



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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The Call to Follow Christ is a Call to Adventure.

Inconvenient, Imperious and Irresistible *by Lidia Gutierrez*

I was born in Guatemala, but I was raised in El Salvador where I have lived for much of my life. I became a Christian when I was 17 years old. I was happy knowing I was going to Heaven and that is all I wanted to know. I had plans for my future and I did not want God to change them. But, one year later, I changed my mind when I shared the Gospel for the first time and that person accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. That impacted my life because I knew that God could use me in the lives of others to make a difference. In that very moment I got a vision of a bigger purpose for my life—God was inviting me to follow him.

I wanted to serve God as a missionary so I studied at the Baptist Seminary of my church for three years and then I was sent to Honduras as a missionary. After working there for eight years, I moved with a team from my church in Honduras to Guatemala to start a new church. After 3 years in Guatemala, I went back to El Salvador. I was satisfied with my life; I thought I was a good Christian helping others to know God. But through all this, I began to forget the One who sent me, the One who really deserved the glory for my accomplishments. Looking for new opportunities in my ministry I decided to move to Santa Ana, near the capital city of San Salvador, where I was helping to disciple young women. But in 1996, many problems came into my life and I started to have economic problems, ministerial problems, my mother got cancer and eventually died, and finally my boyfriend told me that he was gay. I was shocked since he was a leader in my church at that time.

The impact of that revelation brought back to my mind a disturbing time in my life when two women abused me. I was only five years old. For thirty years that memory had been blocked and at that moment those memories flooded my thoughts. It completely overwhelmed me and I could hardly believe it. My perfect world started to fall apart and I found that I could not handle too much pain before depression took over. Although I tried to get help from my pastor, nothing seemed to work. I faced many difficulties in my life before and was able to overcome them and was getting good at helping people deal with their own issues. Now, however, I could not do anything for myself and all the knowledge about biblical principals did not work. I became more and more depressed; all I could do is pray, "God have mercy on me." After several months of depression and hopelessness, I decided to commit suicide. But God heard my cry and sent a friend to comfort me. This friend said, "Lidia, God told me that you needed me." I saw him as an angel and I cried and cried as never before. I told him what I had done. I had swallowed an entire bottle of sleeping pills but they did not work! Praise God, he still had plans for me.

Amazingly, I was fine the next day and ready to start the healing process. At the end of this crisis, God reached me with the same message that impacted me when I heard the Gospel for the first time — "I love YOU." I understood that I did not have to do anything to please God or earn his love. He already loved me and was embracing me at that very point of brokenness as he started to restore me. I think that was the first time I really understood the grace of God. I was like a new believer learning again the basic points of our faith, but now with a new point of view—the grace of God. When I decided to look for help to overcome my abuse, God led me to a couple in San Salvador who counseled abused people. It was a painful process and sometimes I thought I would never overcome the memories and emotional pain that accompanied them. One day when I was so discouraged God told me, "I will use your pain to heal others." I was wondering how he could use something like this and what kind of ministry he was going to give me.



Lidia Gutierrez is from El Salvador and is currently training to become an effective leader by participating in the 2002-03 Upper Room Intern Program.

After working through my abuse, God allowed me to go to Italy on a short-term outreach trip to share the Gospel and help start a new church. I was so excited with the results of the trip that I wanted to go back there, but God had other plans for me. One day as I was sitting in a big popular mall in San Salvador. I saw a group of young men between 13-15 years of age who were gay and I prayed, "God, send somebody to tell them you love them." I prayed the same prayer another time when I saw a group of gay men. The third time however, I prayed, "God send me to tell them that you love them." That was the beginning of this new adventure. A short time later the Lord began to bring gay men into my life.

One day, a friend of mine told me he was gay and I told him about my interest in helping people struggling with homosexuality. He started introducing me to his friends and I shared the Gospel with some of them. I really did not know much about homosexuality, but I knew that their basic need was Jesus Christ. As I shared the Gospel I was sure that Jesus could change them, which was a great hope for them. Not knowing much about homosexuality or lesbianism I knew that I needed to find out more if I wanted to be effective in the lives of those wanting to leave the lifestyle. As I looked for people or a ministry to help me learn, I realized that no one was reaching out to homosexuals in El Salvador or the surrounding countries. Thankfully, there is now a group in Costa Rica. After doing my own research, I found out about Exodus Latin America and they started to help me by providing literature and information regarding this issue.

Starting a ministry like this meant fighting prejudice against homosexuals, prejudice against women working with men in ministry, religious points of view and ignorance. Because I wanted to reach this segment of the population I started to hang out with them, to befriend them, and accept them, although I did not accept their lifestyle. I only wanted to show God's love through my life. Since I accepted them and wanted to learn about their feelings and thoughts, they opened up to me and answered my questions. Sadly, I lost friends who chose not to understand my involvement in this kind of ministry and I began to understand the rejection many homosexuals face in my country. I also had the blessing of people, who themselves did not want to be involved, but encouraged me to continue. The leaders of the church I was attending were not supportive of this ministry and I had to look for another church that would spiritually cover me. Finally I found one that was interested so I began attending there. This type of ministry was very new to them so they did not know how to help me. This was a very lonely time for me and I prayed that God would send people who were interested in this ministry as well. But, the only people that came were those in need of counseling.

