



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Can You Handle the Truth? by Laura Birdsong

*For those who have seen the movie 'A Few Good Men', Jack Nicholson's reply spoken from the courtroom witness stand, "You can't handle the truth!" is not quickly forgotten. We live in a world today where many question, "What is the Truth?"*

I have also asked that question in regards to my struggle with homosexuality. In fact, if life were like a courtroom, then homosexuality was the case that finally brought me to face God, whom I viewed only as my Judge. As I questioned God about this issue, the Bible (His Truth) confidently stood in the witness stand. As I cried out for explanations, the Bible patiently sat there speaking, "You want answers?". The following is an overview of my life, which grew from not being able to handle the Bible's answers spoken from that witness stand into one that has been apprehended by them.

At 22 years of age, when I finally acted on my homosexual desires, I thought that I'd found what seemed to be missing all of my life. "No wonder I had no interest in guys and that I've always felt different from most other girls." My first sexual encounter with a woman stirred passions in me that I had tried to deny for years but now at last were able to fully surface in that experience. Some time after that first experience, I eventually found myself heading to a popular gay bar in Florida. I'll admit I was more than a little nervous and uncomfortable at the outset, but soon the fears subsided and I felt at home among a community of people with whom I could identify. I had a small, close group of friends at that time who fully accepted me, and were even happy for me, once I built up enough courage to tell them that I was gay. I won't deny that I had some great times and met some beautiful women during those years, but the growing unrest in my soul became more than I could bear. I began to see through all of the laughter and the freedom that supposedly sprang from 'coming out' and 'accepting yourself' and discovered instead a lot of hurting people, many broken relationships, and even more partnerships based on neediness rather than genuine love. At this point many people say, as even I once did, "Heterosexual relationships are no different. If you look at them you will see the same things." Consider the following scenario in light of that response:



*A child is sitting on the playground trying to build a model airplane. No matter how hard she tries, she simply cannot put the parts together correctly and always ends up with something that doesn't resemble the picture on the box and certainly doesn't ever function properly. She's determined, however, to make it work so she won't leave that spot until she gets it right. At this point someone comes along and says, "Hey, I see what you're trying to build there but you're not doing it right. Will you let me show you the correct way to do that so you'll end up with the picture on the box and a model that can actually soar the heights as it should?" The child vehemently protests, "Leave me alone! I can do this however I want. I don't even need that stupid box anyway; this model will be whatever I want it to be! Look at the kid over there. He's not putting his model together right either so why are you bothering me?"*

In other words, homosexuality and heterosexuality are like two kids trying to build their own models of sexuality. They both experience difficulties in the process, but we can't find answers by simply looking at and comparing the labored results of each child. Yet we see this attempt in the finger pointing that goes on between the two "children" who seek to justify their actions to any onlookers by shifting the attention to the

Laura Birdsong will be participating in the 2004 2005 Upper Room Intern Program and co-leading in the Taking Back Ground Program.

failures of the other. The real problem arises when either child decides to push away the box of original design to which each of their works are 'accountable'. In the midst of all this, the Word of God sits on the witness stand, "Do you want answers?" The more I paid attention to this Witness, the more I realized that homosexuality, like the girl above, decided long ago to 'do her own thing' and make a model completely of her own design.

In keeping with the above scenario, while trying to 'make something of my life' I continually ran into problems. The word *problems*, actually, is an understatement because the things I fashioned with my hands have encompassed severe depression, suicidal thoughts, sexual relationships and encounters which I have regretted, a lot of pot smoking, alcohol drinking, experimentation with cocaine and LSD, failed relationships at many levels, and ultimately even a loss of my own sense of identity. I was one who tried to toss God's Word to the side because I knew that I could not live up to the design of life pictured and required in its pages. I read and understood God's judgment on my homosexual relationships. My failed attempts in the past were a constant reminder that I couldn't handle that kind of Truth. For a number of years I would cry out to God asking Him how He could condemn me for something which I could not change. Yet Jesus Christ, in His love and mercy, would occasionally 'drop in' on my life to tell me in various ways, "Laura, I can see clearly what you are trying to make there. I AM a Master Designer. In fact, I fashioned you and even if you don't think too much of yourself right now I'm here to tell you that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. You see judgment in My Word, and rightly so, but you were never expected to meet those standards on your own. You can't meet those standards on your own, Laura. The conviction you sense over your sin may seem like a cruel taskmaster, but in reality it is a loving guide that will lead you to Me if only you will come. You seek peace in so many ways, but true peace will be yours when you receive the forgiveness that only I can give you. As your Creator, My design is good and perfect. Don't push My Word away because you can't handle what it says to you. I have already paid the price for your failures with My life and even while you have rejected Me, I have continued to love and call out to you. My question remains for you, "Will you let Me in so that I can fulfill My Word in you?"

