



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

February 2007

Conversations About Homosexuality

by Duan Walker, Executive Director

At the moment, my life is a series of interesting events and conversations. One of the realities of serving in a ministry that walks alongside those affected by homosexuality, is that my conversations tend to differ from “the norm.” It seems that bringing up the topic of homosexuality draws out a reaction or feeling from almost everyone. Those responses tend to fall into one of a few categories:

Acceptance and Celebration of Homosexuality

Last week, Kendra and I attended a debate at Oregon State University entitled “Is Same-Sex Marriage Christian?” The Reverend Wesley Mullins, Assistant Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church in Portland, presented the perspective that same-sex marriage should be an option, believing that homosexuality is natural and God-given. Todd Miles, Assistant Professor of Theology at Western Seminary in Portland, presented the opposing perspective. Both presenters communicated their information well and then responded to questions from the audience.

What I found intriguing was the audience’s response. Most distinct to me were those who seemed angry and hurt at the suggestion that homosexuality was viewed as a sin by God. Some shared that they were gay or lesbian or had loved ones who were. To them, the belief that homosexuality is a sin became an attack on them or their loved one. The only possible solution in their mind was to accept homosexuality as a healthy expression that should be celebrated.

The entire conversation that evening came down to opposing perspectives on the authority of the Bible. Do we accept God’s truth in spite of our feelings, or do our feelings and experiences determine what is truth? Our feelings are often misleading in life and much more so in the understanding of truth.

Standing Publicly Against Homosexuality

The Reverend Fred Phelps is the pastor and founder of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. While his name may not ring a bell, the actions of his church probably do. According to their website, “WBC engages in daily peaceful sidewalk demonstrations opposing the homosexual lifestyle of soul-damning, nation-destroying filth.” His group most recently made news for picketing at “over 200 military funerals of troops whom God has killed in Iraq/Afghanistan in righteous judgment against an evil nation.”

Phelps is no doubt an extreme example. However, when we stand publicly against homosexuality, do we include grace and compassion? Do we condemn instead of extending hope and redemption? As someone who stood publicly against issues in the past, without grace and compassion, I can attest to its ineffectiveness. As I struggled with homosexuality, hearing only the opposition did not impact my life, even when one of the voices communicating it was my own.

Silent About Homosexuality

Silence is often another response or lack of response to homosexuality. While not embracing homosexuality as a healthy expression or actively opposing it, silence can still have a damaging effect. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Church. After years of trying to be the best Christians we can, real problems get buried beneath layers of fear and shame. In the end, those who acknowledge they have issues are either few and far between or seem non-existent. The reality is, there are people with struggles in every church. There is also an astounding number that are impacted by homosexuality – a friend, loved one, or a personal struggle.

This fact was never more evident to me than this last year. I had the opportunity to visit several different churches through the course of the year. Some were large. Some were small. Even in the small churches, whether in the center of the city or in a remote area, I still ran across people affected by homosexuality. Do we extend hope to those affected or do we remain silent, hoping the problem will go away or not reveal itself?



*Westboro Members
Protesting at a Funeral*

Desiring Redemption of the Homosexual

Every Tuesday, I travel up to Portland Fellowship (a sister ministry of Mid-Valley Fellowship). I volunteer as a small group leader for their discipleship program. For the last half of the evening, another leader and I sit with 5 guys in a room and talk. The conversation is rarely light. All these men, along with many others, have expressed a desire to walk away from homosexuality. Sometimes that end goal is the only thing that keeps them coming back each week. We unpack the events of the week, celebrating the victories, forgiving the failures, and analyzing what went wrong and right. Difficult emotions and situations are shared. Tears and laughter both have a place. In the end, our desire is to point them to the heart of God.

It is a hard road – hard work for them and for us as leaders. But it is worth it. When we press into the process and pursue God, He does not disappoint us. While walking alongside people who are struggling is messy and difficult, it is also incredibly rewarding. And I believe it reflects the heart of God. He sent Christ to our muck and mire to walk alongside us and proclaim the fact that God wanted relationship with us. What is more incredible than that?

So, I ask you: Where do you find yourself? Do you accept and celebrate homosexuality? Do you stand publicly against homosexuality? Do you remain silent? Do you share God's redemptive heart?

What action does that perspective require of you? We want to offer a few practical opportunities as potential steps:

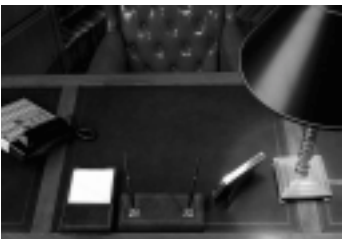
Outreach – We desire the opportunity to share our stories of redemption with your church, youth group, college, or other group. We offer a picture of God working in individuals' lives, no matter what their issue, while extending hope to those who are affected by homosexuality.

Homosexuality 101 – An interactive three-part curriculum designed for one-hour blocks, intended to fit into a Sunday School or Small Group format. The focus is to educate the Church, give practical advice, and answer questions on this complex and confusing topic.

Open Group – On Wednesday, February 28 at 7:00pm, Mid-Valley Fellowship will offer an opportunity for anyone interested in finding out more about the ministry. Duan and Kendra will share some of their background and answer questions from the group. Anyone is welcome. Please call or e-mail the office for further information and directions.

Share with Others – Are you excited about the ministry of Mid-Valley Fellowship? We challenge you to share that with others. Encourage them to visit our website, sign-up for the newsletter, or attend the Open Group.

I had lunch with a new friend the other day. We both come from similar backgrounds that had very concrete answers for many issues, including homosexuality. Through different situations, usually involving other people's lives, those assumptions have been challenged. It is easy to hold a perspective or belief in theory, but it is very different to apply that to someone's life. There is not always a clear answer. We find ourselves in a tension between holding on to truth and extending grace. I pray you will embrace that tension, and see the incredible effect it can have on your heart for those affected by homosexuality and other issues.



Office & Meeting Location

As of January, Mid-Valley Fellowship has an office and meeting location! Through God's provision and the generosity of a local church, we are able to meet confidentially with those who contact Mid-Valley Fellowship. In addition, we will have space for future growth and group meetings.



Pray With Us

Jesus, you have said, "Come to me, you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." We ask that those coming to Mid-Valley Fellowship in that state will find your rest. May that offer of rest extend throughout your Church, your body as a whole.

Upcoming Events

February 8 - Lane Community College

Duan & Kendra will be speaking at the second of three forums entitled "The Bible, Sexual Identity, & Open Dialogue."

February 28 - Open Group

A time for family, friends, strugglers, and others to find out more about Mid-Valley Fellowship. Join us as we share together.

March 30-31 - Sy Rogers Seminar

Sy Rogers will be returning to Portland, presenting a seminar with Portland Fellowship. More information coming soon.

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