



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## "God's reluctant therapist" by Steven Donaldson, M.A., L.P.C.

**Ten years ago if someone had asked me where I wanted my career to go, the last thing I would have said was working with people who struggle with homosexuality and advocating in professional organizations for the right of clients to seek therapy for homosexuality.**

Who would choose to become a therapist who was constantly questioned for his professional ethics and accused of being homophobic, hateful, ignorant, and harmful to his clients? I did not choose to do this type of work. God choose me. I am honored and humbled.

I see myself as a fairly typical therapist. I jumped through all the hoops: classes, internships, supervision, exams and licensure, then I began my practice. I sat through classes on human sexual development and was taught unequivocally that homosexuality was either in-born or so deeply rooted that attempts to change it were absurd and most probably harmful. Being a Christian, I had my doubts about this but did not have to think too much about it. I knew that the human race is deeply scared by many generations of sin. Some of the consequences of this sin we will be able to heal here on earth while others will need to wait until Jesus' return. It was completely conceivable to me that some well intended Christians may struggle with homosexual impulses through their entire lives and had no hope of changing.

Then one day a young man, we will call James, came into my office for an appointment. He said that he had heard I was a Christian and that I worked with men with sexual issues. I responded affirmatively to both questions and asked him what brought him to see me. He told me about a life long struggle with homosexual thoughts, feelings, and acts. This man was a deeply committed Christian and had never for a moment considered homosexuality to be God's plan for his life. He told me of his fear of intimacy with women and how he had never been able to be physically intimate with a woman, even in nonsexual ways.

I knew I was over my head already when his story became even more interesting. He explained that he had fallen deeply in love with a woman and wanted to marry her. He told me how after two years of dating he courageously told her everything about his sexual problems knowing that she would certainly and wisely call the relationship off. The problem was that she did not. She had confidence in him and in God's ability to heal him. Now what was he to do? He said, "I'll do anything I have to. I want to be a normal man. I want to be a husband and a father. I do not want to be homosexual."

The professional literature tells me that my duty as a therapist is to help this patient understand that his homosexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are normal, natural, and unchangeable. Then I should help him understand how the rejections of his homosexuality is a rejection of his true self and based on the ignorance of society about the true nature of homosexuality. It tells me that mental health for this man would be the acceptance of himself as a gay man. The only reason he would want to change is because of the hatred of homosexual people he had experienced directly or vicariously by ignorant, and homophobic people in his life.

This answer clearly would not fit for this man. In addition I could not give him this answer because I believe what the Bible says about sexuality. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) Central to the Christian message is the sanctification of all sexuality through marriage.

James was in terrible conflict. I felt very badly for him but I still was not very anxious because I knew what my next move was. When a therapist is not qualified to help a patient with a certain problem, it is his or her ethical duty to refer. I told James that I would find him a suitable Christian therapist that could help him and sent him on his way. Surely, I thought, there must be people who deal with this problem. It must be fairly common. The literature tells me



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that 10% of the population is homosexual. Many of these people, I thought must be Christian and need help with this problem. It was at this point that my education began. I could not find anyone doing this work. I later found out that there were some people in the area that were, but God apparently had something else in mind. Now I was the one with the conflict. I was unwilling to just tell James, "Good luck but I can't help you." I called him and said I would be willing to find literature to study and try to help him with his problem. I admitted I could not offer him much assurance of success. He was very grateful. I felt inadequate, alone, and uncomfortable taking money from someone I had so little confidence I could help.

What I did not realize is that I was not alone. God was operating all around me and my inadequacy made room for His adequacy. I had no idea that just four blocks north of my office a small group of dedicated Christians were running a program (Portland Fellowship) to help men and women overcome their struggles with homosexuality. I wonder if I would have ever known if God had not moved John and Anne Paulk into a



house across the street from mine. John and Anne are both ex-gay and were heavily involved in Portland Fellowship and Exodus International. I remember the day I was getting to know my new neighbor and I asked John about his occupation. He sheepishly told me he worked for Portland Fellowship and what that organization did. He didn't know what kind of reaction to expect from me. I was shocked, of course, but not for the reasons John naturally would have assumed. An instant friendship emerged.

Through my research I was also put in contact with an organization called NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality). It turns out that this is a very scholarly organization that was able to offer a great deal to me in terms of literature, consultation, and support. I began to understand that the majority of what I learned about homosexuality in school was very politically motivated and just plain wrong. The emotional rhetoric on both sides of this issue is so intense that truth is hard to come by in the literature. I learned that Christians need to shoulder a good share of the blame for this. We have not responded to the homosexual with the love of Christ and a deep sense of our own sin. In our sinful pride we have treated the homosexual unsympathetically. There is good reason for the gay community's anger at us. We (the Church) need to seek God's forgiveness for our sin.

