

A PUBLICATION OF  
DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES



The Gift  
Above all Gifts

The Gift  
OF Fruitfulness

BY ANDREW COMISKEY



'You did not choose Me but I chose you to go and bear  
FRUIT—FRUIT that will last.' John 15:16

On Christmas, we celebrate the Gift above all gifts—God's ultimate self-giving in Jesus Christ. I approach with awe His vulnerability, how He chose to become an infant, helpless, subject to mere creatures. He did this to lay claim to the breadth of our lives—to represent to the Father every stage, from cradle to tomb. His identification with our actual, vulnerable lives grants Him unique authority to reconcile us to the Father and make us fruitful.

Why this way? Why did the Father and Son opt for such a costly, risky plan? Love alone. Our good alone, our fruitfulness, motivated the Child King! Who can probe the depths of such love? We can only marvel at Almighty God in the manger; words fail to grasp and convey

adequate gratitude for God's gift in Christ.

As 2010, our 30th year as a ministry comes to a close, I am grateful for many expressions of God's gift in Christ, His life bearing fruit in us. I marvel to this day at the memory of Living Waters Leadership gatherings in New Zealand, Australia, and South America. Similarly, I gathered with Living Waters teams throughout the French-speaking world. I witnessed the faithfulness of men and women who have for decades dug wells of 'Living Water' in local churches. For love's sake.

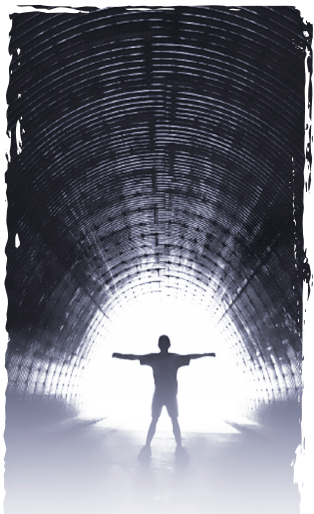
Such thorough 'foot-washing' is but one expression of gratitude to the King who draws near to harassed, humbled hearts and reclaims their fruitfulness. Hail

the babe who meets us at our most vulnerable and strengthens us to restore others. His gift liberates our own!

My most profound gratitude is reserved for the gifts God has given my family in 2010. Jesus honored my eldest son Gregory by giving him his greatest gift, humanly-speaking. Greg wed Christina last September, to the delight of all. Words fail to convey the marvel of the wedding and the months that led up to it.

Greg was and is a faithful son, remarkable in his kindness and diligence. Like the elder son in the Prodigal Son parable, Greg looked out for the interests of his parents; he gauged his own actions and attitudes on whether they honored us.

*continued on page 2*



*'And now  
we must celebrate,  
because this son of mine  
was dead and  
is now alive again;  
he was lost  
and is found.'*  
LUKE 15:32

**The Gift Above all Gifts...***continued from page 1*

Wow. What a guy.

And he was lonely. Having never strayed far from the Father, Greg struggled at times to experience the extravagance of the Father's mercy. I wanted that for him, not as I had known it in my moral failures, but in the same spirit of unmerited, extravagant love. I prayed for partnership for my son, the fulfillment of the Father's words to the elder in the parable: 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours...' (Lk 15:31)

God gave Greg a share of His inheritance for him when he met Christina. His life went from black and white to color when he began to orient his life around her, this new beautiful life.

Fruitful love—the joy of such love welled up to new heights at their wedding two months ago. I have never lost myself so thoroughly at a family gathering: time was our sole restraint as we rejoiced in the holy, earthy love of Greg and Christina.

My youngest son Sam led the entire Comiskey family, including my frugging 85-year-old mother, onto the dance floor where we grooved for hours to 5 decades of music, from Bill Medley to Beyonce. (For Annette and I, each cover sounded utterly fresh. This confirmed our irrelevance forever, a truth Sam conveyed with one bemused glance at his 'hustlin' parents.)

Sam—a man made new. The gift that resonates profoundly to me in 2010 is the gift of Sam, the real Sam that Jesus reclaimed from the darkness.

