



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

july / august 2005 volume 10, number 4

## Taking the Time it Takes *by Steve Baliko*

Art I understand. I know what careful intervention it takes to restore an old painting from years of candle wax, fire soot, and greasy fingerprints. Restoration is the kind of work you attempt with a box of q-tips, a set of solvents, and months of magnifying patience.

You don't grab a rag off the workbench and commence scrubbing because the beauty beneath the filth is worth preserving and will be destroyed with brute force. You don't hose a canvas down in the back yard because the wrong pressure in the wrong spot will make problems that might never be fixed. A professional art conservator sets to do the work it takes, in the time it takes to do it.

Several years ago, while working through sexual addiction materials with a friend of mine, I found myself misunderstanding the idea of restoration. Most of my Christian life had been spent trying to strike a deal with God. I would tell him: "If you take away my same sex attractions and rip out all the pages of my history that are stained with those thoughts and actions...then I will be the best, most helpful follower you've ever seen." I didn't just want Jesus to wash my sins whiter than snow; I wanted Him to wash them away entirely. (A word to the wise: God doesn't make deals with humans. He knows us too well. Thankfully, He makes and keeps promises). Through our conversation, I was realizing how my concept of restoration was proportionately distorted after all these years of my exhausting pursuit of compromise. But, I was stuck in theoretical ideas of restoration. The facts weren't sinking in, I wasn't getting it; finally, my friend asked me to look the word up in the dictionary.

After rolling my eyes and reminding him that I was an English major in college, I hoisted the conveniently large dictionary off the coffee shop's shelf behind me and flipped to the R's. "Restoration," I read the definition using a sketchy British accent: "The act of restoring, renewing; a return of something to a former state of original, normal, or unimpaired condition, as a building, statue or painting." I began to trail off when I read the final words, closed the book, and looked at my friend. He and I sat there in silence for a few minutes while this simple but significant perspective began to sink in to my mind and heart. In the course of reading a short definition, I saw that God was asking me to join Him in the restoration of my life, doing the work His way and in His time...all for my good.

With a smile on his face, my friend pointed out that the object being restored was being returned to its former original condition. It seemed as if God was whispering in my ear, reminding me that His work was great work, His design of my mind, body, heart and soul was profoundly right - despite all of my life-long misgivings and insecurities. My life was not the sordid scrap heap that I had



*Steve and his Dad enjoying the vast beauty of Alaska in August 2004*

allowed myself believe. Sitting in that cafe, I began to see that Jesus wanted to labor along side me - cleaning off the mess from my past to reveal a breathtaking masterpiece: my life.

Even as I write these words I feel the ongoing struggling to keep this truth at the forefront of my mind. And yet my forgetfulness and weak faith does not render something false if God has declared it to be true. God knows the plans He has made for me, He has established good work for me to do before the beginning of time, He embraces me like a mother enraptured by the child at her breast. All of these truths indicate a good design made by a good God. But I severely doubted this for so many years of my life.

I grew up the oldest of three boys in a modest East coast Christian family. My parents loved us and loved the Lord but somewhere in the process of growing up I found myself drawn toward the shadows of same sex attraction. Sexuality was not an openly discussed subject in our home or our church, so when I began to notice guys in the high school locker room and to feel drawn to muscled men in catalogs, I felt I had nowhere to go with those feelings. I thought that the world of men had secrets it wasn't letting me in on, that somehow I wasn't man enough to know what everyone else surely knew. So I hid. I hid my fears and my thoughts, I hid my exploration of masturbation, I hid my guilt and shame. At the same time I redoubled my efforts to be thought of as a model young man. In tow with this endeavor came my constant vigilance to make sure no loose strings would be visible in my life that might indicate that I had any sort of homosexual inclinations. Unfortunately, I had no idea how much self-hatred and shame I was internalizing to keep up this exhausting habit. I didn't want to be me, but at the same time I was afraid to hint that I wanted to be anyone other than who I appeared to be. The longer this went on the more I wanted to escape the loneliness. In reality I knew I wasn't alone since I had accepted Jesus into my life at age six. But the more I pursued my own desires the more I relegated Him to the corner like a nice houseplant rather than inviting Him to be the traveling companion I needed.