My work with James over the next several years taught me a lot about the nature of homosexuality and God's ability to heal a humble soul. As we identified the roots and causes of his sexual desires and he courageously faced his fears, he was able to develop into a fully functioning heterosexual man, husband, and father. He was able to develop a healthy pride in the man that God had made him to be. He was able to assume his role as a leader in his church. Like many men, under periods of stress he can have intrusive sexual thoughts and feelings but he would tell you that he was able to fully accomplish

his therapy goals. This is what the professional literature had told me was not possible.

It is important to mention that not all the men I have worked with have been this successful. Homosexuality is a very deeply embedded problem that men and women struggle with mightily. They did not choose to have these feelings and cannot simply will them away. Some of the men I see have worked very hard and not achieved the success they would like. I do not have all the psychological or theological answers. I do know, however, that having homosexual feelings is not hopeless. People that have unwanted sexual attraction should seek help.

I have been involved with Portland Fellowship for the last five years. Over this period I have developed a deep respect for this organization, its mission, and the courageous and God-inspired people that have followed God's call into this ministry. I personally am a financial supporter. There are three reasons I believe it is urgent for the Christian individual and Christian community as a whole to support this organization with their prayers and their checkbooks.

First we need to care for our own. I know from my experience that there are many very good men and women in the Christian community that struggle with homosexuality in silence and very alone. Some are married and others are single. Many are faithful husbands and wives, dedicated fathers and mothers, and participating church members. They deserve our help and God's healing. The individual congregation does not have the resources or expertise to help these individuals. It is naive and wrong for us to simply pray for them and tell them to get over it. That is like watching our child break her arm and telling her that we will pray for her. This response is simply inadequate. First we rush our precious one to the hospital, then we pray for them. Portland Fellowship is a wonderful resource for our brothers and sisters in Christ who struggle with homosexuality.

Second, Portland Fellowship is a beacon of light in a lost world. Many unsaved and unchurched souls long for the peace of Christ. We see many that find Christ through their struggle with homosexuality. Jesus continues to be the answer for a lost and dying world. Homosexuality can become a very deep and dark hole for a lost child of God. Portland Fellowship is a powerful tool that God is using to save these precious individuals.

Third, Portland Fellowship is a tremendous support and resource for mental health professionals and clergy like myself who have been called to hold the line against the powerful professional and religious communities that seek to normalize and promote homosexuality in our society. I could never have been as effective in my work and advocacy without the emotional support, testimonies, and resources of Portland Fellowship and other organization like it.

If you are already a financial donor, thank you and please consider increasing your monthly contribution. If you are not a donor please pray for God's guidance and consider pledging a monthly amount to this very important ministry. Although Portland Fellowship is not in a foreign country, it certainly is a mission field ripe for harvest. Please encourage your churches' mission committee to contact Portland Fellowship to learn more and to arrange to have speakers come to your church. I am confident that once the body of Christ is aware of the great work God is doing, they will want to include Portland Fellowship in their missions giving.

God bless.

## a time to celebrate

We can't seem to get enough of parties this year! We started out the month of December with a beautiful Christmas dinner put on by the staff for our group leaders, board members, and interns. It was our opportunity to honor them and bless them in return for all their hard work and the many hours they volunteer here at the Portland Fellowship.

It was a beautiful evening, complete with video clips from participants who expressed gratitude to their leaders, prizes supplied by area businesses, and a video recap of all God has done through the Portland Fellowship.

Following that, on December 4<sup>th</sup>, the women had a party at the home of a small group leader. This was a chance for the participants and women's group leaders to enjoy a festive evening complete with a cookie exchange and even a sock exchange. A good time was had by all even though it seems that in the "war" to steal the most coveted pair of socks we may have stirred up some issues of envy.

And then finally, on Dec. 18<sup>th</sup>, the participants had an opportunity to bless each other at our Tuesday night open meeting, by bringing desserts to share! Yummmm!

After all of the holiday food and cheer, the staff is in need of rest. So we will be taking the week between Christmas and New Years off to retreat to a nearby fat farm and hopefully be back in shape again before the participants return to begin our next trimester of Taking Back Ground.



## a time to reflect and plan

On January 26, the staff and board of Portland Fellowship will gather for our annual planning meeting. Each year, the staff gives an overview of the different projects and responsibilities that were tackled during the previous year. It is awesome to see God give us a vision and watch it unfold, while it impacts the lives of many. This past year we carried out the development of the Upper Room Leadership Intern Program, created the second version of the Interactive CD ROM: The Map, Began the publishing groundwork for the *Taking Back Ground* curriculum workbook, developed a whole new look for the ministry, put together two conferences, "Son's of the Father" and "She Shall be Called Woman", and began the new web support group for teens, ReachTruth.com. Along with the special projects, we continued to meet with men and women seeking freedom from homosexuality, carried out the largest *Taking Back Ground* group in Portland Fellowship history, participated in media events like the "Sally Show", radio interviews, and our local Trinity Broadcasting Network. As mentioned above, we put together a short video of the different activities carried out last year. If you would like to receive a copy of that video, please contact Portland Fellowship staff.



