

Journey through same-sex attractions leads to joyful embrace of God's call to holiness

All of us feel a need to belong. But sometimes we're like a lost wolf, wondering where is our pack and will they accept us?

Hudson Byblow has been on that journey back home to the Catholic Church since his mid-20s after starting to drift away when he was a child. It's been a long and difficult road, through the trauma of bullying and abuse, the experience of same-sex attractions, and questions about his own sexuality, identity, and faith.

"I don't think I'm a brave person for sharing my journey to self-honesty," says Byblow, a teacher and Catholic speaker who shares his journey with audiences across Canada.

"I feel there are so many people waiting for it to be safe for them to share stories like mine, which are a little outside the box ... Our society says, 'You're gay and Christian and do your thing' or 'You're gay and Christian, white-knuckle it.' How do I define myself? First and foremost, a beloved child of God. No question about it."

Byblow rejects the idea that one's appetites – sexual or otherwise – ought to define a person. Instead he simply shares his story of the pursuit of holiness, chastity, and other virtues by striving to live his life as his faith intends him to.

At 37, after decades in the wilderness, Byblow says he's finally found his pack: the Church.

Byblow grew up in a Catholic family, attending Catholic schools and church on Sundays. However, among his peers, he felt like he never quite fit in, like he just didn't measure up.



Hudson Byblow says he was looking for love and acceptance as a child. Courtesy Hudson Byblow

At age 9, he lost his best male friend and the pain of that loss caused him to cry for three days. He didn't want to feel that pain again, so he began to build walls.

After being exposed to pornography through an after-dinner TV program, he turned inward even more, which didn't help build healthy relationships.

At times he also felt terrorized by bullies in the hockey dressing room. "If that's what it meant to be a boy, then I didn't want to be part of it," he recalls.

"I learned very quickly that I wasn't good at what I perceived to be boy things," Byblow says.

"It makes perfect sense to me why I drifted to things that were more 'girly' because (in them) I had a hope of feeling like I could be successful."

Byblow vividly recalls one Valentine's Day when the only card he received was from his teacher. "The question that went through my mind was 'Why doesn't anyone want to love me?'"

He gravitated toward activities like skipping rope and playing with the girls, to find love and acceptance wherever he could.

“At the age of awakening, so to speak, the boys began to seek approval from the girls. And I was still seeking approval from the boys,” Byblow says. “I didn’t feel that I had that need for belonging met yet, because of my low masculine confidence at the time.”

Starting in his teens, Byblow drifted away from the Church of his youth. He was drinking and partying by 13. By 15, he was also cross-dressing while continuing to experiment with pornography, trying to re-achieve his first “high” while also trying to escape those feelings of inadequacy.

Byblow had casual sexual relationships with women, in the pursuit of greater self-worth. In his late teens, he was molested by a man. Though he was scared, his body physiologically responded, and even more questions began to abound in his head. By his early 20s, he was exposed to transgender pornography, which drew him eventually to explore same-sex male porn.

“I was making a lot of poor decisions while I was trying to belong a little more. That desire to belong kind of guided a lot of my decisions, and it guided me away from the Church into some pretty dark areas,” Byblow recalls. “What happened was I basically hit rock bottom. I was living out of control. Things spun out of control in many ways. If I didn’t come back to the faith, I don’t know where I would be.”

Byblow was invited back into the Church. Once inside, he started asking questions. He took classes at St. Joseph’s College in Edmonton. It was there, after a few key encounters, that Byblow says he felt the spark.

He began to learn all he could about his faith – and about his identity. He came to realize that the sexual and or romantic attractions he experienced were only one facet of that identity and that it was OK to question the narrative he felt society was pushing onto him.

“I asked myself ‘Am I a sexuality with a person or am I a person with a sexuality?’ For me that was like ‘Boom!’. I can’t, as a matter of self-honesty, call myself a straight person or a gay person or a trans person. I have to call myself a person. My personhood is my first ingredient, so to speak.”

Byblow considers himself no different than any other Catholic who is called to live chastely. He strives to live according to the truths upheld by the Church and remains focused on that virtue, among others. The fact that same-sex attractions and gender identity questions are a part of his story is secondary. He says he has found joy in this pursuit that far surpasses what he had ever experienced before coming home to the Church.



Hudson Byblow says he had casual relationships in pursuit of self-worth
Courtesy Hudson Byblow

“It means you’re striving to live your life as best as you can, as best as you know how, in accordance with what God has written into creation,” Byblow says. “The Church is inviting me to pursue a heart for Jesus, a heart of virtue ... virtue in dying to self, in letting go of my earthly attachments. All of these things have to do with spiritual fatherhood and growing in holiness.”

Byblow is a member of Courage International, a Catholic apostolate for men and women who experience same-sex attractions and who want to live chastely, in accordance with the truths upheld by the Catholic Church.

Those truths are unequivocal, even if, in today’s society, they are controversial.

The Church makes no distinction between any unchaste sexual or romantic acts. All unchaste acts are considered sins because they counter what God has authored into creation. Whether a person experiences same-sex attractions, opposite-sex attractions, or even other attractions is secondary.

