



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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A Holy Waiting Room by Jim Thompson, with Joshua Kilpatrick

Whatever training in counseling we may have received, there are moments for which we are totally unprepared. Such a moment came years ago as I began the first meeting with the father of a gay son. He opened by saying, "I would rather have heard my son had committed suicide than to hear this."

The man had no way to know how deeply his words burnt into my brain. In order to control my reaction, I squeezed the underside of my chair so hard that my fingers hurt. The memory of my own son's near-suicide flashed through my mind. Over the years, I had heard my son, Jason, tell numerous audiences of his early struggle with same-sex attraction. I have now heard that narrative so many times I could recite it myself, though it does not get easier to hear. But when he comes to the part about the night he was on his motorcycle and was thinking that maybe he would...well that part I may never be able to bear.

The dad sitting across the room from me was oblivious to the wildfire he had lit in my mind. I wanted to scream at him, "You have no idea!" But (by God's help) I was stopped by something I saw deep within him: his deep pain. This was a man in profound distress. Before this, he assumed he had been a good dad. His other kids were okay; so what went wrong with this one? He felt embarrassed by his son's effeminacy. He sensed that his whole family had been compromised by this one son who had chosen to defy their deeply held values. And he was a man who had no language for saying to another man, "I hurt; God, I hurt."

At the center of Portland Fellowship's mission is our outreach to those who wish to be free from unwanted same-sex attraction. God has given us amazing resources to do this work – skilled staff and volunteer leaders, good program materials, a marvelous facility, and countless supporters who give faithfully and pray incessantly. Helping the homosexual struggler is Job One.

But these resources allow us to do other things as well – not less important things, but additional ways by which the primary healing experiences in this place can be extended to others. We have an HIV-AIDS group, a wives' group, and a residential intern program. And we meet with parents and other family members.

Many are parents who come in for personal counseling. They may have just discovered that their college freshman son has come out, or that their daughter has moved out – and in with an older woman. Parents have driven or flown over a thousand miles to talk to us. They have called from the East Coast or outside the country. They're confused, often desperate for answers, and they hurt bad.

Some find their way to our monthly Family & Friends Group. It is a great privilege for me to be part of this gathering. Sometimes we are a handful; other times we number several dozen. Some will be new to the group — parents who have learned of their son or daughter's disclosure perhaps that very week. Others have lived for years



with this reality in their family. Some are angry (at the gay community, the lover, maybe at God); others are weary; some don't know what they feel.

We form a circle, say who we are, pray, and start talking. On some occasions we have a speaker. John Paulk has come, as has his wife Anne. Sy Rogers has spoken twice. They have blessed us. But mostly we just talk to each other. We share stories. We struggle with questions (Do I invite my daughter's partner to Christmas dinner?). We encourage one another, challenge one another, some bringing years of experience to the discussion.

PF's is not the only Christian Family & Friends group in the Pacific Northwest. I have had the privilege of meeting with others. A long-range goal of PF is to help churches foster such groups, especially in cities lacking one. The pastor who will give encouragement to such a ministry will see Jesus' love shared in a compelling way.

But expect much pain. That needs to be said. When a Christian mom or dad is confronted with a son or daughter's homosexuality (or by chance discovers it), a jarring collision takes place between parental love and deeply-held religious beliefs. Fear sets in. What about sexually-transmitted disease? Can suicide happen? Grief follows. Will I be shut out of my child's life? Will I have grandchildren? Dreams die.

Then comes self-blame. Where did I go wrong? Why didn't I see what was going on? Couldn't I have done something? In some cases, guilt about failed marriages, or suspicions about sexual abuse arise. I hurt for the dads. When a father starts reading the literature on the causes of same-sex attraction, he gets it in the neck. You find yourself in the list: failing to bond; being distracted from the parental task; being emotionally absent. Moms, too, often have vague feelings of failure, and with all the powers of hindsight, see piles of mistakes.

And all the parents (at least the parents of adult children) are parked in the dilemma: what can I do now? Is it too late? How do I face this new reality? Do I change my convictions? Do I make one last push at "fixing" things? Or must I somehow just get over it and move on?

Some of our best meetings occur when one of our Upper Room interns sits in with us to share his or her story. Recently, Joshua Kirkpatrick came, bringing with him an audio piece he had prepared to serve as a discussion starter. It begins with Josh interviewing a mother whose son who is gay. Terri, the mother, had her suspicions of her son's homosexual relationship confirmed by eavesdropping. This put her in an untenable situation, and revealed to her the fact that his was a childhood she had observed

but had clearly failed to understand. Her reaction was to confront her son. She delivered an ultimatum. He left home.