I continued to hold onto the notion that I could do things my way with just occasional coaching from Him every now and again. Sure, I wanted peace with Him, but I wrestled with that because I couldn't bear the thought of trying to live for Him while at the same time living with strong sexual desires that could never be satisfied. It took many years before my anger,

doubts, fears, frustrations and pride gave way to tears and a true cry for help in 1997.

I called on Your name, O LORD, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: "Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help" You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, "Do not fear!" (Lamentations 3:56)

I was finally willing to bend my knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, and I sought His forgiveness for my rebellion from His Word and for resisting the conviction of His Holy Spirit for so many years. It's as though God was waiting all along for this cry of admitted brokenness (repentance) because He answered in a powerful way and revealed to me in no uncertain terms that I was forgiven, truly loved by Him, and that He was my Father - not my Judge. Yes, indeed, I was apprehended by the Truth,

Jesus Christ, Whose inevitable execution of judgment on this world at one time only frightened me, but now Whose love, mercy, tenderness, and compassion only amaze me. I would be lying if I told you that it has been smooth sailing since that time. It has not been an easy path and I have experienced failure while on it. I am reminded, though, of a poem written by Robert Frost that has been one of my favorites even before I surrendered my life to Jesus, but which afterwards held even richer meaning for me:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both...

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Actually, over the past 7 years I have been growing in the realization that, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, **but Christ who lives in me**; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) Truly that is what *has made all the difference* as I am slowly learning to let go and allow Jesus to enable my spirit to 'soar the heights' as it should.

I'd like to share one final thought before I close. At some point in our lives, or sometimes at several points, we all have a major 'case' with God and His word...homosexuality happened to be one of mine. I recognize now that regardless of how I decide to handle God's Truth with any particular 'case', there will always come a time when His Truth will handle me at a very personal level. That handling can be done in mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God, or judgment and separation from Him. The choice is mine.

Thankfully, the Lord promises wisdom to those who ask. Therefore, I hope to always choose wisely.



Laura surrounded by others from the  
*Taking Back Ground Program*

## welcoming joanne to the pf staff

I have recently been given the position of Women's Ministry Coordinator here at Portland Fellowship, and would like to introduce myself. Let me start by telling you a little about what brought me here.

God has allowed me to go through a rather convoluted journey to get me to where I am today. The first part of this journey involved turning my back on God, doing whatever I darn well pleased, and experiencing the bitter consequences of my self-centered choices. The second part involved the healing journey of turning back to God and being willing to live His way, no matter how I felt or what happened.

The process of doing things His way has taken me through an interesting journey of growth and change. It has not been easy, but it has certainly been well worth it. Much of my healing journey began after I started attending Portland Fellowship's *Taking Back Ground* discipleship program. My gratitude for all God taught me here produced a strong desire to give back to others what He has given me.

I have been helping teach and lead a small group here for the past two years. God, in His grace and compassion, has used my past wrong choices and experiences to give me compassion and understanding into the lives of others. I know where they have been. Over the years, I have been impressed with the courage of those who come here to undergo this difficult but rewarding journey. The growth and healing I have seen in the lives of numerous men and women have truly illuminated the faithfulness and compassion of our heavenly Father.

As I continue to be obedient to God in the little things, He seems to be continuing to open up new opportunities for service in bigger things. I feel very honored and privileged to have been given this position as servant and supporter of the needs of women at Portland Fellowship. As I continue forward, I covet your prayers for wisdom, love and an increasing passion for Jesus Christ.



Joanne McBride is studying women's ministry at Multnomah Seminary

## the gospel according to daytime talk

Proverbs 14:12 states, 'There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death.' According to two of our culture's most "wise and insightful" television personalities, Oprah and Dr. Phil, the message could not be more clear.

On Wednesday May 12<sup>th</sup> Oprah had as a guest a father whose son wanted to live as a girl. The young son wanted to dress in pink and play with dolls and his mother endorsed the behavior. The dad was having a difficult time knowing how to react to his son's feelings. Oprah's advice was, 'If the child feels like a girl, then let him live as a girl.' The audience clapped in agreement with Oprah.

