



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Front-line Warriors Taking Back Ground teachers

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:5

In talking to a father whose son is currently based in Iraq, I asked, "Are you frightened for your son's safety?" He replied, "One moment I am fearful for him, the next minute I'm jealous of him. I have spent my whole life making money and doing good things, but I've never had the opportunity of helping set free oppressed men, women, and children from an evil dictator. To me that seems pretty significant!" I paused for a moment and realized how that statement applies not only for those fighting against evil men, but for those who fight against the Evil One. It is an honor and blessing to direct those in a spiritual war through the *Taking Back Ground* program here at Portland Fellowship. *Taking Back Ground* teachers don't use tanks, blackhawks, or hand-granades, but rather they put on the full armor of God and use the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Below we will hear directly from those on the front line. - Jason Thompson

I often say to those who know that I have been through the *Taking Back Ground* program that I wish my church experience were more like my time at Portland Fellowship. I love the freedom in worship, the practical biblical teaching and most importantly the transparency and humility found in each session. I have not found such a place in the churches I have attended.

When I started into the program myself more than six years ago, I so badly needed the grace, love and direction that I found at PF that I drove from Eugene - 220 miles round-trip - each Tuesday for four years. The leadership's encouragement, challenge and care helped me through very low and difficult times as I began my own path of obedience and understanding leaving a homosexual lifestyle. Knowing that I was walking through this with others with the same struggle made my own path clearer and not so lonely. I had been a pastor within a conservative denomination that preached against the sin of homosexuality, but like many other Christian settings provided no hope of escape for those willing to leave it behind. Seeing those who were walking with, and ahead, of me gave me hope that I could walk free.

I believe that I bring a unique perspective coming from a pastoral background when I approach those who are in the journey out. One man told me, with tears in his eyes, that he had despaired over a pastor ever being able to understand his own battle. God had given me a shepherd's heart for those who struggle with this and other difficult issues.

I have been very open with those I know inside and outside the church and it has allowed me to relate to a multitude of people with various issues, including those with same-sex attraction. Each week for the last three years I have been hosting a men's group for those who struggle with a variety of issues. I am also finishing a Masters in Counseling at Western Seminary to further equip and prepare me to assist fellow believers in the church. I am excited to see God use me and my own story of His power in my life as I teach and share in the *Taking Back Ground* program at Portland Fellowship. - Colin Halstead

In 1989, I joined my first "men's Bible study." This was my first exposure to men gathering together to freely worship God and to be real with one another. It was at this same time that I became exposed to the Promise Keepers Organization. The message they proclaimed struck a chord in my heart. It was like fuel poured on a simmering fire. God was calling us as men to assume the role that He had created us to fill. Doing this meant locking arms with one another, being vulnerable, and accountable. I took this message back to my church and formed a group of my own



Please pray for those teaching and leading groups in the *Taking Back Ground* program. They choose to give their time, energy, and that which they have received to others.

with these principles as a model. I spent the next 5 years leading a group of men with the sole purpose of seeing men become all that God wanted them to be. To be in the position of challenging men to look at hard issues in their lives and to be open and transparent with one another gave me tremendous satisfaction and joy.

It was seven years after God ignited this passion to see men "become whole" that I came face to face with my own struggle with issues of same-sex attraction. God orchestrated my landing on the steps of Portland Fellowship. Thankfully Phil Hobizal and Jason Thompson were there to receive my confession and to point me in the way of truth, healing and freedom from the chains of deception that had entangled me. I spent the next 1-1/2 years working through counseling and the *Taking Back Ground* Series. Throughout this time Phil, Jason, and a small group of "wounded healers" were faithful to remind me of the truth and to accept me despite the feelings I struggled with. As I came to grips with the deception of the enemy and was able to break the addictive cycle I had been in, I knew that I had a responsibility to pass on the truth that had been revealed to me.