These were her hardest days — being separated from her son — for they had always had a close relationship. She turned to her pastor, but found him unhelpful. He simply said, "He's made a bad choice; he'll just need to repent." Then, one night at 4 a.m., she got a call from her son's partner saying that he feared her son was going to commit suicide. Terri reneged on her ultimatum and allowed her son to return home.

She now had to face the truth: she was the Christian mother of a gay son. Her fear of rejection caused her to shy away from friends. She began to drink heavily. Her involvement in church all but came to a halt. She felt completely alone. God had fallen silent in her life. It seemed the weight of it all might crush her.

Terri's healing process began when she heard the voice of God tell her to keep her eyes on Him. Over time she found the strength to regain a relationship with her son. Paradoxically, the very thing that had put a wedge between them — her faith — now bridged this painful gulf.

Terri's son is still gay. But Terri has now overcome her fear of rejection and has formed new relationships with Christians. Today she works in an Exodus ministry, helping others in their struggles

with homosexuality as she herself awaits the day God brings healing to her son.



Joshua discusses his audio piece with Jim

In his audio piece, Josh calls this a *holy waiting room*. I believe that's exactly right. It's *holy* because God meets us there — in our pain. He doesn't merely take away the hurt. Indeed, sometimes — in this waiting room — deeper hurts have to be revealed. Parents (and other family members) need to come to terms with their own role in the development of their child's sexuality. The complex, multi-layered process of healing is likely to uncover old wounds in the hearts of the parents. And perhaps the deepest pain of all comes when parents — freed of all illusion and denial — come to realize the depth of the suffering their son or daughter has endured.

We are not to be afraid of pain. God did not intend for our wounds to have such power over us. He has shown us the way *through* pain. He has shown us His child, Jesus, and in Him has shown us the power of love over all that the Enemy might attempt for the destruction of our families.

Each month, as parents gather here at Portland Fellowship for prayer and support, I am amazed and deeply humbled as I watch God move among us. These will never be routine meetings. Even if the circle should be comprised of the same familiar faces, and the questions and dilemmas all too familiar, something of enormous consequence is happening. People are waiting in holy faith. And God is making haste through eternity to heal broken hearts — to *turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents*. For this He has come.

the cry of a womans heart by Catherine Chapman

“All I want is to be known and loved unconditionally.” Isn’t the cry of our hearts? We all deeply desire a love that will stand the test of time – that will carry us when life is beyond our ability to cope. As women, we want at least one person in our life who will never leave. Is there something wrong with this desire? No way. Women are created for deep, intimate relationships and our capacity to love through thick and thin is unmatched in the earthly realm.

So what’s wrong? In my short time working at Portland Fellowship, almost daily I hear from women that they are lonely, isolated, and no one understands, no one listens – *really* listens to them without judgment. This is sad to hear because I imagine that if Christ were on the earth today, he would have dinner at their home – and He would listen and He would love them unconditionally. And what would be the result of this unexpected, undeserved love? They would turn away from all the distractions of their lives, they would leave their broken relationships, and they would follow Christ whole-heartedly. We all would, if only we could sit with Him for one meal.

The women who are participants in our Taking Back Ground discipleship program have chosen a very difficult path. They desire to follow Christ at any cost, yet in the process must give up the only relationships in their lives where they have felt unconditionally loved and known. Many would attest that they have gone to hell and back in their search for love, but what now? If they have given up all they known – given up their identity as a lesbian, given up their circle of friends, and for many, even given up their homes, what now?

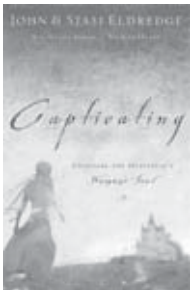
The answer is twofold. First and foremost, Christ is the answer to the cry of our heart for deep, intimate relationship. He is the only one who knows us inside and out. As our creator, He knows our deepest need and understands us even better than we understand ourselves. He is also the only person in our lives who will *never, ever* leave. Romans 8:35 states that nothing will separate us from the love of God. Nothing. Nothing we’ve said. Nothing that’s happened to us. Nothing we’ve done. He *simply loves us*. That’s almost impossible to comprehend with our finite minds. Yet it is in the knowledge of Christ’s unconditional love and His relentless pursuit of our heart that we are saved, rescued, and ultimately healed.

