

A PUBLICATION OF
DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES



Living Waters

Why is **LIVING Waters**
So Long?

BY ANDREW COMISKEY



I asked myself this question a few weeks ago. The local Living Waters in which I am a small group leader was on its 186th week (out of 25), and frankly, team members and participants alike were tired.

Like some groups, we were meeting on a Saturday to combine two teachings—healing of the feminine and masculine—into one long day spent at the cross. As the day lumbered on, I was tempted to scorn the familiar teachings and consider trivial the heartfelt confessions of how one gender had wounded the other.

Then I thought of James, the 29-year-old man in my small group who had entered Living Waters on the brink of leaving his wife and kids for a gay friendship he had recently forged on the Internet; I also considered Bev, a participant and friend from church, whose father had sexually abused her and who now, having emotion-

ally and sexually withdrawn from her husband, was considering divorce.

I observed both of them during the day, two wounded Christians, tempted by hopelessness and lured into false solutions to solve their problems (thereby creating huge ones for their dependents!).

I thought of their faithfulness to spend 3 hours every week progressively opening up to God through worship, to truthful teaching, and to others for healing prayer as they dared reveal more and more of their profound need to Christ's body.

The end of that ministry day involved each gender grouping on either side of the cross in

order to declare the first fruit of their healing; one at a time, one man would declare to the women a specific way in which they blessed him; a woman would then respond with a blessing for the men, until the volley ended.

Having just turned a corner in recognizing he needed to honor his wife and kids by breaking off his gay 'friendship', James cried out: 'I bless you because of your faithful love for us, even when we fail...'

Bev had recognized a couple of weeks earlier that Jesus could actually bear the dark shame she bore from her father. For the first time, she allowed

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"...the truth of the cross actually takes time to set us free; the Spirit broods over our broken, divided humanity and in a time God drops that truth into our depths. Until that happens, the truth remains bound up..."





“Gaining trust is perhaps the best reason why Living Waters is so long. Our defenses are high and longstanding... we must ascertain others are trustworthy. Trust is a function of time. There are no shortcuts.”

JER. 6:16

‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’

Why is Living Waters...

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other women to bear with her in the grief she had carried for years. Then, at our long ‘cross-gathering’, she received open-heartedly the love of the men who confirmed her dignity and worth. Looking tearfully at the men through the cross, she responded to James’ blessing by declaring: ‘I bless you men for persevering with us in our wounding!’

I marveled at this practical application of Paul’s words to the Ephesians when he declared that the cross had ‘destroyed the dividing wall of hostility... thus making peace, and in this one body had made the two one.’ (Eph. 2: 14-16)

And yet I realized that the truth of the cross actually takes time to set us free; the Spirit broods over our broken, divided humanity and in a time and manner known only to God drops that truth into our depths. Until that happens, the truth remains bound up—understood at one level, but not yet the healing word.

I was beginning to answer my own question as to why Living Waters is so long.

The foundations inside humanity are weak.

By foundations I mean the solidity of soul we need to love others well. Most of the people we serve in Living Waters come from deeply fractured families. The ‘mother and father love’ they have received is insufficient, skewing their perceptions of self and others. It takes repeated interactions with the truthful love of healthy Christians to rebuild those foundations. Any shortcuts will not impart the depth of love needed to repair these foundations.

The foundations for loving others well are weak in the culture.

We live in an age that has deconstructed the very foundation of what it means to be man for woman and woman for man. Popular entertainment and pornography (on multiple screens that consume more and more of our time) have addicted us to images of sexual and romantic love, while distancing us all the more from learning to engage with real people.

And a society that champions no-fault divorce and ‘gay marriage’ as high water marks of civil liberty means that we as a culture no longer even point to mature, committed love as a goal. That means

that our participants will often begin the journey to wholeness not even knowing what the ‘goalposts’ are.

People today are more confused by deceptive solutions and dull to biblical truth. Helping them to turn the corner from darkness to light takes time.

