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Intimate Authority, Tender Army

BY ANDREW COMISKEY



Mary Magdalene is considered by the Roman Catholic Church to be the Apostle of Apostles. Why? The risen Christ revealed Himself to her first; out of all the disciples, God entrusted her with the witness of the resurrection.

How can this be? Mary had no authority in the eyes of men. Living on the fringe of a 'religious' culture, she is commonly understood to have traded her body for money. Moral poverty made her less than credible; she cast a shadow on the company she kept.

Jesus drew her out of the shadows. He offered her a love deeper than shame and more powerful than the demons she housed. He made her new. In His intimate love for her, Mary became mighty. God entrusted her to bear witness of history's greatest event.

She did not want the honor. In John 20, Mary implores Peter and John to bear witness of the

empty tomb. Both men raced there but could not comprehend what had happened. They saw evidence of resurrection but still did not see; they walked away from the tomb, disoriented.

Mary wept and lingered at the tomb, alone. That was her great gift, this evidence of intimacy with Jesus. For what else better defines intimate reliance upon another but weeping and lingering? Love alone provokes tears for another; love alone compels us to wait, to abide, to linger. These tender expressions of intimacy—tears and lingering—are the earmarks of her authority.

Let's piece together some clues about this intimate authority

through the one whose relation with Jesus was marked by weeping and lingering.

Anyone damaged by false intimacy hungers for the real thing. The pain and shame of degrading unions cut deep. That's what distinguishes sexual sin: it is the one we inflict most violently upon our own selves (1Cor 6: 18). When real love enters our depths, we drink it in like rain from heaven.

Jesus' love rained on Mary. She witnessed how He poured Himself out on the lost and least. Instead of shaming the shameful, He regarded them with dignity. He looked at her too but His eyes did not scorn

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Intimate Authority

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her. In truth, they seemed to be pleading for something more, something better for her.

Doubtless, she was used to scornful eyes. Before she saw Jesus, Mary would have seen the Pharisees as the face of God: righteous, serious, a sharp reminder of her degradation. One critical gaze from such a man might have withered her. The law can cause us to weep and to linger in our shame, but it cannot heal us.

So she watched Jesus from a distance; He became her hope for freedom from a life of shame and regret. According to Luke 7: 36-50, a poor woman with 'issues', perhaps Mary Magdalene, saw Jesus eating with a Pharisee; she wanted to run over and surrender all to Him, to offer her devotion as best as she could. Her barrier was the old face of God, the Pharisee, seated next to Christ. She had to risk the scorn of her righteous accuser in order to worship Jesus.

And she did. She crashed the party and flung herself at Jesus' feet. At His feet she wept tears of gratitude and repentance, repentance from her life of degradation, gratitude for the mercy she knew He embodied. The Pharisee looked on, critical of both Mary and Jesus for this embarrassing display.

Her courageous devotion is our first glimpse of the intimacy that made her great. Deeper than her sin and shame was her need for Him, her profound awareness that only Jesus had the power to anchor her in a true intimacy that would surpass the false. For Him, she wept and lingered, even in the face of her accuser.

Luke 7 describes Mary's courage to endure the shame for the mercy set before her. Receiving such mercy lays a base for intimacy with Him: recognized vulnerability anchored in real love. Tears of gratitude and repentance result from such recognition. That is the authority that can testify to new life at work in one's depths. 'He who has been forgiven of much will love me much; he who is forgiven of little, will love little.' (Lk 7: 47)

Yet experiencing Jesus as the source of true intimacy isn't enough. One must rely daily upon that Source. After the Luke 7 account, we become aware that Mary was among a small group of women who accompanied Jesus (and disciples) as He traveled from one town to another; according to Scripture, these women provided for the Kingdom band with their own funds. (Lk 8: 1-3)

Mary immersed herself in His world. She embodied the words of St. Faustina Kowalska: 'The more I have known You Jesus, the more I desire You.' This is the bond He loves, a bond He vows not to break, an intimacy with us that supersedes sexual intimacy and all other loves.

