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David Matheson

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The Transition from Homosexuality: The Role of Evergreen International

David Matheson

Evergreen International is a fellowship of individuals who sustain the doctrines, scriptures, and standards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), and who are in the process of overcoming same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior. Our work is founded on the belief that the atonement of Jesus Christ enables every soul the opportunity to turn away from all sins or conditions which obstruct their temporal and eternal happiness and potential. Evergreen is organized as a non-profit, tax exempt corporation and is not affiliated with or endorsed by the LDS Church.

Evergreen began with a group of 12 participants in the summer of 1989 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The basic concept of this new group was that homosexuality is a changeable condition. They drew on information from Christian ministries in other parts of the country which had been doing such work successfully for nearly 30 years. The next spring, this small group sponsored a conference to publicly attest to the truths they had found. The conference received national attention and participants were invited to appear on the Phil Donahue Show and various local television and radio programs.

Today, Evergreen has eleven chapters for men in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Evergreen also sponsors a chapter for family and friends, and is in the process of organizing a chapter for women dealing with homosexuality.
Over the past four years many men who have aggressively and consistently pursued the principles Evergreen teaches, have experienced changes in their lives ranging from improved self-esteem and freedom from addictions to the spontaneous development of a heterosexual self-identity. These men testify that they are better off and far happier now than they were a few years ago.

Evergreen’s Programs

Evergreen’s purpose is to provide support and direction to those who are making a transition from homosexuality, and to families and friends of homosexual individuals. Evergreen is also available as a resource to professional counselors, religious leaders, and all others involved in assisting those who desire to change. To fulfill its mission, the organization carries out or sponsors the following activities:

Transition group meetings

Meetings are held weekly for men who are committed to the process of transition. The evening consists of a brief opening, including a hymn and prayer, followed by a 30 minute lesson given by a participant or guest, and then an hour and fifteen minutes of micro-group discussion with 4 to 8 participants. Lessons focus on aspects of the transition process, such as overcoming addictions and compulsive behavior or learning to be totally honest with self and others. The meetings close with prayer, refreshments, and an informal mingling period of about 20 minutes.

The purpose of these meetings is to allow these men an opportunity to discuss their feelings with other like-minded individuals, to experience beneficial relationships with other men, and to learn about the transition process. For many, these meetings are the first time they have ever received unconditional acceptance and love from other men. They also learn to trust, to be honest in communication, and confront one another constructively. The intimacy of the micro-group discussions facilitates the development of strong bonds among the men, and enables them to encourage one another to progress.
To participate in a Chapter, men must first show a commitment to making a transition. They must also commit to having no sexual interaction with other members of the group, and to hold information shared among their group confidential, including the identity of group members.

**Sports groups**

Some Chapters may organize, or be part of, a sports group where they participate in games like softball, basketball, and football. These activities help some men to face very real fears in a safe environment, and to at least partially resolve a sense of inadequacy. Their self-image can change as they accomplish something which may have previously been ruled out. It can also help them develop a sense of belonging and identification with other men in a new and non-sexual setting.

**Support meetings**

Evergreen sponsors monthly support meetings for families and friends of homosexual individuals who need support and information to cope with their own and their loved one’s issues. These meetings are open to any who are interested, whether or not their loved one participates in Evergreen or wants to change.

Although these individuals are not dealing personally with same-sex attraction they do face the dissonance associated with it in a very personal way. They often experience recrimination and feelings of guilt, mistrust, betrayal, frustration, and great uncertainty. They too struggle as they attempt to “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” In Evergreen support meetings they receive an opportunity to share their pain and experiences with others who understand, and to explore and learn ways to understand and give love and support without compromising their belief system.

**Conferences, Seminars, and In-service**

Evergreen holds an annual conference in Salt Lake City, Utah for all individuals interested in understanding how the issues and addictions related to homosexuality can be overcome. Past keynote speakers have included Dr. Joseph Nicolosi and Joe Dallas. The conferences include workshop sessions taught by professionals and participants which are designed for men and women dealing with
same-sex attraction, their families and friends, ecclesiastical leaders, and therapists. Seminars and in-service presentations are held as needs arise or requests are made.

Publication development and sales

Evergreen currently distributes books nationwide on issues related to homosexuality which are published by other organizations and individuals. We are also working toward the development of Evergreen publications including a quarterly journal, internal educational materials, and brochures and booklets for various groups with interests in this subject.

