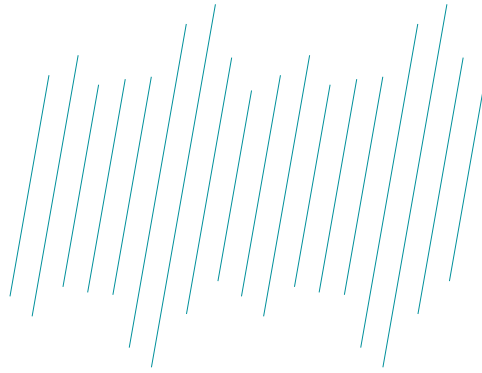




## **TOUGH TOPICS**

**The “Conversion Therapy” Controversy**



## About ReStory Ministries

ReStory Ministries is a nonprofit organization committed to resourcing churches to address homosexuality and gender identity. We are working to see every church equipped, every family prepared, and every believer informed by equipping pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders to respond biblically to these issues and the people affected by them. Ultimately, we believe that when the Church is equipped, new stories of transformation are told!

ReStory Ministries is endorsed by the Assemblies of God. We are in agreement with the Assemblies of God core doctrines, position papers, and official statements. We do not make any official statements on behalf of the Assemblies of God.

## About the Author: Joe Dallas

Joe Dallas has served on the Board of ReStory Ministries since 2016. Prior to his role with ReStory, Joe served as President of Exodus International, Program Director of the *Every Man's Battle* monthly conferences, and keynote speaker with the Focus on the Family *Love Won Out* conferences. He has authored nine books on human sexuality from a biblical perspective and has directed a biblical counseling ministry in Southern California since 1987. Joe has also served as an Elder with Mesa Church (AG) in Irvine, CA, and he frequently addresses churches and conferences nationally and internationally.

Joe and his wife Renee have been married since 1987 and are the proud parents of two grown sons.



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# TOUGH TOPICS

## The “Conversion Therapy” Controversy

### What Is It, and Why the Fuss?

“Conversion therapy” is a controversial term applied to any form of professional therapy, pastoral counseling, or ministry approach designed to help people who are in conflict over their same-sex desires or gender identity.

ReStory exists to serve such people, without apology. As a Christian ministry, **we recognize both the call to repentance when sexual sin is practiced, and the transformative power of the Word of God, sound discipleship, and the Holy Spirit’s operation within the believer. Therefore, we offer biblically-based counsel and ministry to anyone seeking to turn from homosexual behavior**, knowing there is scriptural precedence for believers doing exactly that (1 Corinthians 6:11). We further do this in obedience to the Church’s mandate to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) and to “proclaim . . . the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27).<sup>1</sup>

***We offer biblically-based counsel and ministry to anyone seeking to turn from homosexual behavior.***

Some say this is ineffective, even damaging. Accordingly, there is an international effort to legally ban so-called “conversion therapy.” But these **objections and efforts often seem to come from a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of what we and similar ministries actually do.**

### Labels and Fables

Significantly, **ministries helping people overcome homosexuality do not use the term “conversion therapy.”** It is a pejorative imposed on our work, one which neither we at ReStory Ministries, nor any one of our colleagues, have ever used or accepted.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, © 2011.

The label has a sinister tone, evoking images of shock treatment and exorcisms, both of which have been performed on homosexuals in the past under the guise of treatment. The imagery is effective, and thereby past wrongs committed by past practitioners are used to discredit current ministry efforts. This is, at best, a straw man argument.

After all, past therapeutic approaches to depression or affect disorders have included shock treatment, ice baths, and even lobotomies, yet few are suggesting that all therapy for depression or affect disorders should therefore be banned. Treatment for these disorders is legitimate, even if some past approaches haven't been. **The problem is the way treatment was done, not the fact that it was done.**

Therapy, pastoral counseling, or ministry for people in conflict over their sexuality is likewise legitimate. **It is offered to people who desire it, and should not be imposed on people who don't.** We're against forcing lesbians and gays into any ministry or counsel they're not seeking. But **the believer whose sexual desires and identity are in conflict with his or her worldview deserves counsel and ministry just as surely as anyone in conflict over any life issue deserves counsel and ministry.** They should not be denied simply because of unjust labels or fables that have been attached to the services they need, or because of rare cases of abuse that should be condemned.