His bond of love with us is authoritative and powerful, one that will deliver us from any residual darkness we still bear as a result of historic false inti-

macies. Mary exemplifies this. After her lingering with tears at Christ's feet next to the Pharisee, Jesus delivered her of seven demons. (Lk 8:2)

Intimacy invites deliverance. I love the ease and naturalness with which Mary's deliverance must have occurred. The closer we get to Him, the nearer we come to freedom, even from dark and destructive things that are so familiar we do not even recognize them.

False intimacy takes a toll on us; it invites unclean spirits to lodge themselves in our depths and to hide there. But when we realize as Mary did that Jesus is not going to reject us and that our cure lies only in nearness to Him, then we will be unafraid to come into His Presence. We will not be shocked at the cleansing He has yet to do.

The key is not coming under the Pharisee and his accusing, critical gaze.

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"That is the authority that can testify to new life at work in one's depths. 'He who has been forgiven of much will love me much; he who is forgiven of little, will love little.'"



Like Mary, we must exercise courage to come boldly to Him with our ragged, divided hearts intact, and cast ourselves upon His merciful feet (Heb. 4: 15, 16). Like Mary, we must learn to weep and linger there. Our deliverance will come, is coming, will come!

What deliverance does for us, as we can assume it did for Mary Magdalene: it unites and strengthens our reliance upon the Deliverer, and grants us a godly fear of false intimacy.

In her recognition and reliance upon her Merciful Deliverer, Mary became authoritative in holy love. Her vulnerability forged a dependency upon Him that was qualitatively different from that of the other disciples. While other men had shamed and fractured her further, Jesus' nearness set her free. Her wholeness was bound up in His life, her holiness in the intimacy they shared.

No wonder she wept as she lingered beneath the Crucified Christ. She was among the 4 who watched Him suffer and die on the cross. (Jn 19: 25)

She wept, and lingered at the cross. She had given Him everything. When He poured out His life unto death, a part of her died. She lost the source of her life.

She grieved for a long time. She wept and lingered at the empty tomb. The other disciples went home, confused, disoriented, and worn out. Grief grounded Mary, kept her near His memory. She was poured out, like when she first washed His feet, or when He cleansed her with a mighty deliverance, or when she gave all to support His good works, or when she watched Him die a slow, agonizing death. His life had become hers; His death too.

She was His—where else would she go? She waited alone at the empty tomb, an empty vessel. No wonder He chose to appear to her first:


'Mary', the Risen Christ said to her gently, 'Go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to the Father.' She ran to the disciples, shouting: 'I have seen the Lord!' (Jn 20: 17, 18)

Intimate, holy love transformed a prostitute



into the Apostle to the Apostles. Lingered before Jesus, with tears, conveys the intimacy that made her wholly trustworthy. She lived a life of surrender to her Source. In turn, Jesus forged a bond with her strong enough to bear the most important message on earth.

I am privileged to stand among men and women whose lives of broken intimacy have been transformed by the love of Jesus Christ. Now we like Mary have become trustworthy witnesses of that love. Throughout the world, we minister hope to those under the scorn of the Pharisee and the false bonds that rob them of real life.

As degradation casts its shadow on the earth, might the light of His transforming love shine brighter still? Might we take our places as part of the 'Magdalene' army, tender troops who live only to testify to the One who is true? Might we follow Mary's example of authoritative intimacy with Jesus, as we proclaim: 'We have seen the Lord!' 

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Faithful Father, Grateful Son

BY KEVIN HOKESBERGEN



“...the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.” (Luke 15:13)



“...my relationship began to grow with my parents.

I began to open up and they began to know me and love me in my darkest hour

They began to walk along side of me as I sought the Lord...”

As I reflect upon the story of the prodigal son, I can't help but relate it to my own life. I did not intend to waste the good things I received growing up. Yet away from the security of my home and family, I did squander the spiritual investment my parents had so faithfully poured into my life.

