

Emmanuel
Personal Testimony
November 29, 2020

Hello, my name is Emmanuel. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my personal story with you.

I was around 5 years old the first time I noticed I was attracted to the same sex. At first, I didn't pay much attention to the attraction. However, as I grew older, I began to notice it more and more. I endured a lot of bullying in school at the hands of other boys. As a result of the bullying, and previous abuse I had gone through, I drew near to girls in a desire for safety and protection. I was called, "fag", "queer", and "girly". This bullying really belittled me and caused confusion. I began to question my sexual orientation and gender identity. At the age of 12 years old, I severely hated myself and regretted being alive. I felt incredibly lonely during this time and didn't feel safe to confide in anyone. I thought my only option was to end my life. I'm so thankful that attempts to do so, failed.

In my teen years, I began to explore gay culture on the internet. I deeply longed to understand my sexuality, who I was, and where I belonged. When I turned 16, I decided to identify as gay. I greatly feared rejection and ostracization from my family, friends, and faith community. I began to engage in same-sex relationships and visit gay bars, in efforts to fully accept myself and embrace this new identity. Though not everyone in my life agreed with the decisions I was making, they were all very loving, caring and supportive of me as an individual. I was never asked or required to change my behaviour or what I believed in, in order to belong. During this time, I was told by many outside the community I regularly surrounded myself with, that as long as I was happy and living my truth, that's all that mattered. I agreed with them, or so I thought.

As a 16-year-old, I realized that even though I was doing everything that society said would make me happy, I was still very unsettled. On my own initiative, I chose to regularly meet with a counsellor who compassionately cared for me. She affirmed my sexual identity and encouraged me to continue living the life that I was living. Week after week, I would hear the same message and I would leave feeling just as confused as I did when I walked in. Seeing as I was not getting the support I needed, I once again sought out counselling, this time, from a pastor at a church. He was incredibly compassionate and caring, and neither affirmed nor condemned the decisions I was making or my sexual identity. In fact, we didn't even address those points at first. Instead, we began to tackle the difficulties I had walked through as a child. Each week I met with him, I was able to identify the lies I was believing about myself, and I began to experience truth that restored my heart. Depression, anxiety, fear and suicidal thoughts began to lift off of me. I started to see life differently and deeply loved it. Joy began to swell within me, and I started to see myself for who Jesus truly created me to be.

As a result, I decided I no longer wanted to continue the course my life was on. I ceased to engage in same-sex relationships, and instead sought to live my life in a way that was consistent with my faith and beliefs. I'm very thankful to have received the guidance and support I freely sought out. Had it not been for that, I don't think I would be breathing today and sharing this story with you.

I want to be clear; I oppose and condemn any practice that abuses or coerces someone into a change that they do not desire. I also want to be very clear that I oppose and condemn any law that takes away the rights, freedoms and choices of Canadian citizens. As a teenager, under a restrictive law, I would not have received the help I did, and therefore, would not be around today. I ask that you create a well-written bill that truly bans coerce or abusive practices, while respecting the individual's freedom at any age, to choose the type support they want. Please, do not restrict our freedom to explore our desires and longings in ways that are consistent with our views and faith.

I trust that you will make a decision that will benefit and protect every single citizen of Canada. Let's move forward together, and ensure that our land and people, continues to be glorious, and free.

Thank you so much for your time.