



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

may / june, 2004 volume 9, number 3

An Unexpected Role by Jim Thompson

"So, whatcha do anyway?" That's a question that's bound to come up in any conversation between two American males before two minutes have gone by. It's probably one of the ways we "size up" each other. So what do I do anyway?

Well for three decades, I would usually answer that question, "I'm an Episcopal priest." I say *usually* because there are times when discretion prevails – such as when you've just buckled yourself into your seat for a cross-country flight and you'd rather not have this turn into a four-hour theological discussion!

So what do I do anyway? These days, my answer is carefully crafted: "I'm on the pastoral support staff of a Christian ministry that helps persons who desire to overcome same-sex attraction and establish new healthy relationships." Perhaps with a little practice, I can get than down to fewer words.

I'm amazed to find myself here at PF. Ever since my son Jason (PF's director) first became a participant of this ministry, my wife Pat and I have been supportive in whatever way we could. Later, as the Pastor of the Cathedral in Fresno, California, when a similar ministry needed a new home, I was overjoyed to welcome them onto the campus. And of course, being in a church that has become painfully divided on the issues of homosexuality, I've tried to stay on top of issues. But now to be actually working in a ministry such as this is a surprise.

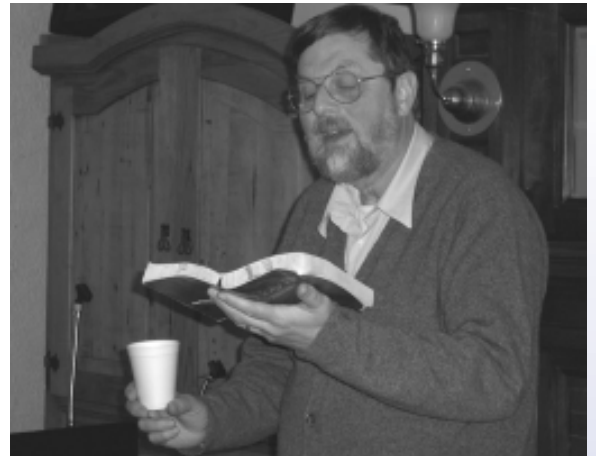
Things fell into place last fall when Jason needed someone to do teaching. I also agreed to be an assistant leader in a small group. Teaching, for me, was old hat; but sitting with a group of men who are bravely sharing their personal struggles was new territory. And while my struggles have been somewhat different than those faced by these guys, there has not been a single Tuesday night in which I haven't felt myself to be as much participant as leader.

The unforgettable night was the one that resulted from Jason and I deciding to co-teach the lesson on the "The Marred Image of the Father." We had met over lattes at Starbucks (the PF Annex) and laid out a basic outline for the evening. But otherwise it was to be unrehearsed. I was to talk about my growing up; he about his. Easily said; not so easily done.

When that night came, we sat and faced each other and did our best to tune out the fifty or sixty people in the *Taking Back Ground* audience. I started. I told of my being abandoned by my natural father, of a physically abusive stepfather, and of a loving and wise (but unfortunately alcoholic) grandfather who attempted to fill the gaps. I told of how difficult relationships were with my peers and of my sense of urgency that *my* kids would have none of this on *their* shoulders. That's what I shared. Except for the discomfort of re-surfacing some old wounds, it wasn't so bad. I had managed to forget about the audience, although I thought I heard some sobbing.

Then Jason spoke. "I have no memory whatsoever of my ever being loved, held, cared-for, or played with by you. My memory of you is this (and he made me hold a book up in front of my face)." I was dying. My jaw clenched and I felt tears coming to my eyes. I was trying to keep my mind from racing ahead to the story he might tell of his near-suicide. O God, how did this happen?

Then he did a most kind thing. He explained that he had been thinking about all this the night before. Not being able to sleep, he took out an old family photo album. He then showed everyone pictures of me holding,



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kissing, and playing with him and his brother. “I have to take responsibility for my own perceptions,” he said. But, of course, I need to take responsibility for my failures as well. Both of us have the work of allowing God to intervene in a cycle of abandonment, abuse and neglect that has probably gone on for generations.

In taking a few speaking engagements recently, and in talking with hurting parents, I have come to understand part of the reason God has me here. There’s plenty of people who want to hear from the *dad*. Of course, I’m always introduced as Jason’s Dad. But what dad isn’t delighted to have to bask in the glory of his son?

When I was asked to come onto the PF staff, there was the obvious concern about nepotism. But, as we came to rationalize, the evangelical world is very familiar with father-son teams. So how about a son-father team?

In the short run I’m here to help fill some gaps. I do office work, take some of the teaching at *Taking Back Ground*, pick up some counseling, and meet with the *Family & Friends* group. Because I’m a pastor (and I still have the little parish in Gresham), I’m always glad to talk to pastors who are trying to help their people deal with questions concerning homosexuality.

In the long run, I will take charge of the *Upper Room Intern Program*. This is exciting for me. I have been a part of mentoring programs a number of times. In fact (not to get on a soapbox), I believe mentoring, especially done in a setting that provides both community and one-on-one, is the church’s most natural and most effective means of preparing new leaders.

