

Grove City Chapel, Grove City College

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Speech by **Kristin Johnson**, M.Div., Executive Director of OneByOne ex-gay ministry at www.oneby1.org, at Grove City College, Sept. 23, 2008

Thank you for the welcome and introduction. It is such an honor to be with you today. I want to say that I am very jealous of all of you. I always wanted to be a “Grover” - a student at Grove City College.

I have at least three family members who attended Grove City - my mother my uncle, and my sister. My mother and uncle attended Grove City College in the early sixties - in those days when students ate formal dinners with linen napkins and there were evening curfews. I loved sitting with my mother (we had so much fun) looking at her old year books and listening to her stories of sorority parties and getting “pinned” - of her dates with my Dad here on campus when he came to visit from his college. Images of wool plaid skirts and penny-loafers and my parents walking on the bridge are all a part of some of my earliest memories. Later, my sister attended Grove City in the 80’s, and although I never attended Grove City, this place is in my memory and in my heart.

While my sister was attending school here, I was going to a small liberal arts college in Indiana. My freshman year, I had high hopes to have fun at school, make lots of friends, find my “calling” in life, and then get married. Instead, I found something unexpected and frightening happening: I was falling in love with my freshman roommate. The feelings I felt for her were the feelings I had hoped to have felt for the guys I had dated in high school. I was overwhelmed and confused and had no where to go. There were few if any books or resources on finding help with unwanted same-sex attraction back then, and not many Christians were talking about it – there were certainly no chapel speakers being invited to our campus who were willing to address this topic.

I remember being horrified by my feelings but also excited by them, too. Romantic love is exhilarating, make no mistake about it. God meant it to be, but he meant those feelings to be felt between a man and a woman, and I knew that. Instead of asking myself or God “Why am I experiencing these feelings? Help me with this.” I silently struggled, rationalizing that I was just in a close friendship, and I went about my business, telling no one (including my roommate) about my feelings.

Years passed and my feelings (left in the dark) only grew. By the time I graduate from college, I had decided that marriage was not a big deal, and that I didn’t need a man in

my life to love and care for me because I had my roommate. My roommate and I lived together all throughout college and one year after college, but we never talked about our feelings for one another or engaged in any physical sexual relationship. Regardless, we were a couple. We were emotionally dependent upon each other (we viewed other people as a threat to our relationship, preferred to spend time alone and were frustrated when this didn't happen, became angry or depressed when the other withdrew slightly, lost interest in other friendships, and experienced romantic and sexual feelings for the other), and we both knew something was not right or satisfying at the core of our relationship.

After college, I entered the Peace Corps, which required me to leave my roommate. This was not easy for either of us. However, on my flight to Albania, I prayed that God would bring a man into my life. Thus began my search for love and the hopes to marry again. I was 23 years old. In Albania, I found myself having sexual feelings for both men and a particular woman as I served as a volunteer. I lost my virginity and became more promiscuous with men.

After my service in the Peace Corps, I attended Columbia University and taught in NYC, and I got involved in a good church there and cell groups and I began to cling even more tightly to Christ, desiring to obey his word. I no longer struggled with same-sex attraction, and I kept myself from places and situations where I would not fall into compromising situations with men. I prayed that God would bring a Christian man into my life who would love me and with whom I could marry.

However, after a disappointing dating situation, I immediately lost hope and resorted to self-destructive thinking and behavior. I remember after receiving this young man's rejection, driving to a gas station and buying a pack of cigarettes and taking a long-hard drag, allowing all those negative thoughts and insecurities to overwhelm me and remove any vestige of hope in my heart.

It was not soon after this that I fell into a sexual relationship with a woman who was openly gay, and who pursued me. In my loneliness and neediness for intimacy, I gave in to her and found being with her to meet a deep emotional need inside of me. This relationship continued until I moved to a different state for work. When I heard that she would be coming to live with me, I was euphoric and ready to come "out" of the closet, so to speak. I began telling friends, and I even attended a gay-friendly church, but it all seemed so foreign and unsatisfying, and the Holy Spirit kept nudging me in my heart telling me that this was not God's will for my life.