In the years following college, fantasies turned to a random diet of pornography, setting deep hooks in my heart and mind. On numerous occasions I found myself on the phone with a guy who wanted me to come over and fulfill the things we had been chatting about. Each time I managed to back away from pitching myself headlong over that edge, but it was always

with a mixed sense of gratitude for God's help and shame from my own illicit desires.

G.K. Chesterton sums this insanity up well in his short book about Saint Francis of Assisi: "The moment that sex ceases to be a servant it becomes a tyrant." My sexual desires ran rough shod over me at every turn. I was mad at God and mad at myself for the sinful choices I made time and time again. I don't even think I had a concept of sexual desire ever being a good servant because I had given it the reigns so early in my life. Finally, in 1998 the craziness surfaced and I was forced to face my struggles with pornography and masturbation after losing a job as a youth pastor. The failure in that capacity felt like a cold, stone sweater - far too heavy for me to lift off my own shoulders.

Eventually, I was tired enough to seek out the help of other men who were also working through their own sexual addictions. On a weekly basis I was finding hope and tools for living that didn't solve all my struggles in one fell swoop, but they gave me perspective and joy that had been dormant for years. During this era of my life, the conversation about restoration occurred and God launched my understanding of His grace and truth into a new and undiscovered country. I don't do well with unknown things. My sexual struggles attest to the fact that I tend to prefer something perverse and known to something good and uncertain. The battle has been, and continues to be, intense at the times of the greatest discoveries and insights. Thankfully these are also the times of precious intimacy with God and deepening wells of hope.

My life to the present has been a season of learning (and forgetting and remembering again) the lay of the land and trusting that Jesus is right next to me even when all the lights go out. Many brothers and sisters, especially this year at Portland Fellowship, have helped chisel away the weight on my shoulders and God has been merciful in teaching me what He means about His yoke being light and easy. His plans may feel constricting, but they are a far better fit than the baggage of my own selfishness. No pages have been ripped out of my book and not a word of my story has been washed away. Certainly, history is written in permanent ink. And now facing these realities, I am immensely grateful that God has written the words Grace, Love, Mercy, Forgiveness, Truth, and Testimony over the top of every page I planned to burn. There is nothing in my life or yours that cannot be restored by the creative and powerful hand of God. I am in awe of His persistent kindness.



## beyond expectations: reflections on this years upper room



### joshua kilpatrick

The more clear my expectations, the more certain I am to be surprised. I never put it into words, but I left my work and life in Dallas hoping to figure out what to do with my future. God was not satisfied with such a small goal. This year has challenged most of my ideas about who I am and how I understand my value and personality. I think

I expected to build a network and score new opportunities for my life; instead, God, circumstances, and the PF staff offered me an intrapersonal overhaul. I'm leaving here with a better foundation on which to build. The idea that there's some "magic" solution for my life is gone. I see my strengths and many of my weaknesses. In both, I feel the Lord conferring power and maturity on me - power and maturity that allows me to make wise choices in my life and pursue what is good in the everyday.



### matt lieberman

Being the first Deaf person ever in the Upper Room Intern Program, the challenging part was being alone in a hearing ministry. For the past 8 years, I had been working in a variety of Deaf ministries, where communication was a lot easier. But, I definitely have no regrets for being here. I have been so amazed at how

everyone at PF treats me with love, respect and maturity. It is a miracle that the Lord provided me with American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for the sessions here; without them, I would not have understood much at all. PF offers a range of programs and I am learning a lot and getting my questions answered. Additionally, I have been able to practice and grow in my own life with regard to boundaries. I am thrilled with the chance to stay here for another year of the internship, I feel that God wants me to get more training and develop new materials to help the Deaf community. Also, I love the culture and the city of Portland!



### philip imamura

This past year was awesome. Many of the things I expected didn't materialized, but other blessings came unexpectedly. I did accomplish my two goals for the Upperroom Internship. One is healing awareness for myself — as there is no program in Hawaii.

The other was learning and experiencing what a program like *Taking Back Ground* can do in the lives of people. I am excited to take my experiences back to my home church. My heart goes out to the dedicated staff, fellow interns, my small group, the leaders and participants of TBG, churches that I shared with, and finally the parents in PF's Family and Friends Group. I will miss you all — come and visit me in Hawaii.



