



A Conversation with Frank Worthen

By Bradley Furges

Frank Worthen is one of the founding fathers of what has become known as the “Ex-Gay Movement.” The work began way back in 1973 when Frank, at 44 years old, recommitted his life to Jesus Christ. Over the next few years he founded Love In Action (LIA), one of the largest and oldest ex-gay ministries in the world. He was also one of the founding fathers of Exodus International. Over the past 25 years, Frank has appeared on countless radio and television shows including the “700 Club” and the “Phil Donahue Show.” In addition, Frank has written several books including *Helping People Step Out of Homosexuality*.

The following conversation/interview occurred on October 1, 2002 between PLM staff-member Bradley Furges and Frank Worthen:

Brad: What kind of things were you doing to reach out to homosexuals in the early days of Love in Action?

Frank: When we first started, we were able to advertise in the newspapers. The most successful ad we ran was in the classified section of a sex newspaper—where people went to look for partners. I didn’t know if they would be willing to take an ad from me, but when I called, the lady said, “Honey, we’ll take any ad no matter how bizarre it is.” So, you know, I was right below a guy who was looking for somebody with a toe fetish. But an awful lot of people saw it.

Brad: What would you advertise?

Frank: Oh, we had a little ad that just said, “Do you want out of homosexuality?... Send for a free tape.” We would send them my testimony on tape. That first year of advertising we had 60 people who sent for the tape. But as soon as the gay community got on to what we were doing, the newspaper wouldn’t take our ads any more.

Brad: How did you begin Love in Action?

Frank: Initially, my ministry was called Brother Frank Tape Ministry. We didn’t have a lot of materials; all we had was just the tape. And we started group meetings in San Rafael very early on. We were born in the middle of the Jesus Movement. There was a lot happening in those days...and so we formed a little group that went to all the concerts and all the...all the things that were happening. It was a very exciting time to be a Christian.

Brad: What part did you play in the formation of Exodus International?

Frank: It was 1975 and I had been in ministry 2 years. I was introduced to a man named Jim Casper, who was running a support group for homosexuals in Anaheim. He was running his ministry almost exclusively on a psychological basis, while I was running my ministry totally on a spiritual basis. Nevertheless, I was fascinated with his work there. I told him, "We're worlds apart and I have a staff and you have a staff and I'd like to have them all get together and we could present one message to the world." And so we talked about maybe having a conference the next year. A few months later I was surprised to get a notice saying he was having a conference in Anaheim. Walter Martin (the Bible Answer Man) was the key-note speaker. So we went to it.

When we got there, we could really feel the presence of the Lord and knew that this was the beginning of something. We didn't know what God wanted us to do, but we knew that it wasn't supposed to be a one-time conference. So before we left on Sunday afternoon, we put all the pieces together to have a conference every year. And then we named it Exodus at that time. We just kind of knew by the Spirit what we were supposed to do.

I took over the job of putting on the second one in Oakland, in 1977. There were about 130 people or so. But we had tremendous opposition on the second one. Gay activists showed up and it got pretty wild. It was interrupted so many times that we could hardly even present our message. People would break in and run through the church shouting. The police eventually showed up. There was a lot of shouting and noise and you know people breaking in and running through the church and everything.

Brad: Love In Action became quite an organization and I know many people have been helped through it. But now you run a ministry called New Hope Ministries. What happened?

Frank: I ran Love In Action for 18 years and then God called me to go to the Philippines, where I spent a little over 4 years. I couldn't run Love In Action from the Philippines so I groomed John Smid to take over the ministry. He eventually decided to move it to Memphis. When I came back the ministry was on it's way to Memphis. I felt the Bay area needed a ministry, so I came up with the new name: New Hope.

Brad: How are you educating the church about ministering to those coming out of homosexuality?

Frank: One of the neat things is that 3 of our graduates went to Focus on the Family: John Paulk, Mike Haley, and Jay Stone. And they do this Love Won Out Conference. They do about 6 or 8 a year and get bigger crowds than Exodus.

Brad: How is the gay agenda affecting the ex-gay movement today?

Frank: Coming out of homosexuality is a real struggle, very difficult. The gay community is convincing people that they don't have to...that it won't work anyway and so why bother. And people are buying that message. When I ran Love in Action, we would have maybe 100 or 120 people showing interest in going through our residential program. But we're not seeing that interest any more. The gay community won some major battles in changing the worldview. We actually have guys in our program whose parents are against it. They say, "Well gay is OK. Just be gay. Why would you want to go through all this trouble to change when you don't have to?"

Brad: Do you think it is possible that the momentum of the pro-homosexual movement could ever be reversed?

Frank: Yeah, I do. I think that it's possible that we could have another Jesus movement or Great Awakening or something like that. I don't think we can write that off. God can do stuff. He can do the impossible! Yeah, it would seem humanly impossible to turn it around, but I think we've seen times in history looking back where it seemed impossible...to turn things around and God has raised up certain people to come forward and make a difference. But I think the Church needs to put all its attention on the youth right now...I think our hope lies there. If we can raise up godly young people, they can change the world. We've kind of failed you know. But the energy that [the] youth have I think that it could make a difference. And any investment in youth I think is worthwhile—it's the most important investment we can make right now.

Brad: What do you say to the pro-family groups that are out there now battling in the courts?

Frank: I don't think ex-gay ministries can fight the political battle because we can't fight the people we are trying to reach. I think the Church has fallen down and I think the Church should have been more political. The Church should be a light to the world and it should be the one that affects legislature and everything, you know. The Church should set the moral pattern. And it hasn't. And a lot of it has gone over to the liberal side. Here in California, many of the mainline churches perform gay marriages and are totally in the gay camp. The Church [in many ways] has abdicated its roll.

Brad: Is there anything else you would like to share?

Frank: We're just in an enormous battle... a spiritual battle. It's really a battle in the heavenlies, you know. The forces of evil are just overwhelming the entire earth. We often see the day-to-day picture and we get discouraged, but we're not seeing the big picture that the enemy's time is short and that he is working overtime right now to deceive. And he's deceived a large segment of the Church. A large segment of the mainline Church is pro-gay and the enemy has made vast inroads into the Church. People get upset about a gay marriage or something, but they're not seeing that the forces of evil are winning right now. Christianity as we have known it will not work.

You know, we have to have a deeper relationship with the Lord and we've gotta have a much higher level of Christianity than we've ever had—it can't be Sunday only. And we have to bond together and put aside the differences. One thing I do see is that there is a movement toward unification of the conservative churches and that's a very good thing. We are in an enormous battle and no one really is aware of the extent of it—just how prevalent it is in every walk of our life. Every minute of the day you're encountering some evil.

There's very few workers as the Lord said. And all of our ministries are starving. There's no funding for ex-gay ministry. A few people give a little bit. Most of the ministry workers work with no salary...they just give their time and it's a very difficult ministry. But it's the calling. God wants more people and I'm sure He'd want to see it more supported.

Brad Furges is the Director of the Pure Life Ministries Live-In Program. Having been delivered from the homosexual lifestyle, he now has a bountiful life in God and is being used to bring hope and encouragement to other men struggling with sexual sin.

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