



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 2008

Happy Holidays?

by Duan Walker

The last few years, Christmas and the holiday season have not been an incredibly joyous season for me. In fact, depression would settle in at the beginning of December and remain until the beginning of January. And I was not alone. Many people have similar experiences. This month, I wanted to share some of the challenges that surround the holidays for those impacted by homosexuality and share some of my own holiday challenges.

There are many reasons why the holidays can be a difficult time for those impacted by homosexuality. The most universal feeling shared by people during the holidays is stress. From Christmas parties (personal and work), to Christmas programs (school and church), to family gatherings, to overspending on gifts to meet some sense of expectation, there are many potential sources of stress. And no matter who you are, that will make you more vulnerable to do the things you do not want to do as Paul relates in Romans 7:14-24.

Difficulty can also arise because of time spent with family or in situations (geographically or relationally) that have been a source of temptation before. No matter how much growth and work has happened in your life, when you return to certain relationships, it can feel like the auto-pilot has been switched on. You can easily shift back into unhealthy and destructive ways of relating. What normally takes effort to avoid in relationships can take even more effort. Certain geographical areas can also be a temptation even though personal growth has occurred.

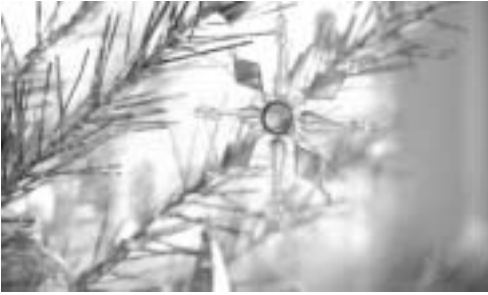
Around MVF, one of the tools we use to help strugglers through the holiday season is called "HALT," which you may be familiar with. The letters stand for **H**ungry (physically, spiritually, relationally), **A**ngry (frustration, difficulty, stress), **L**onely (isolated, literally or relationally), and **T**ired (physically or emotionally). The point of the tool is to recognize that when any of those situations are true, you can be vulnerable to temptation. So, you need to "halt" and do your best to take action, adjusting the situation.

For the parent of a child who has embraced homosexuality, holidays can also be incredibly challenging. "Should we let his partner come to Christmas dinner?" "She's traveling from out of town with her partner, and they want to stay at our house ... " For others, having the whole family present can be an opportune time to disclose their struggle or lifestyle to the whole family at once. Some of the challenges with these situations will be the focus of our Family & Friends Group coming up on Tuesday, January 15th. The group is designed for those who have a friend or family member struggling with or embracing the homosexual lifestyle.

If you are like me, you can probably relate to parts or all of the difficulties above. As I mentioned earlier, the holidays have been a challenging time for me in the past. There were a few reasons for that. During a Christmas season a few years ago was when I hit rock-bottom in my struggle. I had spent a week around family and friends, interacting in unhealthy ways – the only way I knew how, and it all came to a head. On the one hand, it was a very dark time, but on the other, it was a time that God met me in my struggle and gave me hope for something different.

Beyond that, I have experienced several significant transitions over the last several years: my extended family has expanded, which ushers in the end of some family traditions and the start of others. In the midst of that transition, I began to experience a surrogate family in the form of my spiritual family at church. As physical





family changed, the spiritual family grew in relationships. But as all relationships do, my spiritual family began to experience change as well. With that change, some of the new traditions I had adopted as part of my Christmas season changed as well. In the midst of that, I experienced a vocational and geographical transition. I moved to Portland for a year-long ministry internship, leaving all the changes in familial relationships unresolved. When I moved back to Albany a little over a year ago, Christmas came around the corner, and all those unresolved feelings about the season came with it. However, my response to the situations changed.

When we experience the death of someone close to us, we usually experience the grief process. When completed, that process allows us to move forward in a healthy way. The same is true with the loss of other things in our lives – like the loss of relationship, tradition, etc. Just as death in the winter season prepares for the life of spring, so grief and mourning allow us to open our hearts to something new. For me, last Christmas was a time of mourning. Many things prompted positive memories of the past. Those memories were opportunities to acknowledge the value and joy of the memory and accept that it was part of the past and not the present. After celebrating the memory and mourning the past, without trying to recreate it, I was able to open my heart to new things. Last year was incredibly difficult, but I was supported by friends who let me be and feel where I was instead of telling me I should be happy. And this year is a time of “spring.” I’ve been enjoying Christmas for the first time in a long time. There is still stress but my perspective on the season has changed.

I encourage you in this new year to take the risk of asking what might need to adjust in your perspective and challenge you to pray for others for whom this is a difficult season.



Family & Friends Group
Tuesday, January 15, 2008, 7:00pm
LifeSpring FourSquare Church
1495 NW 20th Street, Corvallis

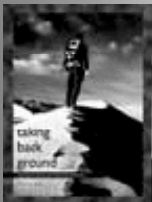
This monthly group will address the difficult issues faced when a family member or friend is embracing homosexuality. Receive support, prayer, and encouragement from others who can relate.



Want to Hear More?

We welcome the opportunity to share our stories of redemption with your church, youth group, school, or small group. Through a picture of God working in individuals' lives, we share hope with those impacted by homosexuality or any other issue. To learn more or schedule a time, please contact us by phone or e-mail.

Taking Back Ground
Resumes in January



This two-year discipleship program is designed for men and women seeking to heal from sexual and relational brokenness. The program includes worship, teaching, and small group participation.

- ✓ **Understanding Homosexuality**
- ✓ **Knowing God in the Struggle**
- ✓ **Walking Out the Process**

Please Call or E-mail for More Information

Pray With Us

Taking Back Ground Participants and Leaders as the program resumes in January

MVF Board as we spend time praying through and planning the next year of ministry

Family & Friends of individuals embracing the homosexual lifestyle as we begin meeting in January

Upcoming Events

January 9, 16, 23, 30
 Taking Back Ground Program

January 12-13
 MVF Board Retreat

January 15
 Family & Friends Group

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