I know I shall be forever grateful for the mentors whom God brought into my life to teach and encourage me. For nine years, I worked for a wonderful Bishop – Matthew Paul Bigliardi – a brilliant, romantic, Italian (in an Anglican church!) who took me under his wing and taught me the ropes. Even today, two decades later, I catch myself doing as he did – whether dealing with a crisis, working through spiritual doldrums, or even in writing a newsletter article (!) – he is, in a way, right here beside me.

Our church was going through much controversy in those days – the ‘60s and ‘70s. Matthew didn’t have all the answers, but he showed me how to hold on to the truth when the foundations are being shaken. And for us Anglicans, and especially for us in the Episcopal Church in the United States, the shaking is so strong that we wonder if we won’t be left with rubble in the end. But Matthew would say – and did say – “Hold tight. The truth always, always emerges. God will bring things to light.”

The truth does prevail. I think that’s the energizing force by which the Lord empowers PF. People tell the truth. Not at one another — *with* one another; *for* one another. After the Spring Retreat, and particularly the Saturday night Surrender Ceremony, I was asked, “What do you as a pastor think about all this?” I

(again exercising discretion) answered without telling my heart. My heart was, “Why can’t this happen back in my church? If only we could be this honest with one another. If only we could always welcome *Truth*.”



Jim holding and loving his second son Jason, (2 months old).

So I pray and stand fast. It’s one of the advantages of being (as our prayer book says) “of riper years” that one can see that truth does prevail. But actually, I am enormously optimistic about the Church (if not some of the churches), for Christ Jesus is forming a powerful bond between believers that is rapidly overcoming all the old barriers of tradition, denomination and even geography.

A few years ago, I simply couldn’t have been here. Jason and I had taken divergent paths – he leaving the Episcopal Church – with my blessing –

and I becoming more and more steeped in the rich (but sometimes self-absorbing) liturgical life of an ancient tradition. Since most (not all) of those in PF’s programs are from non-liturgical churches, worship on Tuesday nights was at first bewildering to me. I just didn’t know the tunes. And every once in a while, while teaching, I would utter some ancient dictum known by everyone at *my* church, and see a room full of wrinkled brows. So I’m learning to speak Evangelical.

But these are superficial difficulties. When Christ gathers us for his vital work, all these barriers melt away. The most moving experience of this came when, during the Spring Retreat, Jason and I joined to lead the communion service (I would say *celebrate Eucharist*). What a natural and beautiful thing to be there at the Table of the Lord together!

We see this at PF as men and women come from all sorts of church backgrounds – Pentecostal, evangelical, house-church, liturgical and traditional – coming to be mere Christians, people surrendering to the healing power of the Father, revealed through Jesus.

I pray this for our interns – that they will see first-hand the power of the Gospel at work in this place. I hope they will see it me, also. There will be no way that I can, or would want to hide the evidence of God working in me. For no one who stands near this fire can fail to be warmed, and even, if necessary, be melted down. I might wear nametags saying “Pastor” or “Mentor,” but I will want them to know that I, too, am working out my salvation.

So what do I do? Things. But the most exciting thing I do is to watch God at work. He’s worked in my life to rescue me from deep despair; He has brought an unexpected joy into my life by making it possible for me to work in the same office with one of my sons (the other two will have to wait their turn!); and He has allowed all of us at PF to be part of something we could never, never do ourselves – heal the hearts of his precious sons and daughters. That’s what He does.

upper room program underway

It follows...that if Christians are disciples who make disciples, and an important part of the healing process is reaching out to others who need healing, then a successful ministry such as Portland Fellowship ought to teach others to reach out to the sexually broken through similar ministries.

The **Upper Room Intern Program** is Portland Fellowship's endeavor to prepare men and women to work in, or even begin a ministry to those seeking freedom from same-sex attraction. This September, five men and women will take up residence in Fellowship House (*and others may live nearby*), and begin a nine-month program of discipleship training for future ministry work. Applications are now being sought from across North America.

In the course of the nine-month program, the interns will pray together, take leadership roles in the *Taking Back Ground* program, meet weekly with mentors in specific skill areas, receive counseling and spiritual direction, and enjoy the camaraderie of the other interns and PF leaders.



Matt Lieberman

The weekly classes will cover such areas as teaching, small group leadership, fund-raising, community relations, and non-profit ministry administration. The program will be customized to meet the aspirations and abilities of each intern. The design also allows interns time to undertake concurrent studies in local colleges or seminaries.

The **Upper Room** program was created by PF's founder **Phil Hobizal** and is made possible through the generosity of the Murdock Foundation and the other donors who funded the renovation of the third story of Fellowship House in 2000. The facility provides five bedrooms and two baths. The residents will share a community kitchen, and will have a common room for study.

Matt Lieberman is the first intern accepted into the 2004-2005 Upper Room Intern Program. Matt, who comes from Wildwood, Missouri, has been waiting for more than a year for the re-start of the program. Matt, who is deaf, will present a special opportunity to PF to train someone for ministry to the Deaf Community.