“If we want to help these brothers and sisters, it’s through friendship. It’s through fraternity. It’s through sharing, sharing the same Gospel, because the Gospel talks about love and talks about truth,” says Father Robert Gauthier, a professor of moral, spiritual, and pastoral theology.



Father Robert Gauthier

Gauthier says the Church doesn't judge those who experience same-sex attractions. Instead, it offers them support and respect.

"Who are we to say you are excluded from the grace and redemption of Jesus Christ? All persons affected by different suffering or wounds are invited to open up to the salvation given by Jesus Christ. If we would reject these people because of their inclination, that would be wrong."

Byblow maintains that it's also important not to assume that people are 'suffering from' or 'struggling with' same-sex attractions – even though some may experience them that way.

"A lot of people, myself included, never saw same-sex attractions as the struggle or point of suffering. Rather, it was the pursuit of chastity that was the struggle – and the suffering was from knowing we were, at times, acting in ways counter to how our loving God wrote us into creation."

In groups such as Courage International, the support, respect and education is a two-way street.

"It's where the priest would be a learner," Gauthier explains. "I'm pretty sure if we were to be close to these brothers, supporting them, hearing their stories, their background, how this inclination came, then we will learn things."

"We will try to help him or her or support him or her, but we cannot approve no matter the circumstances, no matter the intention ... It's not enough. The homosexual genital act or non-genital but sexual act, we cannot approve that. It's not the plan, the design, of God over human sexuality."

Byblow says, "It's important that this topic not be reduced to mere behaviour management. This is about real people with real hearts, but also real choices to choose to live chastely or not. But I know that I never could have conscientiously chosen to live chastely unless I had first come to see the joy of it myself from others.

"Following the rules of the Church did nothing but push me away and make resentment grow in my heart because I couldn't behave the way I thought I ought (based on how I saw myself.) It was the joy of virtue and holiness radiating from the hearts of others that cracked open my heart. And that choice to pursue virtue ... that is for any person to make.

"In fact, before I was struck by the joy of pursuing virtue, I had always thought the Church was rejecting me (and asserting behavioural controls) but I now realize it was me rejecting the Church. I used to think that I had to 'deny my nature' to be a good Catholic.

"Today, however, I see that it is my nature to be more joyful when unified to the Lord, and that unity comes when I honour His creation instead of pretending that I can 'follow my heart' to what works for me."

The Church considers same-sex attractions a condition whose roots are complex and largely unexplained, Gauthier says, noting that each person has their own individual freedom to make choices.

Byblow notes that "even though the origins of particular appetites are largely unexplained, a person doesn't have to look too deeply to see a number of common elements in the stories told by those who are on the other side. I think it is just becoming aware of stories like ours.



Hudson Byblow says he is far from alone in his personal story. Courtesy Hudson Byblow

“Believe me, I am far from alone. I know that I made choices, and those choices impacted my life in all sorts of ways. Though I most certainly am not saying that people specifically choose the attractions they experience, I can’t sit here and pretend that somehow my sexual and romantic appetites were magically unaffected by my life experience. I know they were – in fact it took a gay activist, of all people, to introduce me to the idea that environment plays a factor in the development of our attractions.”

“We have no proof about a gay gene,” Gauthier adds. “Saying that we have no choice – that you are forced to act according to that inclination – it is too strong because with Christ we are set free.”

Byblow now knows that freedom.

“It’s not that I have been ‘set free’ of homosexuality *per se*, but rather that I have become set free of the pattern of life that involved sexual compulsions – which I now see as being rooted in loneliness and isolation in addition to the prior addiction to the sexual release. I’ve also been set free of the desire to seek people as solace above Christ.

“Never again do I want to go first to a person above God, for things that I need *from God* – like His infinite love.”

Asked about the idea of “change therapy,” which aims to change a person’s sexual orientation, Byblow chuckles. “What does that have to do with striving to grow in virtue? Change therapy, or therapy with that type of change as an objective ... is something the Church doesn’t endorse, and nor do I. I think it takes people away from addressing the fact that if we truly strive to grow with Christ, our hearts will be transformed, and our desires will transform as well, as a fruit.”



Hudson Byblow invites people into a deeper relationship with Christ. Courtesy Hudson Byblow

Byblow acknowledges that there are a lot of people who want to “change” but sticks to his guns in inviting people to enter deeper into a relationship with Christ – and with their overarching Christian community, where holy, person-to-person relationships can be formed.

“We never know what God can do. Sometimes He lets us carry a cross of experiencing something we would rather not experience. It’s up to us to take up that cross and follow Him anyway.”

Gauthier notes, "I would ask the question to the person who is heterosexual ...'Is there is no choice, are you obliged act on your heterosexuality or your impulse?' Well, the answer is no. As disciples of Christ we have an inner freedom that enables us to master our compulsion, our sexual urge, and the homosexual person could do the same thing."

Byblow found freedom in this exact way in his own life. "Whether we experience same-sex attractions or opposite-sex attractions, we are all called to self-mastery, regardless of how we self-identify."

In his late 20s, Byblow was challenged to look at his past and his future.

