



*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

March 2007

A Father's Journey

by Jim Thompson

For a parent, a single sentence can turn the world upside down or at least shake it so badly you can hardly stand. I will never forget the night that my wife, Pat, woke me and said I had to talk to Jason, our twenty-year old son. I was having trouble waking, so asked her if it could wait. Then came the sentence: "Jason says he is gay."

That was a night in which the three of us, my son, my wife, and I, found ourselves trying to keep our balance on the shaking ground. Jason had approached his mother, fearful of my response. Pat insisted that he speak directly with me. I remember trying to reassure Jase of my love for him, and my confidence that he would find God in his struggle.

I felt okay about my conversation with him. But then there was the conversation with myself. I was afraid. At the time I was working in an inner-city church which had a busy ministry to persons with HIV/AIDS. All I knew of "gay" was the very frightened men in these support groups, the visits to dying men in hospitals, and their funerals. Jason could have had no way to understand how my mind raced ahead, seeing him lying emaciated in a hospital bed. It was an exaggerated fear, but not an entirely unrealistic one.

My second reaction was, (and I apologize to the reader) "How the h*** did I let this happen?" I was a stewing cauldron of anger, disappointment, and confusion. As a pastor, I knew enough about personality development to suspect my own role in my son's struggle. I thought I had put a firewall between my experiences of being abandoned by my birth-father, abused by my stepfather, and taught emotional distance by my beloved grandfather, who was an alcoholic. For the wakeful hours of that night, and many hours afterwards, I pondered how it could be that my troubled childhood had been allowed to affect one of my sons.

I am grateful to God – who knows my great need of Him – that He came speedily to my rescue. A number of things happened in the coming weeks. I came to learn of the ministry that was helping Jason (a sister ministry of Mid-Valley Fellowship in Portland). I knew he had friends, and a good mentor. This was one of those times in which he needed someone to supplement what I had given him as a father – and I was (and remain) profoundly grateful to this man for mentoring my son.

God also opened my eyes to see that this wasn't a disaster; it was a continuation of the healing He was bringing to our family. These problems had always been there. God was merely uncovering them, exposing them to His light, and allowing us to journey into wellness. From the perspective of the present, seventeen years later, both Jason and I can appreciate what an unexpected and wonderful journey it has been. Today, Jason is director of the ministry that brought him God's healing, and I am one of his staff members, mentoring men and women who are overcoming sexual brokenness.

One of my responsibilities is to meet with parents who are in a position similar to the one in which Pat and I found ourselves many years ago. (I am reminded that God does not waste our experiences, but uses them for the blessing of others.) Many of the parents I see will have a much more difficult time than we did. Some of them have children or adult children who will continue pursuing or remain in gay relationships. We talk about how to love, how to pray, and how to find and keep your own health as you do so.

Here is where it can be the most difficult for parents. On one hand, it is all too easy to look for causes and assign blame, even to oneself. Most of the parents I see have family history of divorce, sexual abuse, alcohol or drugs, or perhaps things seemingly beyond one's control such as financial pressures, or the need to move often. Less obvious, but also



significant is a difference in personality or temperament between the affected child and the parent. Hardly something anyone can control.

On the other hand, it is important for us to allow God's light to fall on our lives, and those of our family members. Often, in a family, one person seems to have an obvious problem. And we can be grateful for that to be revealed. But the whole family needs to undertake the journey of healing. I am grateful to God for Jason's healing, and to Jason for being faithful to God by seeking His truth. His courageous struggle has inspired me to look at my own life, and to expose dark corners to God's truth.

In particular, I have had to re-examine my relationship with my step-father. It was my privilege (and clearly God's plan) for me to be present with him while he was near death. I had time at his bedside to reflect upon what had happened between us. But God also showed me *his* life – losing his father as a teenager, being sent to a work camp because his mother could not support him, and from there drafted into the army where he was part of the invasion of Normandy. His life had its own challenges – and even horrors – which I can now see with empathy and understanding. I'm coming to love him, and I pray with thanksgiving for him.

We live our lives in a sea of circumstances. Some things we can control, some we can't. Other influences in our lives are completely outside our awareness. Yet God understands everything which we face, and He offers His hand to guide us from confusion to clarity, from bondage to freedom, and from life-destroying behaviors to those which are life-giving.

I encourage anyone who has a family member affected by homosexuality to take great courage in the possibilities. We can pray. Speaking with God, even about our fear and our confusion, is always a privilege. We can learn to love in ways that will not be frustrated by the choices of those we love. And we can open ourselves to God's healing, allowing His cleansing and healing love to reach deep into our own lives.

Let me encourage you to take advantage of the ministry of Mid-Valley Fellowship and the support that comes from meeting with others. To ministries such as this, I owe the life of my son, and of many others I love. And I praise God for His touching my own life as we've walked the road of healing together.



Jim with his son Jason



Sexuality and the Body of Christ Saturday, March 31, 2007

a Sy Rogers Seminar presented by Portland Fellowship

Sexual brokenness remains a largely taboo subject. The Church is engaged in a battle that threatens the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of us all, and we are often either unwilling to talk about it, or just don't know what to do. This Seminar offers an honest look at the issue, as well as hope and direction to move beyond the brokenness. See the enclosed brochure for more information.

Want to Hear More?

We welcome the opportunity to share our stories of redemption with your church, youth group, college, or fellowship group. If you are interested in having us speak, please contact us by phone or e-mail.



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 will find Your rest. May that offer of rest extend throughout Your Church, to Your people everywhere.

Upcoming Events

March 30 - Sy Rogers Speaking

This evening with Sy Rogers in Portland will be an opportunity to hear his story and heart for sharing God's redemptive message regarding sexuality.

March 31 - Sy Rogers Seminar

An all-day seminar in Portland with Sy Rogers entitled "Sexuality and the Body of Christ: Honesty and hope beyond our failure." It will be well worth the trip. See the enclosed brochure for more details and registration information.



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