From Struggle to Self-Acceptance - Scott Hale's Story

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Guest: Scott Hale

Resources:

Welcome to Peaceful Life Radio

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, your place on the internet for cultivating a peaceful life. I'm David Lowry, and my good friend Don Drew is alongside me. Hey, Don, welcome to the show.

Thanks, David.

Today , we're going to explore the stories of someone who found a way to peace and contentment despite challenging circumstances.

Don, why don't we give our listeners a preview of our show today?

I'm happy to do that, David, but before we introduce our guest, we want to ask our friends to like, subscribe, and download our show. It only takes a few seconds and it helps a lot.

Introducing Scott Hale: A Journey of Self-Discovery

Today, we're honored to have Scott Hale with us. Scott's journey has been one of self discovery, acceptance, and the pursuit of a life of harmony and wholeness. As a gay man raised in a fundamentalist Christian environment, Scott's path has been anything but easy.

But his resilience and commitment to find peace have truly been inspiring. We're excited to hear his story and the lessons he's learned along the way. Scott, welcome to Peaceful Life Radio.

Thank you.

Scott, so glad to have you here today. Let's begin with some good questions, shall we?

Scott's Childhood in a Small Community

We want to ask you about your upbringing and the values you were raised with in your small Oklahoma community.

I was raised in a very small community of less than 2000 people. And that's quite frankly being generous.

You knew everybody.

You did. You grew up knowing everybody. And in the time in which I was raised in the 70s, it was definitely you are raised by your tribe. Nobody had any problem calling out any kid and saying, *hey, behave.*

Oh, my goodness. I thought I was raised in a small community, but yours is really tiny, comparatively speaking.

Sure. And I would often be sent to the store for my grandma and they would put it on her tab. It was just a very close knit, small community where everybody knew everybody including the things you didn't necessarily want them to know. (laughter)

So what was it like being a young man growing up in that kind of community?

It's interesting, because my mom told me that as a very young toddler I didn't have any problem going up to anybody at all. I never knew a stranger. I would be , *hey, how are you?* You know, want to get involved in right in their life. But that clearly started changing because I have no recollection of that at all.

Really? You don't even remember those things?

No. In my own way of thinking about myself, I'm like very introverted, very withdrawn, don't like going up to strangers, especially, inviting me to a party of people that I don't know is like the worst possible thing you could do in my mind.

Yes.

So clearly something happened, and I, looking back, I can see it was me looking through the lens that other people were viewing me with, and they would, in very small, subtle ways, say, Uh, *boys don't necessarily react the way you just reacted, Scott, you need to man up, boys don't cry, boys don't express their feelings.*

Slowly over time, I started becoming more withdrawn and my childhood when I look back was very isolated and lonely. but I felt safe at the same time being alone. I actually

preferred to be alone.

There's this thing called the looking glass self. And the looking glass self is basically a concept that says we know who we are because people tell us who we are. Your community says, you're tall. You should play basketball or, you have long fingers, have you ever thought about playing the piano or being a violin player? We get all of this feedback, but sometimes the feedback we're giving and what we feel like on the inside don't necessarily line up, they're not in alignment and that can create a bit of anxiety.

Yeah, I have a grandson who's 14 and he is six foot four and everybody thinks he should be playing sports and he loves to play the trombone. As you can imagine, everyone is asking him, do you play basketball? Do you play football? Are you interested in? And his answer is no, I love band.

Of course you began to notice some differences, right?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Realizing and Navigating Differences

So let's talk about some of those differences, and at what age did you start to realize you were different in the way you perceive things compared to those around you?

I believe it was kindergarten, because that's when I was forced to be around a group of kids for a certain amount of time, and I clearly started censoring myself or measuring my responses more than I had before, because I would get made fun of, teased. The boys kind of terrified me, especially as I started getting older because the things that they were into, I had little or no interest in whatsoever. I loved playing with my trucks and the dirt and stuff like that. But violence, aggression,

You didn't relate to that.

No, no, I was much more interested *let's sit down and talk*, as opposed to let's go pull each other and tumble all over each other. That wasn't very interesting to me. The things that the boys started talking about, especially as we aged and getting older, was very confusing to me, when they talk about girls because I was best friends with the girls. My best friend until people started dating was a girl. And I remember the day very clearly she came to me and said, *this guy asked me to go out. What do you think I should do?* And I knew fundamentally our relationship was going to change from that point forward. And it did. She became one and one with him and I took a backseat and our relationship wasn't as close as it was.

