



*Hope does not
disappoint us,
because God has
poured out his love
into our hearts
by the Holy Spirit,
whom he has given us.*

Romans 5:5

January 2007

Made Complete in Christ

by Kendra Hanes, Women's Ministry Director

It seems like all my life I was looking for what would make me feel complete, or at least normal enough to fit in. When I didn't find it at home or with friends, I kept looking elsewhere. I thank God I finally looked in His Word.

From the time my parents divorced when I was two until I moved out for college, I lived with my mother and my sister. My dad's past substance abuse and psychological state kept him emotionally and physically distant from my small family of three. I grew up in church learning about God the Father who wanted to be my personal father, too. Though it brought some comfort, trying to love this invisible God was often like trying to love my absent dad. I still craved a physical person who would wrap his arms around me and call me "loved one."

The first male I distinctly remember wrapping his arms around me was a boy in Mexico. I was six and he was about two years older. As a relative of my host family, he was around for a week. He started holding my hand and kissing me, gradually getting more sexually aggressive. When I tried to make him stop, he gave me a choice between my sister and me. Afraid to tell an adult, I chose to protect my sister and take whatever he did to me. This brought confusion, shame, and a fear of sexual interaction.

Due to competitions with my sister and difficulty relating with my peers, I developed incorrect theories of my creation. My favorite was that I was supposed to have been a boy. I had read Psalm 139 and pictured God putting me together in my mother's womb as if I was play dough. When He got to the boy parts, His hand slipped, and I was born before He had a chance to finish me. Around age nine, I told a couple of my friends on the playground that I wished I was a guy and would love to become one if I could. The next thing I knew, they were calling me gay and chanting for everyone to hear, "Kendra wants a sex change! Kendra wants a sex change!"

After this, I generally preferred to hang out with girls who liked the outdoors or the boys in my neighborhood. We climbed trees and exchanged punches to the stomach while my sister played with toy horses and swapped clothing with her girlfriends. When I outgrew my guy friends, I settled for being a bookworm who withdrew into her own fantasy world. Eventually, that problem faded as a new one emerged. I developed intense emotional longings for women. Combined with past sexual fantasies, I began to seriously question my sexual orientation. However, since I still also liked guys and believed homosexual behavior was a sin, I buried my questions with the fear that I could never bury them deeply enough.

My questions resurfaced in high school when a guy I was attracted to shared his homosexual thoughts with me. The next year he started a gay club on campus. I was president of the Christian club. Though I publicly stated at the time, "Hate the sin, love the sinner," I still felt drawn to my friend's club and feared my own physical reactions. Again, I pushed my thoughts away.

When I moved from California to attend college in Oregon, I had unlimited access to the Internet for the first time. By sheer curiosity, I began viewing pornographic sites, both heterosexual and homosexual. Motivated by fear of breaking the rules, I confessed to my campus pastor after two months of viewing these sites. I was caught off guard by only one of his questions: "Have any of the sites you've visited been of a homosexual nature?" Unwilling to face my own questions, I told him no.

Shortly after that, a friend of mine showed me a very sensual video involving two women. As she told me of her past homosexual involvement, I could no longer ignore the fact that I wanted a similar encounter of my own. After a brief hiatus, I was back online, seeking out women in lesbian and bisexual chat rooms, hooked on brief encounters that left me ashamed in the morning.

My sophomore year, I dated a man that I genuinely cared for, but when things went wrong in our relationship, I turned to fantasizing about a female friend. Some time after my boyfriend and I broke up, my feelings for this friend



developed further. I wanted to be with her forever, physically and emotionally. Though I couldn't reconcile my faith with my feelings, I tried to think of a way to make it work.

God wouldn't let me rest. I shared with my friend how I felt. Wisely, she told me not to go down that path. I toyed with my options, knowing I was at a fork in the road. Gathering prayer support from my sister and a couple of close friends, I chose to talk to my senior pastor. As a first-time pastor, he wasn't sure what to do. He removed me from youth ministry with my best interest in mind. The only practical help he gave me was the name "Exodus" and a hope that he could get resources from another pastor. Next thing I knew, he and his wife were moving to Los Angeles.

I worked that summer at a Christian camp. I immediately told the female director my struggle, in fear that I would be "found out" and fired. Instead, I received some mentoring while still being able to minister. I was encouraged not to let self-rejection usurp the truth of Romans 8:1, that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The director's unconditional love and tough challenges from Scripture added greatly to the small measure of hope God had planted in my life.

That autumn, I entered school for my junior year of college. I had found Exodus Ministries online (finally a good use for the Internet!) and followed a link to Portland Fellowship, a sister ministry of Mid-Valley Fellowship. What I discovered was a community that was as desperate for God's direction as I was. At home I was literally on my face before God, finally able to lay my will down before Christ. I read in James, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life" (1:12). I knew then that if I did not obey God, I would be missing out on God's blessings for me. I also knew that if there was blessing for endurance, then it must be possible to endure. I decided to take time off of school and just seek God, wanting to see certain areas healed before acquiring my degree and starting a career.

In this time, God started uprooting the lies that I had allowed to grow by my own sin and life circumstances. I reread Psalm 139 and found a far more accurate and purposeful Creator. I was no mistake. I learned to know Him as a God who loves me even when I make my bed in hell. The deep longings I tried to fulfill sexually, I could only fill with Christ. I came to believe what I had long ago memorized, that I am complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10).

It has not been easy since that time. I have battled loneliness, sexual temptations, and drunkenness to numb the pain. Leaning on James 1:12, I endured temptation, and learned to repent quickly when necessary. I transferred to Oregon State University and began to grieve for those struggling with homosexuality on my new campus. I prayed for those I did not know and came to know some people who shared my story.

A couple of years after transferring to OSU, I met a man named Nathanael at my church's college group. In some ways, he was not at all what I thought I wanted. Yet in God's wonderful way of providing, Nate was everything I *needed* in a husband. We married during his year of Bible College, on December 11, 2004. Getting married did not make everything better. In fact, our first year of marriage was even harder than we anticipated. Still, being married to a man has given me an even greater appreciation of what it means to be a woman. With Christ as our foundation, Nate and I have found we are capable of enduring much together.

I still see myself on a path toward something greater, but it no longer seems so dark or lonely. I rejoice in knowing that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And the life He gives is good.

Looking Ahead

As we embark on 2007, there are already some exciting plans on the horizon. We thought we would take a moment and share our vision for the first part of the year:

- **Effective Dialogue** — how we can effectively interact with those struggling with or embracing homosexuality



- **Church Outreach** — serving churches through sharing our stories of redemption and a curriculum designed to equip the Church
- **Parent Testimony** — hear challenges and hope from a parent of a person struggling with homosexuality
- **Open Group** — an opportunity for you to meet the staff and learn more about Mid-Valley Fellowship

Are You Interested?

If you are interested in having a staff member speak at your church, youth group, college, or fellowship group, contact us by phone or e-mail.



Prayer Requests

- Meeting location for mentoring & groups
- Future participants
- Prayer intercessors
- Financial support

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