Testimonials

I will conclude by presenting six testimonials. These testimonials demonstrate the progress individuals have made by participating in Evergreen programs. An asterisk (*) indicates that a pseudonym was used to protect the participant’s privacy.

In early 1989, I was in serious trouble. I was married with children, active in church, and yet very involved in homosexual activity. I was literally in the depths of hell trying to deal with the issue by myself. I couldn’t deal with the tremendous conflict going on inside me. I had decided to either take my life or leave my family. Although I was not close to the Lord, and avoided prayer, He heard the cries of my heart, and literally lifted me out of the mire. I knew I could not succeed without some kind of support system. In addition to some good therapy, Evergreen came into my life. I was then able to experience the beautiful principle of repentance, and develop a personal relationship with my Savior. I now have peace of mind that I have never had before; plus a good relationship with my family, church, and the Lord. I could not have done it without the love and support of my wife, the Lord and His church, and Evergreen.

Ken, Provo, Utah

For most of my life I struggled with homosexuality. I was molested by my Grandfather at age four, introduced to masturbation by older neighborhood boys at age five, and first exposed to pornography at seven. By ten I was acting out homosexually with neighborhood boys. At eleven, I had my first homosexual experience with an adult, my Grandfather’s male nurse. I enjoyed the contact and attention these
activities gave me and was soon addicted, looking forward to the next experience. The scouting program at the church I attended offered quite a bit of opportunity for this. At 15, I had two homosexual experiences with the organist at the same church and he introduced me to alcohol. I was soon smoking pot and began to use these drugs to escape the reality that what the kids were saying was true: that I was a sissy, a fag, a queer, a homosexual.

Despite the perversion in my life, I was a good kid with a big heart. My teachers liked me and I was an honor student. The pull between bad and good was ripping me apart. I could not continue going this way. I did not ask for or want to be the sexual freak I had become. As I graduated from high school, I hated my condition, myself, my life. At this all-time low in my life the Lord began to work a miracle and prepare me for accepting the Gospel. I was introduced to the L.D.S Church by friends, and soon was baptized a member of the Church.

It was a great blessing to have a second chance in life and have all of the sins of the past washed away. I soon found though, that the homosexual attractions were not washed away with all of the other filth. At first this was very hard on me but I decided that it did not matter what temptations I had, just as long as I did not act on them.

I later married and began a family. I again fell to the temptation to masturbate as well as the homosexual fantasizing. I had a strong testimony and loved the Church and so the inner conflict between good and bad was tearing me apart. If I did not get help I was going to lose the three things I loved the most: my wife, my children, and my membership in the Church. That is when the commitment to change took place deep within. I was led by the spirit to people who desired and had experienced change in their lives or who were dedicated to helping others change.

It has been about six years since I started the process. The attractions and desires which were constant and life dominating are now gone. I am finally free and in control of my life.

David Carlson*, Salt Lake City

I have struggled with homosexual tendencies since my earliest sexual feelings emerged. Like many people with similar struggles, however, I have never accepted the homosexual lifestyle as a viable option. I found myself in a battle between emotional and physical longing to love and be loved; and the spiritual knowledge that the "love" I envisioned was not love in the true sense, nor could it ever provide lasting happiness. In the midst of this quandary, I found solace in my knowledge that God
would not forsake me, nor would He ever ask me to live in a way which was inconsistent with my capabilities.

Over the years, I have been involved with numerous therapists and support groups to try to understand and alter both my thoughts and my behavior. This process, though somewhat slow and deliberate, has helped me begin to see that just as God is there for us, we are here for each other. Since our sexual identities are formed from early childhood, it is difficult for us to view such things objectively. And so it was for me—I was lost in a torrent of turmoil from which, it seemed, there was no escape; and I had neither the knowledge nor perspective to provide balanced answers to my own questions.

My involvement with Evergreen was critical in helping me identify the sources of my difficulties and the specific steps that I needed to take to change my life as I desired. This organization has the benefit of knowledgeable people who have shared my problems and who are my friends—helping me with their advice and supporting me when I need them. To anyone who wishes to be free from homosexuality, I would recommend three things: (1) Evergreen, (2) a therapist who shares your values and who has expertise with homosexuality, and, most of all, (3) trust in God. Without these factors, my upcoming temple marriage would never have been feasible—not in my wildest dreams. I wish success to those engaged in the same battle.