So once again I took on the role of small group leader. This role was similar to that which I had been in 10 years earlier. Only now I was ministering to men who were completely broken and admittedly in desperate need of the Savior. I was put in the position of reminding them of the truth of God's word and pointing out the deception of the enemy. Asking hard questions and praying in faith for men who were broken and desperate for the Heavenly Father's touch was a privilege and an honor.

I long to one day see a ministry like Portland Fellowship operate under the umbrella of my own church and that of other churches here in the Portland area. The whole area of sexual and relational brokenness is grossly misunderstood in Christian churches. For this reason a ministry like Portland Fellowship continues to be desperately needed.

So often I am reminded of the saying - lest we forget whence we have come, "I was desperate, lost, shamed, and without a place to understand, support and encourage me to return to the Great Redeemer. Without Portland Fellowship I would have been just another casualty of spiritual warfare. But God intervened and redeemed that which the enemy had tried to use for my destruction. Just as Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus changed his life and passion, my own "encounter with God" has given me a passion to break the strongholds of the enemy in the lives of others and to see the captives set free! - *Craig Hamilton*

I have been a part of Portland Fellowship since September of 2000. This is my first year on the leadership team. As I walked out my years at Portland Fellowship as a participant, I was reaffirmed that I am a child of God. Not just in the general sense that we learn in Sunday school or in church sermons, but that I am literally a son of God. I lived the first 16 years of my life with the absence of a father. But through my time at PF, I began to see God as my Father. I knew that God had stepped in and fulfilled that absent roll.

I have a great passion for God's word and love to teach and

convey it to people - and not just within the meetings at Portland Fellowship. God has been faithful and has aided me in accomplishing a degree in Pastoral Studies, where my heart truly lies. My hopes and dreams are to be in full-time ministry one day. At Portland Fellowship, God is showing me so many things about what ministry truly is. And I love to teach God's word and look at *all* the details.

I know that through my experience, God has equipped me to be a part of the teaching staff at Portland Fellowship. It is my hope and prayer that my testimony will be a demonstration that God does and *will* heal us of all our brokenness. - *Joe*

One of the privileges I have as the Women's Ministry Director of Portland Fellowship is the opportunity to be involved in the *Taking Back Ground* program. I have served as a small group leader for 5 years now and continue to be blessed as I witness the process of change in the participant's lives.

I remember the optimism I felt when I came here the very first time. There are only two requirements for change: faithfulness and love of God to bring about conviction that leads us on the path of change and humble cooperation with the Holy Spirit. God's part is a given. And the fact that these individuals have come to Portland Fellowship to engage in the process of change completes the requirements needed to experience freedom. It has been my joy to help others along in this process and to see lives so radically changed. I continue to feel the same optimism I felt when I first walked in the door 5 years ago! What a blessing it is to partner with the Lord in this ministry. - *Rebecca Wade*



Bill Dolan leading worship for the Taking Back Ground program, Tuesday evenings.

Eleven years ago God got my attention. As I became a Christian and began to learn about who God is and who He made me to be, The Portland Fellowship provided the support and encouragement to be real and let God change me. Tuesday nights at the Fellowship House became a part of the rhythm of my week. First, as a participant, being challenged to trust and know Jesus, and then helping Phil with worship. It was a blessing that God redeemed the years I'd spent playing guitar by giving me a ministry purpose. I also led small groups and was privileged to see men's lives changed by the power of truth, trust and obedience.

I took some time off from PF over the years. The year I got married I spent Tuesday nights with my wife. Then I went to work for PF for a year. My Tuesday nights were again filled with worship and the joy of watching people's lives transformed. I took another break a year and a half ago when I started law school. Time is always scarce in law school but these last few weeks of playing worship again on Tuesday nights have not been an added stress. Instead, it's been refreshing.

