

In Rural Alabama, Not Everyone Thinks Sex Is Great

✖ **March 19, 2009** – Sex sells, and in recent years more churches have used it as a marketing tool to impact their communities. From nationally known megachurches such as Dallas' Fellowship Church to smaller congregations such as Relevant Church in Ybor City, Fla., an increasing number of pastors are issuing sex challenges from the pulpits to churchgoers. Now a rural Alabama church is spicing up things and, not surprisingly, sparking community interest-both good and bad.

Three few weeks ago, Daystar Church in Good Hope, Ala., launched a monthlong series called "Great Sex: God's Way" that, given the church's small-town locale, figured to get townsfolk talking. But it's Daystar's decision to rent out billboard advertisements promoting the series that has ruffled more than a few feathers.

"I understand what they're trying to do. I get it," said the small town's 22-year-old mayor, Corey Harbison according to the Associated Press (AP). "[But] some people just aren't ready for that. Good Hope is just a good old, country town."

One local minister added: "Paul said preach the gospel. Talking about sex ain't gonna get nobody to heaven."

Even outsiders questioned not the content of the series but its setting. "It sounds like an example of one of those church-growth, market-savvy campaigns going out to an area where you wouldn't normally see it," said Larry Eskridge, associate director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College in Illinois reports the AP. "I could see where in that particular setting, that could raise some eyebrows."

For Daystar, however, it's par for the course of venturing into new territory. When lead pastor Jerry Lawson arrived nine years ago, Daystar was called Glory Hill Church of God and averaged fewer than 100 in attendance. Since its "relaunch" in 2002, the church has grown to more than 2,000-more than Good Hope's total population-but along the way, according to Harbison, has caused many longtime residents to grow leery of its sudden mega-success.

As far as the "Great Sex" series, Lawson chalks up any local controversy to a natural conflict whenever the three-letter word is mentioned. Rather than have kids learn about sex from the often-immoral portrayals found in media, Daystar wanted to create an opportunity for parents to address the issue. "I think some people are kind of missing the point," said Lawson, adding that the church needs to be leading the way on creating an understanding of sex rather than allowing the world's depiction to rule.