Our move to Kansas City was hardest for Sam, our youngest. It split up his high school years, and threw the otherwise bright and engaging kid off balance. He did not find adequate footing with a solid peer group in KC. He fought in vain to secure a whole-enough identity then succumbed to substance abuse and a 'cool' persona.

A river of self-hatred and despair flowed underneath and occasionally surfaced upon Annette and I. (In those times, we would ask his forgiveness for how our decision to move damaged him; he forgave us, but was still in darkness.)

Sin is a cancer that seeks one thing: more ground. We set boundaries with Sam at home and he chose to leave. To his credit, he took responsibility for his choices; he did not

make them our fault but his decision. He came around the house regularly, still kind, yet subject to powers that altered him in strange ways.

Drug-use took its toll, and opened him up to darker patterns that months earlier he claimed would never master him. I kept initiating our coffee/lunch meetings where I would press into him more specifically than I would at family gatherings. To his credit, he would show up and be painfully honest. What a guy.

His honesty was tough but let me know what he was up against. It provoked my fighting for him. After all, God rescued me when I was subject to dark powers that wanted to pervert my identity and take my life. The demons wanted blood. Jesus laid claim to be through His prayer and the prayers of others. I prayed that the Child King would do the same for Sam.

In October 2009, Sam and I met at his lowest ebb. I had stopped trying to pressure his conversion. He knew the lingo and the ultimatums and I did not want to corner him. He came freely to hear from me; I wanted to keep that channel open. I felt led to remind him that he had so much good to give, and that the time he had

## WORSHIP

*"Jesus' glory filled  
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making its people holy.  
Silently, we welcomed  
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with well-timed and aimed encouragement—one prayer, one meeting, one act of service at a time.

Having received God's gift in Christ, we can be the gift ourselves—agents of the Child-King who lays claim to the unseen fruitfulness of loved ones. We fight for their repentance until they bring forth its fruit!

Two months later, just before Christmas, Sam lost his job. Dejected, without money or immediate options, he asked to come home.

We welcomed him on the condition that he play by the rules. He chose to do so because he wanted back. And we wanted him.

Christmas Eve was a shimmering miracle. Snow fell swiftly for hours that day, so much so that we were barred from formally worshipping the Gift. No matter, we honored Him by simply reminding each member of the unique gift (s) he was—specifically, actually, tearfully. Sam heard afresh of the fruit he had engendered in all, of the gift he in truth was.

Jesus' glory filled the room as snow continued to fall. Late afternoon sun broke out briefly and revealed a sky flecked with gold flakes, gilding the land, and making its people holy. Silently, we welcomed the Gift as our freedom, our fruitfulness.

A few weeks later, Sam quietly surrendered His life to Jesus. He told me about it after the fact, as a matter of fact. Beloved brother Nick and sister Katie encouraged him in a way that Sam could take. They were his fellowship; though Sam attended church with us, he failed to find a Christian peer group. We were concerned about this, as isolation had been the lonely ground on which his old false self had been built.

Sam persevered, and we persisted in prayer for him. He sobered up, got a job, and began to excel at University (he had staggered his way through prior to this time.) 5 months later he started a summer-long internship in a wonderful local church. Today, he remains knit together in Christ with the friends he made there.

Glory to God. He gave and He gives. This Christmas we shall gather together as a family again, gifted by new members (Christina and beloved parents Kathy and Steve, as well as Nick and his fiancée Meg—more on this next year!)

And I shall celebrate Sam, a man made new. 2010 marks his year of God's favor, with many more to come! I will rejoice in Jesus' quiet entry into his life. 'Silently, silently, the wondrous gift is given.' I delight in the fruitfulness I witness in him, and I pray for all the fruit he has yet to bear.

'And now we must celebrate, because this son of mine was dead and is now alive again; he was lost and is found.' (Luke 15:32) 📖

to prepare himself to be a good gift to others was actually finite. Jesus could forgive Him, but could not give him back wasted years.

That resonated with him somehow. After our meeting, Jesus led me to Luke 13: 1-9, an obscure passage in the Gospels. Jesus calls the Jews to radical repentance and warns them that they will perish if they do not turn to Him.

