who counsel, the booklet does provide an in-depth treatment of clinical definitions and is highly recommended.

Why Me?

No matter how much I read on the subject of pedophilia and ephebophilia, no matter how much understanding I feel I am gaining, the basic question remains, "Why me?" Most of the letters I receive and the conversations I share with other strugglers eventually include that question. Perhaps what others and I really are hoping is that answers will make the struggle disappear. The answers themselves will not bring on this freedom but they will make the journey easier.

So How Did I Get This Way?

In the heart of every person who is attracted to children is a lost child. Something happened to that child which should not have happened. I do not believe that pedophilia or ephebophilia are genetic conditions. The conditions are the byproducts of what others have chosen to do to us as well as what we have chosen to do to ourselves. All choices are solutions, sometimes good and sometimes bad, but always a response to a legitimate need.

As a young child, I was taught that God made me in His image and likeness. That connection with God ruled out any possibility that He would create a condition/person who had no other choice but to harm others. Accepting this basic belief allowed me to see God as the source of change because it was never God's intent that I should become a molester.

In my opinion, the root of pedophilia and ephebophilia is essentially the same: *a child is somehow separated from him- or herself during childhood, growing into biological adulthood yet locked into either a need to find connection with children (and the individual's own lost childhood) or an inability to exist in the adult world.*

"No normal man (or woman) would do such a thing!" is a comment I hear from people expressing disgust over the latest reported case of child molestation. If I take that comment at face value, I must look at what would make the individual to be not normal.

Violent Separation

“B” wrote: *“My entire childhood was filled with fear. My father controlled me with anger and intimidation. He never physically forced me to submit to him, but he did force me to pretend that I liked what he was doing to me and that I wanted him to do it.*

“I believe that my inability to express my true feelings about what was happening to me and my being forced to act as though I enjoyed it left me with many deep-seated emotional wounds. The few times I timidly attempted to speak out in honesty about my situation were devastating. My father’s violent reaction, his ranting and raving was so frightening to me that I soon learned just to do whatever he said without objection.

Fear was my constant companion: fear of my father, fear of being exposed, fear of my mother finding out about what was happening, fear of having and then losing friends and being lonely.”

Separated from his own masculinity because of his father’s sexual abuse, this man became isolated from his peer group as well. He became disconnected and eventually became a molester himself. Others like “B” eventually see themselves as soiled and unlovable, having lost their innocence to someone with power over them.

“R” once explained to me how he crossed the line of merely being attracted to children to abusing them in this way. *“When I would look at her, all I could see was her innocence. Just being with her made me feel good. But that didn’t last. I found that after a while I was angry because she was innocent and I was not. God didn’t protect me when I needed protection, so I decided that I would do to her what was done to me.”*

“E” shared *“Having lived in hell all of my life, it’s difficult to imagine any sort of paradise at all. Both parents were alcoholics. My father severely abused me physically, mentally, and emotionally from my infancy until my mother separated from him when I was seven. She entered into a sexual relationship with me when I was eight years of age. This ‘relationship’ was progressive and went on for fourteen years until her death from alcohol-related liver disease.”*

The three examples I have shared with you all have one thing in common—lost childhood. Not one of these individuals expects to be forgiven for their acts of molestation simply because they themselves were abused, yet all three have learned to recognize the extent of the harm done to them was significant in their own abusive patterns.

Non-Violent Separation

It would be incorrect and grossly misleading to state that all those who are attracted to children were products of abuse and extreme neglect. I have met parents of molesters currently in prison—people who have stood by their sons when everyone else turned a deaf ear to any kind of request for support. In general, many parents of molesters carry a burden of guilt that may or may not be valid. No parent, however, is a flawless parent; all parents make mistakes; and all mistakes have consequences.

Every child is rejected at some point or another while growing up, whether at home, on the playground, or in the classroom. One has only to watch children at play to see that children themselves are capable of harming other children and of rejecting and ostracizing others if for no other reason than as a sign of dislike. The object of scorn is pushed to the outside of childhood society along with others who have been rejected. Years later, memories for these set aside evoke pain and perhaps anger.

“M” faced physical challenges as a young boy and underwent surgery on a number of occasions to correct an assortment of problems. He bore his physical limitations and survived but survival came at a cost. He wasn’t like the boys around him. He couldn’t do all the things they could do.

