



BREAKING THE

silence

By Mike Ensley

You can probably still remember the first crush you had—the first time you realized someone of the opposite sex was interesting in a new way. But what if it had never happened like that? What if those strange feelings—feelings that seemed to come out of nowhere and were so powerful and unique—had been for someone of the same sex?

Nobody asks for same-sex attractions— and almost everybody who has them asks for them to go away.

Don't think right now about somebody you know who is gay, or someone you think is gay. Imagine what it would be like if this had happened to you. Would you have been scared? Confused? How likely would you be to tell your friends? Your parents?

You would probably try whatever you could to have "normal" feelings like everyone else. You might pray and ask God to take those feelings away from you. Imagine you did all of that every day. You prayed and begged God and tried everything to force yourself to be "straight," only to still have those same-sex attractions each new day.

If you're really trying to picture what that would be like, then you're getting a glimpse into a very real experience that's shared by thousands of teens across this country. It happens to teens that are Christians and teens that aren't. It happens to boys and girls. It happened to me.

The Meaning of Silence

I asked if you would have told your friends or family about your same-sex attractions (SSA). Your answer was probably no. I sure didn't tell anyone! Everything that had been communicated to me from the playground to the pulpit was that homosexuality is unforgivable. There was no way I was going to tell the very people who seemed to despise gays so much that I thought I was one.

If you're like most teens, you probably know a lot of gay jokes. A common phrase among teenagers is, "That's so gay." These things often aren't said with the intent to hurt anybody's feelings. In fact, most people find it easy to talk that way without even thinking about it.

Of course, you don't have to think about it. But imagine what it's like hearing those jokes and those flippant phrases through the ears

of someone who struggles day in and day out with SSA they didn't ask for and can't get rid of. Each one you hear would add another thin layer of shame, making you take one step back into deeper secrecy. It would make you feel unsafe and, frankly, unloved. Believe me, I know.

So what happens when you don't feel safe at home, at church, or at school? You live with a secret struggle until you do feel safe.

That first safe place, for most teens going through this struggle, is usually among those who embrace and promote homosexuality. You might think a Christian kid "should know better," but after keeping secrets and feeling afraid for so long, the lure of giving in and accepting homosexuality—with other people by your side—is very strong.

I'm telling you this so you will understand what propels some teens to participate in the "Day of Silence." Gay students recognize this day every year on college, high school, and even middle school campuses all across the country in protest to the bullying and harassment homosexuals often face. Students and teachers who participate vow to remain silent for an entire day or for a specific period of time to represent how society has silenced gay students. This year, the day will be recognized on April 17.

For the most part, these participants are probably not trying to force an "agenda" on you and they certainly aren't trying to turn you gay (they know they can't do that). What they are trying to make you aware of is that silence which so many of us have lived in—that feeling of danger, of being unaccepted, of not knowing what was wrong with you that wasn't wrong with everybody else.

I am also telling you this so you will know that your peers who you identify as gay or lesbian are not just worldly people who woke

up one day and decided to be gay because it was different. Nobody asks for same-sex attractions—and almost everybody who has them asks for them to go away.

I'm not trying to say homosexuality is good or you should celebrate it. **The Bible is clear that God did not create us to be homosexual, and He certainly doesn't want us to do those things.** But before we engage people in discussion or debate, it's important to understand what they are going through, and to care about what they are going through. That's how Jesus did it; it is the example He set for us to follow.

Know the Truth

"Homosexual behavior is sin" is not the only truth you need to know. Most teens that don't have SSA find homosexuality at the very least unattractive, and many (especially guys) think it's repulsive. That doesn't make them holier than someone who is tempted by homosexuality. **God hates homosexuality because He is holy and He created our sexuality as a beautiful representation of Himself, and homosexuality is not part of that.** People, however, tend to hate homosexuality just because it's unfamiliar or they don't like it. That's very different. There are plenty of other sins those people like just fine.

Think about it: what is someone tempted by SSA guilty of? They have desires for something that God calls a sin. How does that make them any different from anybody else? God also calls lying, gossiping, and selfishness sinful. **He calls heterosexual adultery, lust, and idol worship sin. Each of these is something all people—all Christians—naturally find attractive and tempting. In fact, we pretty much expect people to struggle with these temptations.**

So why don't we consider it somewhat normal for people to be tempted by homo-

sexuality? Why does that sin have to be taboo? Why do we talk about it like it's worse, or feel hostility towards those who sin in that way? There's no reason. The truth we need to realize is

all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. People struggle with homosexuality and that should be no surprise. If that's not your struggle, something else is—and you're no better off. **Each and every person is in desperate need of the saving grace available through Jesus—and for each and every person it is a free gift.**

On Your Campus

So how should you respond to the "Day of Silence" at your school? After all, people who participate aren't just promoting tolerance. In

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*Editor's note: For more ways to respond to the Day of Silence, check out <http://www.ipopculture.net/2009/02/silence/>

the days surrounding this event **you will probably hear many students and even teachers saying homosexuality is normal, good, healthy, and not a sin.** They'll just as likely tell you it's bigoted or "homophobic" to think otherwise. **These things aren't true and you shouldn't pretend like they are.**

You can, however, **find some common ground** with students participating in this protest. People with SSA—whether they call themselves gay or strive to overcome it in obedience to Christ—deserve to feel safe, to be **treated with respect and dignity.** These are things everybody can agree on and work toward. You still might have disagreements—some of which may make people pretty unhappy—but you can still work together to build a community of kindness and compassion.

As a Christian, **share the message of Jesus.** The gospel isn't really about debating the right-or-wrongness of homosexuality. Sharing Jesus means sharing our testimony, telling of the things God has done for us, and NOT what we've done for Him. Don't pretend like you have it all together, or your struggle is somehow better than someone else's. After all, we can't tell the truth about Jesus without telling the truth about ourselves.

Following Christ doesn't always come naturally to you, does it? What things in your heart and mind is God working in you to transform? Sharing these things with others takes boldness and vulnerability, but when we do that we are

engaging in true fellowship. By letting people see the real us, they feel safer letting us see the real them. And somewhere in the mix, the real Jesus begins to shine through.

That's not just important for the "out and proud" gay students you need to reach out to—and you do need to reach out to them with all love and compassion—but for your own circle of friends. I'd be willing to bet you have friends in your youth group who struggle with same-sex attraction, but you'd never know. A lot of people never guessed about me. Remember what I said about all those harmless jokes; you wouldn't want a fellow Christian to feel unsafe around you, would you?

Romans 12:2 says we are to renew our minds, change the way we think, and let God transform us into a new person. Only then can we know His good and perfect will for our lives.

So change the way you think about homosexuality, and that will change the way you talk about it. And when you talk differently and you treat people differently, they will respond to you differently. **This year, on your campus, tell the bold truth—the truth about God, about you, and about the wonderful hope you have in Jesus.**

