

From Being Different to Making a Difference

By Frank Worthen

My pastor took me into his office and said, "Frank, you are a homosexual." Being only thirteen, I needed him to explain same-sex attraction. He did. Then he added that homosexuals were different from other people.

I'd been called different before! When my mother took me to kindergarten, my teacher told her, "Your boy is very different from the other boys." And she was right; I'd detached from my family's constant arguing by hiding in the attic and creating my own fantasy world. In response to my patterns of isolation, my peers called me names (which I later learned meant "homosexual").

When I was ten, I began taking piano lessons. My piano teacher knew the Lord in a powerful way. She was ecstatic when, three years later, I accepted Him. She took me to her church, where I began to study organ.

My father died that year. The pastor took an interest in me, assuming the "father" role in my life. He was everything I looked for in a father! But in my heart, I hoped he was wrong about me being a homosexual. Certainly, I was different; I had no friends, I wasn't into sports, and I devoted a lot of time to music. Still, I hoped that I was just late in developing opposite-sex attractions.

When I turned eighteen, I met a young lady. We went together for about a year. It was very exciting to think, *Thank God, I'm normal! I love this woman and I want to marry her.* So I proposed. She answered, "There are only two things that I love: horses and other women." Crushed, I returned to my pastor, who told me that I'd been attracted to my girlfriend's masculinity. He reasoned, "I've been telling you for years that you are a homosexual." I left the church that day, making the decision to accept my homosexuality. Since "God's man" had convinced me that I was homosexual, I hoped that God would accept me.

I entered the gay life-style at that time. By accepting my homosexuality, I believed I'd found where I belonged. The male homosexual lifestyle, however, is built on youth. And so, by the time I was 40, it was pretty much over for me. The only steady partner I could find wasn't even really driven by homosexual sex—he just stayed with me for the money! But even then, we both cheated on each other. It was very depressing.

The business I owned required me to travel around the world a great deal. During one of my trips, the manager of my biggest store hired a "hippie" boy with long hair and an anti cultural appearance. Though I didn't want Michael there at all, the manager promised to keep him out of the customers' sight if I'd let him work in the stock room. I agreed, reluctantly.

Returning from another trip, I was startled to, see Michael with short hair, properly washed, and working at the front counter. He was efficient, the customers loved him, and he smiled all the time. Finally, after a week of watching him, I asked, "What in the world happened to you?"

He answered, "I accepted the Lord." I wondered if Michael's Christianity would last. During the following year, his life kept getting brighter and brighter. I began to wonder if God could change me the way He had changed Michael. But I told myself, "No. God has never changed a homosexual person." I vacillated between hope and despair.

One day, the Lord spoke to me, saying, "Today I want you back." I knew, without a doubt, that this was the voice of God. I ran to the store and located Michael, gasping, "I've just heard from God, I don't know what to do." I was beside myself. Michael responded that he had the keys to his church, and suggested that we go over there to pray.

Michael had me kneel on the altar's marble steps as he led me through a 20 minute sinner's prayer! Because he knew nothing about homosexual activity, he had me confessing all kinds of things I'd never done. But I wanted everything God had for me, so I thought, "If I have to do this to change, I'll confess anything!" When the prayer ended, the Lord's Spirit came alive in my heart. I came out of the church a changed person!

When I went to Michael's church, the people expressed love for me. Later I learned that they'd spent two years praying for "Michael's gay boss." And for the next year and a half, people from that

church came to see me every day! That accountability kept me from going back to the homosexual lifestyle.

At Michael's suggestion, I made a testimony tape to reach out to people who were trapped in the homosexual lifestyle. I decided to advertise the tape in the most liberal paper in town. The ad read: "Do you want out of homosexuality? Send for a Brother Frank tape on a Christ-centered way out of homosexuality." During the first year of its run, my ad brought in 60 people who wanted out of homosexuality! Men in my own church sought me out for counseling on leaving homosexuality. After a while, I started meeting with these men on Saturdays.

Eventually, the Lord put me in contact with a pastor who needed help in counseling homosexuals. Since he was a writer, he and I produced a book called "The Third Sex?" (the first Christian book on homosexuality). Going all over the English-speaking world, that book generated an average of 200 letters a month.

Though I'd had no intention of leaving my business, the Lord impressed me with the need to enter ministry full-time. Thus, *Love In Action* began with weekly support group meetings.

After a little time had passed, I received a distraught phone call from Barbara Johnson, a woman in Los Angeles. Barbara's son had entered the homosexual life-style, but the ex-gay ministry there didn't offer ministry to parents. This was the first time I'd ever heard of any ex-gay ministry besides *Love In Action*! Intrigued, I hopped a plane the next morning and went down to see them.

When I met with the ministry down there, we wondered if any other ex-gay ministries existed. We didn't really know how to find out, but we managed to locate a number of ex-gay ministries around the world. So, in the middle of 1976, we had our first conference. Sixty people, representing twelve ministries, attended. *Exodus* was born!