He began smoking at a young age and progressed to drugs. Before long, “M” was having difficulties at school, eventually being expelled for a time. “M” wrote that he was sexually intimate with both boys and girls but that his main sexual interest was for boys. As in the case of so many others, “M” grew older while his sexual attractions and occasions of intimacy fixed themselves on young boys. Arrest and prison were only a matter of time.

In my own case, inappropriate sexual activity initiated by older boys started occurring when I was seven years old and continued into my teen years where I more willingly participated in or initiated the activity.

My freshman year of high school was spent at a seminary and was, in many respects, one of the happiest years of my youth. With one week remaining to the school year, however, I was expelled for masturbating with other students, seen as the initiator of the activity, and asked to leave. My father cried—a memory that stays with me even to this day.

My victims were generally 14-16 years old—a focus that therapists have told me is directly related to the events I have just described. My parents did not abuse me or fail to meet my needs, but I saw my behavior and the shame I brought them as a wedge between us.

I was sixteen when my father died. In some ways, my disgrace was like a stain I could not clean away, and his death closed the door to the kind of communication I so much needed from him.

Relating in the Adult World

There are variations in the kind of separations I have already described, but most of the differences can be attributed to circumstances peculiar to an individual child. Other separations become evident when the child seeks to take his or her place in the world of adults. As long as life is bright and tensions are at a minimum, being an adult is not bad.

“W” came from a fairly dysfunctional home, had made some mistakes as a teen, but believed that being married would finally give him the respectability as a person that he wanted so badly.

The first years of his marriage went well. He and his wife became the parents of a little girl whose needs were insistent and beyond what either parent thought they could meet. Arguments were a daily event and “W” started drinking to escape. His wife had wanted a knight in shining armor, a man who would work

hard so that she could have a little home in the country. His drinking disgusted her; his advances in the bedroom were increasingly unwanted.

One night when their daughter was about five years old, his wife went out for the evening and told him to take care of the child until she returned. A few beers wouldn't hurt, he told himself, and he settled back to watch TV—his daughter on his lap. That was the night when it all started. That was the night that would continue for more than a year until the girl told her mother.

Free of the continual effects of alcohol, "W" finally recognized the damage he had done to his daughter and his wife. He saw his inappropriate behavior with his daughter as getting back at his wife for rejecting his sexual advances. And in his sober state, he agonized.

"I didn't do anything!"

When I was a boy, a teacher took me aside, pointing out something others said I had done wrong. When I protested that I had not done what he suggested, he responded, "Where there's smoke, there's fire." It has been many years since that day, but the comment remains a powerful statement about the attitudes people have based on little more than the visual observations of others.

Sometimes when I am speaking to a group about child molestation, I make the statement that there are men who write to me for help who have never acted on their sexual feelings toward children. Only a few in the audience have no reaction. The remaining will raise an eyebrow, shift in their chairs, look at one another, or give me that look which clearly states, "That's just not possible." But I would stand by my statement because I believe in those strugglers.

"C" first spoke to me some five or six years ago. As I sat next to him on the front stoop of a building waiting for him to begin, it looked to me as though he were summoning up the necessary courage. When he finally did so, his story came out in a rush of words.

While in his late teens, he was asked to help with the youth of his church and to teach a Bible study to the younger children. The little ones, he said, were trusting and loving, throwing their arms around his neck or wanting to sit on his lap. To his great distress, he often found himself physically aroused during these times. He told the minister what was happening and agreed to separate himself from his involvement with the children.

"C" had not done anything but that was only part of the problem, a small part. Of major concern to him was the fact that he even had the unwanted feelings at all. His greatest fear, however, was that he might abuse a child. It has been some time since I have heard from "C" but when I think of him, my prayer is that God grant him sufficient grace to withstand any unwanted temptation.

I've known another man, "D," for several years now. We aren't in close contact but do managed to talk a few times a year. My first question of him is usually, "How are you doing?" and we both understand that question to mean, "Have you crossed the boundaries you have set for yourself?" His answer is a firm "No," but there follows a brief description of the good times and the not so good times in his life. Like "C," this gentle man cringes at the mere thought that he could abuse a child.