I was fascinated with boys and men in the same way that other guys were interested in women and girls. I emulated my mother until I figured out pretty quickly. You can't do that. The things that I loved about her and wanted to emulate, I would get made fun of. *Why did you say that?* I'm like *my mom says that all the time.* But it was just received differently.

That realization process, did it make you feel like you had to be very careful about what you said, thought, or did? How did that work on you?

I became keenly aware of how I was perceived, and that continues very much to this day. I don't often say anything without measuring how it's going to be reacted to when I walk into any given situation. I'm like, *where's the back door?*

Facing the Challenges of Self-Acceptance

So, how did you initially learn to deal with and come to terms with your same sex attraction as a young person?

I would say as a young person, I did not. I very much believed what I was taught at church, which was *pray and ask God to take this away from you*. *This is just a phase, you'll grow out of it. You will meet the right woman and she will change you fundamentally. And all of a sudden you will be attracted to women if you're patient enough.*

The fault was always put back on me. It was *you need to do something. And if it isn't working, by the way, that's because you're not praying hard enough. You're not trying hard enough. It was never anything other than you are the issue and you are the problem.*

When you were a young teen moving into adulthood did you ever talk to anybody about how you felt towards guys and girls and that sort of thing? Or did you feel like you had to keep that hidden from your family and people you knew? How did you manage all of that?

Men that I loved, respected, and looked up to and thought were the kind of man I want to be would say things like, *boy, did you see on TV when those two guys, that figure skating guy made me want to throw up.* That was my grandfather. My preacher, we were at dinner and I don't even know how it came up, and I was a 12 year old, maybe, and he would talk about how he wanted to vomit when he saw two men showing the slightest bit of affection towards one another. No. I did not feel safe, even with men that I knew and loved that were in my family, that were in my church. I knew intuitively, you don't share this with them, because then you'll be the one that wants to make them

vomit? I couldn't handle that.

So, here you were, a young man with a secret. You probably didn't even know how to process it yourself, did you? You knew that you were different, but not sure what all that difference really meant, other than people didn't like it.

Absolutely. The only things that I ever heard about being gay or homosexuality were remarkably nasty, dirty things. It was always revolving around back alleys and sexual encounters with complete strangers, which I didn't relate to in any way, but that's what supposedly was going to be my future if I allowed myself to feel and follow what I knew to be true about myself.

So, as you were moving into adolescence, what kinds of changes did you experience?

I became compartmentalized. I, felt this conflict because the things that I did express that I felt to be somewhat true about myself were the very things that left unchecked would become, the thing that got me judged. For instance, being creative. I was always considered a creative kid. I was in art, music, theater. And interestingly enough, arts tend to be where you can find some acceptance and camaraderie with people who will not necessarily judge you. If you really look at it, theater is pretending to be something that you're not, pretending to be another person. And I knew intuitively how to do that. It was second nature to me to pretend to be somebody else. I didn't get teased by my team, by my, classmates because they knew me from when I was five years old. But the moment a new kid moved into school or the older boys, I would absolutely get tormented, physically, certainly verbally, but my classmates would often come to my defense because I'd like, *hey, hey, I know that those shoes he's wearing are gay, but that's Scott, so leave him alone.*

In class, there are clicks. I didn't become part of a single click. I moved seamlessly from group to group. And looking back, I honestly see a pattern in my life. And that is Peacemaker. Whether it was in my family, whether it was in my class, wherever in my entire life, it's been, *no, no, no, don't make fun of him for that. You're better than that.* And I would find subtle ways of inserting myself into situations, especially when I felt someone was being wrongly accused or made fun of, and I would find a way to diffuse it. And I've learned by looking back that was something that I honestly feel is similar for many gay people.

We tend to be the glue of our family. I believe we're created for a reason. I believe when you look at a family unit, God, the universe, or whatever you want to call it, says, *I know what would help the situation. I'm going to give this family a gay child.* And were it not for these external circumstances, such as people's interpretation of the Bible saying, *Oh no, no, this is a terrible thing.* If I was allowed to celebrate the way I was from the time I was little and grew up to be a teenager and young adult and a man, it would be

considered my strength, not something that was shameful.

Yes. But you had to grow into that thinking.

100 percent had to grow into that.

Every message I was getting, even all the way through college, was *you got to change, you have to change.* People said, well, *you're not praying hard enough*. And as a person of faith, I prayed, *I will get down on the floor. I will sob. I will cry, I will you know, whatever it takes.* And I would do that. I did that for 30 years

Well,

At some point you start to wonder, and that's where I started questioning things. It can't just be me. No one can say that. I have not tried. And, I'll just go ahead and say it, I don't know how it will be received.

