



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Confused No More *by Matt Lieberman*

*I was born deaf* in New Jersey, two years later my family and I moved to Louisville, Kentucky in July, 1977. I had a great active childhood with my family during our nine years in Kentucky, though I didn't understand the communication taking place in the family. Dad was a busy, outgoing, successful businessman who traveled a lot. But he didn't know how say, "I love you," or be emotionally close. He showed his love by taking me out and buying me things. My mom was a religiously dominant, compassionate mother who was in charge of the family. Due to a divorce, my grandmother joined the family. She always gave me coffee and chocolates, and loved to laugh. My oldest brother was humble and had good manners. My second-born sister and I loved to play with hairstyles and wear fashions. My third-born brother, who is also deaf, loved sports and being "Mr. Cool". I'm the fourth-born, youngest son, who loved to climb trees and play.

When we lived in New Jersey, my deaf brother and I went to our first school, Summit Speech School from 1975 to 1977, where we first learned how to speak and listen. After moving to Kentucky, we went to the Louisville Deaf Oral School for speech therapy from 1978 to 1981. We went to many hearing schools and did sports activities together. Unlike my deaf brother, I hated all kinds of sports that had a fast moving ball. It scared me. So, the only sport in which I felt safe and enjoyed participating in was swimming. In Summer 1985, while at the swimming pool, I suddenly realized that I was feeling attracted to boys, not girls. I didn't understand why something was wrong with me. So, I told myself, that I would have a hard life in the future.

In August 1986, we had to move to St. Louis, Missouri, for me and my deaf brother to attend school at the St. Joseph Institute for the Deaf. This school also provided the speech therapy and lip-reading, which we call oralism. I didn't want to move, because I loved Kentucky, so I got angry at my father for the change. Already distant from him, I vowed never to be like him. I became very close and comfortable with my grandmother, mother and sister and the other girls, because I didn't have any real male role model. During my four years at the Institute, I hung around with girls all the time and began to develop my love for drama. At home, I would usually watch TV for hours, design art and do landscaping. I was unexpectedly exposed to some x-rated videotapes and pornography, which stirred up more gay feelings. When my deaf brother and I got into a fight, he called me a fag and a sissy. All these events confused and hurt me, leaving my mind continually bombarded with negative thoughts, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I like girls?" With my inner dialogue, I began to abuse myself mentally.

In 1990, I entered into a mainstream high school thinking I would do fine in the hearing environment with my oralism training. It was a terrible year because there were so many communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. I wanted to feel accepted, be recognized and have friendships with boys, but I was left out, rejected, and isolated from both hearing girls and guys. I was experiencing significant "Deafphobia" and I got tired of the superficial friendships. I tried to get involved in the hearing drama department, but to no avail. Quickly, I went into severe depression; I thought about killing myself. I hated myself for being deaf in this hearing world. I got so fed up that I demanded a change in my life.

Finally, in the summer of 1991, I went to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. for a Deaf drama program, "Young Scholarship Program." I found many deaf friends, learned Deaf Culture, and felt genuinely



*Matt waited an extra year for the Upper Room Intern Program to begin. We are glad he did!*

included. Immediately, I quit my hearing school and moved to the District of Columbia to attend the Model Secondary School for the Deaf that fall. I learned American Sign Language (ASL) which is a vital language for Deaf Culture and participated in many professional drama opportunities.

One of my dreams came true when I finally found a best guy friend at school. We trusted each other and did everything together. We felt safe to talk about our feelings and it later turned into a secret gay relationship. I did feel a little guilty about this relationship, but it was the answer to my feelings. In the past, I had a few girlfriends, but it was never serious. It felt great to “come out of the closet” and be accepted. I could be myself! I gained a completely new self-esteem and perspective in my gay and deaf identity.

When I visited St. Louis for my 1992 Christmas break, my father blurted out to me, “Get a girlfriend!” My parents had found out about my gay relationship and that I was busted for underage drinking at a gay bar in D.C. They tried to take me out of school, but I argued that they couldn’t take away my Deaf culture, community, friends, and my drama opportunities. I terrorized my parents in order to stay at the school. I feared losing my self-esteem and suffering again in a hearing school. In January 1994, my parents forced me to go to “ex-gay therapy” and church. While at church with two lesbian friends, feeling bored, I decided to flip through the Bible. I was stunned to find that I Corinthians 6:9-11 said that homosexuality was wrong. I justified that being gay was okay with God. I never wanted to change and kept lying to my parents that I was getting “better” so that they would leave me alone. After graduating from the Model Secondary School for the Deaf in June 1994, my boyfriend and I broke up for good because our gay relationship had become physical, verbal, and emotionally abusive.

I entered Gallaudet University for my freshman year in the fall of 1994. A girl I knew there had killed herself. This really shook me up and made me wonder what will happen to me after I die. I began zigzagging back and forth from homosexuality to God in a confused state. Feeling lonely in October 1994, I snuck off to a popular gay bar. While dancing drunk, I became uneasy as I felt God was watching me. I couldn’t ignore or hide from Him. I thought to myself, “What am I doing?” and was confused about homosexuality and God. So, in December 1994, I left Gallaudet without motivation for education. Back in St. Louis, I got two jobs to save money to move to Hollywood for my acting career.

