



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Finding True Fulfillment *By Joanne McBride*

It took a lot of problems and pain for me to realize that an intimate relationship with Christ was what I was looking for. God broke through my stubbornness and self-will, and showed me that an intimate relationship with Him is better than a wrong relationship with any woman.

I had a good home with parents who cared about me, provided for me, and wanted the best for me. However, just like anyone else, my parents were not perfect. My dad was a very good and thoughtful man, but did not allow anger or negative emotions in our family. My mom was a wonderful person, but I don't ever remember her being affectionate with me or holding me except when she greeted me at the airport. She was a very nice and good person, but very quiet and undemonstrative. I don't ever remember having heart talks with her, or much conversation with her at all. I do remember playing sports with her off and on, and enjoying that very much. When growing up, I tended to be in my own dream world much of the time, except when I was playing sports. I didn't talk much, and it never occurred to me to share how I felt about anything, as I did not have this behavior very strongly modeled to me by my parents. I now realize I suffered from detachment, and was unable to experience the feeling of love from others. This was because I never felt real love from my parents or any other parental figure. I knew intellectually that they loved me. I just couldn't feel it. The main mechanism for our bonding together was through playing sports.

Our family lived overseas in Iran because of my dad's job there. Every summer we would travel back to the states to be reunited and reacquainted with the rest of our family. In Iran, I learned to play tennis from the Iranian Davis Cup players, and in my teens I began playing the Northwest tennis circuit during our summer vacations. I became the top player in the Northwest in the 16's and 18's, and ranked highly in open play as well. Dad loved my athleticism, and did everything he could to help me in my tennis. I knew he was very proud of me because I was a "natural" athlete. I needed him to always be proud of me too, because this was the only way I knew of to feel loved. So whenever I performed well in sports or any other area in life, or whenever I was able to impress anyone and make them think I was special in some way, I felt loved. I didn't understand that love involved an open, honest, vulnerable relationship with another, and that it wasn't necessary to impress someone to get them to like you.

When I was a junior in high school, a friend loaned me a book that talked of the reality of Jesus in present day life. For some reason, I knew the Bible was true and that Jesus was truly God. Looking back, I know now that was God in His kindness, drawing me to Himself. By His grace, I truly wanted to know His reality in my life. I was very excited to learn I could be saved by sincerely praying a simple prayer I found in the back of this book. So I told Jesus I believed He was God, as He claimed to be. I thanked Him for dying for all my sins, past, present and future. I asked Him to forgive me all of my sins and come into my heart to be my Lord and Savior. The joy I experienced after praying this prayer was very great. I knew I had something special in my life, but it didn't occur to me to actually share my feelings and excitement with anyone. I did not know others actually believed that Jesus was real, as I did, and it was intensely personal anyway. Wonderful as it was, my salvation was not a magic wand that automatically showed me how to share my heart with others.

In my late teens into adulthood, I struggled with same-sex attractions. God designed each of us with a legitimate need for affection, relationship, and emotional bonding from our parents. Because I never got this legitimate, God-given relational need met through my mom, I later hungered for it from other women. I know now, that an emotional bond and healthy admiration for my mom would have helped me identify more with my feminine side. It would have met that legitimate, God-given need that I so hungered for later in my life. Because this God-given need was never



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met as He intended, I felt different from other girls. I wasn't a like a boy, but I wasn't like any girl I knew either. I felt a little different from the other girls.

As a teenager, the hunger for affection and love from another woman overcame my detachment from them. But because of my belief in God and the Bible, I knew it was wrong to be with another woman. So I struggled against the desires, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, until I got married at age 25. The man I married really loved me, and I loved him very much as well. He was the best thing that ever happened to me, except for knowing Jesus. However, I still struggled, and my relationship with Jesus was not very close. I slowly drifted away from Christ over the years, and even though my life with my husband was very good, I became very discontent. I felt this discontentment could be eliminated by simply being who I was meant to be. I was gay and I was meant to be with a woman. If I stopped struggling and embraced my desires, my life would be perfect. Besides, intimate closeness and affection from a woman was what I had always wanted, and I didn't want to struggle against it anymore.

So I finally got involved with a woman I befriended at work. It was so exciting and I felt I had finally arrived – I had found what I had been looking for. It was fantastic for the first four months, but after that, the relationship started slowly breaking apart. I started seeing some real brokenness in my partner; not that I didn't have my own faults. She became more and more verbally abusive. I did not understand this verbal abuse at first, because her reactions and behavior didn't make sense. I have since learned that verbal abusers are broken too. They are stuck in a childhood pattern involving a one-up/one-down relationship, and don't know how to have a healthy adult peer-to-peer relationship. Anyway, I tried everything I could think of to make the relationship work, but it only got worse. Finally, after three years, I broke it off. I promised myself I would never be involved with a verbal abuser again.

