



## Healing the Child Within

By Andy Comiskey

(This article was first published in 1985. The young baby is now in college. He had indeed been well tended to by his father, and brings a great deal of pride and joy to his mother and father. Annette Comiskey)

As I held Gregory, my six month old son, close to my chest, I realized I was holding a little life, one that is in part an extension of my own. He awoke fearfully, with a tear, startled as he sometimes is upon finishing a nap. I comforted him, he smiled, then lay peacefully in my arms. I thought of the awesome gift, and task of stewarding this young life.

Will my tending of him dispose Gregory to view the world as frightening or accessible? Will he sense within himself the freedom to accept his own gender, and God-given sexuality? Will my care better enable him to receive Jesus as loving Lord? My meditation led to thinking about the child within myself, that part of me that sought from day one, and continues to seek love and affirmation from others. My own journey has been a confusing one, in part due to my attempt to find love and identity in sexual relationships with men.

Many of us who come out of gay backgrounds can readily get in touch with our inner child. We identify its bumbling yet earnest attempt to discover who he is in relation to others. Easily hurt, then discouraged to proceed any further, he is often compulsive. Unable to love under the harsh standard of perfection imposed by the critical parent, he may seek to lose himself in promiscuous behavior, or in an emotionally dependent relationship. We may interpret that child within as "of the flesh", and sinfully needy. In turn, our "Christian" tendency is to shut the child up, and treat him as an enemy. Our efforts to suppress that child are doomed to failure. For that part of ourself which has never grown up has at its core some legitimate needs for which God has compassion, as well as a desire to meet those needs constructively.

The inner child is that part of yourself you once were which continues to exist in adult life. The process of growing from child to adult involves internalizing the responses of your parents to yourself as a child, and in turn beginning to act as a parent to your own inner child during adulthood. We also possess an inner parent which responds to the child within. That parent is to a large degree modeled after how your parents treated you as a child. Thus you may treat your inner child with respect or disdain, acceptance or judgement, with firmness or indulgence.

How does the inner child relate to homosexual feelings? The roots of homosexuality run deep into one's early life. In order to grow into heterosexuality, a child must find needed sources of same-sex intimacy and identification. Affirming relationships with the same-sex, especially with the same-sex parent, secures the child's self-worth and clear sense of gender. The child can thus say, "I am a little boy (or girl) and that's good!" Gender security is one key factor that enables the boy or girl to reach out during adolescence into heterosexual relationships. The young adult whose inner child is confused in the area of gender identity may seek clarity and assurance through homosexual

relationships. In joining with the same-sex erotically, the needy child within seeks in adult form the affirmation and emotional intimacy from the same-sex that was never properly attained in childhood.

Many of us can recall the rejection of same-sex peers on the basis of our being "different", or the conditional, detached love of a parent whose approval we so badly wanted. Many can attest to the fact that gay sex wasn't really the motivating factor in their homosexual pursuits. Meeting an emotional need as opposed to an erotic one was the true goal. And those needs are legitimate. It is the needy child's illegitimate attempt to meet those needs erotically that gets him (or her) into trouble. The power of sexuality in the hands of two people attempting to be whole through each other is indeed a futile effort.

Our inner parent may respond to the child within and his neediness with disdain, and severe judgement. The parent points to homosexual feelings and expression as the enemy. If you view God as angry and harsh towards you due to homosexual struggles, then the critical parent within feels that it is actually carrying out God's will in stifling the inner child. In Jesus' name, we attempt to suppress the inner child because we can not accept the reality of our homosexual feelings. We reduce the child to a sinful, compulsive scapegoat who must be kept down through sheer force of the will.

Suppression of homosexual feelings does not rid you of them. If the child is locked in his room, he will climb out the window and storm in through the back door when you least expect it. So too, sexual feelings will erupt into compulsive behavior unless you deal with their reality constructively. Feelings which are denied may overpower the individual, prompting a fall. Guilt consumes the individual who in turn seeks to forget his failure in another sexual binge.

What steps then do we take to remedy the destructive behavior of the inner child, and his adversary, the critical parent? The apostle Paul in 1 Cor 13:11 describes the need to "lay aside childish things" in order to grow into maturity. If we are to truly lay aside the bondage of homosexuality, we must first accept the reality of our homosexual feelings. Remember that refusing to listen to the cries of the inner child will only increase his voice.

One of the first steps towards healing is to recognize the need to accept the voice of the inner child as inevitable, albeit prone to destructive and sinful expression.

In order to accept the child, the critical parent must be replaced by a more kindly source, to receive in faith the affirming voice of our heavenly father, who breaks through our own paltry system of perfection and its counterpart of condemnation to reveal His patient, all-knowing, all-loving concern. Psalm 139 describes a father who upholds each child with intimate care, even in face of the child wandering into darkness. Verse after verse describes He whose face continuously shines upon His little ones; such unmerited favor continues ever in light of our dark and distorted attempts to be whole homosexually. And His intimate knowledge assures us that He understands our struggles, why we are as we are and how difficult it can be at times to obey Him. I can now more clearly grasp God's compassion on myself. Through His wise and graceful care, I am now able to accept my inner child, and to respond to its needs with increasing wisdom and grace.

Central to that response to your own needy and compulsive tendencies is learning to set limits for those tendencies. If I want to be a good parent to myself, I must learn to say no to homosexual behavior and those situations where temptation will be too much for me to bear. It means saying to myself "your homosexual feelings indicate a need, but that need can not be met by sexual fantasy or behavior." These are not easy statements to make or to stick with; following through on them requires the grace and strength that can only come from God. Yet the truth remains. Your inner child

will only be further abused, and all the more needy if you indulge him in homosexual activity. Firmly and patiently setting limits provides the forum in which real needs can emerge and be met.

What are those needs, and now can they be met? The real need of the inner child is emotional, not sexual. The need is also profoundly spiritual, as the inner child needs relationship with He who is Love, our heavenly father, who promises to intimately care for him. Thus taking care of the inner child so that he may grow out of his neediness into maturity entails relationship with God, as well as His people. That involves initiative on your part. By setting aside time and energy for healthy same-sex relationships within the church (perhaps in home groups or Bible study groups) the much-needed same-sex intimacy and identification with others is met. As you seek constructive outlets, you grow as an adult in relationship to other adults. Women, in particular, can readily attach to other women; but the tendency may be towards forming undue dependency on other women, placing them above God. Through healing, and the process of learning to place growth in the Lord at the center of her relationships, women can tend to the inner child emotionally without having to elevate the creature over the Creator. The wise and gracious care of the child frees a new compassion on themselves, and a freedom in relating to their heavenly father and His people.

I hope the same for you, especially in those deep, needy areas where you have blocked Him out due to the shame and guilt inflicted by your "critical parent". Accepting your neediness, and your loving heavenly father, who accepts it as well, paves the way for tending rightfully to the needs of your inner child. Then, setting the limits for the child by not allowing him homosexual pursuits paves the way for meeting your child's spiritual and emotional needs. In meeting those needs, the child is progressively forced to "lay aside childish things" and grow into full adulthood. May God grant you the grace to accept His grace and wisdom in those areas where you need it most deeply.