A Slow Turn

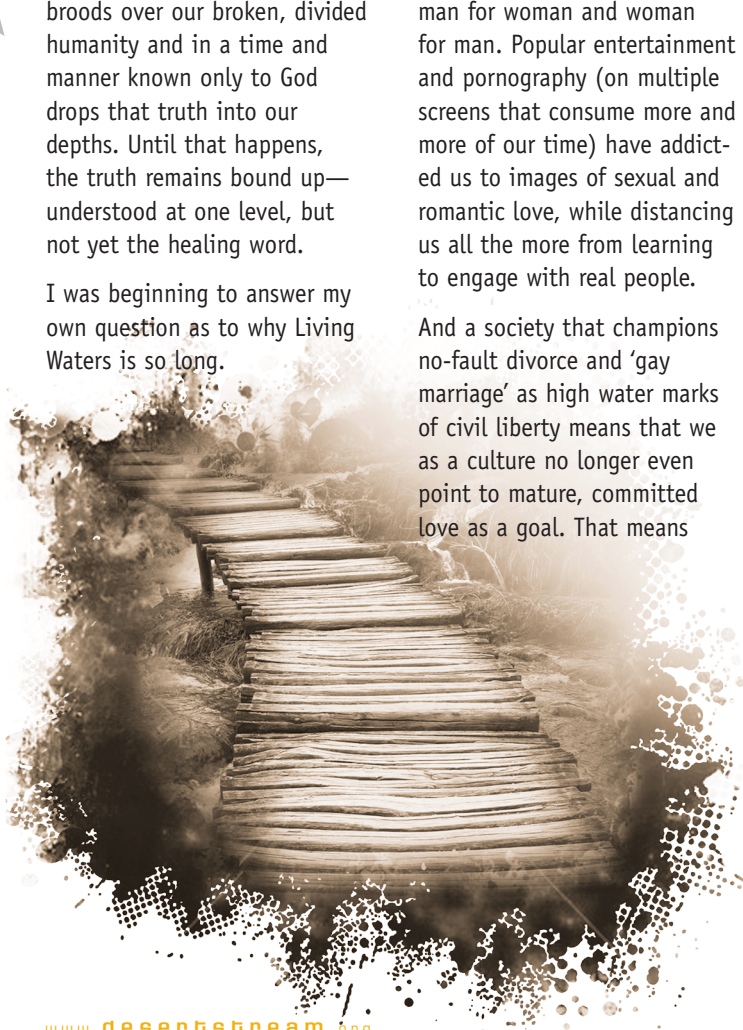
James’ repentance occurred slowly and was not well on its way until after 16 meetings. He had to first realize that he could receive love and affirmation from other men in the small group. We loved him well! Each week, he received a bit more of the real love he needed: appropriate touch, confirmation of what was strong in him, while gently challenging some deception.

He was ready to let go of sin, and to re-embrace his commitment to wife and children. An 8-week series or healing week-end cannot replace what time alone requires. (I say this rejoicing in introductory groups like CrossCurrent that introduce the broken to the ‘waters.’ All I ask is that we realize this is an introduction, not the deep end of the pool!)

Wounds are deep, defenses high, trust is weak.

Gaining trust is perhaps the best reason why Living Waters is so long. We as human beings are not inclined to let others into the deep wounds and conflicts of our lives. We cannot; our defenses are high and longstanding. We are able to let them down only when we ascertain that others are trustworthy. Trust is a function of time. There are no shortcuts.

One opens up to others because (s)he observes that when others share their pain,



healing happens: the response of the ministry team or small group leader/members is kind and powerful in mercy. One learns that (s)he benefits from sharing the truth no matter how difficult that truth is: that alone engenders the trust needed for disclosures that heal.

Historically, most of our people have received at least inadequate responses to their deep needs in the body of Christ. They are thus wary and watchful. A few leap into the 'waters' the first week. Most wade in cautiously.