Worship at *Taking Back Ground* is always sweet. There is such a sense of need. The men and women, going through such a profound season in their walk with the Lord, come with expectant hearts that cry out, "God, we need You!" I know God honors that attitude. It's a pleasure for me to worship at *Taking Back Ground* on Tuesdays. It's an honor to lead the group. My prayer is that I don't get in the way of the precious time God would have with His people. - *Bill Dolan*

a weekend of surrender reported by Tara Cooper

As Rebecca Wade and I began making preparations for our group's room at the retreat center on the Oregon coast, I noticed a real sense of joy filling the place. As we started to see the *Taking Back Ground* leaders and participants trickle in, the joy did not stop with us. From the initial crowd of people settling in, to the last few latecomers, laughter saturated the rooms and hallways. What a grand way to begin our weekend retreat!



Annual retreat center for TBG participants at Young Life's Breakaway lodge, Gearheart, OR

Amidst all of the laughter, and yes, even the tricky, well-thought-out pranks, God's hand was purposefully and powerfully moving the entire weekend. One of the most intense yet beautiful times was the session devoted to the act of surrendering. With gentle praise music playing, a soft candle-lit room, and a life-sized rugged cross at center stage, there was an environment created for the Holy Spirit to move among His people in amazing ways. During this time most of the *Taking Back Ground* participants, one by one, made their way forward to the cross, carrying with them a symbol of their struggle. Along with this

symbol, each of them shared heart wrenching testimonies of what this did to keep them in their struggle and what it meant to leave it at the foot of Jesus' cross. After laying down their symbol, *Taking Back Ground* leaders would lovingly come around the person, lay hands on them, anoint them with oil, and then pray. Prayers of thanksgiving, praise, and petitions rang forth as we acknowledged and supported their step of obedience, casting down their idols and cleaving to the living God.

Many of our precious brothers and sisters in Christ have recently committed to walk closer to Jesus and the path He has chosen for them. In doing so, we also realize that along with such vows and steps comes much resistance and attack. Please pray for their protection and perseverance as they continue to walk in freedom. Thank you for all of your love and support.

John, a participant in his final section of *Taking Back Ground* shares, *"For me, one of the greatest encouragements was being at the retreat with other participants from the year before and seeing the amazing things that God has done for them and myself in the last 12 months. Things that a year ago I dared not even hope for in my own life, people that I did not give much chance for completing their first year were flourishing and growing under the care of the Father were breaking new ground in their lives with regard to their true God-given identity. And there is so much more."*

-- *"Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You alone are my praise." Jeremiah 17:14*

ministry update

As most of you know, Portland Fellowship has undergone some significant changes in the past couple months with Phil Hobizal taking an extended leave of absence. Many have called, e-mailed, or stopped by to express their concern for Phil and his family. This has been a difficult change for Phil, but a much needed break. Phil is getting the time he needs with his wife and children, and his church has come alongside him through this process. Although he has left PF for now, his heart remains true to this ministry he was called to start 15 years ago.

Some of the letters we received were so encouraging, we wanted to share them with all of you. One supporter writes: *"I read the letter from Steve Donaldson the same day I was deeply discouraged about my own failure. I was so grateful for the compassion that came through his message. It helped me forgive myself and to not withdraw in shame. Thanks for your ministry. Thanks for the way you are supporting and loving Phil."*

Another supporter and friend for over 10 years writes, *"I very much appreciate the April update. I've been praying regularly for your ministry and will continue to do so. Please let all the staff and Phil know that I will stand alongside you as you continue to serve. I'm in awe of how God has prepared Portland Fellowship for a time like this! I pray God's continued blessing on you all."*

In one e-mail exchange there was also confusion about Phil's leave. After sharing in more detail Phil's God-honoring response to his needs, this gentleman responded: *"Thank you SO much for taking time to answer so powerfully, and so quickly. You can be sure I never intend to stop supporting PF. You are too important to the body of Christ. I appreciate PF's honesty with us about what is happening. That makes me even more willing to come on board with your vision, because you are not afraid to be real."*

There are others who have very good questions about the future of Portland Fellowship, the support Phil is receiving, and the overall attitude of the ministry.

Again, the Portland Fellowship staff, small group leaders, and board members thank you for your love and concern for Phil, his family, and the ministry of Portland Fellowship.