Then He tells a seemingly unrelated parable about how a gardener advocates for a fruitless fig tree in the face of the landowner who wants it chopped down. The man implores the impatient owner: 'Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not then cut it down.' (vs. 8, 9)

Here truth and mercy meet. To be sure, Jesus soberly describes the judgment we incur when we fail to repent. We can squander our inheritance and die miserable, fruitless deaths. But He then highlights the power of His advocacy and the advocacy of His saints towards fruitless ones: we intercede, prayerfully and actually on their behalf, fertilizing them with love, breaking up their fallow ground

"For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! ...'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year.. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Luke 13:7b-9

## Help Wanted

**Web-wonder who loves DSM and is passionate about two things:**

- ① Assisting Andrew Comiskey
- ② Helping DSM to maximize its website through creative, focused, and collaborative efforts with web-master Lori Butler.

It is a part-time position to start: 20 hours a week. The applicant must be able to fulfill the Desert Stream Leadership Qualifications.

**For more information contact Lori at:**

lbutler@desertstream.org

# The Gift of Caring for Others

BY KIN LANCASTER



*"See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have kept my word and have not denied my name". (Rev 3:8)*

When I received the request to write an update on our lives, a myriad of things came to my mind which I could share regarding what the gift of healing has made possible. Through the cross of Jesus and the grace that came to us through Living Waters we celebrate a truly wonderful marriage of 32 years, and the joy of our sons and their families, including our three grandchildren.

However, there is more to share. After my time with DSM we served at the Las Vegas Vineyard. Near the end of the third year we received a call that my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. We made a trip to Oregon where we not only visited my parents but also Jolene's. While on that trip we heard God speak to us that we were to go and serve our families. Intrinsic to our understanding of this call was that it was time for us to work out the gift of healing in a state (Oregon) and in family systems we felt we had 'escaped' from many years before.

Within a couple of months we moved and found jobs, while we turned to serve our families. Jesus strengthened us so that we did not fall into old patterns of relating based on the old family rules. God not only challenged us to serve but to set the tone for the care of our parents. He wanted us to give to them what they, in their brokenness, had been unable to give to us.

It was not long before my mother died as I was holding her hand. My dad followed her a year and a half later. I had time to be with him and hear his heart in a way I never had. God filled me with enough healing that I could be there for him while he grieved. I loved him in a way I had not been able to before. In the end, my hand was on his chest as his heart quit beating. Had I not experienced the gift of healing I could not have done this. Nor could I have led each of my parent's memorial services while facing my own loss.

Jolene has become a source of life to her parents, serving them in such a way that her family has not only noticed but has come to respect her for doing what none of them have been able to do. They each see the trust, wholeness, and care

she brings into the family.

If there is anything we have learned in this time it is that many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. (Pv. 19:21) We never desired to engage with our families in this way, yet God has proven to us that His healing power has not only changed our lives but also enables us to bring that healing to those family we once fought hard to be free from.

*Kin and Jolene are living in Oregon and are actively involved in their local church. Kin is still caring for others internationally as well, he along with several other North Americans were the prayer team for Living Waters leaders who gathered to celebrate ten years of ministry in South America.* 🇺🇸

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PRO. 19:21

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## The Gift OF Encouragement



BY DALE DEMARCHI

It's hard to believe that it has been almost nine years since I left DS staff! And what a whirlwind the years have been! I left DS staff shortly after Suzzie and I were married. In 2003, we moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado and have two sons (Nathaniel 6, and Bryant 5) to raise and guide. For almost seven years, I have been the Communications Director for Envoy Financial, a financial services company that provides retirement plans to Christian organizations.

Suzzie has been building a Pampered Chef business for the past 5 years. (She's pampered, and I'm chef!) The flexibility of her business allows us to be the primary caretakers for our boys. (We waited long enough to get married and have them, we didn't want someone else raising them!) We've continued to extend the healing hope of Desert Stream to the Colorado Springs area, initially through Cross Current groups, a conference and a Living Waters pilot. I have also taught for the Living Waters group in Denver.