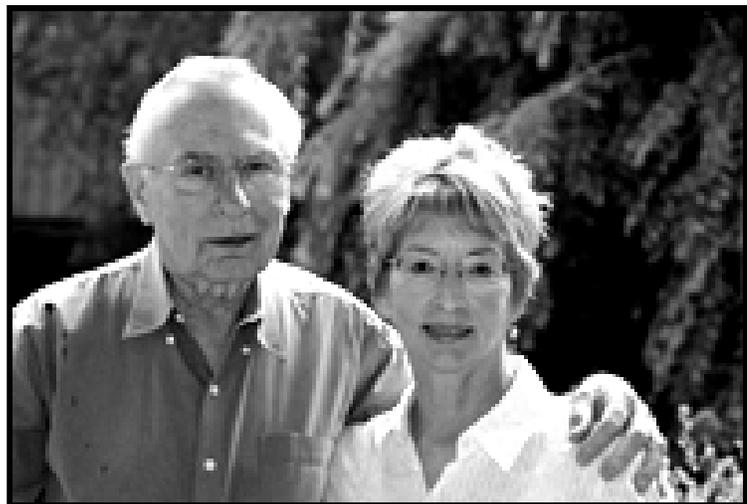
My busy life satisfied me. I enjoyed my work and loved my church. I felt secure and complete, able to settle into a life of comfortable celibacy. After five years, I sensed I was ready for marriage, but was unwilling to make the time commitment involved. I often worked in the office from morning to midnight. How could I give a wife proper attention? I saw no compelling reason to seek marriage.

Around the tenth year of celibacy, however, I began to grow uncomfortable with the single life. Intensely lonely, I began to pray for a mate. During this time, the *Love in Action* team held a seminar in Eugene, Oregon. I noticed the lady who sponsored the event across the room rapidly talking with a group of people. I thought, "What a hyper lady! I don't think I want to get involved with her!" So I kept my distance. I felt quite sure I never wanted to meet her!

A year and a half later, I visited Los Angeles with Chris Medcalf of *Exodus's* London ministry. We were on our way to Disneyland and had stopped by Barbara Johnson's house to pick up some passes. Barbara told me that she was obligated to take this woman to Disneyland, but that she just didn't have the time. Essentially, I would be doing her a favor if I could take this woman with us.

I was not happy at the prospect, but there is not much I wouldn't do for Barbara. So I said: "Yes." She introduced Chris and me to Anita (whom I had no idea I had ever seen at Barbara's seminar the day before, and much less that she was the woman I'd so carefully avoided in Eugene!) The day at Disneyland proved to be the most fun I had known for years. Anita was full of jokes and the life of the party. I thoroughly enjoyed her company and dreaded to see the day come to an end.

The next day, Chris and I returned to San Rafael and I became immersed in the day-to-day pressures of the ministry. The memory of that relaxing day faded until Barbara called to say that Anita had apparently liked me. Excitedly, I thought, "A woman really 'likes' me! Guess I did something



right!" But calmly, I told Barbara that I couldn't remember having a better day. I asked her to tell Anita that I liked her very much also.

A month or so later Barbara called again. She said that she and four other women were coming north to visit me. Since my late hours at the *Love In Action* office had never given me reason to furnish my home, I frantically prepared my condominium so that they would have a comfortable stay. As I talked with Barbara it became clear that only Anita would be able to make the visit. I panicked. How would that sound?! "Director of Ex-Gay Ministry Hosts Single Woman in Newly Furnished Apartment!"

Lori Thorkelson, a lady on *Love In Action's* staff, came to my rescue by agreeing to stay with Anita in my guest room. As a result of that week, Lori built a firm friendship with Anita and she was invaluable in helping me keep my romantic relationship on an even course. (Later, when I went to Europe for three months, I left a stack of cards for Lori to send Anita every few days, so Anita would know I was thinking of her.)

For Anita, it had been love at first sight. She became completely enamored with *Love in Action*. She loved all the staff and the work we were doing. She wanted to be part of it all. She cried all the way to the train station. It would take time for Anita's love for me to match her love for LIA.

Late one night Anita called me and wanted to see me. I suggested that she get in her car and drive to San Luis Obispo, the halfway point between Los Angeles and San Francisco. She was a little surprised that I was so impulsive, but she wasn't willing to act on the spur of the moment. So we agreed to meet there in a few days. This rendezvous inaugurated a series of long drives to our halfway point (about a 500 mile round trip for each of us).

During these times, we had many meaningful talks about marriage. I was already fifty-five, which made me uncertain that I could consummate our marriage. We decided that a life together was far better than our long-distance relationship. We would have each other, and that would be enough. (As it turned out, my worries were needless.)

In November of 1984 we were married. Being married has been far better than our greatest expectations. The honeymoon continues.

FRANK WORTHEN founded *Love In Action International* in 1973, and subsequently co-founded Exodus International in 1976. He is, therefore, credited with founding the worldwide "ex-gay" movement. Today, Frank continues his ministries in San Rafael, CA, and Manila, Philippines—New Hope and Bagong Pegasus, respectively. He permanently resides with his lovely wife, Anita, in San Rafael.