I am the youngest of two boys, and we were both adopted at birth. I always felt inadequate in relationship to others, including my own brother. I was a hyper-active child which made it difficult for me to form friendships during most of my childhood. Other kids would tease me constantly for being “ADD” or “ADHD”. They were relentless, causing me to cry regularly on the bus home from school. I saw others around me, especially my brother, and wanted to be like them—calm, collected, cool, and most importantly accepted by their many friends.

My parents did their best to encourage and console me when I was upset, but they could not fully understand what I was going through every day. We were a devout Christian family; I was taught to ask the Lord for help and for His guidance. I asked Him for friends. When He did not bring me what I wanted, I took matters into my own hands.

I began to separate myself from others, and searched within myself for how I could become more acceptable. In this process I looked at other boys and what traits they had that I believed attracted others to them. I thought I could take what they had, apply it to my own life and “Presto”, have an overflow of friends. I could not have been more wrong. As I walked this out, I found myself attracted to my male peers. What started as an emotional longing to connect became sexualized when I went through puberty. This was scary for me because I knew it wasn't right.

Once I realized this was taking place, I brought it to the Lord in secret. I told Him that I did not want these attractions and wanted them to go away. Once more, I was not met with an immediate answer to my plea. I started to become angry, as well as more distant from my parents, God and church.

When I was in high school, these attractions became so strong I could no longer stand it. By this time, I had met a neighbor and others at school that had some of the same attractions toward men. My life took a turn for the worse: I opened the door to same-sex relations and promiscuity; I found a way to be “accepted”. After graduation, I embraced

my homosexuality to the fullest. I moved out from my parents' covering and freely offered up my body as a price for acceptance. I did not care about the consequences of my actions. I just cared that I was finally able to feel like I was a part of something and valued by someone, no matter the cost.

As time went on, I found myself being less and less satisfied with my choices. The friendships I was investing in all hinged on how much I was able to offer physically; they were very shallow and superficial relationships that would end in a heartbeat if someone better came along. The hurt I had tried to hide and cover up through sex escalated. I worried I would experience the same rejection I had experienced throughout childhood. My response was to begin meeting anonymously with multiple men. I was able to feel the physical connection without the threat of the pain of rejection. This was a dark season in my life.

Working in a grocery store as a “bag boy” and living in a friend's garage, I finally realized that there had to be something more. I was a mere 23 years old and knew this could not possibly be what the rest of my life was supposed to be.

Periodically I had kept in touch with my parents and they had

voiced many times how God had so much more in store for me. All He offered was available to me if I just went home to Him. Despite the anger that arose in me upon hearing this, I couldn't get their words out of my head. I had a feeling there was something to what they kept telling me.

I made what seems now to be the best decision of my entire life: I went back to church. I was fearful of returning and still angry at God, but I also remembered the comfort of being in the Christian community. As I began to interact with others at church, a new peace pervaded my life. I was starting to realize I could choose to live my life differently.

When I contacted my parents, they told me about a gentleman that had come out of homosexuality. I was skeptical, but strangely ok with the idea of meeting him and hearing more about what he went through. If his story was legit, that would mean he could relate to what I had gone through and I would no longer be alone in my struggles.

As I met with this him, he spoke a lot about the transformation the Lord did in his life, and of the fire he had to go through (and still was going through) to get to where he was in Christ. I was deeply encouraged and found a new hope welling up within me. He wanted to continue in a mentorship role with me, but suggested that I explore some options in the area of healing from my past, and allowing God to come in and transform. He connected me with the leader of a Living Waters group near Seattle.

Through this time, my relationship began to grow with my

parents. Even though we had many boundaries in place, I began to open up and they began to know me and love me in my darkest hour. Eventually, they lent me their pickup and helped me move out of my horrible living situation. They began to walk along side of me as I sought the Lord in a renewed way.

