



*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*

*December 2008*

## Sowing Hope

by Flip Anderson, Board Member

In the last ten years, before I met the folks at Mid-Valley Fellowship, I knew very little about homosexuality. When our nephew announced to the family that he had been living 12 years as a homosexual, it raised many questions in my mind. How does someone become "gay"? Can gay people change? I never heard of someone leaving homosexuality in the news media or in conversations with my Christian friends. I had never personally met anyone who had left homosexuality.

That changed two years ago when the Mid-Valley Fellowship team taught *Homosexuality 101* to our church Sunday School class. *Homosexuality 101* was an eye opening opportunity where we got to hear two speakers share their life stories, which included coming out of homosexuality. Like most "straight" folks, I had a hard time understanding homosexuality and wondered why someone couldn't just walk away from it.

For me, *Homosexuality 101*, was very helpful and a great starting point. It provided an opportunity to personally meet someone who had left homosexuality. I got to ask all my questions, process what I was learning with peers in the class, consider the ideas during the week, and ask more questions the following lesson. It was a helpful way to start learning how to 1) reach out to hurting people struggling with homosexuality and 2) represent our faith accurately in our culture and the world.

However, I didn't feel like I had enough understanding to share this good news with others. So I began learning more. I read testimonies of people who left homosexuality on Mid-Valley Fellowship's website and other like-minded websites. I also made an effort to listen to practicing homosexuals talk about "celebrating the lifestyle" and their desire to be accepted as gay people in our culture. I started conversations among friends and family on this topic to help me process and understand what I was learning.

My husband and I recently attended a 5 part video series dedicated to stories of homosexuals who are rejected by society, the church, Islam, and Orthodox Judaism. The ensuing discussions were lead by those who favored celebrating homosexuality as a positive lifestyle. Judging by the discussions, those in attendance agreed with the leaders. At the close of this series, I entered the discussion and shared the possibility of change, saying that I personally knew someone who had left homosexuality. When questioned whether I thought all homosexuals needed to be "fixed," I simply re-stated my original comment, "I personally know someone, who through counseling and the love of our heavenly Father, has left homosexuality."

Later the discussion leader thanked me for my courage sharing my unpopular opinion with the gathering. Perhaps that night there were a few who did not know there was hope. As I ponder it, I am struck by how similar



## Want Homosexuality 101 at Your Church?

Homosexuality 101 is an interactive three-part curriculum, intended to fit into a Sunday School or Small Group format. The focus is to educate, give practical advice, and answer questions on this complex and confusing topic.

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it is to the parable, "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." (Luke 8:5-8)

Practically all of us have a relative or friend impacted by homosexuality. As church members, we are debating the ordination of homosexual clergy and as citizens, we are voting whether or not marriage licenses should be issued to gay couples. This topic solicits a response from all of us. What, we ask ourselves, is the appropriate, Biblical response? To say these people "are sinners and going to hell" is condemning and provides no words of hope. John 3:17 "For the son of man came into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him." But to accept the homosexual lifestyle as God's purpose, requires that we reject God's Biblical standard and celebrate a lifestyle, again without any hope of transformation. Neither of these responses speaks the truth of God's saving power. Neither of these responses mentions hope.

Hope is what Mid-Valley Fellowship is trying to bring into these conversations. Our letterhead includes these words, "releasing the power of hope." Hope is powerful. Hope is the central message of our Christian response to homosexuality. But as the Church, we need to learn how to proclaim this hope. We indeed have good news but how can we begin to share it?

Do you think everyone we speak to will be glad to hear and receive this good news, this hope for change? No, however this perspective needs to be spoken in the public discourse. And we must speak with respect, humility and love. We must "be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry." (James 1:19)

I am sure I am an idealist. I dream really big dreams. And these are two of my visions for the Church: 1) to become the voice for life-changing hope and 2) through the efforts of God's people, strugglers can leave homosexuality by the healing power of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let's start talking about this hope in our churches. Let's personally get to know those who have left homosexuality, and let's start engaging others in conversations of hope and transformation. We have good news. Let's start learning what this good news is and then, with gentleness, respect, and love share it with our friends, neighbors, and the world. I believe this is what our Father in heaven wants us to do.



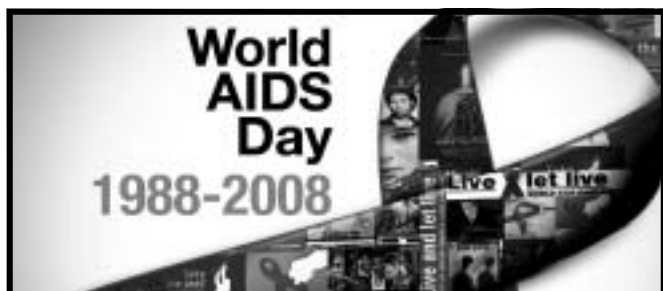
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## Please Pray With Us

Father, thank you for the incredible blessings from our benefit dinner. Your hand was evident in the process, and we praise You for the outcomes we see now and will continue to see in the future.

As another holiday season draws near and has already begun, we pray for the many stresses the season will bring. We ask for wisdom and compassion when faced with difficult situations in our families and lives in general.

Our desire is that You be the center of this season, since its purpose is to celebrate You and the incredible gift You gave.



**The First of December is World AIDS Day, a day when individuals and organizations from around the world come together to bring attention to the global AIDS epidemic.** 2008 marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. While much has been done since 1988, there is still much more to be done. Please join us in praying on December 1st and contemplating what part you might play in reflecting God's heart to those impacted by HIV/AIDS.