Later on, I got involved with another woman. Although this woman was not verbally abusive, she was broken in other ways. Because of her dysfunctional childhood and unresolved issues, she had lived her whole life avoiding or killing pain with addictions. Her addictive coping mechanisms came out in a variety of ways. They manifested themselves through illegal drugs, prescription drugs, workaholicism, alcoholism, and gambling, to name a few. It seemed as though she created one crisis in her life after another. After three years of problems, stress and crisis, I was finally at the end of my rope. I was so empty inside at this point I could hardly function. However, I was too afraid to commit suicide, so my last and only resort was to start crying out to God. I took long walks after work every day and poured out all my feelings and thoughts to Him. I began to realize that although I had left Him, He had never left me. As I poured my sadness, my loss, my anger, and my feelings out to God, my emptiness started disappearing. I liked that. I started getting into his Word and rediscovering how great it really was. How could I have ever left Him? In December of 1999, I recommitted my life to Christ.

At this point, I didn't want to have anything more to do with lesbian relationships. They started out wonderfully, but they ultimately didn't seem to work. I had never before experienced the abuse, problems and emptiness that I experienced as a result of these relationships. God says that we sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. Sadly, that is what had happened to me. Because of the bitter consequences of my actions, I felt I would no longer struggle with same-sex attractions, especially since I was now in a close relationship

with God through Jesus Christ. When my brother-in-law mentioned something about getting involved in an Exodus group, I told him I didn't think I needed it anymore because of the "aversion therapy" I went through with my ex-partners. My brother-in-law agreed that might be so, but the group could also help me with the underlying problems that caused my same-sex attractions in the first place. Those underlying problems might come out in other ways, not just in same-sex attractions. That made sense, so I got involved in Portland Fellowship's "Taking Back Ground" program. It was



PF Interns, Lidia and Joanne enjoy the Christmas appreciation dinner together.

very helpful to learn about the roots of homosexuality and lesbianism, triggers for acting out, healthy living tools, spiritual warfare, how to have intimate, healthy friendships, etc. What was especially important was the knowledge that most problems are rooting in relational brokenness with our parents, family, peers, and God. I learned much during the first year of this two-year program.

However, I didn't develop any close friendships with women that year. The second year, I started forgetting how miserable and empty my unhealthy relationships with women had made me. Winter depression began to trouble me and started longing for the affection of a woman again. But now I knew too much. I knew in my heart, through experience and through what God had shown me, that a lesbian relationship would not give me what I was looking for. It could bait me and hook me, but it could never give me the lasting fulfillment I desired. I knew only God and His truth could accomplish that. What I really needed was to draw close to the One who could truly satisfy my deepest longings.

God has shown me some invaluable things through this struggle. When I am not in a healthy, close intimate relationship with Him and others, any stress can act as a trigger for me to fall into old, accustomed patterns. In order to avoid being an unfortunate statistic, I need to have some close healthy friendships to fill that legitimate God-given need for closeness. If I don't fill that legitimate God-given need in healthy ways, I tend to start filling the need in unhealthy ways. Going even further, in terms of basic, practical, common sense, I must be a good steward of my own needs. I must maintain a healthy balance in all areas of my life. Instead of ignoring or trying to suppress my needs, I must take care of my emotional, physical, mental and spiritual needs. Only then can I consistently give back to others what God has given to me. I have learned that, not only is it okay, but it is healthy to be weak, to be in need, and to ask for help. We all have needs, but fulfilling them the world's way does not work; it only leads to problems or a downward spiral. But thank the Lord, that fulfilling them God's way, and according to His principles does work, and leads to real life with no regret.



PHIL HOBIZAL

The year 2002 has been quite a mixture for me personally. I started a few projects the year before that saw their completion this year. That led to ending 2002 a bit tired, but excited to see what's up for this year.

As you may know, the responsibility of overseeing and completing our remodel project fell onto my shoulders. Given my experience in this area, I was the right man for the job, but it was physically and emotionally challenging. I was so glad when we had our final inspection, I wasn't sure whether to jump up and down or just cry. The work has transformed the house into a quality facility to train, equip and send out those who share the burden to reach the broken and lost.

Another major project, five years in the making, was our Taking Back Ground workbook. Again, I had an overwhelming sense of joy and tears as countless hours of laboring were finally paying off. It is a blessing to see others get the opportunity to use this material that has helped hundreds here in Portland.

This past year was also a year of travel, as well - Chicago, Florida, Mexico - and a personal cross-country trip in a pink car to Georgia. But the most exciting time was my teaching trip to Ecuador. I look forward to another opportunity to go back and encourage the brothers and sisters there. Traveling to South America has awakened a desire within me to help in anyway we can see those beautiful people get the resources to walk in freedom from sexual brokenness.

I am grateful to my wife, family, staff and friends who have supported, encouraged and challenged me to not be mediocre or complacent, but to pursue the call the Father has for my life.



JASON THOMPSON

In 1989, I arrived at the doorsteps of Portland Fellowship looking for answers to my own confusion and frustration. Thirteen years later, God has not only brought truth and freedom to my life but has given me wonderful opportunities of helping others find victory over their same-sex desires. Through individual pastoral counseling, I have seen tremendous growth in the young men I have been working with. It is exciting to see hearts and minds transformed as they take the truth of God and apply it to their lives.