Lately, our service has been in leading pre-marital counseling and mentoring married couples through marriage retreats at our church. Three couples we mentored got married this year and I officiated at one of the weddings! It was wonderful to celebrate with these cou-

ples as they entered into a lifetime of being good gifts to each other. We have also recently started providing Christian Life Coaching ([www.unveiledliving.com](http://www.unveiledliving.com)) to people wanting help moving forward in their life.

It's an exciting new arena God has opened for us to use the Desert Stream tools and training to encourage people who want to deepen their spiritual walk and live in bold freedom, but need help getting there. We're excited to see how God will develop this ministry!

*Dale and Suzzie live in Colorado Springs. Dale can be reached at [www.unveiledliving.com](http://www.unveiledliving.com)*

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"The time has come, now, to be that healing presence for others again...

**I will be a good gift, with more understanding than ever of the healing effect of being loved."**

## The Gift OF Giving Love



BY HELEN BACH

Six years have passed since I was on staff with DSM, serving as coordinator of LW USA. I think I was a good gift then. With DS transitioning to Kansas City, I stayed behind and began working for Olive Crest in their Non-Public School, Therapeutic Education Center, serving a population of emotionally disturbed children.

I have been a good gift here, as I have loved the "throw-aways", abused, and neglected ones. I believe my training through Living Waters has helped me to understand the pain that is behind their behaviors. I have experienced a lot of my own pain in these six years, and know what a good gift is. I have been the recipient of many good gifts. With the loss of my DS family, and my work of ministry through Living Waters, I needed others to come alongside, understand my grief and help me to readjust.

I was the recipient of many good gifts through relationship with my friends, my family and my husband. I stood by my husband through his illness, and I was a very good gift to him, but I needed others as well.

Three years have passed since his death, and all this while I have been on the receiving end of the good gifts of family and friends

that have carried me through. The bottom line is that it is Jesus himself who has held me, who has used others to extend their hand, to show me his face, to heal my heart.

The time has come, now, to be that healing presence for others again. The children I see every day at work so desperately need his love. I can be a good gift to them. I am participating with the Living Waters leadership team in Southern CA, and will be helping to rebuild the Region. I will be a good gift, with more understanding than ever of the healing effect of being loved.

# The Gift of Vulnerability

BY CATHY MORRIL



A few years ago a few friends of mine and I began the Soul Restoration Project, a ministry that evolved out of my work with The River at Desert Stream.

I now practice as a Marriage and Family Therapist, and I leave my office daily with great satisfaction. I love the opportunity to create space for others to grow.

The Soul Restoration Project mission is to help men and women experience restoration in the innermost parts of the soul so they can make a maximum impact in the outermost parts of their world. We do workshops, conferences and are a group of Marriage and Family Therapists and interns in practice together.

As I consider the approaching Advent season, I am struck by the gift God gave. He didn't build a political or religious structure. He gave Himself. He was born, lived and died in complete vulnerability.

He invites us to do the same. But my vulnerability, unlike Jesus', is deeply tainted by my own sin and weakness. In this season I have been wrestling with God about a number of issues. God's challenge to me is to be fully present with others. I would rather hold back. To risk exposing my ongoing uncertainties and disappointments is to potentially lose the image of strength I would like to have.

My choice to be vulnerable is often (though not always) a significant gift to others. Not just talking about being vulnerable, but actually being vulnerable.

It's not the only gift I give (thankfully!), but perhaps one of the more valuable ones. As I became a part of my new church I declined any specific leadership positions, wanting instead to cultivate friendships apart from a leadership role.

