



## Higher & Truer Ways

By Dean Greer

Growing up I often felt that the true brokenness in my life needed to be covered by a false image. I didn't believe the "true me" could be loved and so created a "false me" in order to gain the acceptance, approval and love I was hungry for. I was filled with anxiety.

My parents were pastors and image was everything in their world. I was supposed

to be the good little boy. On rides home from church, my parents would say, "Don't you realize that everyone is watching you! You have to be the example! You have to be good!"

I learned quickly that it was easier to comply with their expectations than be confronted with their disappointment. I wanted so much to be loved by them. In many ways I became exactly what they wanted me to be, at least on the outside.

On the inside I was in great conflict with who I was. A very early sexual encounter with an older male friend left my body responding in all kinds of new, exciting and confusing ways. Both physically and emotionally I was drawn back again and again to this new way of homosexual release and acceptance.

To complicate matters my friend's mother caught us. "What are you doing? That is disgusting! You should be ashamed of yourselves!" she railed.

### SHAME

Immediately I was ashamed. She threatened to tell my parents. I can still recall, quite vividly, the fear of them discovering my homosexuality. No longer would I be their good little boy. I would bring shame upon the family and the ministry.

Somehow it remained unspoken, and in the darkness it was allowed to fester. It fueled my need to work extra hard at creating an image that could be affirmed, praised and loved.

Shame led me to believe I was un-loveable. One day I realized that all of my relationships were based on a false image of me; no one knew the true me. This fed my loneliness and it revealed my need for real love.

Out of hunger for love I began to pursue homosexual relationships. It was liberating to find others who felt like me, others who accepted me without my having to pretend. I was accepted, embraced and even celebrated for who I could be. I moved from relationship to relationship feeling loved until the shallowness of each self-serving connection was exposed.

I had yet to discover real love: my shameful identity allowed me only to experience a façade. In the absence of real love I was willing to settle for cheap imitations. I found that even bad love was better than no love at all. In 1989, the choices I made led to contracting the AIDS virus.

### FINALLY REVEALING TRUTH

The seriousness of this diagnosis prompted me to tell everyone the truth, even my parents who had no idea of the life I was living. They thought I had been living a good, Christian life. It didn't matter anymore what they thought. I had to stop pretending.

I sat them down and, for the first time, said, "Mom, Dad, I'm gay and I'm HIV Positive!"

I said it with an attitude of defiance in anticipation of their rejection. But instead, their response was one of love. My father said he would need to quit the church. Not because of the shame of having a gay son but because I was more important to him than the church. The reality of this went against everything I had believed up to that moment.

For the first time I encountered the love of my father. Not a contrived or manipulated love but a real, authentic love! For the first time I was able to know the reality of his love because I was giving him my reality to love.

### TRUE LOVE

More importantly, I was able to know the reality of my Heavenly Father's love. Empowered with His love, I prayed, "God, I don't know that I can give this up. Frankly, I don't know that I *want* to give this up; but I want to give you an opportunity to make me who you want me to be. Help me to choose Your love above all others."

Within my church, I found a community that allowed me to be broken and loved at the same time; **a community that called me into God's truth** rather than the "truth" I was tempted to believe for myself. It was helpful to have others standing with me, believing for me because in truth I did not have much hope. I felt that if I ever was able to love



Dean and his wife Chrystal.

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a woman I wouldn't be able to find a woman willing to give herself to me, to my past, to my terminal diagnosis, to the unlikelihood of children.

At my lowest a dear friend prayed the truth from Jeremiah 29:11 over me: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (NIV)

**I allowed these words of life to go deep into my heart, confessed my fears and disbelief and found that in my weakness He was strong. I found that His ways are higher than my ways; that greater is He within me than he who is in the world.**

As I allowed His truth to be greater and embraced it as my own I discovered a wonderful woman, Chrystal, and discovered a love for her I never thought possible. We were married in 1997.

#### CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

At times I still feel shame for my past sin, my present sin, and my AIDS diagnosis. I am tempted to be named and defeated by sin and disease. It can be easy to allow them to determine who I am rather than allowing God's truth to name me.

But I also find that in presenting the reality of my need to Him, He is able to meet me. **My weakness becomes an invitation for His strength rather than a source of shame.**



*Dean sharing his testimony at the Exodus Freedom Conference in 2007.*

The power of His love, the same love that makes a way for me to be reconciled to Him, gives me the strength to pursue more of what He has for me.

#### TRUTH REINS

Through the *Living Waters* program at my church I was able to identify areas of my life that had been affected by my sin as well as the sins of others against me. I allowed Christ to breathe life into the dead places of my heart. I learned to embrace the good of healthy relating. I am able to stand holy and unashamed before Him and I am free today because of His love for me. His Love has restored my relationship with my parents and family, empowers the love my wife and I share, and strengthens me to pursue His plans rather than my own.

When I hide in my sin and weakness, I give it power to name me and bring shame. But when I confess my sin and my weakness, He is faithful to forgive me and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). I am then free to take my rightful place as His beloved.

As I look back and see the man I once was compared to the man I have become, I am amazed and relieved that I didn't settle for my own plans but allowed His to be worked in me. Praise be to God. ☺



Dean Greer is the Associate Director of the Exodus Member Ministry, Desert Stream Ministries, and the National Coordinator for Living Waters, USA. Having been involved in healing ministry for the past 17 years, Dean has trained leaders around the world to incorporate the healing programs of Desert Stream Ministries within the local church community.

A native of San Francisco, Dean now lives in Kansas City, MO with his wife Chrystal. They both serve at the International House of Prayer missions base.