Inspired Depths

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.' (Ps 42:7)

Something dropped from head to heart for Bev at about week 16, long after the 'teaching' on abuse. She was simply ready to open up. The Spirit had been wooing her every week but she had remained locked up inside, still guarded by the protective wall that distanced her from others, including her small group and her husband.

God waited; we waited with her until the fullness of time. God came to her when she was ready to let down her defenses. Through healing prayer, He gently bore her suffering with the help of His body, and gave her sweet consolation instead. He released 'living water' to her where she had always been most in need of it but could not yet receive it. He rewarded her perseverance with a double portion of healing.

Deep needs take time to be met. For both Bev and James, and thousands like them around the globe, there are no shortcuts to the truthful love that can set them free. 25 long weeks may

not be enough! Still, we have found it to be a reasonable time frame in which God enables broken ones to resume the journey toward loving others well.

Resuming the Journey

'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made mature, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.' (Phil. 3:12)

Resuming the journey does not mean that Living Waters finishes the journey toward wholeness for anyone. Bev still must make some brave steps toward her husband with the help of others, a task that Living Waters alone cannot accomplish for her. James must steer clear of unhealthy relationships and initiate new expressions of love toward his wife.

We at Living Waters do not promise to do that for him or anyone. Yet we have helped unblock what seems like an impossible road ahead, and have made clear that this bright hope for wholeness is clearly and deeply to be found in Jesus Christ through His body.

Bev and James now know Jesus' hope at a profound level; it cannot be taken from them, as it is an eternal hope wrought in the depths of their humanity. They have tasted and seen that the Lord is good; He is able and willing to meet their deepest needs with the help of His body. That is the goal of Living Waters. I contend that it cannot be accomplished effectively without a good 25 weeks.

Churches Want Quick Healing

'They dress the wounds of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say when there is no peace.' (Jer. 6: 14)

Sadly, many churches claim to want to restore the broken but fail to see that the broken need an inspired track on which to realize that wholeness. Over time.

Yet the pragmatic and at times simplistic body of Christ may be tempted to mistake a brief set of sensational experiences or teachings for a course of action that enables the broken to actually integrate the truth that sets them free.

We longstanding Living Waters leaders throw no stones at those churches that fall into that temptation. Rather, we rejoice and invest in those exceptional churches that actually help the James and Bevs of this world lay a track of truth that will inform and guide them throughout their lives.

We salute you, faithful pastors and elders and workers that have said yes to Living Waters. You gave God and His body time to accomplish His work in our lives.

Thank you for freeing us to resume the journey toward loving others well. Our friends and families and communities bless you.

'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.' (Jer. 6: 16) 🙏

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Deeper Wells

in the U.S.A.



BY AMY DONALDSON

Over fourteen years ago, Jesus began to capture and heal my heart using the ministry of Living Waters through the Body of Christ. He is the Wellspring of Life and I needed deep drinks of Him. I was caught in deep gender confusion and lesbianism and I was crying out for help. I needed a greater reality and experience of Jesus Christ through the work of His cross. I needed truth. I needed love. I drank of Him. Jesus used the ministry of Living Waters as a deep well to receive from Him. What a gift.

Over the years, not only has my passion for Christ and His church grown, but so has my desire to offer the ministry of Living Waters to others. After leading Living Waters in my own community, I became a Regional Coordinator which was an excellent fit for my passion and gifting. I love that Living Waters is offered by a team of men and women through the church. I love building teams of people. I love seeing Christ come and set us free—free from the bondage of the darkness of sexual brokenness.

For the past seven years, I have been working with our Living Waters programs throughout the Eastern Midwest. What a privilege to work with godly men and women who are digging wells to offer the Wellspring of Life to others.

