

Jesus Will See Me Through

by LHM Youth, 25

I am so glad that my younger brother is getting married this week, and that he has found an amazing bride who shares his calling to walk with our Lord. Of course, it may be interesting to some people that I have never dated anyone, and I don't have any current plans to get married. Years past, when people would ask, So, are you dating anyone? I blamed my singleness on the fact that my parents would not let me date in high school or that I was too busy or didn't know any girls who I was interested in. Those responses were all basically true, but I was really denying what was really happening inside me.

Like some young men who struggle with same-sex attraction, my grade school years were confusing: some attraction to girls mixed with this indescribable longing for acceptance with guys. My family was a supportive, Christian home, but I was not allowed the time to forge close friendships with boys through playing or hanging out. There were no guys my age at church when I was really young. While I appeared to be fairly well-liked in school, I was not accepted as a normal boy, and could not seem to make truly formative friendships with my classmates.

By high school, this desire for relationships with guys turned my affections turned almost entirely to guys. Most of my thought life and even my prayer time centered around an intense desire for friendship with guys who understood me and wanted to spend time with me. Honestly, many of these desires were simply for deep Christian friendships, but some of the attractions toward acquaintances or strangers were purely out of physical lust. Whether or not I was sexually attracted to other boys, my heart was still worshiping and lusting over their personalities, bodies, or the intimate friendships that I dreamed of having with them. Since I was not acting out physically with guys and I was not addicted to pornography, I thought I was a solid Christian who was nowhere close to struggling with real homosexual attraction. I was still really deceived, because these self-centered thoughts and desires for relationships were replacing God in

my heart. For many years, I pursued a very private sin struggle of lust and fantasy for intimacy and physical affection.

God protected me through my college years from many possible homosexual experiences, especially during a lot of summer travels. Even though I was at a great Christian university surrounded by Godly younger and older men who would have loved me and helped me, I was still lonely and struggling constantly. Yes, it seemed like I had more friends and deeper relationships than I did in high school, but really I never was vulnerable enough with my issues and selfless enough with my time to turn light friendships and great acquaintances into a circle of trusted Christian friends. The phrases that some people seemed to live by, like hanging out with the guys, doing life with, and talking with my best friend until midnight, were all things that I wanted to do regularly, but almost never experienced.

I truly avoided facing my struggle with same-sex attraction until I was a senior at my Christian college. For 22 years, I had denied that I was one of those guys who struggled with homosexual attraction because I was not very effeminate, I was not an abuse victim, my dad was in my life, and I had never had a sexual encounter with a guy. Those were not assets that could cancel out my sinfulness though, and I was willingly pursuing private sin, allowing Satan to deceive my desires for intimacy and masculinity, all the while keeping this struggle all to myself.

God used a college retreat to finally convict me that this was huge area of spiritual darkness in my life. Mike Haley, from Focus on the Family, was a guest speaker at this retreat with his testimony and teaching about leaving homosexuality. I can vividly remember how the Holy Spirit just wrecked me during and after Mikes talk – that this *is* my sin, God *can* provide healing, *but* I have to be willing to confess it. I could have discovered these truths sooner. Three years before I heard from Mike Haley, there was even a professor who started an SSA support group at my school. I had too much pride about my reputation to be vulnerable about this, so I never even looked up more information about this group. I maintained my busy-ness with school, organizations,

and music to have my identity in those successes rather than living a life submitted to Christ.

I actually thank God that he allowed me to struggle much harder in 2008. I fell more to pornography that year and began questioning my identity more because of a new friend who was gay and very attractive to me. This friend was actually the first person who I had ever talked to about his homosexuality, and the first time that I seriously considered having a deep friendship with a gay guy. He appeared very masculine, knew he wasn't born gay, and claimed to be a Christian, so I started to think, maybe I could give my fantasy a try in real life, and still be a faithful Christian. Thankfully over the course of months, God protected me and wrecked my conscience. I started to realize my brokenness – I knew this was wrong, and I was becoming burdened with guilt and confusion.