Annual Exodus Conference

Each summer, Exodus hosts the largest conference on the recovery of homosexuality in North America. The conference is designed not only for those who are affected by unwanted homosexuality, but also for the Church at large, mental health professionals and educators.

The 28th Annual Exodus Conference will be held July 21-26 at the First Presbyterian Church in beautiful downtown Orlando, Florida.

Speakers Include:

Mr. Alan Chambers
Ms. June Hunt
Mr. Mike Haley
Mr. Sy Rogers
Mrs. Janelle Hallman
Mr. Andy Comiskey
Mr. Joe Dallas
Dr. Kathy Koch

Drama by: Acts of Renewal

Worship by: Cede

Register at:

www.exodus-international.org

may-june calendar & services

may 5, june 2
Monthly Board Meeting
Fellowship House - 7 p.m.

may 6, 13, 20, 27
Taking Back Ground
Discipleship support program for men, women, and their spouses.

may 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
Leadership Training
May is the final month for the Upper Room Leadership Program.

may 9; june 13
Family & Friends Group
Please join us for encouragement, prayer, and support. 7 p.m.

may 26
Memorial Day
Office Closed

june 7-13
Leanne Payne Conference
Portland Fellowship is sending Women's Ministry Director, Rebecca Wade, to attend the Leanne Payne pastoral conference.
Wheaton, Illinois

june 3, 10, 17, 24
Open Meetings
Open to anyone interested in learning more about PF. 7 p.m.

june 21
Love Won Out
Focus on the Family presents a full day conference on the issue of homosexuality.
*New Hope Community Church
Clackamas, Oregon*

Additional updates:
www.portlandfellowship.com

Counseling, speaking, and youth support
Can be arranged through the office.

serving latin america

Portland Fellowship invited Oscar Galindo, the new Executive Director of Exodus Latin America to visit us. Oscar spent his time with Lidia Gutierrez who is finishing up her training in the Upper Room Leadership Program. Together, Oscar and Lidia are working on translating the *Taking Back Ground* material into Spanish.

"Some years ago I couldn't even imagine what God was going to do in my life. For many years I was deeply involved in homosexuality and in alcohol. After looking for 'Mr. Right' for more than 12 years, I realized that the gay lifestyle was a delusion and found myself immersed in alcoholism. Finally I found the Right Man I needed to meet: Jesus. I was very sick and depressed when Jesus found me and started to change my life."

"I had to believe there was a ministry that helps people to come out of homosexuality. After a time of searching, I found Exodus International. Over time, I began to translate teachings, testimonies and even some books into Spanish - for which there was a great need."

"Through many faithful people, God confirmed to me the call to work in this ministry. Last year I started a ministry in Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world. In February 2003, the Exodus Latin America board invited me to be the Executive Director. I know that this ministry is one God's heart and that He has heard the cries of His Latin American sons and daughters struggling with these issues. There are many barriers that need to be broken and we know that the best way to raise a ministry is on our knees before the Lord. "Please, join us in these efforts through your prayers and support. ¡Muchas gracias! ¡Dios te bendiga! (Thank you very much! God bless you!)"

love won out

Love Won Out is a dynamic one-day conference addressing, understanding and preventing homosexuality.

At the Love Won Out conference, you'll hear from experts on homosexuality, learn how to respond to the misinformation in the public school system, change public opinion and much more. But mostly, you'll be reminded of the power of love and how it will always

win out over fear, hate or ignorance. Logic and well-defended arguments have never won the heart. Such persuasive conversations on the truth of homosexuality have often intrigued minds, but it is the love of God that transforms hurting hearts.

This conference is sponsored by Focus on the Family. For more information go to www.lovewonout.com or call 1-800-A-Family.



Oscar Galindo visiting PF



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

Jason Thompson
Ministry Director

Rebecca Wade
Women's Ministry

Benjamin Brown
Administrative Assistant

Ron Perry
Volunteer Extraordinaire

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post office box 14841
portland, oregon 97293
telephone 503_235_6364
fax 503_235_3896
e-mail: pf@portlandfellowship.com
portlandfellowship.com