Matt writes, "I believe that Portland Fellowship will help me to have the maturity, foundation, and wisdom ... to meet the needs of the Deaf Community... I am willing to make the sacrifices to do what the Lord wants in this much-needed ministry."

pf library now open!

Portland Fellowship has always had a small bookshelf that hosted different resources for individuals to checkout, but now we have a whole new library room. On the main floor of the Fellowship House was a butler's pantry that is now a beautiful new room. There are three doors attached to this small 5 by 6 space, two of which were old pocket doors that, for years, took muscle and patience to open. We have fixed both doors, repainted and carpeted the room giving it the feel of a real library.

There are many valuable resources available on God's purpose for sexuality, and specifically - a freedom from homosexuality. Our new library contains numerous books, videos, and tapes. The following are just some of the books:

Coming out of Homosexuality - Bob Davies

Called the nearest thing yet to an all-purpose book on overcoming homosexuality, this book is ideal for the Christian man or woman struggling with homosexuality who is just starting out on the journey toward healing.

Desires in Conflict - Joe Dalles

While this book is written directly to the person struggling with homosexuality, it is also a very helpful resource for friends, families and church members who seek to understand how they can assist the struggler.

Portraits of Freedom - Bob Davies

These stories are so much more than mere testimonies. They wrap around common themes of the healing of a broken past and being transformed by the power of God. This new resource is highly recommended for anyone interested in homosexuality: overcomers, family members, pastors and counselors. PF director, Jason Thompson is one of the fourteen chapters. (*Book is also available for purchase at the office.*)

Restoring Sexual Identity - Anne Paulk

Are you or someone you know struggling with same-sex attraction? Is lesbianism an inherited predisposition? Find answers to this and other critical questions. Women, their families and friends wrestling with this issue will find practical advice for healing and change. (*also available for purchase at the office.*)

The Map, an interactive CD ROM - Jason Thompson

This powerful resource was designed for young adults. Rental is available. See a demo and order at www.reachtruth.com.



may-june calendar & services

may 1
Neighborhood Church
Jason Thompson will be speaking at a men's breakfast. 7 a.m.

may 14; june 11
Family & Friends Group
Support for family and friends with loved ones struggling with homosexuality. 7 p.m.

may 16
Gladstone First Baptist
Jason Thompson will be speaking at a missions luncheon. 12:30 p.m.

may 17 & 18
Student Led: Homosexuality Awareness Week
Jason Thompson and TBG participant Duan Walker will be sharing their stories at Oregon State University.

may 4, 11, 18, 25
Leadership meeting 6 p.m.
Taking Back Ground
Discipleship group for men and women seeking freedom from unwanted same-sex attraction. 7 p.m.
Graduation Ceremony - May 25

may 6, 13, 20, 27
NW Praise the Lord
Jason Thompson, Jim Thompson, and Joanne McBride will conduct a live call in talk show. Thursday mornings in May. Local channel 24.

june 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
Open Group
Portland Fellowship invites anyone interested in learning more about the ministry, sharing their story, or simply listening to others to join us every Tuesday night in June at 7 p.m. All are welcome!

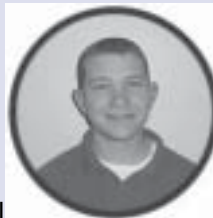
Additional updates:
www.portlandfellowship.com

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

new volunteer staff

As you know, things get busy around the PF office when TBG is in full swing, and there are always plenty of tasks that need to get done. That's why it is great to see an old familiar face around the office on Tuesdays.

Former Upper Room Intern and TBG alumnus Drew Berryessa started with us as volunteer staff member on April 6th and will be in every Tuesday assisting with whatever needs to be done. In addition Drew is also back with us Tuesday nights as a co-leader and partnering with Jennifer Meilke as a worship leader for TBG. *"It is so great to be back at PF!! I've missed it so much. God is always at work doing amazing things around here, and I am so excited to be part of it again!"* Welcome back Drew!



annual exodus conference

Each summer, Exodus hosts a Freedom conference on the subject of recovery from homosexuality. This dynamic conference is designed not only for those who are affected by unwanted homosexuality, but also for pastors, the church at large, mental health professionals and educators. The 29th annual Exodus Freedom Conference will be held July 20th-24th on the beautiful main campus of Azusa Pacific University in the greater Los Angeles area.

upper room 'wish list'

For the past several years, former intern, Kermit Rainman has generously shared his furniture and kitchen supplies with the ministry. He is soon to move as we welcome the 2004-05 interns to the Upper Room. His departure, as well as an already existing need, gives us the opportunity to put together a "wish list".

Would you consider purchasing or donating items that will help fill the rooms and allow for a comfortable environment for our future interns? Here is what we need:

- 3 Beds** - (single, double, or queen)
- 3 Night stands and lamps** - (a place for their Bibles)
- 3 Dressers** (two of the bedrooms are already furnished)
- 2 Love Seats or Small Couches** - (matching would be nice.)
- Framed (tasteful) Art** - (for the walls of the third floor)
- Kitchen Supplies** - (You name it, we probably need it.)
- Computer** - (for the interns, our 1994 system just died.)



Common area of the Upper Room. There are four bedrooms attached.



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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