The Turning Point: Embracing Identity

One day I heard a voice in my head that said, *stop doing that*. *Stop asking for that. You are absolutely fine the way you are, and in fact, I made you this* way.

That was a turning point for you. Was it the moment where you began to accept who you were and accept your identity as a gay man?

It was very shocking to me, yes. And I'm not going to say that there was some sort of revelatory, *oh!*

No light shone from the heavens or anything?

No, and this was

Didn't see an angel?

It was the crack in that facade that allowed me to go, okay, *well maybe I should read that book. Maybe I should go to this conference. Maybe I should expose myself to other ways of thinking than the way I've been taught in the environment that I was raised in.* And I would go kicking and screaming. Sometimes *I go, no, no, no, no, you're just making that up because you need to.* In other words, I want to make it clear, I was one of those people who's like, if the Bible doesn't say it, I'm not going to do it.

You had to reconcile religious teaching, cultural upbringing, strong family structures, and your own, dispossessed spirit, as it were. And then you hear this small voice saying, *Stop doing that.* And did you stop? What was the progress like?

It was a very intellectual process for me. I would read, study, talk to people, go to conferences, and slowly but surely I started questioning things and saying, *let's be logical about this.* The Creator, in my mind, is logical. You can look at the creation and see the logic in quite a bit of it.

So, I would go, what is the worst possible thing that can happen with two men being in a relationship together that could not also happen with a male and a female? There's very little difference what the worst possible scenario could be. And it's just a slow process of meeting people and that, by the way, is a very powerful thing.

I was raised before the internet. So coming into contact with people that were different than me took physical effort. I had to put myself in those situations. And learning that these are good people. These are not people in the back alleys doing shameful things. These are beautiful, lovely human beings I can aspire to and find role models in.

Did you have the courage to be true to yourself, even though you knew you'd face backlash?

I don't consider myself overly, heroic or whatever you want to call it, but people are like, *wow, that was very brave.* And looking back, I'm like, *yes, it was*. And that's one of the things that I can credit my parents with is I certainly don't want to give any kind of impression that they did not do the absolute best that they could and that they loved me with their entire being. At the same time, it took a great deal of courage for me to tell my parents because I knew what would happen, and what would happen is exactly what would happen. They followed what they believed to be the biblical example, and I was excommunicated. They stopped all contact with me for about a year, thinking this would send me running back home like the prodigal son, when in fact, I found a community of people who loved me, nurtured me, and raised me up, so that I was ready to have those conversations with my parents because they instantly blamed themselves. *What did I do wrong*? Especially my poor dad. He would sit and cry *I failed you! You're going to have a sad, lonely life. You're not going to have anyone who loves you.* Because that's what he was taught. That's what was modeled for him.

Scott, sometimes we really can't change other people's minds or positions on things.

Finding Peace and Acceptance

What are some of the steps you took to find self acceptance and inner peace in your sexuality?

As I said, I read several really good books and I read some terrible books. I met some great people who were role models for me. And that would include, by the way, you two. This is something that didn't happen for me, it's been a very long process. I'm now in my fifties and I still struggle with things. I still find it hard at times to find hope. But the one thing I do believe has gotten me through is this inner peace that was instilled in me. I've realized the more I try to get back to that little kid and that open acceptance, that kid who's like, *hey, here I am. I want to know you and I want you to know me.* The more I embrace that, the more I've clearly seen peace coming into my life.

Peace is something that you become. You do it. You do peace. And that to me is looking outward instead of always me, me, me, me, me. It's being empathetic. The things I learned from theater, stepping in somebody else's shoes, are remarkably helpful because I often, when someone does something bad to me now, my instant reaction is, *I wonder what's going on with them? Why would they have done that to me? I would they have said that?*

That's a marvelous lesson right there. You've learned how to ask the question *What's going on?*

Well you were the one who said if something's weird, use this phrase, and I've used it over and over and over. *Tell me more*.

Tell me more. That is such a great phrase.

One of the things Scott said that really resonated with me is *do peace*. Make it an action of our own. And oftentimes we talk about peace as though it's something we feel, or we should possess, but really to have peace, you have to do peace.