On Dr. Phil a man and his wife came seeking advice on how to heal their marriage after he had had an affair with a man. Both he and his wife loved each other and wanted to make their marriage work, but were unsure as to what they should do about his feelings. Dr. Phil's advice was to 'get a divorce and embrace your gay identity'. By the end of the show, the couple were in tears because ending the marriage was not an option for them, but they left with no real direction or hope.

What a testament to the spirit of our culture that feelings and behaviors determine our identity and we should embrace it without question or regard for the consequences! This is why your support of Portland Fellowship is so important. Each of the participants who come here have chosen to go against culture and chose instead the road of relational and sexual healing. This last term 15 people graduated from the *Taking Back Ground* program. It was a wonderful night of celebration and reflection.

As we watched each graduate testify to what God had done in his or her life over the last two years we can only wonder what their story would be if they had chosen to go with the wisdom of this world. We also wonder what the culture would be like if these men and women had the opportunity to share their stories on these popular shows.

We have taken the time to write Dr. Phil and Oprah to share with them the message of Portland Fellowship and Exodus related ministries. There has been no reply. Our heart goes out to the thousands of men and women who watch these shows and do not hear the life changing truth that freedom is possible and available to all.



**Dr. Phil Show**

5482 Wilshire Boulevard #1902  
Los Angeles, CA 90036



**Harpo Studios**

1058 West Washington  
Chicago, IL 60607



## july-august calendar & services

july 9; august 13

### Family & Friends Group

Support for family and friends with loved ones struggling with homosexuality. 7 p.m.

**July:** Special summer social

**August:** "Relinquishment"

(a discussion of a chapter from the book "Parents in Pain")

july 10

### Gay Pride Parade - Vancouver

Portland Fellowship will host a both. See story on the right.

july 6, 13, 20, 27

august 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

### Sy Rogers Video Series

We invite anyone interested in joining us throughout July and August to watch Sy's powerful series "Lessons Learned". Each evening will include a video teaching followed by group discussion. 7 p.m.

july 18-19

### Exodus' Directors Day

Jason will be joining other ministry directors from around the country for prayer and support.

july 20-25

### Exodus: Annual Conference

Jason and Jim Thompson will be attending. For registration information: [www.exodus.to](http://www.exodus.to)

august 1

### Trinity Fellowship

Jason Thompson and Pastor Chris Stuart will sharing to the congregation on how to lovingly address the issue of homosexuality. 9 & 11 am.

### Additional updates:

[www.portlandfellowship.com](http://www.portlandfellowship.com)

### Counseling, speaking, and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

## summer activities

Throughout the month of June, we offered an open group setting to which anyone could come and learn more about the work of Portland Fellowship. Open groups offer a range of people from openly gay men and women enquiring about what we do, to pastors, family members, students and participants of the TBG series. It always proves to be encouraging and helpful.



During the month of July and August we are offering the Sy Rogers Video series on Tuesday nights at 7 p.m. This is a dynamic series titled "Lessons Learned" We will watch a teaching and then discuss how the teaching applies to our personal life.

Some of the topics include: Realistic Expectations: *What Redemption does and does not do for you... (and why it takes time.)*; The Power of Forgiveness; Renewing the Mind; The Power of Relationships; What Works; Relapse Prevention.

If interested in joining us, please call the office to allow us to have a head count. Please invite family, friends, and personal supporters to this series.

## times of celebration

The end of May is always an exciting time around PF. It marks the end of the Taking Back Ground series for the season. This May, for 15 faithful men and women, it meant the completion of a two year commitment made by each to draw close to God and embrace the process of healing. It was evident that God had done much in all of their lives. For a few, this "two year commitment" had taken much longer, some as long as 15 years. Their words of exhortation to those still yet to complete the program were both powerful and heartfelt. As each participant came up, they received a certificate of completion and encouragement to continue their journey. The evening also held a time of fellowship, worship, and of course... food. As with every year, the end of the year potluck proved to once again show that people here at P.F. know how to celebrate!

In addition to the celebration for the participants, the leadership of Taking Back Ground had moments for reflection and celebration as well. Enjoying a wonderful time of fellowship and pizza, Jason bestowed on each leader an "award" of their own. Each of these "highly esteemed" awards reflected either characteristics or moments of each leader. Some of the awards presented were, "The Foot in Mouth Award", "The Overqualified Award" and "The Forgotten Award, Award". All joking aside, we love these men and women and highly value what they bring to the ministry here at P.F. We pray each of them has a refreshing summer season.



## 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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