

## The Problems of George

All of his life George had been out-going and popular, not only with his peers, but with both older and younger people as well. And, according to Sam, he still was until his very last problematic days. While George had never been a genius, he had always been a B to A student, primarily through hard work and discipline. In high school George had lettered in football, and in his senior year had been the team captain. In fact that year George had run the touchdown play making his team "All State."

While George had been offered athletic scholarships from several universities, he declined them all. He wanted to devote the majority of his time to his studies, which he knew were going to be very difficult. You see, George planned to combine computers with business. So, he desired to work toward an MIS degree.

Before leaving for university, George had always been quite active in the various youth programs of his local church. His denomination was main-stream protestant --- rather on the conservative side. However, during his freshman year, as well as part of his sophomore one, George had nothing at all to do with any religious activities. It was not that he had "turned atheist" or saw no benefit in organized religion. He simply did not go to any church services or participate in any social activities sponsored by religious groups on campus. His studies took a great deal of time. He did socialize with a small group of close friends, however. George dated, falling in and out of love several times with some attractive co-eds. None of these relations, however, ever developed into a live-together arrangement.

Toward the end of his sophomore year, for some reason or another --- George really could never remember --- he went with a group of his close friends to a party sponsored by his own church denomination. George enjoyed himself very much and the next week went to Sunday services. For the remainder of the Spring Term George regularly attended Sunday services, while also becoming more involved in the campus activities of his church. He, in fact, discovered that he had very much missed his relations with his church, active worship, and helping other people through the church.

That summer George was to have worked with an investment firm in his home town, but the job fell through because of a poor stock market. The only other job that he could find was as a counselor at a youth camp sponsored by his local church. Needing the money for books and tuition, he took the job. He also spent a good deal of his time visiting at the retirement center run by his church. He had an enjoyable social life that summer with Jill, a girl he had known for a long time, and Bill, a friend since kindergarten.

More importantly, toward the end of the summer, George decided that something was very much lacking in his life at university, in his computer and business courses, and just "in general." When he returned to university he decided to change two of his elective courses --- one in business law and another in data base management. He instead took a course in ethics and one in comparative religions. George enjoyed these courses a

great deal, although he found them difficult. He continued being active in the campus activities of his church.

George felt something happening to him as the months passed. It were as if it was quite beyond his control, as if he had no choices to make. His group of friends narrowed. While he still dated, he did so less frequently. More time was spent with his church group and church activities. George still studied hard, maintaining a 3.5 GPA. And he found himself taking more courses in the humanities and fewer in computers and business.

At the end of his junior year --- George was a little over 20 years old --- he changed his major to English literature while also readying himself to go to seminary. This was something that he felt compelled to do. Yet, he certainly could not understand this compulsion. Many of those around him thought that he was “crazy.” Not Sam, however.

Sam had been an extremely close friend of George almost from their first day at university, having met in an introductory computer course. Furthermore, Sam had been, and still was, very supportive of George in and through all of the anxiety and uncertainty George was experiencing. While Sam, a good-natured business major and fraternity man, was not the religious type, he thought highly of George and had a great admiration of him. Sam listened intently, without judgment, over long periods of time to George. From time to time Sam made comments and suggestions, but always such as “George, why don’t you think about it from this angle, too?” Indeed, through all of this Sam came to know and feel a great deal about and for George, as they shared and did many different things together.

The next year George graduated from university with “Honors” and went to a very reputable seminary of his church --- a seminary known for its stress both on scholarship and pastoral care. The seminary, however, was also known for many in the denomination for its “liberal ways.” The seminary itself recognized its liberal position and reputation. It said to its critics that Christ came to preach love and not judgment; that God said judgment is His. We are called upon to forgive, be merciful and helpful to our fellow human being.

George did well in his seminary training, although he did not find the courses in Greek all that easy. While in seminary George kept in contact with a few of his college friends, especially Sam who had gone on for an MBA in “Human Resource Management,” and who now had a lucrative position as personal manager of a large factory. In fact George saw Sam several times a year. George also kept up with Jill, especially when he was home during vacations and summers.

Bill, a member of George’s church, had also gone to seminary, but not the same one as George. They compared “notes” when they saw one another during the holidays. They often entangled themselves in heated arguments over the roles of the church, the proper interpretation of scripture, the nature of humankind, God’s judgment and mercy,

and the like. It seemed to George that the seminary to which Bill went stressed the notions of sin and judgment a great deal and how terrible it is to be a sinner facing eternal hell-fire. Bill's seminary was viewed, however, as more orthodox than that of George.

During his third year in seminary, George had to go into Metropolis, a large city, three times weekly to work, from a religious stance, with various social workers and their cases. The vast majority of the people who were his "cases" were, for some reason or another, about his age. None were younger. Only a few were much older, and then only in their early to mid-thirties. Most of these people were simply "hard luck stories," and not necessarily financial. Coming from broken homes, having alcoholic parents, or being sent away so the parents could have more time, they were people who had never been wanted, never been loved; people for whom no one had ever cared, nor cared now; George became quite close to several of them, and they to him. He thought that he had never been more needed, more wanted, more useful, more loved than with and by these people. He would do anything in his power for them in order to return their love for him. Indeed, in some cases especially, it was a compulsion to return their love; to be close to them. It was a compulsion he did not understand. Neither did Sam, with whom George continued to discuss everything, and anything, of importance in his life.

Upon graduating from seminary George was ordained. As luck would have it, he was called to a church in a medium size town about an hour and half drive from Metropolis. The church was not large --- a congregation of some three hundred persons. Part of the attraction of this church position was that George would still be permitted to carry on some of his case work in Metropolis. Of course, he would narrow his case load, but keep those most close to him. At this church George was also nearer to Sam's factory and, therefore, could see him even more frequently. Everything was fitting nicely into place for George to continue doing the work of the Lord.