Because of my passion for helping others, I wanted to become more equipped in the work I do by going back to school. This past year, I continued my pursuit toward a Master's in counseling at Western Seminary. It has been extremely beneficial as I continue to meet with people through Portland Fellowship.

On an even more personal note, my wife Amy and I have some wonderful news. In July 2003, we will be expecting our second child! As many of you may already know, our first child, Abigail, has already gone to be with our Father. Even through all the pain and hardship of Abbie's complications, she has been the joy of our life. No matter what God has in store for our next child, we eagerly await his or her arrival! We ask for your prayers as we, of course, are a bit anxious.

I'm very excited to see what God will continue to do as I enter my fourteenth year at Portland Fellowship. I cannot imagine a more rewarding and exciting place to see Kingdom work done. Thank you for your support, partnership, and prayers. I would not want to do this without you!



REBECCA WADE

The Lord continues to bless me with the privilege of working with the women here at Portland Fellowship. Throughout this past year the number of women seeking to find freedom from lesbian issues and attractions continues to grow. Our women's small groups for Taking Back Ground are also growing in size, but most importantly, the changes that are taking place in the hearts of these women are such a demonstration of God's faithfulness and grace. The healing path for each person is just as unique as the individual factors that contributed to their wounded hearts. But, God truly is faithful to complete the work that He has started in each heart.

This past year has also involved the mentoring of new leaders as well as the training of the women in our intern program. It is exciting to see the passion and love God has put in the hearts of these women to offer hope to those who struggle.

I thoroughly enjoyed writing lessons for our Taking Back Ground workbook. I have a passion for discipling and was blessed to help develop a tool to assist those who want to engage throughout the week with the Holy Spirit in regard to the issue of homosexuality. It was such a blessing to finally see the finished workbook published. The second workbook should be published this spring.

As the Lord continues to give me opportunities to teach I am growing in my appreciation for that privilege as I get to experience His voice speaking to me and directing my thoughts and words. It is truly awesome to experience His anointing and witness His work in the lives of His children. I look forward to another year and anticipate good things as I continue at Portland Fellowship. May the Lord bless you as well, as you serve Him in the place that He has appointed for you.

january-february calendar & services

january 17

Leadership Meeting

The ministry leadership team will meet with the Portland Fellowship Board of Directors.

january 18

Annual Planning

The Portland Fellowship staff and Board of Directors will meet to layout our 2003 ministry plan.

january 7,14,21,28

february 4,11,18,25

Taking Back Ground

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

january 10; february 14

Family & Friends Group

Please join us for encouragement, prayer, and support.

Second friday of each month. 7 p.m.

thursday's in january & february

Leadership Training

Classes will be published on the Internet. These classes are to equip future leaders for ministry. \$10 per class.

january 23

A.W.A.R.E

Jason Thompson will be speaking to an abstinence awareness group in Vancouver, Washington. 2 p.m.

Special events, speaking opportunities, and monthly updates

www.portlandfellowship.com

Counseling, speaking, and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GIVING

As we head into a new year, we wanted to bring to your attention a few ways that you could make giving to Portland Fellowship easier and in some ways, increase the amount of your support. Many of you will be asked to contribute through the United Way at your work place. Even though we don't appear in the list of their organizations, many people have taken advantage of the 'designated giving' portion of the program. Giving through UW is a simple way to give without having to remember each month.

Another great program that some have taken advantage of is matched giving. There are several corporations who match the giving of their employees. A few that we have received money from have been Starbucks, PGE and Nike. Though these companies may not necessarily agree with what we do as a ministry, we are a legitimate charity and cannot be discriminated against based on their political or social biases. If you have the chance, please look into seeing if your employer has a matching gift program. It will usually double the amount you give!

The truth is that all we have belongs to God. And the challenge to each of us is to invest in seeing His Kingdom come to earth. How we use the resources God gives us reflects on what it is we truly believe in.

APPRECIATION DINNER

For the second year in a row, the staff of Portland Fellowship honored their volunteers by offering them a elegant evening in appreciation for all they do throughout the year. Teachers, small group leaders, and members of the Board of Directors enjoyed a special meal prepared for them, and then were quizzed on their trivia knowledge to win wonderful prizes furnished by long time supporter, Eric Murfitt. A video was made which included several Taking Back Ground participants thanking them for their hard work and dedication. Again we want to thank our leadership team publicly for all they do.



This event would not have been possible without the enthusiastic contribution of a gifted kitchen staff. Thank you Pat Thompson (*Jason Thompson's mom, in case anyone is wondering*), John Blomberg (*who supplied the best ice cream one could ask for*), Drew Berryessa (*the humor in the kitchen*) and Sonja Mundt (*the nicest kitchen help a person could ask for*).

For those who have given to the Portland Fellowship during the 2001-2002 year, we will be sending tax receipts out to you shortly. We are extremely blessed by your support.

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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

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