I struggled in prayer and reading the Bible. I read Mel White's book *Stranger at the Gate* - one of the first books written by an evangelical Christian and leader that argued that living in a gay relationship and being Christian were compatible and even a gift from God. I was emotionally "sold" by this book, but in my mind and heart I knew that the

Bible did not in any way allow for homosexual relationships no matter how consensual or monogamous.

It was here in my confusion, at the brink of living with a woman and coming out publicly, that I prayed the prayer that changed my life.

“Dear Jesus,” I prayed. “You know I love you, but I don’t know what to do. But please, Lord, I ask that your will be done in my life. Let your will be done.”

I arose from that prayer without making any major decision. I went about my plans and my work, and two weeks after that prayer, I got a call from the woman who was to move in with me. She said she wasn’t coming, and I never saw her again. I knew without a doubt that God had orchestrated this, but instead of being relieved and happy, I was angry and depressed. I was angry for being rejected (again), and I was angry at God and what I foresaw as a life of “righteousness” which, in other words, meant depravation and loneliness.

I remember one day during this time, driving in my car, smoking a cigarette and listening to Alanis Morissette. I mindlessly drove right through a red light and a truck ploughed into me. My car spun around and my air bag ejected. I remember sitting there with smoke and debris swirling around me, and a broken cigarette hanging out of my mouth. My car was completely totaled but Alanis was still singing in the background. It was comical but I wished at the time that God had ended my life that day.

But God didn’t take my life that day; he saved it. In his grace and mercy and love toward me he had me crash right in front of an apartment where I had prayed with a group of Christians. It was the first time I had confided to any Christian about my struggle with same-sex attraction. I had not seen these girls for months, but when they heard the crash, they came out and wrapped their arms around me. I was in tears, and as one of the women held me, I drew my arm away, not wanting to give her any wrong idea because I knew she knew my “issue”. She immediately drew my arm right back to hers, and I cried even more. I felt the Lord telling me through that gesture: “I did not come to deprive you of love but to give it to you in my way.”

It was after that car crash that I had to learn to trust God to meet my needs for love and everything else. He gave me the verse I share with you today: Hebrews 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

What was powerful to me about that verse was the last part: “He rewards those who earnestly seek him.” I had always believed that God existed; I just didn’t trust that he would reward me for following him and obeying his commands. He had let bad things happen to me, and so I questioned his love for me. I had also heard things like “God

should be enough” and “God is not an ATM machine” and “Don’t expect God to give you everything you want” and “God doesn’t want you to be happy but holy.”

These statements have elements of truth in them, but what I have learned since that day and over the years is that God in his perfection can be trusted to meet all our needs, especially our needs for love, companionship, and happiness. God tells us in Scripture: “Seek first his Kingdom and all these things shall be added unto you” and “He will give you the desires of your heart as you delight in Him” and “ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened” and “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come” and my mother’s favorite, which she imprinted on my heart during tough times in my life: “we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God”. These are not false promises of God. They are true! You are not being a wishful thinker if you believe them – you are being a true and courageous believer.

So what happened to me after that crash? Did God meet my need for love? Yes. Was it quick and easy? No. Nothing of eternal value is ever quick and easy.

How did he meet my need for love?

First, he taught me that he wanted me to go to him first to get my needs for love, security and identity met, or they would never be fully met. I would always be thirsty. I learned that people and things, though they may be good and from God, will fall short and disappoint me. Only God is worthy of worship because only he can pull it off. Only he can love perfectly.

Second, he taught me to understand the expression “God is enough”. He taught me that this expression doesn’t mean he is our only relationship but that he is our first relationship. God wants us to have friends and family connections and a rich social life. We were meant for relationships. It is not good for us to be alone. He taught me that if I wanted friends to ask for them and learn how to be a good friend. He taught me that if I wanted to get married to pray and prepare for it and to not lose hope even as the years passed.

Third, he taught me that when I asked for good things, the devil was right there to bring counterfeits to confuse me. God’s Spirit reminded me that I am engaged in a spiritual battle here on earth, and I am Satan’s enemy, so I needed to wear my spiritual armor every day and refuse to listen to Satan’s lies.

Fourth, he taught me to wait on him. I read and studied Genesis more than once, learning that some of the greatest men and women in the OT had to wait to see their prayers answered and God’s promises fulfilled in their lives. God taught me that when I fell into sin it was right at the time when I stopped waiting and trusting him to provide for me.