In the summer of 1996, I was accepted to the professional summer drama school at the National Theatre of the Deaf. It was a wonderful learning experience. But, I was trying to ignore my gay desires and I didn’t feel that I was a changed person. While I was confused and vulnerable, I met a gay actor and model

from Hollywood. We started a relationship because I thought he was “Mr. Right.” He and I planned for me to move with him to California so I could pursue my dream in acting.

My life changed on September 21, 1996, while attending a Deaf Christian retreat in Oklahoma. I saw an ASL drama about Jesus by “The Master’s Hands” of Deaf Ministries Worldwide. God touched my heart deeply and I cried and asked Him to forgive me. My confusion about homosexuality and God suddenly became clear - I received a great sense of peace.

So instead of moving to Hollywood in August 1997, God led me to a non-denominational Evangelism Training Center, a Deaf Bible School, at Deaf Ministries Worldwide in Oklahoma. By October 1998, I was thrilled to join their “Master’s Hands” Deaf Christian traveling drama group. During this time, I didn’t share much about my freedom from homosexuality until July, 1999 when I went to



*Matt hiking for the first time in the Pacific Northwest with his fellow interns from Portland Fellowship.*

the Exodus International Conference for the in Chicago, Illinois. I was shocked to see over 1,000 hearing people there, many whom have left the gay and lesbian life for Jesus. I discovered about the root causes of homosexuality. I met many new friends and we talked about sexual issues openly. I was sad to realize that many Deaf people do not know about Exodus resources.

I graduated from the Deaf Bible School, in May 2000, with a Deaf Culture Ministry Certificate. Then I was hired to work at Deaf Ministries Worldwide as an evangelist, public relations representative, assistant office manager, and an actor performing with “The Master’s Hands.” I also attended the Exodus-affiliated First Stone Ministries for support group sessions and mentoring by Stephen Black for nearly three years. It was a great experience working in these ministries. In May 2003, I left Deaf Ministries Worldwide and First Stone Ministries because God wanted me to get more training.

Finally, God paved the way for me to come to Portland Fellowship. I am the first deaf person to go through this internship program. I am at peace as a single man doing God’s will. God wants me to share my life with Deaf people and present a clear understanding of the great message that freedom from homosexuality comes only through Jesus Christ. I am available to share about this freedom without forcing or condemning gay people to change.

Right now, God is working in my life daily by healing my root issues: my tendencies, attractions, feelings and emotions. It is not a life of “going back into the closet” or “suppressing homosexual desire,” but a life of joy and true freedom. Philippians 4:13 says, “Christ gives me the strength to face anything.” Before I was confused about Jesus and homosexuality, but now I am **Confused No More!**

*This September, PF lost a dear friend, Scott Mitchell, who served as our chairman of the board of directors. By sharing with you our letter to his wife Connie we hope to convey our deep respect and appreciation for Scott:*

Dear Connie:

The board, staff, and interns of Portland Fellowship have been filled with emotions over the past month as we have begun to come to terms with the loss of so great an advocate and friend of the ministry. We have spent time on numerous occasions lifting you and your entire family up to the faithful care of our Father God. Consolation rises up our hearts when we know that Scott is enjoying the fullness and purity of his lavish intimacy with our Savior – he knows face to face what is still seen through the glass dimly for us.

Scott imparted a legacy of life, encouragement, and wisdom to the entire fabric of PF. On more times than I can count, he spoke into my life and knew exactly how to pull back the confusion and point to the places of light and hope. His enthusiastic endorsement of the change that is possible in the homosexual's life has brought about the transformation of hundreds of lives.

His leadership of our board of directors maintained a continuity, weathering rough waters that would certainly have capsized other well-intentioned ministries. Everything that God called Scott to be involved with was embraced with great hope and joy in doing the desires of his Father's heart. His fearless confidence in God's ability to be faithful and true to His promises has been the light in the darkness that countless members of our community have seen as their beacon of help and salvation.

There is not enough room to recount all the specific ways that Scott blessed our lives. But his passion to see the work of PF flourish and expand will be the prayer on our lips and the pursuit of our hearts. He spurred us on in faithfulness because of his great love of God, his amazing love for each of us, and his commitment to this ministry as vital to the life of the church. We will honor the life work of your husband by being diligent by pressing forward in calling people to the great and precious hope found in Jesus Christ. Thank you for your desire to bless us with a portion of Scott's memorial fund. All funds will be used in direct fruition of the work he was so diligent and bravely committed.



