

CROSSING WEST 15TH STREET

Bob Honeysett

Having walked out of homosexuality and into a new life with Christ, one would assume that determining God's call on my life would be simple. The natural mind would say, *"Go back and preach the Gospel to those still locked into the bondage you walked out of."* Unfortunately, nothing in life is that simple. I didn't know when I first accepted Jesus as my Savior that it would take such a long time for His call on my life to be revealed. Little did I know that it would take me 21 years just to get to the other side of West 15th Street.

I left homosexuality behind in 1981 after a dynamic, supernatural experience with God. In the twinkling of an eye, Jesus stepped into my life and broke all of the compulsions that had once ruled me. Once the compulsions were broken, I began a slow and sometimes discouraging healing process as the Lord walked me through the "root" issues that led me to the gay lifestyle in the first place. With Jesus at my side I spent the next 5 (intense) years facing the pain of my past.

In 1985, I met and fell in love with Phyllis. We married the following year and moved out of New York City for good (or so we thought). During the first nine years of our marriage the call of God seemed illusive to us. The "doors of opportunity" were all closed and every attempt we made to step out in faith was met with frustration. In spite of our disappointment and confusion, we attended church, raised our children and kept asking the Lord to show us His plan.

In our tenth year of marriage, God's call began to take shape after Phyllis and I moved from Atlanta, GA to Dallas, TX to pursue a secular job opportunity. The first step in His plan was having me deal with my past, my testimony and the work that the Lord had done in my life. Through the years, I had allowed myself to fade into the "heterosexual woodwork" within the church. I'd never even shared my testimony because I feared I would be rejected if anyone ever found out about the "real me." The Lord dealt with the fact that I was "in the closet" over what He had done in my life. I repented and told the Lord I would share my testimony wherever and whenever He opened the door.

Within days, an opportunity presented itself to appear on a Christian talk show to discuss what the Lord had done in my life. My "closet" door was blown off the hinges and nothing would ever be the same again.

Shortly after the talk show aired, I was invited to join a ministry called Living Waters in Ft. Worth, Texas. Living Waters reaches out to men and women struggling with homosexuality and a variety of sexual and relational brokenness issues. In order to serve on the ministry team, I was informed that I would first have to go through the program as a participant. The prospect did not thrill me considering the years of pain that I had already walked through. I had no desire to live through it all again, yet I knew that the Lord was asking me to take a step of faith.

Living Waters revolutionized my life! Through the teaching, I was able to put all of the missing pieces of my life into perspective. The Lord used the Living Waters program to bring down the last remaining walls that separated me from Him and what I have come to view as “the lost parts of myself.” It was an awesome experience and the benefits and blessings continue to the present day.

When my days as a student of Living Waters were completed, the Lord opened the door for me to become one of the ministry leaders. What a joy it was to see lives changed before my eyes. What the Lord had done in me was now being used to comfort and heal others that were engaged in the same struggle.

Within two years of joining Living Waters, I felt the familiar stirring that I’d always attributed to the Lord. After much prayer, Phyllis and I felt we were being directed back to New York City to establish a ministry to those struggling with their sexual identity. We sold our house; moved back to the Northeast and *Matthew 19:26* (...with God all things are possible) *Ministries* was born.

Contrary to what we believed, the doors of opportunity did not fly open once we arrived back in New York. Phyllis and I lived through four very frustrating years as the Lord refined the vision He had given us. He even closed the door at the church we originally planned to work with. The turn of events was mystifying but we had no choice other than to trust the Lord.

In addition to incorporating a discipleship program (for those struggling with homosexuality) into our ministry structure, we also felt the Lord would have us establish a seminar series. In obedience, we implemented seminars that are geared to helping churches to understand the problem of homosexuality and Christ’s intention for healing and redemption.

The first church to contact us about our ministry was Grace Chapel, a new church plant on West 15th Street in Manhattan. Pastor Charles Simpson (whom we’d met shortly after we arrived back in NYC) asked us to conduct a seminar for his new church leadership team. Grace Chapel is located in the Chelsea section of Manhattan (literally in the heart of the gay community) and Pastor Charles explained his desire to reach the community. Phyllis and I jumped at the opportunity.

Arriving on West 15th Street the day of the seminar, I couldn’t help but feel the block was slightly familiar. I quickly put it out of my mind and attended to the business at hand. Still, the “familiar feeling” lingered.

A short time after we conducted the seminar, Phyllis and I felt that we should become members of Grace Chapel. As we continued to wait on the Lord for the refining of His vision, the events of September 11th took place. With Grace Chapel being only 20 blocks from Ground Zero we saw devastation and hopelessness in the eyes of our Chelsea neighbors. They seemed to us as “sheep without a shepherd”. Through that experience, the Lord made it clear that our outreach was to change. While the seminar portion of the

ministry would remain the same, we felt that we should reach out to those struggling with ALL forms of sexual and relational brokenness and not focus solely on the problem of homosexuality.

On January 11th, 2002, our weekly *Living Waters* program was officially launched, hosted by Grace Chapel. The launch was a tremendous success and today the vision and the calling of the Lord in our lives is a reality. The story, however, does not end there.

During the course of one of our weekly *Living Waters* meetings, one of the students mentioned the tremendous number of gay bars that surround the church. I had known that this was the case, but as he spoke, the “familiar feeling” that I’d felt the day of the seminar came back to me. As I listened to his words, it suddenly dawned on me that one of the gay bathhouses I had patronized many years before had been somewhere in the Chelsea neighborhood where Grace Chapel was located. Now I was REALLY curious! I knew the club was no longer in existence (the City of New York had closed it at the height of AIDS crisis in the mid 1980’s) and I couldn’t remember the name of it. Life went on but I couldn’t shake the curiosity that had taken hold of me.

The sense of déjà vu haunted me for days. Finally, remembering the name of the bathhouse, I did an internet search to see if I could find where it was located. A few clicks later I had my answer. The establishment I’d patronized so many years before had been located ACROSS THE STREET from Grace Chapel. That’s why the block seemed so familiar. Today, a new apartment building is being constructed on the lot where the bathhouse once stood.

With the mystery solved, it didn’t take long for me to begin to, once again, think about all the Lord has done in my life over the past 21 years. I’m awestruck as I think about the fact that in spite of seeing the “old” life I’d lived on West 15th Street and seeing all of the ungodly things I’d done there, He still reached out to me and called me to Himself. By His love and grace, he allowed me to return to West 15th Street to remind me how much my life had changed.

God’s healing work and “construction” in me continues to move toward the completion He has promised. Through all of the ups and downs of life, He’s been faithful. Phyllis and I have three beautiful children, we have a great church and we found the call of God for our lives.

Thank you Jesus, for giving me the grace and the courage to cross West 15th Street.

Bob and Phyllis Honeysett are the Directors of MATTHEW 19:26 MINISTRIES. For more information regarding their ministry, please contact them at www.matthew1926ministries.org

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