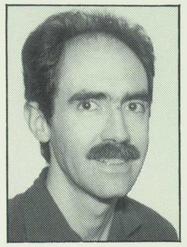

Brad Sargent
Editor

'The term "ex-gay" identifies people with a sinful past instead of a Christian present and future.'

EX-GAY: THE TERM HAS WORN

Early this year, a challenging letter appeared in our mailbox. The subject? Our use of language, especially the term *ex-gay*.

Dear Editor,

On reading the latest issue of *The Standard,* I was struck by the frequency with which the term "ex-gay" appeared. Speaking to my colleagues in ministry here in South Africa who attended the last Exodus conference, I understand the term was fairly commonplace and standard at the conference.

While I agree it's a nice, easy-to-say and catchy term, I don't believe it should be used to define people who are emerging from or have emerged from homosexuality. Very rarely do groups of humans define themselves in negative terms, in terms of the past, or in terms of what they *were*. I believe we should define ourselves in positive terms of the present, that is, in terms of what we *are*.

While I concede that it is a bit long, in South Africa we use the phrase, "Christian *dealing* with homosexuality" as opposed to "Christian *struggling* with homosexuality," as the word *struggling* seems to convey a sense of no progress being made. Once homosexuality has been "dealt" with adequately, we should loosen ourselves altogether from the words associated with homosexuality.

There is also the danger of using the term "ex-gay" in order to maintain some kind of link with the gay world and experience. I believe this can slow down and even retard the process of becoming sexually whole in Christ. Christians don't call themselves "ex-sinners," so why "ex-gays"?

I do not regard myself as "ex-gay." I am a Christian who has found God's will and plan for my sexuality. After 7 years of experiencing this—4½ as a husband and 2 as a father—I can't think of a single reason why I should still label myself with a link to homosexuality. This, despite the fact that I am in leadership of Trail Blazers, a ministry to those "dealing with homosexuality," using the Living Waters Program.

Thank you for an otherwise excellent magazine, providing us with much-needed information.

Sincerely, Mark Sutherland
South Africa

We'd already been thinking about how to change more of our vocabulary into words closer to a biblical base, since *ex-gay* really identifies people with a sinful past instead of a Christian present and future.

In fact, perhaps unnoticed, on our resource lists and reprint articles we've been changing terms like *homosexual struggler* to things like *overcomer* to stress the positive instead of the problem.

And I've been using *Christian men* and *Christian women,* which emphasize identification with Christ and biblical gender identity, instead of *homosexual males* and *lesbian females,* which emphasize a sexually broken orientation and physical gender.

But it's a slow process to change vocabulary that developed spontaneously in a situation that defied existing vocabulary when Exodus started in the mid-1970s.

As we head into our 20th year in 1995, you can expect to see a higher degree of consistency in our publications' use of better word choices—terms that fit better how God, not society, sees us.

—Brad Sargent

THE STANDARD

Vol. 11, No. 2–1994 ISSN 0749–9094

"When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him." Isaiah 59:19

Published by Exodus International—North America, P.O. Box 2121, San Rafael, CA 94912. Phone: 415/454–1017. Fax: 415/454–7826.

Purpose: This publication communicates news and opinion concerning redemptive ministry to men and women overcoming homosexuality. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the official viewpoint of Exodus International—North America.

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Subscription Policy: U.S.: $10/one year, $18/two years, $25/three years; Canada and overseas: $15/one year, $27/two years, $37/three years in U.S. funds.

About Exodus International—North America: Founded in 1976, Exodus is a Christian organization which seeks to equip and unify agencies and individuals to effectively communicate the message of liberation from homosexuality through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

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Printed in U.S.A.

EVANGELICAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

DO I NEED A THERAPIST?

(from p. 1)

help you regain health. Likewise, a professional counselor can help you achieve a new measure of health and maturity in relationship with God.

WHAT ABOUT THERAPISTS?

Now let's get back to Jim's question, "How do I know if I need the help of a therapist?" Perhaps it will help to think of it this way. I (Vern) am an avid bicycle rider. I also like to do some general repairs on my bike. But there is a limit to my skill and to the amount I want to risk when making adjustments.

Last year I was having a problem that resulted in an annoying "bounce" in my rear wheel. Before I called the bike shop, I tried the things I knew; when those efforts proved ineffective, I called the shop and asked some questions. Upon realizing that I had tried all those suggestions, I took the bike to the "doctor" to be examined by people whom I trusted. Now I have a bike that rides very smoothly again.

Your process of deciding if you need a therapist is not much different from my decision to call the shop. Good bike shop people will help me fix the problem in my home with my own resources. They'll also help me decide when it's wise to seek "outside help."

In the same way, a competent therapist will help me know when I can work on issues myself, and when I need additional help.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK HELP? A CHECKLIST

We recommend seeking professional help when one or more of the following symptoms exist.

- **Inability to Cope.** An increasing awareness that you can't cope with everyday life might come from many factors.

Day-to-day decisions seem to overwhelm. The kids are too loud too often. Or, you just have no energy to get up and do normal tasks because it is too energy-consuming just trying to "figure out how to get the job done." These show you are not coping and may need help.

- **Compulsive Behavior.** You are aware of behaviors that are not good for you, such as overeating, smoking, or working all the time. But you can't stop on your own.

A behavior is considered compulsive if doing the activity reduces anxiety, and resisting the desire escalates anxiety.

This is different from behaviors that bring enjoyment, promote health, and are part of a wise plan for long-term well-being. For instance, exercise is one issue that can create a fine line between being healthy versus acting compulsively.

- **Inability to Function.** There is especially an increasing lack of ability to function at work. When so much is on your mind, or you focus on compulsive behaviors to the extent that you can't do your job, you need to talk with a therapist.
- **Difficulty with Relationships.** An increased realization that interpersonal relationships are not meeting healthy expectations offers a good clue.

Perhaps you are angry that a friend isn't spending enough time with you. Or you and your spouse argue more than agree. Maybe you feel no one is ever there to meet your needs—you are the one always expected to give.

If there is no ability to set boundaries, or a perception that none of the boundaries you have set are being respected, this may be a strong indication that outside help is needed. Difficulty making or keeping friends may also indicate a need for therapy.

- **Intense Fear and Worry.** If these feelings are in your life and you cannot move beyond them, it would be wise to seek professional help. When you are driven by fear and worry, you may develop compulsive behaviors that you believe will promote survival. But because these behaviors do not address the real underlying problems, they don't work very well.

Many people respond to these emotional states with control. In some situations you can find acceptable ways to control your world, such as only eating certain foods, or always being the one to decide what movie to attend.

Too often, however, while control covers the fear, it doesn't really relieve or resolve it. When this happens, you may find yourself scrambling faster and faster to stay in control until finally you collapse emotionally or physically.

- **Depression.** There is depression in your life which may be quite recent, or it may have been around for a long time.

The symptoms of depression can range from a general lack of motivation to a deep sense of hopelessness that causes you to strongly desire death over the pain of trying to go on any longer.

There can be sleep disturbances, which often include a desire to sleep or doze during the day, and a high level of panic or anxiety when you want or need to sleep.

A change in eating patterns or habits is another possible sign.

Inability to concentrate and a need to cry many times a day also can be symptoms of depression.

Often therapy, as well as the use of an antidepressant medication prescribed by a medical doctor, may be warranted.

'A competent therapist will help me know when I can work on issues myself, and when I need additional help.'