With our Love and Prayers,

*Jason Thompson*

## the books are here!

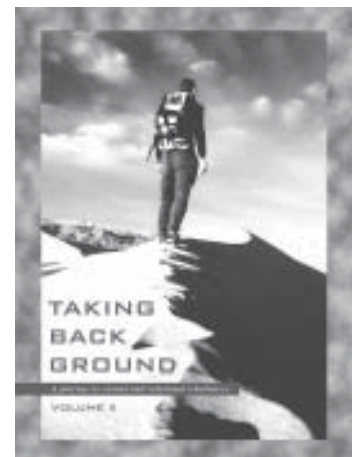
The long awaited published version of *Taking Back Ground* Year Two has arrived. Year One covers introductory and general information for the person wishing to overcome same-sex attraction. Year Two features more specific topics such as healthy boundaries, emotional dependency, addiction, narcissism, etc. To order your copy call the office or go online.

## a nice problem to have

*Taking Back Ground* is filled to capacity. This has required us to put people on hold for the past two weeks as more and more people seek freedom from homosexuality. It's a good problem to have, and we are well on our way to solving it the overwhelming need.

It is no problem to squeeze more people into our worship time – the more, the better. We also have ample room in our classrooms, since Year One and Year Two participants meet separately. It's with the small groups that the problem comes. We have groups in all our offices, meeting rooms, the basement – even the kitchen. And, of course, if you add too many to a small group, it isn't small anymore.

Most likely, we will solve the problem by having additional small groups meet in the late afternoon, before the other parts of the program. But as PF grows, we will need to consider prayerfully, how best to serve the increasing number of men and women who are seeking freedom and support.



*Taking Back Ground  
Volume 2*

## november - december calendar & services

November 2, 6, 16, 23, 30

### Taking Back Ground

Discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions

november 4, 11, 18

december 2, 9, 16

### Upper Room Interns

These two months of training will include: suicide prevention, boundaries in ministry, sexual misconduct safeguards.

november 12; december 10

### Family & Friends Group

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

november 6

### Valley View Evangelical

Jim will lead a workshop on compassion for the homosexual.

november 4

### A.W.A.R.E.

Jason will be educating a group of youth workers on the issue of "youth and homosexuality"

november 8

### Milwaulkie Baptist Church

Jim will meet with parents and concerned friends.

december 2

### Multnomah Bible

Jason will speak to the student body during their chapel service 10 a.m.

december 11

### Leadership Dinner

The staff will host a dinner for all our faithful leaders.

### Additional updates:

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

### Counseling, speaking, and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

## take up and read

Only a few years ago, it was difficult to find a book that helped the Christian with the subject of homosexuality; today many excellent books are available both for the struggler and for those who wish to understand the issues and support those seeking healing.

Some books, such as Bob Davies' *Portraits in Freedom*, include stories of people well known to us at PF. Others, such as Joe Dallas's *Desires in Conflict* or John White's *Parents in Pain* are often purchased following counseling appointments in Fellowship House.

PF maintains a lending library, an up-to-date collection of books on homosexuality and related subjects. The library is a pleasant place to sit and read, but books can be checked out as well.

Most of the commonly used books and pamphlets are relatively inexpensive and available through Regeneration Books, [www.regenbooks.org](http://www.regenbooks.org). Products produced by PF (*Taking Back Ground I & II*, *Do I have to be Gay?* and *The Map: a Journey to Freedom*) can be ordered directly from PF ([www.portlandfellowship.com](http://www.portlandfellowship.com)) as well as from Regeneration and other booksellers.

A special need at PF is funding for the expansion of our technical library used by staff and interns. The interns utilize a special reserved collection of textbooks and periodicals recommended by various instructors during the year. If you would care to help us build this library, please contact Jim.

There are many components to the healing process – teaching, support groups, prayer. To these we encourage the careful hearing of others' stories and the other information that comes by reading.

## supporting pf through nccf

There are many reasons why we as God's people choose to give back the re-



sources that He has entrusted to us. For many it is obedience; for others it is obligation. Either way, your support to Portland Fellowship directly changes lives in extraordinary ways. God is at work here and we are excited about your partnership.

One very faithful organization is Northwest Christian Community Foundation. They have supported us for over ten years and continues to do so. NCCF is designed to help large and small donors: those with cash gifts, those who want anonymity, or those with complicated property or estate planning issues. NCCF provides a simple system for helping you in supporting us.

If you are interested in investing through NCCF we encourage you to contact them for more information. Phone them at 503.675.9023 or learn more about them at [www.nccf4christ.org](http://www.nccf4christ.org). Thank you for investing in the work of Portland Fellowship.



## 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

### MINISTRY STAFF

**Jason Thompson**  
Executive Director

**Joanne McBride**  
Women's Ministry

**Jim Thompson**  
Pastoral Support

**Drew Berryessa**  
Ministry Assistant

**Benjamin Brown**  
Facilities and support

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post office box 14841  
portland, oregon 97293  
telephone 503.235.6364  
fax 503.235.3896

e-mail: [pf@portlandfellowship.com](mailto:pf@portlandfellowship.com)  
[portlandfellowship.com](http://portlandfellowship.com)

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