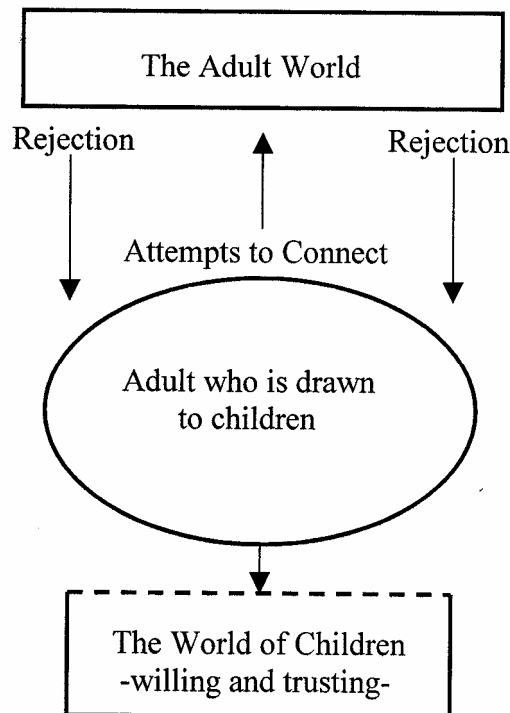
“D” sees a therapist he trusts on a regular basis and feels he is making progress. A major breakthrough occurred as the result of a relationship he established with a senior member of his church. The elder man (described as a “grandfather type,” full of wisdom, and nonjudgmental of others) paid “D” a compliment in one of their recent conversations. The effect was unlike anything “D” had known before. The elder man had affirmed his place as a man in their relationship, chipping away at an inability to accept himself as a man.

Is There A Pattern?

Whatever the root cause of pedophilia or ephebophilia, I do see a pattern that exists in those of us who deal with an attraction to children (see diagram). The more I look at this pattern the more convinced I am that in its design lies the answer for significant healing and change.

An adult who is attracted to children is not born with an aversion toward adults but over time comes to feel rejected in their world. This might be due to the kinds of abuse and separation mentioned earlier. It is also possible that efforts made to become an integral part of the adult world are met with rejection—real or perceived. This rejection is nothing new; its roots are firmly anchored in the individual’s childhood.

The box surrounding the adult world is an imposing structure to such a person; there won’t be that many efforts to break through. The world of children has its boundaries as well, but because of an adult’s position in that world, it is possible to enter without too much difficulty. Children trust adults for protection and recognize that having their needs met often means surrendering to the authority of an adult.



It doesn't take long for the adult to realize that his or her needs are met in the world of children far easier than they ever would be in the world of adults. The trust betrayed by such adults, however, is a trust that will be difficult to restore.

Steps to Freedom

Facing the Past

Of all the barriers to the healing of an adult attracted to children, none is more difficult to deal with than facing the past whether as a victim or as an abuser. An offender failing to do so is said to be in denial, refusing to accept responsibility for the damage done to his or her victim. For those in prison treatment programs, the law requires that an offender be made to acknowledge the child abused, seek ways to avoid a relapse, and recognize signs of potential risk in every day living. There is not, unfortunately, uniform treatment that acknowledges the abuse an offender may have suffered as a child. Indeed, any recognition within treatment by an offender of that abuse is often labeled denial.

Scripture says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other *so that you may be healed.*" (James 5.16 *Italics mine*) The moment one person confesses wrongdoing to another, the bond of secrecy is broken and the weight of shame is lifted. I am not suggesting that such a confession is ever an easy thing to do, because it is not.

Few behaviors or conditions are held so much in personal darkness and secrecy as that of being sexually attracted to children. Reasons may include:

- ***Fear of rejection and alienation by family, friends, and society in general***

Those who share their struggle with a professional or family member with the hope of getting help fear they will be looked upon with suspicion and treated as though incapable of maintaining appropriate boundaries. Not many families would be able to work through their own issues about this topic sufficiently to provide the help being sought.

- ***Prison/jail***

While I am in full agreement with the rights of society and a just sentence of confinement for those who molest, people who have not acted on their feelings fear sharing their struggles with *anyone* because of the potential for unjustified accusations. Those who *have* acted out have only to read the paper or listen to the news to learn what is probably in store for them. Help comes in a distant second when faced with that reality.