Scott knows people that I know, and I know a little about those people. And he has changed their understanding of LGBTQ people profoundly. Yes. Until they knew him, until they had actually been with him and all that goes with a beautiful soul like this, they had some really abhorrent ideas and attitudes. But you would never know that today. In fact, they probably say, *I never felt like that*. But I know stuff about them, right? You've made a difference. That's what doing peace is all about. This peaceful life, being a life of peace changes people, doesn't it?

Yeah, and I don't want to give the impression that every interaction I have is full of peace and love and understanding. I will be confrontational and that includes people that I love very much, my family. I will say, *look at this. What did you just say? Did you hear what you just said?* Because my parents naturally have always loved gay people.

They didn't know it. But if you walked them into a room full of 100 people, they're gonna find the 10 gay people in there and go, *isn't she great? Isn't she awesome?* And then the moment, in the past, anyway, they would find out, *oh, Ellen DeGeneres is gay?* I'm not gonna watch that show anymore. Someone that they loved and completely embraced, that additional knowledge of, Oh, by the way, this person's also LGBTQ? Well, now they're a bad person.

And I would say, *what is going on with that?* One person can change an entire family. And then that family can change the extended family. It Takes time. It takes patience. And it takes lots of uncomfortable conversations. But that doing of peace or peacemaking absolutely is how I feel the world is going to eventually and is changing. It's through relationship. It's through caring about someone enough to tell them. *What did you just say? Can we talk about that? What did you just do? Do you realize how somebody else could have perceived that?* And people who have done that for me and loved me enough to come up to me and say, *remember that email you sent?* I was like, *Oh yeah, I didn't even think about it that way until you took the blinders off of my eyes.*

I love the fact that you would come to those conclusions in your life. I have a question about philosophies, practice, spiritual beliefs, and things that have helped you find more peace and contentment in your life.

Exploring Faith and Spirituality

I have studied many different faiths. I have many different practices. Meditation, yoga. I've studied Buddhism. I have been in workshops with monks. I have both Catholic and other persuasions. So, I'm curious. And that curiosity has benefited me in my growth as a human being and as a gay man, for sure.

I think if I wasn't curious, that initial crack in my beliefs wouldn't have led me to walk through it and explore it, because it's terrifying. Cause what happened when you question and pull out one little brick from that foundation of your faith, thinking, well, that one little brick can't make that much difference, the whole thing falls down and you got to rebuild it. That is terrifying, especially to an 18, 19, 20 year old. That's where a little bit of courage comes in and going *I'm going to be okay. I can build this back together slowly*. It's a faith that works for you rather than against you.

God is love. And if you believe that, then you have to think my faith needs to reflect that. If I believe in a God, I believe in who's going to separate the good and the bad for eternity. That affects how I live on the planet. If I believe that God loves everybody, that's how I treat people. The God that I believe in is the God of love and the God that reconciles rather than excludes.

Reflecting on Personal Growth and Future Aspirations

Scott, looking at your life now, what kinds of changes would you say that you've gone through in the last 10 years, the evolution of your understanding and acceptance of yourself?

I have lived long enough now to where there are entire phases of my life where I'm unrecognizable to myself. I've grown so much as a human being that I can't even look back without going, *wow, that was me. I used to live and believe those things.* But that takes . patience. It takes effort. It takes work. I also recognize that *wow! I still got a long way to go* and not be intimidated by that-- be excited by that.

I'm in a book writing class right now and he talks about this very famous author who said *what would you do if someone read your book and they said they disagree?* And you go, *Oh, well, I don't believe that anymore, that's my old book.* I'm writing my new book! So, being gentle with yourself and looking back in the past and going, *Oh boy, I was an idiot!* Because let's say I stayed in that narrow path I was raised in. My bandwidth, or whatever you want to call it, this straight and narrow road, the breadth of life that I have experienced, I wouldn't have questioned it. I wouldn't have even explored it, because I was like, *well, no, this is what a man is. Man does this. Man says this. Man behaves this way,* rather than really looking and saying what else can happen?

Now I want to ask what I call the money question. Remember you talked about getting on your knees and praying for relief for 30 years? Imagine I have a magic wand in my hand right now. And I can answer that prayer the way you begged God to answer that prayer. But knowing what you know now, would you want me to change you?

Oh no. I would say to young baby Scott, you are beautifully and wonderfully made. Don't you dare change who you are. Just continue to grow and be who you know in your spirit you are. No, I would not change. I feel in many ways gay people are blessed in that we are forced, but it's okay to be forced when you are questioning things.

that

Other people don't even think about questioning. Gender expression, you know, that's a big topic going on right now. It's a performance and I can clearly look at it and see it. Whereas I know people that would be, *what are you talking about? I'm not performing. I'm a man being a man.* You were taught how to be a man and you are performing the role that you were given. So, I think it's a wonderful blessing.