The second aspect of healing lies in building healthy relationships in the Christian community. This is a very scary thought for our women as many have been deeply wounded within the church by those who did not know how to “handle” their particular sin and pain. Many continue to feel lost and isolated within their church families. And again I ask, what would Christ do if He were here on the earth today? Would he try to fix them? Well, sometimes He did miraculously heal, but what about all those He passed by? Did He love them less? No, their path to Christ and healing just looked different. My guess is that Christ would walk alongside and unconditionally love, and listen. He would cry with the women as they grieve the loss of relationships. He would encourage them to keep going. He would remind them who they are – women deeply loved by Him.

My question for you, dear family of Christ, is this – Are you willing to do the same? Are you willing to walk alongside, unconditionally love, and listen to women in pain? Are you willing to be Christ to a woman in need? My desire is that, starting next fall, I can pair up women in our program with Christian women who would be willing to come alongside and listen, to model healthy relating, and to stand in the gap for women as they transition to a completely new way of life. You don’t need to “have all the answers” or have a lot of time for that matter (between 2-4 hours per month), but you would need a compassionate, humble heart, a listening ear, good relational boundaries, and a deep desire to follow Christ. I will provide a training session in September so please pray, then call me at 503-235-6364, if you feel the Lord nudging you to follow Him in this way. God bless you as you seek Him with your whole heart.



captivating: unveiling the mystery of a woman’s soul : a pf book review



John and Stasi Eldredge

What are the deepest desires of a little girl’s heart? To be deeply loved, to play an irreplaceable role in life, and to know she is beautiful. Yet because of a constant assault on her heart by the enemy of her soul, she grows up feeling unloved, unworthy, and many times, ugly. Her feminine heart is hardened and she begins striving for love, power, position, and control.

Captivating is the story of God’s passionate pursuit of a woman’s heart. He longs to ransom, restore, and release her to be a valiant and beautiful woman whose life changes the world. What *Wild at Heart* did for men, *Captivating* will do for women. This book is a must-read for women who struggle with distorted views of femininity.

may - june calendar & services

may 2, june 6

Board Meeting

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

may 26

Upper Room Celebration

A time of reflection and celebration for the interns and staff as the internship comes to an end.

may 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

Taking Back Ground

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

may 13, june 10

Family & Friends Group

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

july 19-23

Exodus: Annual Conference

Jason Thompson will be attending. For registration information: www.exodus.to

june 7, 14, 21, 28

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!

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

Counseling and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

reading for people who care

A number of excellent books are available for parents, family members and friends of persons affected by homosexuality. Some of these are available at our monthly meetings of the *Family & Friends* group. All can be obtained through Regeneration Books at affordable prices www.Regenbooks.org or write P. O. Box 9830, Baltimore, MD 21284-9830 – phone (410) 661-0284.

SOMEONE I LOVE IS GAY

by Anita Worthen & Bob Davies

Finding out that a child, spouse, relative or friend is homosexual can be an unwelcome surprise. You're hit with a complex combination of emotions – grief, shame, fear, guilt. You are flooded with questions ranging from why to what's next. You wonder what a biblical response should be. Here are answers for family members and friends in a simple, easy-to-understand presentation. This is a classic book by experts in the field.

PARENTS IN PAIN

by John White

This book speaks to the broader issues of parents whose children have severe problems such as alcoholism, criminal history or even suicide. *Parents in Pain* can be used as a resource for church groups wishing to provide support to these parents, including those whose children are affected by homosexuality.

WHERE DOES A MOTHER GO TO RESIGN?

by Barbara Johnson

In addition to being a well-known author, Barbara is a much sought-after speaker and humorist. She has dealt with many problems in her own life, including anxiety for a son who disappeared into the gay lifestyle for over eleven years. This book lifts that spirit without promising fairy tale answers.

prayer and praise

For our second-year *Taking Back Ground* participants as they approach the end of the program, for God to bring to completion the healing He has appointed for this time in their lives.

For those preparing to come to next year's *Upper Room* program, and for those still in the discernment or application process.

In thanksgiving for each other – participants, supports, leaders, interns, staff. God has given us to each other to reveal his grace and glory in our midst.

For our *Upper Room* interns as they consider employment and ministry opportunities following completion of the program next month.



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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