



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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When I heard the pain... *by Ben Burns*

I really had a hard time with gays and lesbians. Any time the conversation went towards homosexuality I was ready to give a well-reasoned and scathing defense of the biblical view of sex and sexuality. I saw the gay community as an enemy that was trying to destroy my society and my world.

I didn't always feel this way. At first I was rather ignorant of homosexuality. Probably because I didn't really know anyone who was out. There was a guy named Marty on my dorm floor in college that claimed to be gay, but no one believed him. We just thought it was his way of getting special attention. Besides Marty, I never really gave homosexuality much thought.

While still in college my ignorance of homosexuality turned more to shock. My junior year in college I began doing some work around the holidays for a flower shop that a friend of mine worked in. To my great surprise there were five gay men who worked in the shop. I remember one time my friend and I were quizzing each other for a Greek vocabulary exam. I'd say a Greek word and he'd give me the translation of it. One of the owners of the flower shop had come outside where we were working just as I said the Greek word, *homologeō* (pronounced, homo-lo-gay-o). He turned to me and said, "That's me!" I was floored. I'd never been around anyone who was really gay let alone so bold about it.

I continued to work at the flower shop for a whole year after college. I would try my hardest to love these guys as Jesus did, but I kept getting frustrated and disgusted with how they talked. They seemed to go out of their way to shock the evangelical Christian who was now a full-time employee. Two of the designers even claimed to be Christians. It shocked me to think how they were misleading their co-workers to think that Jesus had no problem with their choices.

A year later I moved to Seattle from Arizona, to start my new career in college ministry. I loved being outdoors, especially when the autumn leaves and spring blooms were so vivid. I remember walking through one part of the city enjoying God's creation when I realized I was in a part of town that was known for gay men looking to hook up. Suddenly, I began to feel afraid. Not that I would get mugged or worse, but that I would be propositioned. The thought of that just freaked me out.

I moved to Portland still not very aware of all that was brewing inside of me regarding homosexuality. One fall afternoon I was ministering at the Lewis and Clark College campus when I saw all these women dressed up playing croquet on the main lawn. I learned later that it was actually a group of gay men dressed in drag. It was their annual Drag Croquet event.

About that time all my unconscious feelings about homosexuality began to coalesce into some very focused anger. I was angry at the gay community's blatant disregard for the Bible and what God says about homosexuality. I was angry about feeling afraid to visit certain parts of my town. I was angry about their "in your face" political tactics that were very apparent during the Measure 9 campaign at that



Ben Burns serves on the PF Board. He also works with Campus Crusade in ministering to young adults making choices about their future.

time. And I was really angry that they were messing up my dream of raising a family some day in a wholesome society.

Around this time I heard about Portland Fellowship and invited a couple leaders to come to our campus meeting to help us think about Measure 9. I was surprised when their presentation was more about compassion for the same sex struggler than arguments to use on campus to pummel any gay rights assertions. The leaders shared their stories of being gay and lesbian and how Christ had changed their lives. Deep down I knew I should have this kind of attitude, but I was still angry with the gay community.

Some time later I was sitting in the student union at Lewis and Clark College waiting to meet a student. Outside the window I could see a student club called Homophile setting up an information table about homosexuality. I had been reading in Mark and decided to just pick up where I left off until my appointment arrived. I read in Mark 2 where Jesus went to Matthew's house for dinner.

"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the Law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and "sinners"'? On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but 'sinners.'"

I closed my eyes trying to imagine how this scene unfolded. I kept trying to picture who the Pharisees had in mind when they talked about "sinners". Was it the prostitutes or beggars who were always unclean in their minds? Was it drunkards and thieves who were visible in any town? Then I tried to think of who the Pharisees would have seen as "sinners" today. As I finished that thought I opened my eyes and looked directly at the Homophile table. Then it hit me: these are the "sinners" the Pharisees would have rejected.