The year 2001 was great, and this year we are not expecting anything less. God is always giving us fresh vision in reaching those trapped in sin and we look forward to what He brings our way. Our desire is to listen and respond to His plans and be the vessels to carry them out. Throughout the year, we will continue to share those things in the newsletter and on our web-site.

Currently we have an incredible conference planned for April 26 & 27. We have invited Dan Allender, Ph.D. to speak on the issues of homosexuality. Even if you have been at a Portland Fellowship conference or feel as though you have enough information about the issue, we strongly encourage you to be a part of this conference. Dr. Allender is an incredible speaker and has written several books including, *The Wounded Heart* and *The Healing Path*. Workshops will also be offered during this two-day conference. Please mark your calendars and begin inviting family and friends to "Homosexuality: A Compassionate Response".

The truth of God is being communicated, lives are being changed, and we are enjoying every step. Thank you for being a partner with us and being a part of the great things God is doing through The Portland Fellowship.

## a time for change

Two year ago we set out to establish a branch ministry in Central Oregon. This was consistent with a long-standing desire to offer hope to individuals throughout the Northwest. When Randy King, a former *Taking Back Ground* leader, moved to Sisters, OR with his wife and family, it seemed like our dream was being fulfilled. A team was established and much prayer and preparation took place. It was exciting to see God answer prayer.

Unfortunately over the past few months things have changed. Difficulties in Randy's life have made it necessary for him to step down as leader of Grace Ministries. The reasons are complicated. The result of Randy's departure left the outreach without a leader. As we spent time in prayer and discussion, we decided that it would be best to discontinue the ministry. It has been painful to allow the dream to die, but some great relationships have been established which we intend to maintain.

Please pray for the King family, as they go through some personal transitions. Remember also, those who have invested many hours into Grace Ministries. Pray that God will encourage and strengthen them as they seek to serve. We hope to try again to see a vital outreach established in Central Oregon.

## january-february calendar & services

january 8,15,22,29

february 5, 12, 19, 26

### Taking Back Ground

Support Group for men and women struggling with unwanted homosexuality. Worship, teaching, and small group interaction. If interested in attending, please contact the office for an application. *Tuesday evenings 7 p.m.*

january 3,10,17, 31

february 7, 14, 28

### Leadership development

The interns of Portland Fellowship participate in weekly meetings covering topics concerning ministry. These classes are open to the public. If you are interested in participating in these classes, contact the office. 7 p.m.

january 11

february 8

### Family and friends group

If you have a loved one involved in homosexuality, please join us for encouragement, prayer, and support. Second Friday of each month 7 p.m.

january 15

### KPDQ Radio Interview

Jason Thompson will be interviewed by Dr. Steve Stephens, regarding his story in the newly released book "Portraits of Freedom" *Live: 11 a.m.*

january 26

### Annual Planning Meeting

Staff and Board of Directors  
Fairview Inn  
*All day meeting*

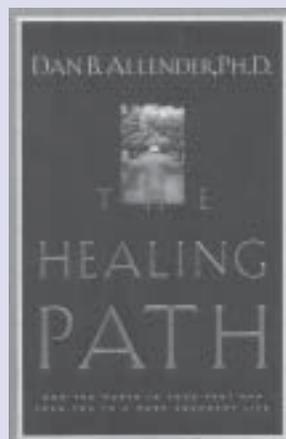
### Counseling, Speaking Engagements, and youth support

Can be arranged through the office

In a world where we see the evidence of evil all around us, opening our arms to each new day is an act of faith. In *The Wounded Heart*, his ground-breaking work on sexual abuse, Dr. Dan Allender chronicled the harm of such abuse and how it eats away at the core of what makes us human beings created in God's image.

But the impact of evil in the world is not confined to victims of abuse. After a decade of continued counseling, study, and reflection, Dr. Allender casts the net even wider to examine how the sin and suffering of this world is doing harm to all of our hearts - and how it darkens our love for God and for others.

Walking *The Healing Path* changes the way we relate to loved ones and enemies alike, empowering us to live more fully for God's glory.



## prayer and thanksgiving

We ask for prayer for our annual planning meeting later this month. Pray God gives the staff and board wisdom in the decisions ahead.

As mentioned on page three, we ask you keep Randy King and his family in your prayers during this time.

Please pray for continued financial partners to come along side the ministry of Portland Fellowship.

Pray for the organizing and planning of the conference *Homosexuality: A Compassionate Response*.

We thank all those who helped serve the leaders at our Christmas dinner and contributed to the making of the thank-you video played that evening.

The staff and Board of Portland Fellowship thank those who are faithfully supporting this ministry. Your gifts and prayers allow us to continue to spread the good news of freedom in Christ. James 5, "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." Let us continue together in fighting for righteousness.

For those who have given financially to Portland Fellowship, you will be receiving your annual statement of giving for tax purposes. Thank you.



## PORTLAND fellowship

The Fellowship Message is a monthly publication of The Portland fellowship, a ministry proclaiming freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ

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