- ***The fear of coming face to face with one's own abused childhood***

Adults who have been abused are never completely free of the effects of that abuse, and facing the abuse can be extremely painful. A trust they had in someone had been destroyed; their bodies had been violated; and their right to a healthy sense of sexuality was placed in jeopardy. When they themselves struggle with inappropriate thoughts toward children, the child within is never far from the center of those thoughts, although they might not be aware that this is so.

- ***The belief that a pedophile/ephebophile "can't change"***

To one who fights an inappropriate attraction to children, the attraction to them is not like waking up with the flu. A trip to the doctor and some medication from the pharmacy might bring back health, but no universal drug is advertised for this condition. The attractions they feel are frightening in their ramifications—disclosure is seen as adding to the problem instead of solving it. Because the media and the medical world alike pronounce, “Nothing can be done,” the struggler asks, “Why aggravate things by being publicly known as ‘one of those disgusting people.’”

- ***The misguided belief that such attractions are normal***

I really wanted to omit this as a reason but could not do so. The North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), for example, publicly states that adult-child sexual relationships are “healthy.” Their goal is to “end the oppression of men and boys who have mutually consensual relationships.” I would like to believe that such individuals do not exist, but they do, although they generally do not announce their beliefs to others.

A Personal Example

The very first time I molested a boy, I could not believe what I had done. Nor could I erase the sick feeling I had in my stomach. At the time the abuse happened, I could not tell my wife-to-be even though I very much wanted to do so. Her image of me was the one I created for her and others to see; what I had done was the other part of me, “my secret.” The two sides fought for control but both were actually places of darkness, and the only light I “saw” was found in the panic I felt. It was a light, however, but could just as well have been described as an inner voice. It called me to reject what I was doing.

I did confess the sin but the confession bore the stamp of secrecy. With time, the fear and panic I had that day gave way to an almost casual “that won’t happen again” attitude. There was, however, a basic goodness to the things I sought. I wanted to be a man who was a dedicated teacher, a faithful churchgoer, and a loving husband/father. At times I know I succeeded in these areas but more often than not I did good things in order to receive recognition and acceptance. In other words, too often what I said and did was for public show and personal gain.

Unable to relate to other men, driven by an addiction to pornography, and manipulating others to meet what I believed were my legitimate needs, my life went into a downward spiral. The light was still there, showing me what I was doing with painful clarity. Instead of looking, I shielded my eyes and wiped away tears.

The very last thing I wanted to do was to admit to anyone the depths of my depravity. When I was arrested in 1985, the two images of me collided in the press, in my church, and most painfully in my family. The secret was no longer a secret, yet the road to healing had begun even though it did not feel very healing at first. Since I had not been able to openly confess my sins on my own, others made that initial confession for me.

Painful as it might be, frightening as the consequences might be, disclosure is the door through which all who have an inappropriate attraction to children must pass. The secret is the bond which must be broken, and facing the past is the mirror God will use to bring truth and healing.

Finding A Therapist/ Finding A Support System

My attorney suggested a therapist; a man who was a respected member of the medical community and who also had some court experience. I had, however, seen a different therapist a few years earlier, a pleasant and encouraging person but one too willing to let me hang on to attitudes I knew had to be dropped. When it became clear to me that things would not really change, my sessions lost much of their meaning for me and were discontinued some months later.

Based on my own experiences and those of others who have written, I would offer the following suggestions to those seeking help:

- Ask people you trust (pastors, medical doctors, etc.) who they would recommend. You don't have to say any more than you have been experiencing some serious stress in your life and would like to get help from a psychologist or psychiatrist. A professional would never treat such a request lightly and most will attempt to give you a name they have relied upon in the past.
- Most therapists offer a "breaking ground" consultation session—a time for you to ask questions and for the therapist to learn what it is you need. I recommend that a statement of your goals be presented followed by a simple question. For example, "I have struggled for some time with an inappropriate attraction to children and want freedom from that. I believe that with God all things are possible yet I know that the roots of this condition might be deep. I have not acted upon these feelings. Can you help me achieve my goal?" If the answer points to the lack of any consistent success in treatment, listen to what is said but look for another therapist. My own therapist has often admitted that he does not agree with everything I believe, but he stands by me and assists in doing what he can to help me achieve those goals.
- If you do not feel that you can share the above statements in a face-to-face setting, call from a phone booth.
- Some of the most beautiful people in the world are senior citizens who have seen a lot of life and know the reality of struggle to get through it. Consider establishing a relationship with someone you respect; spend time with that person without pushing your struggle to the surface too quickly. Given time together, you might feel led by the Lord to probe for a reaction to this sensitive subject. You might remember "D" in an earlier section of this booklet and the hope he has been experiencing through such a relationship.