My mind raced toward the Pharisees since I now saw my place in the story. I put myself in their shoes during the parable of the Good Samaritan and could hear Jesus putting a modern spin on it. The first passerby was a local pastor, the second passerby was a college campus minister and the third passerby who stopped to help the man was an activist from Queer Nation. The irony hit me the way it was supposed to: in the heart. I felt like I had a split personality: the good Christian minister who loved Jesus but did not want to go near homosexual "sinners".



Ben and his wife Janet have three beautiful children, Jack, Lauren, and Sydney

The Lord began helping me see the blackness of my own heart that avoided people made in His image. I was confronted with the notion that I cared more about my "Leave it to Beaver" vision of a wholesome culture for my future family than for people who were trapped in the sin of same sex attraction.

I began meeting more people who had been helped by Portland Fellowship. I came to find out that one of the guys in my Bible study at Lewis and Clark had been secretly attending PF meetings for a year. I was happy for him, but then felt sad that it took him a year to tell me. I wondered how hard it must have been for him to share this part of his life with me. Over time he shared more of his story and struggles with me. I felt incredibly privileged to be trusted with that information. My heart grew ten-fold like the Grinch's as I listened to the pain and sadness he was carrying.

I really liked PF's approach of ministering to the people who wanted freedom from their same sex struggles. With the help of Portland Fellowship our campus ministry was able to sponsor one of our best-attended outreaches on campus. Our students planned a seminar on the topic of whether it is possible to change one's sexual orientation. We had a panel that featured leaders from PF, a gay residence hall director, and a lesbian United Methodist minister. The room was packed and several hundred students heard testimonies of how Christ had changed the lives of those involved in Portland Fellowship.

Over the years my wife and I met more people from Portland Fellowship and were impressed at what the Lord was doing there. We saw the tremendous need in the church to have such a compassionate outreach to such hurting people, so we started supporting the ministry financially. When the opportunity to be on the board came up we felt it would be an incredible privilege to serve.

Just recently I received an end-of-the-year newsletter from a former student who was in a Bible study I lead. I hadn't heard from him in years. I raced through his letter for details on his life and came to a screeching halt as I read about his partner of five years. I immediately wrote him and told him how much I respected his courage to send me that letter. He wrote back and said he was surprised by my response. He thought I was going to come down on him. I smiled and thought of all that God had done in my life to help me become compassionate toward people struggling with same sex attraction. I answered that I would not have been so understanding if he had written me ten years ago.

meet the new upper room interns

Seven talented, energetic people have responded to God's call to spend one school year at Portland Fellowship. They will live in community in Fellowship House, study under some of Portland's finest teachers, and assist in PF's ministries. We are humbled by the array of gifts and experiences these folk will bring. Please welcome:



steve baliko

From Anchorage, Alaska, Steve, 32, writes, "I'm not sure I can do anything that isn't ministry." He served as a youth group leader, a Habitat for Humanity worker, full-time volunteer residential treatment counselor with emotionally disturbed boys, and a youth pastor. He has worked

as an office manager and substitute school teacher. A pastor writes, "Steve is a humble, growing man who causes those around him to grow as well."

laura birdsong

Since Laura, 33, is a Portland resident, her call to the *Upper Room* was discussed at the local Starbucks. She is one of the most remarkable graduates of *Taking Back Ground*. Her writing and speaking already communicates the transforming work of Jesus in her life: "Been there, done that, got the t-shirt, burned the t-shirt."

Her work experience includes service as a pharmacy technician in the Army. All of us who know Laura and her willingness to be used by the Lord expect her to raise the energy level of the program by a few mega-volts!



michael brown

One of our own, Michael, 22, is a student at Mount Hood Community College, working on a certificate in Outdoor Education. He comes recommended as a thoughtful leader, an active listener, and a hard "behind the scenes" worker. His philosophy of ministry: "To be stretched and humbled as I watch God transform lives around and through me." Michael has

already demonstrated his willingness to server by assisting with PF's spring retreat.

sean harlow

One of two interns from Missouri, Sean, 36, currently serves full-time on the staff of a local Lutheran Church. This after serving in the Marines, as a volunteer missionary to Taiwan, and as a recruiter for the missions board of his national church

denominational offices. His hope is obtain a Masters in Psychology with the intent of doing family counseling within the church for young people struggling with sexually related issues.