## CHALLENGING

*"My choices to be vulnerable in a challenging season have created space for growth, curiosity, possibilities and a fresh encounter with God's grace—for myself and others."*

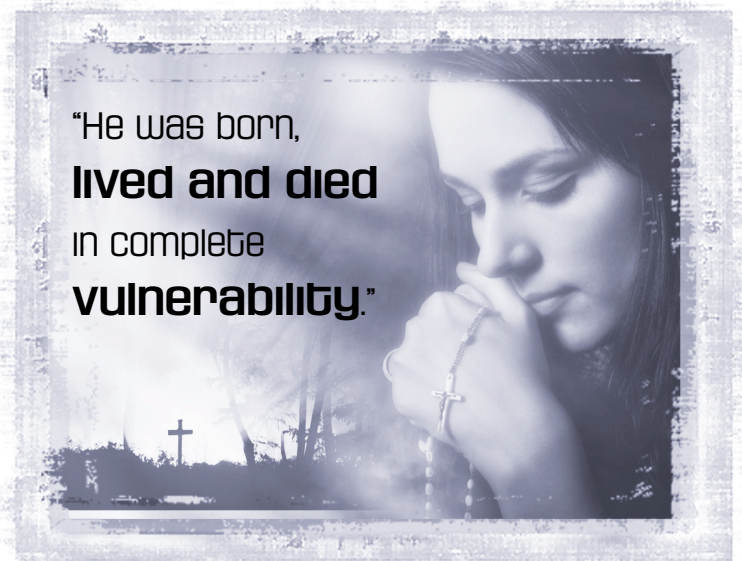
My relationships are more rooted in intimacy than in service. How refreshing! For example, provocative conversations over lunch are the context in which Barbara (my pastor) and I have become good friends. My choices to be vulnerable in a challenging season have created space for growth, curiosity, possibilities and a fresh encounter with God's grace—for myself and others.

May God bless you this Christmas season with the experience of Jesus' love in your own vulnerability.

*Cathy lives and ministers in Southern California. For more information about the Soul Restoration Project, or to be in touch, please visit [www.soulrestorationproject.org](http://www.soulrestorationproject.org).*

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"He was born, lived and died in complete vulnerability."



## The Gift of Transformation



BY RON CITLAU

This Christmas, I celebrate Jesus' gracious love. Some fourteen years ago I was mired in deep sexual sin, struggling with my sexual identity, and completely broken. Today, I am happily married, have three amazing sons, and I live authentically as a man who

has found strength in weakness.

Christ's love has called forth the real me, it is mortifying the darkness within, and it is empowering me to be someone who brings real goodness to my community. Christ's love has (and is) completely changing me.

These days, my family and I live in Chicagoland. For the last four years I have been on staff at a large church overseeing their ministry to 20-somethings. This spring, my wife and I will start a new church campus in an urban area south of Chicago (our church has multiple campuses in our area). We are excited and blessed to see what God does through this new adventure.

One of the first things we plan to offer at our new campus is Living Waters. As we seek to be a community that reaches out to the least, the lost and the broken, we don't simply want to be an accepting community that disguises tolerance as grace.

We want to be a transforming community! Living Waters is key to our strategy to be such a community. The gift Christ has given me and so many others is the gift we offer a hurting community. 🇺🇸

*"As we seek to be a community that reaches out to the least, the lost and the broken, we don't simply want to be a community that disguises tolerance as grace."*



"In this Advent season I realize again that

**God came into our darkness,**

**our fragility, our feelings of abandonment and loss...so that we can face the dark places in our lives and the lives of the people we serve."**

## The Gift of Light



BY SONJA STARK

In December it will be one year since I left Living Waters after 15 years of working with Desert Stream in Living Waters USA & Europe.

When God showed me that it was time to move on and to do something else I had no idea what He had in mind. I gave my notice "in faith". I had to trust that God would show me in time how He wanted me to use my skills and gifts in His kingdom in this season of my life.

He opened a new door for me after months of waiting on Him and seeking Him in prayer. I am now working part-time for my church, the Vineyard Brussels/Belgium. I am in charge of pastoral care and home groups. I can see how I can use all the teachings and trainings I had over these past 15 years in my new job.

I work as a therapist and coach as well. I am still in therapy training and enjoy "being still at school". My overall direction has not changed but my new job(s) allow me to have a more stability and to build new friendships.

I do miss the Living Waters family, the travelling, conferences. I realize how great it was to work with people who are hungry for the Lord. These ones allow themselves and their wounds to be touched by God's healing love again and again.