There's a quote I wrote down cause I love it so much. It's by Sam Austin, who's a songwriter. He said, homosexuality is God's way of assuring the truly gifted aren't burdened with children. And I do love kids, but at the same time, I've never wanted

children because I am much more interested in having a relationship with your kids and then other kids and that's one of the reasons I taught for 20 years.

Scott here at Peaceful Life Radio, one of the things we try and do is help our listeners find peace where they have a lot of struggles and difficulties and so on. What kind of advice would you give somebody who is a 13 year old Scott Hale?

I would say the things that you might hate about yourself right now are actually your secret weapon. They are your true power. If people are making fun of you for something, they could be intimidated. The things that you are being made fun of, teased of, that is your beauty. Embrace it. And it's going to be tough. But at the same time, reach out to people. We have resources now that we didn't always have.

I am very thankful that that young kid who grew up isolated in a small community like I did, probably is able to access information and other people in a way that I never could. Now, be cautious at the same time about who you are meeting and the things that you're allowing into your life. You can connect with other human beings, with other people that are gay. And I think it will be very helpful as a young 13 year old, even just to know by seeing a TV show and a representation, Hey, that's a normal, funny person that I like on that TV show. It's going to be okay.

How do you maintain a sense of peace and centeredness, especially when you're going through a conflict or difficult time or you see the hatred and bias shown these days to the LGBTQ community?

That's where meditation has come in relatively helpful. I can step back, diffuse what my feelings might be, and really think about it, because I've come to the point now where I don't even answer an email without being quite thoughtful. I have that little 30 second delay on this end so I can, whoops, call that thing back. I think reflection, knowing who you are, is always a great journey to go on.

Scott, where do you find the greatest sources of joy, fulfillment, and purpose in your life today?

That's a great question. The lucky answer for me is I don't know if it's my family or what, but I have this wonderful brain chemistry where joy will bubble up out of me I just find joy in so many things, and it literally will physically make me shake at times. I'm a naturally joyful, happy person. Not to say that terrible things don't happen and it is depressing to look out into the world and see what LGBTQ people are having to face often. Living in the state that I live, my husband and I have conversations that other people don't have to have. Like, can we retire here? Will we feel safe putting down roots? Are we not going to be married at some point? Because somebody says, *well, we're going to take that back?* But even in the midst of that I can feel happy with nature.

I have to take a walk, be outside, see the earth and the beauty of it and the creation, and it will reset me on some level.

Scott, you wrote a play, about your growing up experiences. Tell us a teeny bit about that play and if there's a way of getting hold of it or an email we could get a hold of it. There's a lot of people that might like to read this very funny yet poignant play.

Yes, I did. I wrote a play called Confessions of a Hooker Horny Toad, which make zero sense until you realize I grew up in a tiny little town named Hooker. Our sports mascot was the horny toads. That play has been performed a handful of times at this point. It's me getting on stage, talking about my life. I am writing a book and that book will more than likely include some of those same stories. It's what you might call entertainment that also inspires.

I guess the best way to get ahold of me is through Instagram. It's *Horny Toad Confessions.* It is a private account, but if you want to be my friend, I will let you on and follow that journey of that book and how it comes together.

Thank you for sharing that. And when that book is written, you come back here and we'll talk about it.

I would love to. Yeah.

Before we close today, Scott, would love to hear any other advice you'd like to give, any other thing you want to say. What is it you'd like to tell us?

When you find yourself in a moment of depression or conflict or just not feeling good at all? What works for me anyway is to stop looking inward and to take my energy and put it outward. That never fails to make me feel better. I say, what can I do for somebody else? And you just kind of intuitively forget about what bad thing is going on in your life. And by helping somebody else with whatever problem they may be going through, you start to feel better yourself.

Thank you, Scott, for sharing your powerful and deeply personal story with us today. Your journey of self acceptance, faith, and the pursuit of inner peace is truly remarkable. Your willingness to be vulnerable and honest has touched the hearts of our listeners and provided a pathway of hope to those who may be struggling with similar challenges. So, we are grateful for your courage and the wisdom and may your story continue to inspire others to embrace their authentic selves and find the peace and the contentment they so desperately need. Thank you for joining us on Peaceful Life Radio.