When George took over the church it was rather stodgy and traditional. The youth program consisted only in a dull Sunday School. There was even less for the elderly members of the congregation. The attendance at Sunday service consisted only of a few old people. George quickly began to turn all of this around, however. He was a good preacher --- not flashy, but certainly attention getting. He even began having people from other churches attend his services. After all, news travels fast in smaller towns. A board of elders was elected that not only supported the new efforts of George, but gave him all sorts of strong personal support as trusted and very good friends. With their help George was able to introduce a lively set of youth programs in which he took an active part. Programs for the elderly were also started up, and George worked in them as well. With his training in business, George was able to revamp the financial situation of the church, actually taking it out of the "red" in less than a year. On top of all of this, he went to Metropolis twice a week. Everything seemed to be going very well for George.

Yet, George was not happy. He had been led into the church and its ministry by forces quite unexplainable to him. These very same forces led him in other directions, too. George often had long conversations with Sam about all of this. Sam knew full-well

the entire scope of drives, urges and desires of George, and how he carried through, and out, these forces working so persistently within him. Sam was never judgmental, but always a good listener and provider. Sam, the business, and fraternity man, was forever, it seemed, the one with whom George could relate most honestly and could be most openly himself to himself. So, when in his new church position, George became more and more uncomfortable with himself, he always went to visit Sam for his listening, closeness, and support. He went to see Sam often about what he, George, viewed as a serious personal problem --- the problem of being duplicitous.

On his most recent visit with Sam, spending several days in long conversation, Sam had suggested that George might consider taking his problem to his board of elders. After-all, as George had told Sam, the board members were not only all supportive of George as their clergyman, they each were a close and trusted personal friend. George was very relieved by this suggestion, and he returned to his apartment and his church. That Sunday George preached a stirring sermon on love and forgiveness, and helping one another. After the service many in the congregation came to him to say how powerful that sermon had been and how much it meant to them.

During the Monday following this service George contacted each of the members of the board of elders. He explained to each of them that he had a very personal problem which was not affecting in any way his performance as their minister, but which was bothering him a good deal. He needed their collective advice, prayers and guidance. George stressed to each of them that this was a very personal matter to him, and each --- without George asking --- promised not to betray in any way to anyone the trust of George, but to keep whatever he told them as a strict secret.

Thus, on Tuesday evening George had all of the members of the board of elders to meet with him at his apartment. When they first arrived there was the usual chit-chat. There were also many solid, and sincere compliments on how very well everything was progressing at the church, how fortunate they all were to have George with them, how moving and on target his sermon about love and forgiveness had been last Sunday, and the like. Finally, George said that he thought that they should all pray for guidance and understanding before he talked with them. And, so they prayed. Quietly George then told the board of elders, his friends, that he was gay, and that part of his going to Metropolis was to be with his lover. George pointed out that this was all very discreet, and that he had never done anything locally (nor anywhere else) which could bring the least bit of question on the church and his role in it. George told the elders that he in no way was promiscuous, nor did he have any interests whatsoever in anyone except his lover in Metropolis. The group then talked about homosexuality, various stereotypes of gays seducing or attacking children, spreading AIDS, and the like. George assured the elders that neither he, nor any other gay that he knew, nor did his lover have AIDS --- and that he would do nothing to shame the church and its congregation. Indeed, George told the group that, as a Christian, it was not being gay that bothered him. What bothered him was having to lead a secret, dual and duplicitous life. Hence, he felt that great need to share his being gay with those very few people in the church who were of such

unbending personal support to him and also who happened to be members of the board of elders.

After awhile every one left on friendly terms. George felt very much relieved, and, even although it was late, he called Sam to tell him about the evening. Sam was extremely happy for his friend, and told him to have a good night's sleep. George did go to bed and slept very soundly. In fact he over slept.

The next morning the telephone rang waking George. He did not recognize the voice on the other end of the line, but he did know that some one was telling him in a harsh tone of voice, using a great deal of vulgarity, that they did not want queers in their town, much less in their church! Such calls continued throughout the week. That Sunday there was almost no one at Sunday School and the attendance at the Sunday service was very low. Within a month George was "fired" from his church position and he moved to Metropolis where he rented a small room. Soon after that he was completely removed from the ministry of his denomination.

As it happened, Bill was serving on the judicial board that defrocked George. Bill, had become one of the strongest opponent of George in particular and, in general, of what he perceived as a terrible deadly liberalism in his church. Bill, in a "virtuous mood," called Sam soon after the vote against George was cast. While he did not know, Bill suspected that Sam knew that George was gay. Bill even strongly suspected that there was more than met the eye going on between Sam and George.

Knowing that it would be all but impossible to reach George by telephone, Sam immediately tried to call George's lover. No one answered, however. Sam then hurriedly drove to Metropolis and went to George's room. When no one answered the door, Sam let himself in with a key that George had given him. He found George on the floor, a pistol in his hand and a bullet hole in his head. Sam closed George's sad eyes and then called the police from a pay telephone in the hall outside George's room. He next called George's lover, this time reaching him. Finally, Sam went back into George's room, sat on the floor besides the corpse of his dead friend, held his hand which was now growing cold and stiff and wept bitterly.

It was only some years later that Sam discovered what he had long surmised, indeed, had happened. He learned from Jill, who had been told by Bill, that immediately after the vote against George was cast, Bill had called George. As luck would have it, he reached George on the hall telephone. Bill announced the vote to George saying that now the Lord's work had been done. And, as far as Sam ever could tell, Bill always considered his part in the defrocking of George, and his relaying that information to him, as one of the high points of his Christian ministry.