Fifth, God taught me that sexual sin was my attempt to meet legitimate emotional needs in sexually illegitimate ways. He showed me that there were some emotional needs that had not been met in my family relationships growing up, there were some wounds, and so I was attempting to meet these needs and cover these wounds in sexual relationships as an adult. He taught me that there were also things I was born with: a sin nature, a particular temperament, various weaknesses, and a negative body image and negative view of my femininity. He taught me that even though I did not choose all my circumstances and struggles, I could choose to overcome them. I could choose to let God change my life.

Enough about me. Now about you.

I know that you guys are the cream of the crop. You are conservative, evangelical, and smart. Most of you have families that love you and support you. But I know that even the best kids from the best families struggle and suffer. I know that some of you in this chapel struggle with same-sex attraction; there are some of you that struggle with sexual addiction (internet pornography); there are some of you who have lost your virginity and you feel shame and guilt; there are some of you who are sexually promiscuous in an attempt to validate your desirability; there are some of you who have been sexually abused, molested, or raped; there are some of you who have no sexual feelings at all and you feel like a freak; there are some of you who feel completely undesirable; there are some of you who use your sexual desirability to bolster your ego and consequently break hearts. You know who you are.

Finding healing from sexual brokenness, struggle and sin not an overnight process, but it is more than possible. Jesus said "If I can? Anything is possible to him who believes!" And so we pray: "Lord, take away these desires, these temptations! Right now, and let me I never struggle with this again!" But in my own life, God gradually removed these sinful sexual desires as I trusted and obeyed him, and as I grew into a loving and intimate relationship with him and other Christians. I think another reason he doesn't just zap away our sexual struggles is that God gave you sexual desire and he wants you to enjoy it – but in his way, according to his commands, and in his time.

You know this God you've come to worship in this beautiful and stately chapel is willing to get his hands dirty to pull you out of the ugly, shameful mess your heart may be in today. Our God is all about forgiveness, second chances, and new life. Jesus is all about changing lives for the better. I am often asked with a tone of incredulity even by some well-meaning Christians: "Do you really think that gays can change?" My response to them is "Jesus didn't say change is possible he said change is required." Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Saying the sinner's prayer is only the beginning. The Lord demands us all to change – to change our mindsets, our emotions, our desires, our goals, our focus so that we may live an abundant life in accordance with his will.

People ask me, “Do you still struggle with same-sex attraction?” My answer is no, I don’t, but I still struggle with worry and doubt and lots of other things. I know I still have the ability, being human, to fall into sexual sin if I do not abide in the Lord and make godly choices in my life. The more we turn from sin to God, the less sin is our master. Will we be tempted, yes, but temptation is not a sin. Jesus was tempted. We sin when we give in to the temptation and let it define who we are. But God promises to be there to help us. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

So I end today, encouraging you to not just believe that God exists in this sacred place, but to believe that he will reward you for seeking him here and he will spare no expense to go to those dark places where you may find yourself today or tomorrow and bring you home.

God is so good. Never doubt his goodness. There is no darkness in him. He allows us to go through great pain, that is true, and we live in a very fallen world, but he is in control and he will redeem our lives – whatever he allows to befall us – he will redeem the pain and the loss if we give it all to him.

I told you at the beginning of my presentation that I always wanted to go to Grove City College. I asked God, “Why are you sending me to Grove City to speak this year of all places I could have been invited?” And he said, “Because you always wanted to go there, child, and because there is a student just like you who needs to hear your story.”

Another thing I have always wanted to do is fall in love and marry a man who is willing to share his heart and life with me, and this November 7th I will be marrying this man. And he’s from - guess where – western Pennsylvania – of all places. Even though we both live and work in Orlando, we were engaged only 30 minutes from Grove City in May of this year in his home town.

So my dear brothers and sister in Christ, it is never too late, it is never too hopeless, it is never too impossible for God.

- Kristin Johnson

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Here is the link to the actual presentation for the chapel that day:

<http://www2.gcc.edu/media/Chapel/2008Fall/Chapel.htm>

Scroll down to September and click on my name to hear the brief presentation.