When Dean Greer, National Coordinator, contacted me earlier this year to discuss an opportunity to partner with him to build up the ministry of Living Waters throughout the U.S., I knew this was a gift from the Lord. I would have the opportunity to use my gifts and experience as a Regional

Coordinator to assess our current strategies for building and encourage implementing new strategies for greater growth.

My role as a Regional Development Consultant is to work directly with Dean and the regional coordinators to assess our current strengths and needs, strategize ways to best grow each region, develop realistic plans to build, mobilize the implementation of these plans, and provide support and assistance. My desire is that we would see current programs strengthened and new programs planted.

We have already begun to assess and strategize ways to maximize the opportunity we have with new and existing leaders through our Living Waters Training offered bi-annually. This is one of our most strategic opportunities for regional development through connecting, training and nurturing new leaders. We are also actively meeting with each Regional Coordinator to assess their regions in order to prepare for our upcoming Regional Leaders Summit in August.

Our Regional Coordinators will come together in Kansas City from August 4th-6th to focus on "Becoming Builders: Digging Deeper Wells". We will be gathering together to embrace the challenge of strengthening and deepening our current Living Waters programs but also to learn to identify potential new leaders and churches in order to dig new wells.

My hope is that each Regional Coordinator will leave the Summit with two or three practical steps to implement in building their region. We will also spend time interceding for one another and the regions we have been called to build.

Please pray for our purposeful focus to grow the ministry of Living Waters in the US. Our nation needs new wells... deeper wells. We need wisdom and clarity as we walk forward. A great challenge lies in front of us but it is one He has called us to — declaring Him as the only way unto life. He is the only life-giving, sustaining drink. He is the Wellspring of Life. 🙏

"Our nation needs new wells... deeper wells."

He is the only life-giving, sustaining drink. He is the Wellspring of Life."

ISA. 12:3

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

CONFESION FOR a New Generation



BY NICK COMISKEY

LIVING WATERS IS LONG. YET AS A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH, IT IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN WEEK-END SEMINARS OR PRAYER SESSIONS FOR INNER HEALING AND DELIVERANCE. Living Waters hopes to lay a foundation for sexual and relational wholeness. This is best accomplished when the participants learn practices and acquire habits during Living Waters to reinforce the healing taking place in their lives.

One such habit is confession. About a month into Living Waters, confession is introduced into the small group; each participant, many for the first time, acknowledge both their historic and current sin. It can be awkward at first. Yet in the months that follow, the small group becomes a safe, holy place where each participant is cleansed from their sins before they work through that week's material. As Living Waters concludes, participants have been practicing confession for over five months. Many realize the practice is indispensable to maintain the freedom they have begun to experience.

Confession has certainly been indispensable for me. After giving my life back to Jesus, I knew I needed help staying clean from drugs and pornography. God provided a couple

of close friends to meet with weekly. We confessed our sins, declared ourselves to be righteous in Jesus' name and prayed for grace in the persistent areas of struggle. The result? We acquired a hunger for the absolving word of Christ and were freed from the shame of our continued brokenness. Immediately exposed to the light, sin ceased to grow and bring forth death (James 1:15).

Confession remained a priority during college. I formed a new small-group with a couple of friends from my local church. Unlike my former group, this time I was the 'expert.' These guys did not come from churches which included confession and had not practiced the depth confession typical of Living Waters. The first couple meetings were pretty clumsy. We continued to meet, however, and soon found a distinctive prayer rhythm which worked within the dynamics of our particular group.

My friend Chris was especially impacted. He was extroverted, popular with guys and girls on campus as a spiritual leader. Typical of many guys my age, however, he was addicted to cybersex and Internet pornography. Though he was genuinely repentant, he could not simply will his way out of the addictive cycle.

It did not help that Chris was a pretty smart guy. He was so smart, in fact, that he could articulate many profound truths about God's kindness and grace. Yet the God of whom Chris spoke was more of an abstraction than a reality. By keeping his sins private, he was functionally claiming to be without sin (1 Jn. 1:8) and his doctrinal God became a source of judgment rather than mercy.

Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde provocatively writes: *"The point is that God cannot forgive in the abstract. God cannot be merciful in the abstract. God is 'in general' not merciful. The idea that the absolute is forgiving in general is hardly of help to anyone and is usually just frightening."*

Stuck in sin and left to his own devices, Chris found little comfort in reciting cold doctrines. He needed more than an idea

of a forgiving God, he needed the actual presence, a person to come to him and say you are the one, you are forgiven. He found it in our small group.

Chris still had a long way to go. The patterns of behavior and underlying wounds which fed the addiction had still not been addressed. In the act of confession, however, a decisive blow had been dealt to the shame and anxiety which left him powerless. By God's grace, he was free to pursue real healing.

This story is not unique. Though unable to transition these confession groups into a more formal program like Living Waters, God still honored our gathering together in His name. How much more transformational could the groups have been if we were on track to pursue deeper healing?

Of the thousands who go through Living Waters each year, hundreds are experiencing the power of confession for the first time. Coordinators and small-group leaders not only awaken the participants to this sacramental practice but also equip them with an invaluable tool. Sin damages our body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. We can use all the help we can get in our lifelong rebuilding project. 🙏

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for the absolving word of Christ
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Corporate Corner



BY ANNETTE COMISKEY

'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert & streams in the wasteland.' *Isaiah 43:18-19*

2010 is the 30th anniversary of Desert Stream Ministries. For the past three decades God has led thousands of men and women around the world into a "new thing". He has taken weary hearts, tired by the effect of sexual and relational brokenness and sin, and made a way of healing for them to walk and embrace their real selves.

We started with one group in West Hollywood; today we have groups around the world. I remember the days of doing newsletter lay-outs (as unprofessional as they were earnest) and then Xeroxing off newsletters and weekly lessons for the '10-week' group. We now have been publishing our guidebooks and other resources through Desert Stream Press for almost 15 years.

As we have considered our 30th anniversary we know there are many ways to commemorate what the Lord has done through us; this will be the focus of a special newsletter in the fall. We know it is important to not just remember "what was" but continue to look ahead to see what the future holds.

We decided one way to look ahead was to create new logos for Desert Stream. Over the past years we have had a few different logos. The first one, created by Mark Wagner, served us well for the first 15 years. But then



it was time for something new. In the mid-90's Bob Mack (Immanuel Communications) designed the logo that we are currently using.



Earlier this year I felt the Lord saying that it was time for a "new thing". Bob, Andy and I began working on a new logo. We wanted a new look.



I hope you like it. The consistent theme in all is water. Water representing the stream of restoration, the stream of cleansing.

Starting this month we will begin using the new logo and mark on all of our publications, including Desert Stream Press.



A new look is only important if it heralds in new things—we believe the Lord has much

ahead for us. As we continue to stand for marriage we meet more and more pastors who want their churches to not only stand for marriage but offer healing groups for those struggling with sexual brokenness. This is particularly exciting because they are often in geographic areas that we have been targeting for several years.

We also want to refine many of our publications. A revision of "Beauty and the Breach", a book and group format for couples seeking to work out their healing together, is our initial project. Andy is writing a Leader's Guide that will not only give guidelines for offering the group in churches but will have more homework assignments and other resources.

Andy's passion to see Living Waters spread throughout the Latin speaking world continues to deepen. He is complimented well by Mauricio Montion in South America and a growing team of Spanish speaking Americans working in the USA, Mexico and Central America.

It is an honor to serve the Lord in ministry. Both Andy and I are tremendously blessed by the fruit of God's hand upon Desert Stream and look forward to many more years of service.

2010 MID-YEAR REPORT

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Andrew Comiskey

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Desert Stream Ministries publishes the following:
Newsletter (Spring and Fall)
Mid-Year Report (Summer)
Year-End Report (Winter)

Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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