As I went through the Living Waters group, I realized that when I prayed those prayers as a child, I was asking God to give me friends, but not to be my friend. I was also expecting Him to do what I wanted on my terms, instead of surrendering to Him and allowing Him to do His work in His timing.

I realized healing was a process, not always a miraculous and instantaneous event. I had to go through the refiner's fire and be made into a new creation. In this, the Lord met me in many ways. I realized I needed Him as a friend first and foremost. We are made for divine friendship. Jesus said: "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

Since this time, my life has changed drastically. My parents and I are closer than ever before, and more importantly, my relationship with Christ is better than ever before. I feel as though I have come home to who I truly am and who God created me to be. I am so thankful that I had parents who held firm to the calling of God in my life. The foundation they established for me allowed me to come home to a solid place, one in which Christ is the Center.

I have since had the privilege to share my testimony on

national television, to speak at conferences across the U.S., to participate in leadership for a Living Waters group in Kansas City, and just completed an 18-month internship with Desert Stream/Living Waters. Pray for me as I move home to Washington State with the hopes of starting a Living Waters at my church.

When I look back to where I was and see where the Lord has brought me, I am overwhelmed. The Lord's process for us, though hard, is the process for life. I am now surrounded by a solid community, am discovering true friendships, and most importantly have gained the best friend a son could have: Jesus Christ. He is forever faithful. Because of the Lord's love, I am far better than I used to be, but not nearly as good as I am going to be. To God be the glory. 🙏

Kevin ended his internship with Desert Stream Ministries in May, 2013. Kevin lives in Twisp, Washington where he will coordinate Living Waters in his local church.

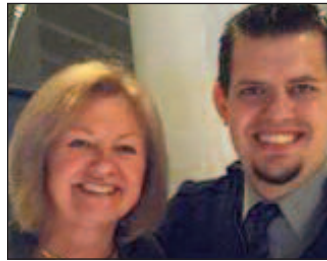
"I made what seems now to be the best decision of my entire life: I went back to church. As I began to interact with others at church, a new peace pervaded my life."



Grateful Parents

BY GEORGE AND CANDY HOKSBERGEN

I would never have imagined that motherhood would be such a journey: the pain of letting go and great joy when we all came together again. Kevin grew up very active, due in part to congenital physical problems; we also have learned that all the times he returned home from school or group functions he told us what he thought we wanted to hear: "Had a great time have lots of friends and life is good."



"I realized healing was a process, not always a miraculous & instantaneous event. I had to go through the refiner's fire and be made into a new creation."

A Grateful Mother By Candy Hoksbergen

As high school came Kevin began to show signs of trouble and anger. We knew that he was frustrated and drove friends away. Then he began showing signs of disrespect to us, me in particular. We tried counseling but Kevin was opposed to all of it.

When Kevin became pretty out-of-control, we had an intervention that included the pastor, family and friends. Kevin had all the correct answers and then he chose to move out. I suspected he had same-sex attractions, yet had nothing to concrete to confirm this. After a time I began to build a wall

around myself where Kevin was concerned. It was very difficult for us, as his Dad and I were dealing with it in two totally different ways. I am often told I see things in a 'negative way'. Perhaps I am a realist, where George always sees things with "rose colored glasses," which I would call denial.

When Kevin finally chose to tell us he was living the same-sex life style, I was not the least bit shocked. I was hurt and wounded yes but not surprised. He was running from God in many ways. Kevin's life was falling apart, and we could not stop it. His father and I told him he was on his own. George and I had moved from the area where we all were living to another part of Washington and that gave us miles between us to not be able to see the choices Kevin was making. What you don't know can't hurt you.

Time passed and very little contact between Kevin and us occurred. Then he called. He

claimed that he wanted and needed us in his life again. He also was committed to trying to understand why the choices he had made were so destructive. DSM and the Living Waters group helped him a lot. Kevin began to understand who God intended him to be.