While I was struggling so hard over my identity and sin in 2008, God was working a parallel path to bring me to a place of truth, repentance and healing. I received an excellent internship (one that I did not deserve) in the Dallas area. Some people told me I should start listening to some sermon Podcasts of a particular church there. Over the next few months, I probably listened to 30 sermons from that church and was deeply convicted that my private sin was still offensive to God, that my prayers of God, please forgive me and take these thoughts away were not true repentance, and that Jesus Christ offers grace and healing greater than anything I can do on my own. During these months of listening to these sermons, I did not even know that my internship and host family were both a mile from this new church. My heart just sunk when I drove by that church for the first time on the way to my host family's house. I finally believed that God was clearly working out some transformation in my life and that it was time for me to lift up my denial and brokenness to Him.

Previously in my spiritual life, I had emphasized how my interpretation of Scripture and my church's way of doing things was correct. Now I was allowing myself to sit under teaching that aggressively addressed my continuous need for the Gospel and

sanctification from sin. It was clear at this church that men & women here would love me as a Christian brother while knowing about my same-sex attraction, but that they would relentlessly push me toward humble confession and repentance, and freedom in close Christian community.

Unfortunately, I still was not very comfortable talking about my sin or same-sex attraction and I did not have friendships yet in the Dallas area to do this with. This is where Living Hope Ministries stepped in. I joined the in-house support group in March of 2009, and I am still grateful for all that the people of Living Hope do every day. I knew it was a safe place. I could easily connect with guys who were actually a lot like me. These guys had knowledge, wisdom, determination, and testimonies that constantly challenged me. God clearly worked through the teaching and accountability at Living Hope to help me start honesty and repentance. The social setting of Living Hope was such an encouragement because I had never had a circle of friends in which I could talk about personal issues. Here I could count on once-a-week time to build friendships, social skills, and honesty that helped build bridges for me to do the same in church, other friendships, and eventually my family. I am still challenged to listen and show brotherly care for other guys at Living Hope, rather than dwelling on self-centered thoughts and worries about myself.

In the last 2 years, God has brought a lot of freedom in my life from same-sex attraction and other sin areas that I did not even know about. He's helped me understand some of the patterns in my life that shifted my attractions to guys. I see now that while I did have a legitimate need for deep friendship, many of my responses were sinful and I was deceived into thinking I was okay. I thought that just having that perfect best friend, a better body, and a bonded circle of guys would really satisfy me. I had also been deceived into believing that the perfect physical intimacy with a guy would really bring me joy. God's broken me down to teach me that those friendships and fantasies don't really work that way, and that pursuing a relationship with Christ will bring more satisfying and eternal joy. I have learned that being open about my life with many friends, mentors, and my family can bring about incredible healing. Sharing with them

has put me on the road to learning how to have real relationships – ones that require persistence, patience, working through issues, and sometimes selflessly giving my time to just be unproductive with them or listen to them talk about things that I'm not all that interested in.

As God has grown me closer to Him in the last two years, many layers of my same-sex attraction have fallen away. The SSA struggle does not own me anymore and I don't walk in the fear that disabled me three years ago. The emotional longings to be connected with great-looking guys have mostly been replaced by realistic pursuit of deepening healthy friendships I already have. I struggle less often with physical attraction, but my mind and flesh will still sometimes pursue it. At least now I know that this will not really satisfy me nor will lustful pursuits make me feel like a man. Sometimes I have to keep my thoughts and heart captive in my work around college and high school age students – as my motivation to build relationships with them can lean towards wanting to fix them, be affirmed by them, or be the one that they open up to about their struggles. These desires and my self-pride are still areas of my life that I need to constantly submit to the Lord.

Perhaps the greatest change in my life from three years ago is that I have confident hope in Jesus Christ who is saving and redeeming me. When I listen to some of the songs about Jesus that I grew up with, the lyrics have a much deeper meaning to me now because I more fully understand the love of my Savior. One of those songs starts with Jesus knows what I'm going through/ Jesus knows what I need to do/ Jesus is there if I ask Him to/ Jesus will Carry me through. Even with my younger brothers wedding this happening this weekend, I am able to rejoice with him, our family and friends, not dwelling on questions about my identity and what people think of me. I know that my identity is in Christ alone. Whether or not I have a wedding day, the most important thing is to worship and follow my God today. Overcoming same-sex attraction is just one way that He is working in my life right now and just one story that can bring more glory to Him. I pray that God will continue grow me so that I will freely speak of Him to others, using His word and the gifts He has given me to be a light of the Gospel.