I worked in this ministry for three years and at the end of 2000, had a group of three men and two women. By that time I had organized and held my first conference. Although I had invited about 500 people, many of them evangelical pastors and

leaders, only 40 people attended. After the conference, I was inundated with people calling about the program and wanting to be in a small group, but since I was alone in this ministry I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I realized that I needed to be trained but also that I needed to take a break in order to recover from the pressures of the ministry.

I made many mistakes in the ministry and one of them was to become independent of God again. After the earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001, many people suffered economically and I was no exception. My salary decreased considerably in my job and I could not find other work. I began praying for God's leading and eventually He led me to the United States. I was hesitant about this because that meant leaving the ministry. My church leaders and those of Exodus Latin America encouraged me to go to the United States for the training I needed for the ministry. So, I decided to step out in faith and God provided all that I needed for the trip. I came to the United States, September 18, 2001, with two purposes in mind: to pay my debts and obtain the training needed for the ministry. I was unable to obtain the legal documents necessary, which would allow me to work here; therefore, I had to take a

much-needed break from ministry and training. This meant having to wait for God to open the door in order to fulfill my purposes for coming here. I must tell you that God has been so faithful! To date I have been able to pay half of my debts while having everything I need to live. Finally, in June 2002, I found out about the internship provided by Portland Fellowship and sent in my application. I was accepted into the program and here I am now!

I am so grateful to my Heavenly Father and the people of Portland Fellowship who have been so nice and helpful to me. I am learning much and at present, am translating the Taking Back Ground material into Spanish. I will certainly be taking this back with me to El Salvador! I will be a missionary with Exodus Latin America when I return to begin the ministry once again in El Salvador.

When I look back and see how much this trip has meant to me spiritually and emotionally, I can only say that God is perfect in His ways. I have grown in my faith and in my relationship with my Father. I have experienced what it means to live by faith every day, far away from my country, my family, and my friends. But I have also seen the faithfulness of God in providing me with new friends here in the United States. There is still much ahead of me, but I know that this ministry is in the heart of God and He will use what I am learning to bless many people.

Lately, I have been meditating on John 11:40, "Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'" I believe that God is leading me and if I follow Him until the end, I will see his glory manifested in hundreds of changed lives by His grace and power in El Salvador and all the Central American countries. Would you please pray with me for God to provide the resources needed to fulfill the vision and dream he has given me?



*Lidia with Fernando Mora
and Enrique Gatrca
speakers at the first confrence about
homosexuality in El Salvador*

pf goes latin

It has been interesting to see how God has moved us to partner with those in Latin America. Our first contact was supporting Jose Maccarone, Exodus' first international missionary. Then after getting to know Tim & Onilda Broach from Ecuador, we began to support them as well.



Exodus Missionary, Tim Broach and his family, came to Portland to visit with Phil Hobizal and Jason Thompson

Phil's trip to Quito this past summer definitely impacted his vision for sharing the experience we have gained as a ministry.

And now Lidia has joined us for the Upper Room series. From the moment she arrived, Lidia has been diligently translating our material into Spanish. Within the first few weeks she finished our teen CD, "the Map" which is now "El Mapa" in Spanish. Soon she will complete the first volume of our discipleship workbook, *Taking Back Ground*. Our hope is to then take this material, have it published and made available to the Hispanic community in the U.S. as well as available to all of Latin America. There are few resources available so it is very exciting to see God bring things together.

Please pray for us as we seek the funding for this project. Maybe you have a heart for Latin America and want to know how you can become more involved. If so, please call Phil at the office and discuss your ideas with him.

where's ellen?

We want to update you on the whereabouts of our former interns as news surfaces. As you may recall, Ellen Wainwright traveled from Saginaw, Michigan to join us for our first year of "the Upper Room". She returned home in June where she joined Emmaus to do counseling for women. Since then, Ellen has established a ministry, "In His Image", with the expressed purpose of reaching out to those struggling with homosexuality. She has been busy developing informational material as well as taking the opportunity to share publicly what the Lord has done in her life.

Here's what she recently wrote to Phil: "The speaking engagements have gone very well. I get a little better each time, I think. I spoke at my own church yesterday and that went very well! The *Saginaw News* is going to do a story about the new ministry. It will be in the Saturday Paper this week the 14th. I hope I am not misquoted (really I should say I hope you are not miss quoted since much of what I said I got from the tape of your talk at Hinson Church)."

