

I Am Sorry

JUNE 19, 2013 BY ALAN CHAMBERS



Three years ago, Leslie and I began a very public conversation with *Our America's* Lisa Ling, from the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) regarding some of our deeply held beliefs about Christianity and the LGBT community. Today, we have decided to carry this public conversation even further. While this conversation has and may well continue to be met with many different responses from supporters and critics, it is our desire to keep having these honest discussions in the hopes of arriving to a place of peace.

Several months ago, this conversation led me to call Lisa Ling to take another step on this messy journey. I asked if she would, once again, help us add to the unfolding story by covering my apology to the people who have been hurt by Exodus International. Our ministry has been public and therefore any acknowledgement of wrong must also be public. I haven't always been the leader of Exodus, but I am now and someone must finally own and acknowledge the hurt of others. I do so anxiously, but willingly.

It is strange to be someone who has both been hurt by the church's treatment of the LGBT community, and also to be someone who must apologize for being part of the very system of ignorance that perpetuated that hurt. Today it is as if I've just woken up to a greater sense of how painful it is to be a sinner in the hands of an angry church.

It is also strange to be an outcast from powerful portions of both the gay community and the Christian community. Because I do not completely agree with the *vocal* majorities in either group and am forging a new place of peaceful service in and through both, I will likely continue to be an outsider to some degree. I imagine it to be very much like a man I recently heard speak at a conference I attended, Father Elias Chacour, the Melkite Catholic Archbishop of Israel. He is an Arab Christian, Palestinian by birth, and a citizen of Israel. Talk about a walking contradiction. When I think of the tension of my situation I am comforted by the thought of him and his.

My desire is to completely align with Christ, his Good News for all and his offer of peace amidst the storms of life. My wife Leslie and my beliefs center around grace, the finished work of Christ on the cross and his offer of eternal relationship to any and all that believe. Our beliefs do not center on “sin” because “sin” isn’t at the center of our faith. Our journey hasn’t been about denying the power of Christ to do anything – obviously he is God and can do anything.

With that, here is an expanded version of the apology I offered during my recent interview with Lisa Ling to the people within the LGBTQ community who have been hurt by the Church, Exodus International, and me. I realize some within the communities for which I apologize will say I don’t have the right, as one man, to do so on their behalf. But if the Church is a body, with many members being connected to the whole, then I believe that what one of us does right we all do right, and what one of us does wrong we all do wrong. We have done wrong, and I stand with many others who now recognize the need to offer apologies and make things right. I believe this apology – however imperfect – is what God the Father would have me do.

To Members of the LGBTQ Community:

In 1993 I caused a four-car pileup. In a hurry to get to a friend’s house, I was driving when a bee started buzzing around the inside of my windshield. I hit the bee and it fell on the dashboard. A minute later it started buzzing again with a fury. Trying to swat it again I completely missed the fact that a city bus had stopped three cars in front of me. I also missed that those three cars were stopping, as well. Going 40 miles an hour I slammed into the car in front of me causing a chain reaction. I was injured and so were several others. I never intended for the accident to happen. I would never have knowingly hurt anyone. But I did. And it was my fault. In my rush to get to my destination, fear of being stung by a silly bee, and selfish distraction, I injured others.

I have no idea if any of the people injured in that accident have suffered long term effects. While I did not mean to hurt them, I did. The fact that my heart wasn’t malicious did not lessen their pain or their suffering. I am very sorry that I chose to be distracted that fall afternoon, and that I caused so much damage to people and property. If I could take it all back I absolutely would. But I cannot. I pray that everyone involved in the crash has been restored to health.

Recently, I have begun thinking again about how to apologize to the people that have been hurt by Exodus International through an experience or by a

message. I have heard many firsthand stories from people called ex-gay survivors. Stories of people who went to Exodus affiliated ministries or ministers for help only to experience more trauma. I have heard stories of shame, sexual misconduct, and false hope. In every case that has been brought to my attention, there has been swift action resulting in the removal of these leaders and/or their organizations. But rarely was there an apology or a public acknowledgement by me.

And then there is the trauma that I have caused. There were several years that I conveniently omitted my ongoing same-sex attractions. I was afraid to share them as readily and easily as I do today. They brought me tremendous shame and I hid them in the hopes they would go away. Looking back, it seems so odd that I thought I could do something to make them stop. Today, however, I accept these feelings as parts of my life that will likely always be there. The days of feeling shame over being human in that way are long over, and I feel free simply accepting myself as my wife and family does. As my friends do. As God does.

Never in a million years would I intentionally hurt another person. Yet, here I sit having hurt so many by failing to acknowledge the pain some affiliated with Exodus International caused, and by failing to share the whole truth about my own story. My good intentions matter very little and fail to diminish the pain and hurt others have experienced on my watch. The good that we have done at Exodus is overshadowed by all of this.

Friends and critics alike have said it's not enough to simply change our message or website. I agree. I cannot simply move on and pretend that I have always been the friend that I long to be today. I understand why I am distrusted and why Exodus is hated.

Please know that I am deeply sorry. I am sorry for the pain and hurt many of you have experienced. I am sorry that some of you spent years working through the shame and guilt you felt when your attractions didn't change. I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatized parents. I am sorry that there were times I didn't stand up to people publicly "on my side" who called you names like sodomite—or worse. I am sorry that I, knowing some of you so well, failed to share publicly that the gay and lesbian people I know were every bit as capable of being amazing parents as the straight people that I know. I am sorry that when I celebrated a person coming to Christ and surrendering their sexuality to Him that I callously celebrated the end of relationships that broke

your heart. I am sorry that I have communicated that you and your families are less than me and mine.

More than anything, I am sorry that so many have interpreted this religious rejection by Christians as God's rejection. I am profoundly sorry that many have walked away from their faith and that some have chosen to end their lives. For the rest of my life I will proclaim nothing but the whole truth of the Gospel, one of grace, mercy and open invitation to all to enter into an in severable relationship with almighty God.

I cannot apologize for my deeply held biblical beliefs about the boundaries I see in scripture surrounding sex, but I will exercise my beliefs with great care and respect for those who do not share them. I cannot apologize for my beliefs about marriage. But I do not have any desire to fight you on your beliefs or the rights that you seek. My beliefs about these things will never again interfere with God's command to love my neighbor as I love myself.

You have never been my enemy. I am very sorry that I have been yours. I hope the changes in my own life, as well as the ones we announce tonight regarding Exodus International, will bring resolution, and show that I am serious in both my regret and my offer of friendship. I pledge that future endeavors will be focused on peace and common good.

Moving forward, we will serve in our pluralistic culture by hosting thoughtful and safe conversations about gender and sexuality, while partnering with others to reduce fear, inspire hope, and cultivate human flourishing.