Anything You Say Can and Will Be. . .

To my knowledge, there are no states where knowledge of child molestation can be withheld without negative legal consequences. "F" wrote, "If I had known that

my pastor would call the police on me, I never would have told him a thing.” In my answering letter, I tried to get “F” to understand the law in such matters, and I tried to get him to focus on the cycle of abuse that had to be stopped.

As stated earlier, getting help comes in a distant second when faced with the reality of an arrest and possible time in confinement for those who have acted out. Being reported for any admission of sexual contact with a child might even feel like a betrayal of trust. One most unfortunate reality of disclosure is that there is no guarantee of long term support from anyone (therapist, family, friends, or church members) should an arrest occur. Yet when no one seems to be there, God is. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41.10)

“It’s Too Much”

A few years ago, I received a call one evening. The man identified himself and began telling me about his younger brother’s recent arrest for child molesting, and about the deep despair that surrounded everyone in the family. We talked for about an hour—mostly about what his brother was feeling, the lack of any apparent clues that this was an issue for his brother, and about my own background. The conversation ended in prayer and the hope that his brother would call the next day. He didn’t.

A few days later the man called again to tell me that his brother had committed suicide. I wanted words to flow that might make sense to him but they were not there. I felt like a hypocrite to my calling in this ministry because no prayer followed. We both merely said we would pray for one another and then hung up.

Anger. Confusion. A deep sadness. These emotions and others intermingled as I thought of the young man who didn’t believe he could survive what he believed would become of his life. Others have made the same unalterable choice and thousands more, myself included, contemplated suicide in the wake of having their most secret shame exposed.

Every time I contemplate the need to paint my house, the job almost overwhelms me. So much work. So much precious free time that could be put to better use relaxing or doing what I want to do. Then there’s the ladder to deal with and the hours I would be pressing my body tightly against rungs, a white-knuckled grip with one hand while the other first dipped into the pail and then spread as much paint as I could before repeating the process. But it’s one board at a time, one side at a time, and the job is done.

There is not one person I know of who struggles against an inappropriate attraction to children who does not wish that the issue would just go away. Some see treatment and steps to change, however, as a reason to shove everything and everyone out of the way of their goal. They announce by their actions that they have set “normal life” aside until they feel that their goal has been reached.

Life is not like that. Life goes on. If I have learned anything in my own walk it is that God creates pockets of healing time when I am best able to participate. Some times as I write a letter to an inmate the Lord opens my eyes to something

I had not understood before. On occasion the image of one of my victims comes before me and I want to run from it. There is too much pain evident in the eyes of that victim, too much of a need for me to acknowledge that I was the cause of that pain. God gives me the courage to confess my guilt and then reminds me that while He has forgiven me, my victim bears the consequences of my actions. I cannot change that, but I can pray for that victim.

Where To Now?

One of the most frustrating aspects of this kind of struggle is the almost complete sense of isolation surrounding it. Every now and then someone reminds me that in the early years AA faced derision from sober people. The dream for sobriety needed to become reality, and against overwhelming odds the dream prevailed. There is an AA meeting in every major city, and every minute of every day somewhere around the world there is an alcoholic struggler seeking help who is connecting with a sponsor.

For one who struggles with an inappropriate attraction to children, a fall is more than just a "slip" that can be set aside with an "I really didn't mean to do that. Let's just forget it happened" kind of response. At the same time, treatment is often based on the idea that a fall is inevitable and that behavior maintenance, not change, is the goal.

My belief system also sees change coming from traditional treatment: establishing proper boundaries, defining and implementing a relapse prevention plan, and establishing accountability. All of these require brutal self-honesty. At the same time, faith gives me the belief that my identity is *not* that of a child molester but as a man *capable* of child molesting. The current worldview, in my opinion, defines me as the same man arrested in 1985 with no hope of ever having a separate identity.