It was clear that Kevin began to feel the need to connect with God and to understand His sacrificial love for him. The hardest part for me was allowing the wall to come down; I was so afraid we would hear the words but not see the change in him. The first year I was very cautious, maybe too cautious, as I allowed my own fear of being hurt to become a barrier to forgiving Kevin.

Feelings are a unique thing. Just as I could not make Kevin's heart change, I could not change my heart right away. I had to learn how to let go, pray, stand back and let both of us work out what we had to deal with. After a time of watching and seeing the true changes in Kevin's life, I have grown in my trust, love and confidence in him. Kevin has become a godly man and I am so proud to call him my son.

"I would never have imagined

that motherhood would be such a journey:

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when we all came together again."

As a parent most all of us have our children's best interests at heart. Providing for their physical, mental and spiritual needs seems to take a high priority in our lives. After you've given it your best shot and then the roof caves in, where, what or who do you turn to?



A Grateful Father By George Hoksbergen

Kevin was your typical very active boy growing up in rural Washington State. He enjoyed most any outdoor activity: camping, hunting, fishing, biking and ATV's. He was ready to do it all.

He also enjoyed his large extended family, attended a private Christian school, and was very social with known characters in the neighborhood. We faced all the typical challenges parents face when nurturing a child from infancy thru the teen years.

I recall very vividly the day Kevin called us and wanted to meet at a familiar restaurant. We knew his choices were leading him to a place and time where joy seemed to be disappearing from his life.

He brought a friend with him for support when he broke the news to us that he was "gay". Wow, how could something that once meant happy make me feel so sad, so hurt and yet invoke so much love for my son?

How could this be? Had not we prayed for and over our son even

before his birth? How could I ever understand or relate to what my son was telling us? With all these questions and more we needed answers; we reflected back on the promises of God's Holy Word by reading and rereading scriptures like:

Psalm 139:14 "We are fearfully and wonderfully made."

Isaiah 59:21 "My Spirit that is on you and my words that I have put in your mouth, will not depart from your mouth or from the mouths of your children."

As time passed the love of God the Father was impressed upon me, and I continued to love my son no matter what his choices would be. I did not love his lifestyle but I loved him. I was also reminded that we all fall short of the glory of God. If it wasn't for the mercy and grace God extends to all we would all be without hope.

We continued to pray for Kevin and love our son even though his choices separated us for an extended period of time. We prayed for the ability to entrust our son to God as a person created in His own image, and for God to lead him in the direction only God could lead.

The absence of our relationship was painful and there was an empty void where there once were frequent phone calls or drop in visits. There were no more annual fishing trips on his birthday or road trips with no particular destination in sight.

Thank God it was only for a season and not a lifetime! The call came in the evening and my son said "Dad I love you, will you forgive me? I am asking for and seeking help, I have made many wrong choices, I'm lonely and I have asked God's forgiveness and He has forgiven me. When can I see you and Mom again?"

After a lengthy conversation Candy and I decided that I would make the four hour drive the next day. Kevin attended Living Waters and did an internship with DSM, to whom I am forever grateful to for their understanding, compassion and their commitment to upholding biblical values.

I still cannot read Luke 15:11-32 without tears in my eyes: the story of the prodigal son. Thank God for His promises, His love, and answered prayers. 🙏

Candy and George Hoksbergen live in Washington. They are committed to helping other parents know the hope of restoration and redemption for adult children through sharing their story.

"The call came in the evening...
"Dad I love you, will you forgive me?"

I am asking for and seeking help, I have made many wrong choices, I'm lonely and I have asked God's forgiveness and He has forgiven me."

"But while he was still **a long way off, his father saw him** and was filled with compassion for him; **he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."**

Luke 15:20b

Corporate Corner



BY ANNETTE COMISKEY

In January of 1998 I went back to work at the Desert Stream offices. I had always been involved at some level but had spent most of the previous decade just being a mom. Due to some unexpected staff changes I choose to step back into a full-time position.