It is exciting for us to see how God is already using the investment we made into Ellen's life to help reach men and women who struggle with same-sex attraction. Please keep Ellen in your prayers. And if you want to send a note of encouragement, she can be reached at: *In His Image*, 600 Gratiot, Saginaw, MI, 48602. Check out her new website at: www.InHisImageSaginaw.com.

meet joanne!

Joanne McBride is our newest intern in the Upper Room program. Last year Joanne completed the two year discipleship program "Taking Back Ground". Joanne shares, "This program equipped me with the principles and tools necessary for my own healing process and because of the changes God has made in my life, I look forward to giving back some of what God has given me."



Joanne McBride, our newest 'Upper Room' participant

Joanne joined the internship program where she is now learning what it takes to be involved in a ministry to those struggling with homosexuality. She is currently leading one of the small groups in Taking Back Ground and has even had the opportunity of speaking recently at a one day seminar on the roots of lesbianism. Joanne is a delight to have in our program. She has a gentle and compassionate heart, and we are confident God will use her in wonderful ways in the coming years!

international resources



www.exodusintl.org

Exodus International is a worldwide interdenominational Christian organization called to encourage, strengthen, unify and equip Christians to minister the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ to those affected by homosexuality.

Link to the following world regions by going to the international website:

North America

www.exodusnorthamerica.org

Exodus Brasil

www.exodus.org.br

Exodus Europe, Africa and the Middle East

www.exoduseurope.org

Exodus Asia Pacific

www.exodusap.8k.com

Exodus Latin America

exoduslatinoamerica.org



Exodus Latin America is the hispanic branch of Exodus International, a Christian organization dedicated to prepare and unite ministries and individuals in order that they can communicate effectively the message of deliverance from homosexuality.

They also seek to offer support and understanding in an effective way to all who face the reality of having a relative or loved one who is a homosexual.

november-december calendar & services

november 14 & 21

Leadership Training

Dr. John Wenrich will be conducting two seminars on preparing a lesson. *Open to all. \$10 per class. 7 to 9 p.m.*

november 5,12,19, 26

Taking Back Ground

Discipleship support program for men and women. *7 p.m.*

december 3 & 10

Open Group

Every third month we have an evening open to anyone interested in learning more about Portland Fellowship and the TBG program. *Please join us. 7 p.m.*

november 8; december 13

Family & Friends Group

Please join us for encouragement, prayer, and support. *Second Friday of each month. 7 p.m.*

november 3

First Friends Church

Jason Thompson will be speaking to and evening church service.

november 20

Crossroads Community

Jason Thompson will be speaking to the church youth group.

december 7

Appreciation Dinner

The PF staff will serve our leadership team as we share a meal together.

Special events, speaking opportunities, and monthly updates

www.portlandfellowship.com

Counseling, speaking, and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

Portland Fellowship is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) nondenominational organization. We are exclusively supported through private donations, support services, and offerings.

our lord's provision...

Last month we shared our financial situation with you, and asked for your help through a one-time gift called "operation catch-up". It was a blessing to see your response. Throughout the following weeks, \$715 came into the office helping to offset our growing deficit. As the deficit was several thousand, we will continue to keep "operation catch-up" on the front burner.

With the staff and volunteers on the "front-lines", we cherish your support. Your financial gifts not only help fund what we do, but they also represent your heart's desire to partner with us in this area of Kingdom work, and that is invaluable to us. We really cannot thank you enough. May God bless each of you as you continue to bless us!

with a little help from ron...

Another way God has shown his faithfulness and blessing to Portland Fellowship is bringing us excellent help. We are pleased to introduce to you, Ron Perry, our almost full time volunteer.

Ron was injured on the job and was placed on disability forcing him to not work for many months. As God is so good at doing, He turned a difficult and trying situation in Ron's life into an opportunity for advancing Kingdom work. Ron comes in at least four days a week and spends his time doing anything and everything needed done (*of course excluding anything that requires heavy lifting*). As you may recall, Catherine Chapman, former staff member, stepped away from her position and is now at home, schooling her daughter. With the financial strains on PF, we needed to wait on hiring someone until we could "catch up", and that is when Ron showed up! Ron is not only a great volunteer, he is also a joy to have around the office. Thank you Ron!



exodus youth - the next phase

Many of you know that Jason Thompson has spent many years working with youth finding victory over same-sex desire. Three years ago, he was commissioned to begin the Exodus Youth program, which included developing a website, speaking on behalf of Exodus, developing youth interactions at the annual conference, responding to countless emails, and creating ongoing resources.

As of January 2003, the Exodus office in Florida will hire a new director for the program so as to have all workers located in one place. Jason turned down keeping the position as his heart is for the Portland area and the work done at Portland Fellowship. Jason still has a heart for youth and will continue, through PF, to counsel, encourage, and support teens. Pray God will bless the new director and the work of reaching teens nationally.



P O R T L A N D

f e l l o w s h i p

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

MINISTRY STAFF

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Executive Director

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Co-Director

Rebecca Wade
Women's Ministry

Benjamin Brown
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Ron Perry
Volunteer Extraordinaire

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