



Listen To What They Say By Rev. John J. Smid

Hebrews 13:3

Remember those who are in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner and those who are ill-treated, since you also are liable to bodily sufferings.

When we minister to men and women who seem trapped in a cycle of negative choices, we must "become a fellow-prisoner" in order to really reach them and help them find freedom.

Lately, I have been hearing in various new reports about men and women who are "coming out" with regards to their homosexuality. In one recent story, the person happened to be the son of a nationally-known female Christian leader.

I heard one homosexual man comment enthusiastically that now this leader has been affected by homosexuality. She and her son had to make great efforts to counter the allegations that they may have a bad relationship. This man was apparently delighted to think that a Christian's "mask" of victorious living was being torn down by the media.

Dishonest Christians

If you listen closely to the words and messages of the pro-gay people, they are actually complaining about our dishonesty as Christians. They are pointing out all the faults that they can find in an attempt to blow our cover. There is a basic mistrust of Christians based on a perceived plastic mask that is always smiling and rarely revealing our vulnerability or struggles with sin.

If you are honest you probably struggle with an area of unresolved sin in your life. Maybe you struggle with deeply seated shame or some area of an addictive cycle. Maybe you struggle with lust, greed, or sexual temptation. I don't have to name the sin, you are probably well aware of the daily struggles you face.

Let's look at this from another angle. Maybe you have a sin area that is already dealt with. Praise God for the victory! But are you free to talk about it? Or do you struggle with the fear that if someone finds out, your life with Christ will be discredited? Or that your reputation may be hurt with the closets of your past?

I don't think a homosexual person is out of touch with his or her own areas of struggle. While involved in same sex relationships, I certainly knew I was experiencing relational break-downs and struggles with my own immorality. I knew I had problems in my life.

I found that I was more open to discuss this with those who were aware of their own struggles. I longed to find a place where I could release my burdens. But this didn't happen with people who always seemed to have their life together.

I wasn't about to reveal my ugliness to someone who seemed perfect. Actually I knew they were not really so perfect; I figured they couldn't be trusted due to their masks.

Do you come from a past of divorce, drugs, and dysfunctional family issues? Do you have a permissive sexual history? Have you shared your story when you find someone is hurting from the same struggles

you have? Do you share your shortcomings and failures? Do you struggle with feeling that you have to stand up to an image of "Christian perfection"?

Difficult Issues

When Sarah was active in the drug abusing lifestyle, she was walking through some very difficult issues, like the loss of her family and children through divorce. She experienced an emotional imbalance in her relationships. Sarah had always had a love for Jesus but was very confused about who God really was and how He related to her struggles. She secretly wished that she had a Christian to talk with about these things.

To learn that there was hope in the midst of her crisis would have been a breath of fresh air. Sarah thought that the only people with whom she could talk were stuck in the same mire she was. But she was really looking for someone who had a solution to her struggles.

Just about any Christian woman could have ministered to Sarah's needs. A drug past wasn't needed, but simply the ability to relate with another woman struggling with her identity and relationship with God. Any one of us could relate to those issues if we were totally honest with ourselves.

Isaiah 61:1 tells us that the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on us, because the Lord has anointed us to preach good news to the poor. He has sent us to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.

Have you experienced any freedom? Have you seen the prison door open on your own cell?

Deceived In Prison

You may be wondering why I am talking so much about your life in an article on how to help others who are trapped in sin. People ask us all the time how to minister to the person in their family or office who is gay. We get questions all the time about how to fight the battles with the pro-gay activists in the political realm.

I believe one of the strongest tools to minister that we have is our own honesty. Our testimony is vital in ministering to those caught in prison. As I mentioned earlier, the Christian mask breeds distrust and builds more prison walls around the very people we are trying to reach.

Do you feel a burden for those struggling with sexual sin? God is holding us responsible to show them the way out of prison as we have been led out.

I was talking with a young man recently who was really struggling with a "secret sin." Sam mentioned that he struggled with exaggerated lust and, even though he seemed quite uncomfortable talking with me, he was open. He said that he felt the freedom to talk with me because I had just spoken so freely about my past sins and current struggles.

Sam went on to talk about struggles with masturbation. It was the first time he had talked with anyone about this. I find this story very interesting, considering. Sam was not struggling with homosexuality like I had but he became open with me due to the fact I had been honest. Coming from a homosexual background, I have to see the value of my life in ministry to all types of struggles.

Hebrews 10:34 says "You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions."

Are you willing to lose property, possessions, or your own reputation in helping someone else? Do you realize the eternal possession you have, your testimony of the freedom you have found with an abiding relationship in Jesus Christ?

Hebrews 13:3 says to remember those who are in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner and those who are ill-treated, since you also are liable to bodily sufferings.

The whole principle of this article is to recognize the prisoners and to know how valuable your prison story is to them, to realize how many people stuck in homosexuality could be helped if you could walk into their prison with them.

Think about a time when someone saw your pain and began to talk about how they could understand because they too had been hurt. Weren't you freer to release your burdens with them?

Dreams That Reveal

I had a dream that so clearly illustrates what I am saying to you. In my dream, I was in a prison cell with several beds. It was such a fearful place to be that I didn't want to do anything but lie in my bed under the covers. I remember thinking, if I could just have a stable roommate, someone familiar who could help me in this awful place, my life in prison would certainly be better.

But my roommates kept changing, leaving me very insecure. (This was similar to my experience in the homosexual lifestyle, looking for one person to stay by my side.) Finally I asked why I was in jail, and the response shocked me. I was in prison for not returning a video to the rental store on time!

Although this may seem quite ridiculous, as dreams often are, the reason for my imprisonment was really important to what I was about to learn. God said that I needed to know what it was like to be in prison for something that seemed quite ridiculous.

Many people feel that their bondages are undeserved, unreasonable and sometimes feel entitled to freedom regardless of the crime.

The dream went on with other lessons to be heard. I kept asking to go home. "I don't deserve to be here," I said. In this dream, the next thing I knew, my earthly father came into my cell and said he had come to take me home.

What a great correlation with our Heavenly Father, the one Person who holds the key to our freedom. God doesn't stand in some remote location with a special button with our cell number marked on it. He walks right into our prison cell to release us. He knows what it is like to be in prison. Think of all the prisons that Jesus endured while He walked the earth.

Dealing with Our Own Bondage

When we come to grips with our own experiences with bondage and sin, and when we are willing to share our experiences with others, we will see a breaking of walls between our lives and the lives of others still caught in bondage.

What is our closet? What walls still exist in our life? People want to know who we really are. Through our vulnerability and honesty, they will see true Christianity. When they see that they are not worse than us, they will feel much more able to share with us the hidden struggles in their lives. When they hear our honesty, they will begin to trust.

For example, people with homosexual struggles are no different than you and me. They have needs, emotions, fears, and desires. They go to work, love their friends, and pursue their hobbies. There is just a part of their lives that may have experiences from yours.

As you begin to look honestly at your own life and the willingness to open up to others, you will see the correlations between you and others, regardless of how different they seem.

Jesus spent a lot of time with "sinners" and others who really needed the Gospel message. Unfortunately, many of today's church members are exactly the opposite, spending most of their time with other Christian friends. Will you follow Jesus' pattern? In reaching out to others who are "different" from yourself-including those dealing with homosexuality? You will be influencing people's lives for all eternity.

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