And what a “gift” I was to the office—I could open and read an email but that was about the extent of my office skills! One of the duties I assumed was being in charge of our publications, which at that point consisted of the Living Waters Guidebook and 4 newsletters a year. My main qualification for that was I knew how to read!

The past 15 years have been a learning curve for me. I have had great help along the way. Andrew has been a most patient “managing editor” for Desert Stream publications; he has had far more confidence in me than I had in myself.

From day one, I have also had the amazing fortune of working with a talented production team, Bob and Dan Mack, and Ron Lara. Every book, newsletter, logo, almost anything stamped with DSM has been possible because of the patient support of Immanuel Comm.


As I grew in my ability so did the quality of our publications, except one: the Living Waters Guidebook. It had been written, produced and published before I came back to work. And is it a big, long book. The idea of revising it meant a lot of time on Andrew’s part and a lot of money for redesign and production.

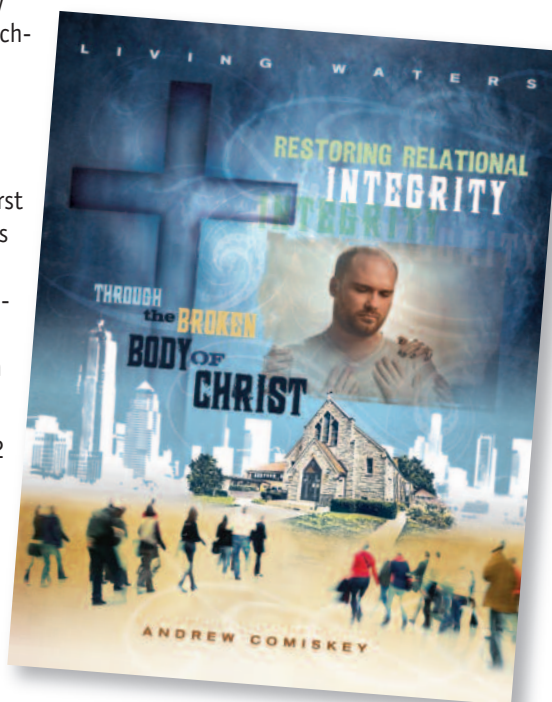
A few years ago we did some minor work, mainly a new cover and new appendices. But I wanted so much more. The original production team really had no real knowledge of how to publish a book. The design was adequate, but often hard to follow. There were many, many typos and poor editing—as I was frequently reminded of by Living Waters attendees through many, not so nice emails and letters.

Fast forward to 2011: Andrew wanted to redo the guidebook! His desire was to see it rewritten to be acceptable to both Protestants and Catholics. After teaching Living Waters for over twenty years he also saw the need to simplify some of the teachings and also address some issues not as prevalent when the book was first written. Yay! His willingness to take on the revision meant we could start from scratch.

In January 2012 Andrew and I led a Living Waters Pilot

group of hand-picked Protestant and Catholic participants. The result was the basis for the new guidebook. Much has changed, much has stayed the same! We have replaced the appendices with amazing personal stories of healing from over 40 Living Waters leaders.

The essence of Living Waters—proclaiming the power of the Cross to redeem our areas of sin and brokenness so that we become “good enough” gifts to love others—has not changed. It is our hope that this new edition will continue to help bring healing and restoration to a new generation of broken souls. 



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Andrew Comiskey

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 Newsletter (Spring and Fall)
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 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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Executive Director
Andrew Comiskey

Desert Stream Press
Annette Comiskey

Living Waters USA Coordinator
Dean Greer

Director of Intercession
Ann Armstrong

Ministry Administrator
Lori Butler

Resources
Maite Rodriguez-Mora

Intern Staff
Kevin Hoksbergen

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Please address all inquiries to:

DESERT STREAM™
MINISTRIES

706 Main Street
Grandview, MO 64030
(816) 767-1730 Fax: (816) 767-7221