Given that disheartening label, those of us who struggle with inappropriate attraction to children (whether we have acted on the attraction or not) must cling to the truth of God's transforming love, the forgiveness of our sins made possible by Jesus' death on the cross, and reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43.1)

In the moments when frustration and despair seek to invade my heart, God reminds me of His love. He also reminds me that the change I believe in will not happen without active participation on my part. Scripture confirms this. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8.31-32)

Personal Perspectives

I am a firm believer in the unique ways in which the Lord brings healing to His children. None of us is exactly like anyone else, so it should not really be a surprise when I see something work for someone else but which does not work for me. At the same time, sharing gives birth to hope, and hope is a direct result of faith. So here are some things that continue to be important in my own healing journey.

- ***Believe the best for yourself***
 By God's grace, I wake each morning with a positive self-image. This is not the same as saying, "I'm fixed, let's get on with life." Nor have I stopped the process of surrender that finally began the day of my arrest. It is, however, looking in the mirror and seeing the reflection of God's love. I can choose to believe in the world, or I can choose to believe in God. Believing in God's design is to believe in the finished product without knowing exactly how that design will come to be. Nor is one who believes in God in denial. God will never allow me to run from the consequences of my sins; God will help me face them.
- ***Temptation is not sin, it's temptation***
 The goal of any treatment is not the absence of temptation but the ability to handle temptation. Many years ago, I chose to act on fantasies rather than to reject or deal with them. Someone wrote, "When you commit any sin for the first time, you make that sin an option for the rest of your life," and that is what I have been dealing with ever since—learning to make appropriate choices.
 Having overconfidence in self, however, can be very dangerous. In my life that might occur if I were to tell myself I could indulge in fantasy or be in places where fantasy could be fueled. "L" for example, wrote that he wasn't really acting out when he gave in to fantasies because he wasn't actually touching the child. My response to that comment was to tell him that he was only an opportunity away from doing so.
 Temptation forces me to make a choice between what I *think* is good for me (usually a decision that takes only my needs at a particular moment into account) and what I *know* is good for me (a decision made only after I look at the consequences of the choice I am about to make and match them with God's word). I am realistic enough to know, however, that unless I train myself on a daily basis I will not be prepared to handle the temptation when it comes. Daily training includes but is not limited to:
 - Time spent learning about God through His Word
 - An active prayer life
 - Journaling my thoughts in some fashion (a prayer journal, letters, etc.)
 - Listening to others when they offer advice
 - Asking questions of others as they occur
 - Being transparent before God and man
- ***Acknowledging that I am "in process"***
 Sometimes I get letters from men in prison announcing that they have been set free—no more temptation and no more inappropriate desire for children. They express great joy and I celebrate with them the elation that they experience. Months later there is a second letter filled with remorse and even self-loathing because the individual gave in to inappropriate fantasy or masturbated to the memory of an occasion of abuse. I share the sadness they feel but encourage them to ask forgiveness of the Lord.

What I am sharing here is not meant to emphasize the futility of achieving the goal of change as much as it is to show that freedom is not won by merely telling others of victory. Freedom is won in the daily decisions I make to reject any inappropriate fantasies and to believe that each decision I make strengthens my resolve for the future. Freedom is accepting the fact that I am a work in process rather than a finished product. Shout for joy, rather, because you are still in the battle! One who has given up the battle is destined for a life of confinement, personal or institutional, as well as sentencing a victim to the same fate.

And All God's People Said, "Amen!"

There is nothing simple about this issue, no quick fixes for the struggler, and certainly nothing easy for those who support them in their struggle. It *is* about believing in the power of God to bring new life where death is often preferred. And in my experience so far, it is most definitely about seeing beyond limitations—our own and those of others—and moving into the light one step at a time.

One of my favorite psalms states, "I have waited, I have waited for the Lord, and He stooped toward me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on solid ground and gave my heart a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." (Psalm 40.1-3) That is what the Lord is doing for me and for all those who seek Him. There is no joy in having such a struggle, no comfort in feeling so alone in this world. But I am never truly alone, am I. And *there* is the joy.