I see how profound some of the friendships with my LW colleagues have been. It is not always easy to find such level of transparency

and intimacy in relationships.

In this Advent season I realize again that God came into our darkness, our fragility, our feelings of abandonment and loss ... so that we can face the dark places in our lives and the lives of the people we serve.

It is the message of freedom! We can be a human being – with all that defines us because God Himself became human. He leads us out of our darkness, our silence, our loneliness into the light, salvation and life . What a great gift to have God as the companion who always walks with us.

*Sonja lives and works in Brussels Belgium where she continues to serve well the body of Christ. 🇺🇸*

# The Promise of the Future

BY NICK COMISKEY

**We have spent ten years in the third millennium. It would be easy to grow discouraged when reflecting on our current cultural moment: proponents of same-sex marriage are waging battles for the approval and use of**

same-sex blessings in their respective churches while the gods of pop culture continue to glorify the dehumanization—and ‘decarnation’—of our sexual and relational lives.

Yet I am encouraged. Though our culture may be changing, our essential offering—providing Christ-centered help for those struggling with sexual and relational problems—as never been more relevant. Jesus Christ continues to transform broken men and women through His death and resurrection! We do, however, have a large task theological and pastoral task ahead of us

## Building on Foundations

Our theological effort is to establish the significant role of the human body—especially its relational and sexual aspects—in God’s plan. We build upon the work of Karl Barth and Pope John Paul II. It is from them we even learn of the possibility of the theology of the human body, the almost scandalous assertion that our bodies ‘speak about God’ (theos—God, logos—word). Barth helped us understand the relational dynamics of being made in the image of God. The late Pope described the primordial plan for our sexuality ‘from the beginning’ (cf. Mt 19:4). Both taught us that it is only by embracing our sexually differentiated bodies—and responding to God’s call through them—that we can live fully human lives in communion with God.

It is, in other words, our creation which determines the covenants we make. Christian proponents of same-sex marriage contend that the sincere, seemingly natural homo-erotic desires of same-sex couples trump God’s creative intent for male and female. Yet marriage is a response to both God’s design and goal for our bodies. It is his revealed will which orders our desire—and not the other way around.

## Citizens of another City

Merely reiterating prohibitions of same-sex marriages, however, is hardly redeeming sexual difference. Our Christian tradition teaches that God offers us a promise for sexual difference: we have an alternative history, another City, where through Jesus Christ our sexuality can transcend than the universally painful experience we all know too well.

For the inhabitants of this City, sexually differentiated marriage and celibacy are the two valid vocational-responses to the gift of our bodies. Here men and women honor each other in either covenanted, sexual relationships or life-long pledges of chastity.

The call of celibacy is of special relevance today. As we proclaim sexually-differentiated relationships as the only valid form of marriage, many, especially at the outset, will feel they will never be able to marry. We must help make our churches

communities in which lives of celibacy and singleness are realistic and desirable.

## Acculturating New Citizens

Just as important is our pastoral effort. The church, equipped with this message, must offer the pastoral care needed for real transformation to occur. Our heling is rooted in the church: wholeness is only possible when done within the larger project of God’s new creation. Healing for the sexually and relationally broken is thus not an isolated activity of the church, a fringe ministry for the ‘real strugglers’; it is part of the larger effort of acculturating the new (and old) citizens of the city of God.

God’s plan for our bodies is more than counter-cultural in the twenty-first century, it is frighteningly unfamiliar. Like Abraham, David and St. Paul, we often do know who we are until God forces our true identities onto us. Reckoning with God’s plan for our bodies is no different. Yet this call is a gift, and by introducing it within the context of the worship, prayer and caring community of our churches, it will be heard. Like the Samaritan woman, we recognize both the gift and the Giver and receive living water (John 4:10).

*Nick was an intern with DSM in 2010. He continues to serve as a part-time assistant to Andy. Nick lives in Pittsburgh, attends Trinity Seminary studying to be an ordained Anglican priest.*

2010  
YEAR-END REPORT

**Publisher/Editor**  
Andrew Comiskey

**Art Direction**  
Immanuel Communications

**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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