philip imamura

Philip, 33, is a fourth-generation Japanese Hawaiian resident. He earned a B.A., from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and is continuing his studies with the goal of starting a ministry that will bring the Gospel to the Gay Community in Hawaii, or possibly the Philippines. His pastor

writes, "I have had the privilege to serve alongside Philip on two short-term mission trips to the Philippines...at every opportunity he shared the testimony of his struggle and the love and grace of Christ...God used him to touch the hearts of those who have similar struggles."

joshua kilpatrick

When we responded to Joshua's pastor that he had been accepted into the program, the answer shot back was, "Good decision!" Josh, 27, is a software designer from Texas, who earned his B.S. in Computer Science at Mississippi State University. "His desire is to serve God with

all of his heart," writes his pastor. "He is very organized and one of his gifts is obviously administration. His caring nature and concern for the well being of others is very evident..."



matt lieberman

The other intern from the "Show-me" state (Missouri), Matt, 28, waited patiently (and profitably) for more than a year for the Upper Room program to restart. Matt's special vocation is to serve the Deaf Community with the good news of Jesus' healing power. Matt's ability to communicate in both the hearing and Deaf communities places him in a unique position to do this ministry. He has worked in Deaf Ministries Worldwide in Sulphur, Oklahoma, and made presentations at a number of conferences. Matt, a personable and sensitive communicator, also has gifts for art and drama.



september - october calendar & services

september 6

Welcome Interns

The staff will host a dinner for the seven interns arriving on this day,

september 7, 14, 21, 28

Leadership Training

Small group training for the TBG 2004-05 program. 7 p.m.

sept 9, 16, 23, 30

october 7, 14, 21, 28

Upper Room Interns

These two months of training will include: orientation, spiritual gifts, how adults learn, lesson planning, teaching, and small group dynamics.

sept 10; october 8

Family & Friends Group

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

september 13

Teleconference

For family members all around the country. Please join us at 7 p.m. PST. Call for registration and passcode.

september 19

Greater Portland Bible

Jason will be speaking to an evening church service about the ministry of Portland Fellowship. 5 p.m.

october 1

Open House

Please join us as we celebrate God's gift to us. 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

october 16

One-day Conference

Dr. John Aganon will present a message on homosexuality at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church.

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Counseling, speaking, and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

pf featured in willamette week

It is always a bit unsettling to be interviewed by the liberal media. So when Taylor Clark of the Willamette Week scheduled an interview with Jason, Drew and Joanne, there was a fair amount of uncertainty as to what the finished product would look like. Needless to say, Drew's larger than life face on the front cover of the paper was not expected. Neither, however, was the overall fair approach that Mr. Clark took in reporting the mission and ministry of Portland Fellowship. While the article had some misinformation, it did convey the message that through our Lord, people can and do overcome homosexuality.



Many asked us why we would open ourselves, and the ministry, to such a liberal paper, knowing that our message could be skewed, misconstrued or altered, and knowing that we may be personally attacked or ridiculed in the process. 1 Peter 3:13-16 reads:

"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this in gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

At PF we are eager to take any opportunity to share "the hope that we have." In response to the article, one former TBG participant wrote, "Great article in the WW. I pray for you all and support you! I love you guys and I thank you for helping me! My life is so much more joyful now. God has put me in a place to help other young women know that with God we can overcome all things."

As a result, four men contacted PF seeking freedom, having heard of PF for the first time in the WW.

teleconference for parents



As a way of supporting parents of those struggling with homosexuality, PF will offer monthly hour-long telephone conversations beginning Monday evening, September 13. There is no charge except for the long-distance toll.

For more information, or to register, please call Jim Thompson at 503-235-6364.

open house

On October 1, Portland Fellowship is opening Fellowship House to all our friends and supporters. Each room in the house will feature displays representing the various ministries of PF. Come meet the staff, our seven new interns, and sample some fine refreshments. 6:30 - 9:00 PM



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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