"There was a particular gay activist who mentioned that environment plays a factor in the development of our attractions," Byblow says, something he knew he had to consider. "It made me look at the environment I had, namely the relationship environment, and how I responded to things."

"Everything I read online was saying that because you are experiencing these attractions, you are gay; this is who you are. I was like, 'Wait a second. I didn't specifically choose these attractions, but I still have the right and the ability to choose how I perceive myself.'"

While he was processing his thoughts around identity, Byblow realized that there were various degrees of truth revealed in the types of identities people embraced.

"I could perceive myself as a unicorn but it doesn't change the fact I am XY male. Once they dig my body up after I'm dead they're going to find a male. I can't outrun nature."

Gauthier says it's OK to experience same-sex attractions and to be Catholic.

"The Church would invite a brother or a sister not to hide that, of course not to publicize that openly, but with brothers and sisters, with a priest that you trust, with a religious, you should talk about that inclination and how it could be managed."

There are some Catholics who identify as LGBTQ and who want to change the Church. However, Gauthier says it's not possible since its teaching are based on larger truths.

"The Church is not there for imposing, but we would be sinning against Christ and the truth if we would say 'You love each other? You find satisfaction? Fine.' No. It's not enough. Drawing satisfaction from a sexual act is not enough. The act has to be ordered. It has to be respectful of God's design."

Byblow came to the same conclusion after realizing that the Church was the upholder of truth bigger than itself, as opposed to being some institution that invented its own truths.

It is this sense of order that allows Byblow to be at total peace when discussing the matter of attractions being intrinsically ordered or 'intrinsically disordered,' in the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 2357). "It's just a reflection of what has been authored into creation, and not to do with how we feel about it. That phrase doesn't bother me one bit."



Hudson Byblow says identity is beyond sexual attraction. Courtesy Hudson Byblow

For his part, Byblow said he bemoans the constructs that society places on people. He said identity is beyond appetites; identity is beyond sexual or romantic attractions. Today, however, he recognizes how the natural desire to belong is being capitalized on by some of those who are striving to normalize various gender identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella.

“Our culture really lays down the idea that if you question yourself, you belong to the LGBTQ spectrum. That view of self, to say ‘Well, I’m questioning,’ really can influence an entire person’s expectations of reality as it unfolds,” Byblow says.

“It certainly doesn’t seem to help people realize that they can live a fruitful life outside the LGBTQ narrative that is so often portrayed in our culture. That narrative can really shape people’s expectations.”

It was “castle walls” Byblow built around himself in childhood that kept him from pursuing his authentic self. He said he was merely coping, but not healing, until he pursued a chaste life with God at the centre. Once he did that, the changes came quickly and broadly.

“God planted that desire to continue grow in holiness. The more I pursued virtue ... the less I desired to lust. The temptations were still there, but the less I desired to cave in. The surprise result of this was the same-sex sexual attractions diminished,” Byblow said.

“Same-sex romantic relationships also began to diminish, which was a surprise, but I see now how it correlated with my rise in masculine confidence – which began to develop with the increase in my own self-control after practicing chastity for a length of time. Transgender inclinations? Those vanished after I realized that I no longer ‘needed’ to escape being a man. Again, something I realized retrospectively after the pursuit of virtue for a considerable length of time.”

As for those who are seeking happiness in their own way, Byblow says, “There are a lot of people who embrace the gay identity who live happy lives. I have no problem saying that, and I have no problem saying that every single person who’s doing that is truly trying to be happy. They are trying to pursue fulfilment and make sense of the world like we all are.”

He asks of them, as with all people, “How is your relationship upholding what God has physiologically written, in terms of the biological purpose of our sexuality?”

So what types of relationships does Byblow have today? “More than ever, I would say they are a lot more holier than they were before. I was craving holy intimacy and I didn’t know what that might look like. Today I know it always involves the pursuit of the fullness of virtue, and the deepening desire to uphold the art of the Divine Artist – what God has written into creation – in terms of the biological complementarity of males and females.”



Hudson Byblow says he found his way back to the Church. Courtesy Hudson Byblow

Critics may look at Byblow's story and come to their own conclusions, and he's OK with that.

"People ask, 'How could you be Catholic?' And I say well, it's easy because I'm striving for holiness and I have one billion people on my side who are supposedly shooting for the same thing. I am on the same journey as everybody else. That, and the fact that I have found the Church to be the upholder of objective truth to the greatest degree. I can't escape that. And it was only because of pursuing deepening self-honesty that I arrived there."

After years in the wilderness, Byblow says he continues on that journey with others, striving to help them walk towards the Lord and a deeper respect for what the Lord has written into our very bodies.

As a child, he was looking for a sense of belonging and love. As an adult he came to desire truth. He found that in the Catholic Church. He says he continues to grow – alongside the rest of his team of brothers and sisters – in the pursuit of truth, virtue, and holiness.

"I could belong with this pack, for one thing. I learned how to be a man, as an adult, instead of running into myself like a little boy like I used to. You

could say I found my team. I can go into any church in the world and there's my team ... and my home."