Barry, Salt Lake City

The wrong choices that I have made in my life were not the result of a lack or loss of faith. I have always known that I wanted the blessings and happiness available to those who keep God's commandments. I just did not know which path would encompass following God and removing the compulsions to do things contrary to that which I knew to be right.

Evergreen advocates the path for which I was searching. It has helped me see myself in a different light. I am not the first person to have felt a tremendous lack of self-worth because my behavior often did not reflect the testimony that often burned inside me. Evergreen has played a vital role in helping me learn what my deficits were and how to meet those needs appropriately. I have had the privilege of developing some of my most treasured relationships.

I know that God lives and that I am His son. I testify that Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of the world. Most importantly, I know that because He atoned for my sins, and through faith in Him, there is nothing I can not overcome, even same-sex attraction. I am so grateful for my Heavenly Father's love. Though the pain and struggling has
been intense and often overwhelming, the joys have been likewise, only a hundred times more. I would remind all who are searching for such happiness of the thirty-seventh verse in the first chapter of Luke, "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

K. J. H.*, Salt Lake City, Utah

I, as a mother, would like to offer my testimony of appreciation for Evergreen International, Inc.

A year ago, I learned, via a letter, that my son was dealing with homosexuality. Naturally, I was very sad and distressed. Besides the shock of this information, I was further disadvantaged because I had no one I could turn to, to discuss this situation and I knew not how to deal with it (of myself and of my son).

Finally, I inquired of a doctor friend, who referred me to a professional counselor (who deals with sexual compulsive behavior) who suggested I call Evergreen. I found the number in the phone directory and called for help. I received immediate response, a listening ear, a resource of answers for my questions, and referrals for literature and other helpful resources and people.

I am so very grateful that Evergreen, not only the organization, but especially the wonderful men, was (and is) readily available to provide me with timely help. I listened, read, and learned as fast as I could to bring me to the level of understanding, peace, and empowerment in order to deal with my son’s self-acclaimed homosexuality and my own personal disruption.

I have since participated in many activities (conferences, firesides, etc.) provided by Evergreen, which help has been beyond measure. Though I have been benefitted more than my son (to this moment), we both have been greatly helped by this wonderful organization. Additionally, my family and select others have been helped through my association with Evergreen.

I have found my interaction with those of Evergreen to be warm and accepting, helpful and non-judgmental. The information and intervention I have received have been “user-friendly,” both in content and delivery.

I whole-heartedly concur with the mission and objectives of Evergreen, and not only desire, but am exercising my influence to further the mission and the dissemination of the gospel-focused information. Because Evergreen is based on the love of Jesus Christ and His plan of salvation, the organization needs to be made available to
many thousands of individuals (and extended individuals) who need help and direction in dealing with homosexuality and related issues.

Unsigned, Salt Lake City

As a teenager growing up in the early 1970s I struggled between hating my feelings of same-sex attraction and trying to accept a gay identity.

I sought help through therapy and after five years of counseling I felt no further ahead than when I started. My feelings of same-sex attraction were as intense as they had always been.

I again attempted to accept a gay identity. Years of wandering in the 1980s led to more confusion and disappointment. My heart’s desire was to overcome same-sex attraction. In 1990 I came in contact with Evergreen. There are no words to adequately express my gratitude for this organization.

I know there is a way out of same-sex attraction. To work with others who have overcome same-sex attraction has in itself, been a great strength to me. Through the testimonies, support, understanding and insight provided through Evergreen, I have progressed far beyond what I once thought possible. I did not know the way out. Evergreen is standing at the crossroad to show myself and others a better way. I look forward to marriage and a family, grateful to finally be on the road to recovery.

Evergreen and the mission it proclaims is for me the light on the hill to those of us who seek release from same-sex attraction. I wholeheartedly support Evergreen in its growth and development to help others who have struggled alone for years, discouraged and longing to hear the voice of deliverance. For me, it is as though the prison doors have been opened, and I, a captive, have been set free.

Brad*, Ann Arbor, Michigan

David Matheson is Executive Director, Evergreen International, Inc. Evergreen welcomes input, inquiries, and the sharing of experiences from professionals and other interested persons. Send correspondence to Evergreen International, P.O. Box 3, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110-0003, or call (801) 535-1658.