## If It's Not Conversion Therapy, Is It Still a Psychological Approach?

As a Christian ministry, we believe the question to ask of any approach is the one Paul posed to the church in Rome:

**What does Scripture say?**  
- Romans 4:3

We subject all theories and ministry approaches to the scrutiny of the Bible, which is profitable for, among other things, "correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). So **if a theory is confirmed by the Bible, we confirm it. If it is neither confirmed nor contradicted by Scripture, we accept it as possibly true. If it is contradicted by the Bible, we reject it.**

So what does Scripture have to say about this? The Bible recognizes homosexual behavior as sinful (Leviticus 18:23; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-10) and homosexual passions as springing from fallen nature (Romans 1:18-27).

Further, it does so without citing any particular family dynamic or psychosocial factor(s) as a contributor. Family dynamics may therefore contribute to the problem, but they should not always be presumed.

Scripture further recognizes the existence of people who have repented of homosexual behavior (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) without prescribing any particular therapeutic plan for abandoning that behavior, or finding relief from temptations towards it.

This leaves us with the conviction that psychological theories on the origins of homosexuality may apply to many people who struggle with same-sex attractions, but not all. Family histories vary among homosexual people, some of whom claim high levels of dysfunction in their families of origin, while others claim a healthy, nurturing family environment.

**Likewise, the most effective approach to take when abandoning homosexual behavior or resisting the temptation towards it will vary from person to person, and the outcome of renouncing homosexuality may not yield the same result for everyone.**

## What Is the Outcome of Your Ministry Approach?

Some repent of homosexual behavior and find they have a capacity for opposite-sex response; others remain celibate, not desiring a sexual relationship with someone of the other sex, but still living obediently and victoriously. Some report complete absence of homosexual temptations; others report temptations remain, but do not need to be yielded to.

**In all cases, believers are promised a way of escape when temptations come (1 Corinthians 10:13) and freedom from sin's dominion (Romans 6:14).**



We therefore believe it is irresponsible to insist that every person struggling with same-sex desires must fit into the same theory or approach, so **we advocate for ministry approaches best suited to the individual, rather than the imposition of a “one-size-fits-all” approach.**

**Ultimately, though, our approach to people dealing with homosexual desires or behavior must be founded upon, and practiced in adherence to, biblical principles.**

So we affirm that the answer to all sinful tendencies includes confession, repentance, accountability, body ministry, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Additional ministry or counseling approaches can be useful, but should always be seen as supplements that are added to the essentials.

## Transformation Without Apology

“Conversion therapy” is a linguistic Boogeyman, an ominous title for strange practices that rarely exist. Several other forms of ministry have dealt with this kind of misrepresentation.

The healing ministry, for example, has been given a black eye by some ministers who employed flamboyant, unscriptural techniques in the name of healing. The same can be said for the prophetic and evangelistic ministries, both of which have suffered because the irresponsible actions of some evangelists or prophets have been used to discredit all.

But God forbid that all ministers who are gifted in healing, or prophecy, or evangelism allow themselves to be intimidated by the bad press they may unjustly suffer.

Accordingly, **we at ReStory Ministries boast in the transformative power of God manifest in the people we serve** (Ephesians 1:17-23), which continually works in them and in us (Philippians 1:6), making an open testimony of redemption visible to anyone with eyes to see (2 Corinthians 3:2).

**So yes, we do celebrate conversion—conversion from death to life, from error to truth, from carnal to spiritual—without apology.** In so doing, we align ourselves with St. Paul who described that ultimate conversion we all experienced through Jesus:

***He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.***

*- Colossians 1:13*