### michael brown

For this being probably the most difficult year of my life, I would also have to say it was the best year. God knew what he was doing when he put me on the attendance sheet. He was able to teach me things and bless me in ways I never thought possible. Yet, so many times when my Heavenly

Father wants to teach me something, it is because I'm doing something I ought not be doing, or just the opposite, not doing something I should be. That can make it difficult and painful to learn. On the flip-side, the relationships God has blessed me with and the information and knowledge I have aquired is great. I feel much more equipped for what the Lord has in store for my future.



### laura birdsong

Jesus describes the kingdom of God by telling us "a man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he doesn't know how. All by itself the soil produces grain - first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."

While the Upper Room internship has provided excellent leadership, thorough instruction, and hands-on ministry training, it has been so much more than a *program* for me. It has been a time in which seeds of relationship, community living, honest communication, and most importantly God's love and grace through the staff and other interns have been planted deep in the soil of my heart. I consider myself blessed to have been a part of this year's internship and I trust my Lord to bring forth a harvest from all that I have received that will bless others for years to come. Thank you, Portland Fellowship, for being a part of God's Kingdom work.



### steve baliko

God has orchestrated this year from start to finish. I had no idea that I would be so welcomed into this community of grace, truth, and instruction. No season in the past can compare to the level of intensity and growth I have experienced during the internship. Coming from Alaska, where there are no ministries for

those dealing with same sex attraction, I had no idea what to expect...and I certainly didn't expect the overwhelming blessings and challenges that I received. Every aspect of life in the PF community was used by God to shape, heal, comfort, unsettle, and redeem my life. What a wild and wonderful ride. I am eternally grateful to God for giving me the privilege of spending the past nine months knowing Him through the tools and lessons afforded by the Upper Room Internship.

## july - august calendar & services

july 11

### Board Meeting

Monthly meeting of our Board of Directors. 7 p.m. Fellowship House

july 5, 12, 19, 26

aug 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

### Summer Series

Steve Baliko will be leading the men as they explore an 8-week "Wild at Heart" DVD series. Discussions will challenge the way men have settled for a life less than God's great adventure and what we can do about it.

For the women: Catherine Chapman and Laura Birdsong will be facilitating an 8-week discussion using the book "Captivating" by Stasi Eldredge. She writes "Your heart matters more than anything else in all creation..."

**Please call the office to indicate your commitment to attend.**

july 8, aug 12

### Family & Friends Group

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

july 19-23

### Exodus Conference

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

### Are you interested?

If you are interested in having a staff member or intern speak at your church, youth group, college, or fellowship group, contact the PF office.

### Additional updates:

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

### Counseling and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

## beyond expectations: *(continued from page 3)*



### sean p harlow

It is interesting to me how my perspective of time and God's perspective of time, tend to be on the opposite ends of the spectrum. The Lord had me hold off for an entire year after being accepted to the URIP Program. During that stressful, anxious time, I was able to go through the first year of TBG which really allowed me to learn more about my-

self, the Lord and His plan for my life. I really did not realize just how much living and learning I had to do before moving on. With one year of experience, I was much more prepared for this intense and amazing internship. This whole process truly helped me to build and strengthen my trust in the Lord and to put my faith in his good and gracious plan. The URIP program is one of the most nurturing experiences I have had in this short life of mine. I feel much more equipped and confident to do the Lord's ministry, whether for a ministry dealing with same sex attraction or even within my own church.

The relationships that I built through Portland Fellowship's intern program have had one of the most profound positive effects on me and have helped spur me on through this awesome adventure of life that God has given me.

Thank you Lord for having me wait! Thank you PF for an amazing growing and learning experience. To God be the Glory

## prayer and praise

Please pray for our staff as we seek time to reflect, rest and be renewed this summer.

Please pray that the Lord would continue to provide for our needs financially as we continue to serve those He brings us.

Please pray for our new interns, that the Lord would continue to open doors and provide their needs as they prepare to join us this Fall.

Please pray for us as a staff, that we would be sensitive to God's leading as we begin to structure and plan for our upcoming programs.



**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

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