



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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A Marriage Restored by Tom and Karen Sherwood

Tom and Karen Sherwood are two of our beloved small group leaders here at Portland Fellowship. This month's newsletter features an interview that was adapted from a testimony they shared with their entire church in 2005. We are grateful for their bold reminder that God is actively performing the work of redemption in our lives and marriages.

How would you describe the problems that were lurking beneath the surface of your lives:

Tom: Through my searching for male acceptance and approval I allowed myself to believe in the lies of Satan and gave into sexual sin. As a Christian and a married man I have struggled with homosexuality. I began by dabbling on the Internet with pornography out of curiosity and it eventually grew into a secret life that I kept hidden from Karen and others around me. This went on for several years with, what appeared to me as, very little ill effects on my family life. But over time things began to unravel and my life began to spiral out of control in this area.

Karen: I learned about co-dependency about 15 years ago and I knew this was apparent in my relationship with Tom. I have struggled with being addicted to an addict. At times I would be overwhelmed with a need to fix him and to take control of his out of control life, but for the longest time I couldn't figure out what his addiction was. I knew he had a problem with anger on certain occasions and I knew he had become distant where we had once had a very close relationship; but, I just attributed that to being busy with our three daughters and being active in the church and with our jobs. All the descriptions I had read about co-dependency were people who were married to alcoholics or drug addicts. I knew that wasn't Tom's problem. I just didn't get it.

Do you remember your thoughts and feelings as you lived with this unresolved sense of disconnect?

K: Many years later I began to get a glimpse into Tom's addiction. A few months after we got a home computer and the Internet, I knew that something was not right. I would wake up in the middle of the night and would find Tom online, but even later when I was sure he had a problem with pornography it never occurred to me that he was into homosexual porn. I was so confused. I'd nag at Tom about his constant use of the Internet, but so many things were happening in our lives that I just put Tom and my concerns about him on the back burner. I actually convinced myself for a time that my suspicions about Tom were not accurate, and that I was being over emotional, so I continued to keep busy.



Tom and Karen completed Taking Back Ground in the spring of 2005 and are now both small group leaders in the program.

T: Five years ago I reached a point where God revealed to me that my life was going down a dead end road and that I desperately needed help. I finally confessed to Karen what I had been dealing with, which was no surprise to her. She had felt in her heart that something was going on.

What was that like to hear from Tom the truth behind your suspicions?

K: When Tom finally reached the point that he disclosed to me, I had already figured out what was going on and had begun to face the reality that I couldn't live like this much longer. I secretly began to make plans to divorce Tom after our youngest daughter graduated from high school. Even though I knew in my **head** about Tom's struggle I was not prepared for the devastating effect it had on my **heart** when he finally admitted his struggle to me. I could no longer live under the shelter of denial and my world could never be the same. I had to face some very painful truths: I had been betrayed, deceived- I had lived a lie. I was relieved on one hand, but was deeply wounded and had growing feelings of anger and resentment toward Tom. I felt ignorant, stupid, naïve, embarrassed, shamed, and used; and, I was full of fear that anyone else would find out about the terrible state my life was in, so I was more than willing to agree with Tom that no one would know our horrible secret.

T: She was able to forgive me and I asked God to forgive me. I stopped my destructive behavior by sheer will power, but I did not seek outside help and we didn't get the help we needed to heal the root issues. We made a mistake and continued to keep this a secret. I would not allow Karen to share with anyone what we both were dealing with. It was then that Karen and I basically took matters into our own hands. Sure we prayed to God to help, but we basically went along as if nothing had happened.

Were things resolved after the disclosure?

T: It worked for a few years and then I again found myself back in the same secretive life and again my addiction began getting the best of me. After pretty much hitting rock bottom a friend of mine invited me to attend Promise Keepers in Kansas City in September of 2003 and I attended. The very first night during a time of surrender the Lord really spoke to my heart and I went forward and knelt upon that arena floor before the cross and surrendered before God my struggles. I cried out to God that I could no longer fix the problem on my own and pleaded before God to take control of my life and this struggle.

Returning home I knew that I couldn't just stop there. I learned from the last time that I would need help in this area of my life.

Through research on the Promise Keepers' web site I was lead to Portland Fellowship. Through this ministry I began my journey two years ago out of sexual bondage. Just as the Israelites were led by Moses out of Egypt from the bondage of slavery, God is leading me out of my land of Egypt. Karen has been a part of this journey with me. The wives group at Portland Fellowship has given her a better understanding of what my struggles are and the underlying root issues. For the first time, I began to believe with all my heart that God loved me and forgave me when I turned my back on my past sin. He welcomed me home.



Tom and Karen celebrated thier 30th aniversary with a trip to Maui.

K: When Tom returned from Promise Keepers in September, 2003 he again had to confess his sin to me. But this time forgiveness didn't come as easy for me as it had three years earlier (not that it had been easy the first time). I just wasn't sure I could do it again. I prayed to God and cried out to him and asked "How many times do I have to forgive this man of such a devastating sin!" and I clearly heard Jesus words, "Seventy times seven..."

I thank God that he lead us to the ministry of Portland Fellowship. In the wives group, over two years ago, I first shared my deepest darkest shameful secrets and it was then that God began to work in our lives and perform miracles in our marriage. It was only when Tom and I took our guilt, shame, denial, and fears and laid them down at the foot of the cross and let go of our need to control and let God

be God, that our healing truly began.

How would you describe your lives today?

T: The Lord has transformed my life from the inside out. I am no longer bound by my old thoughts and desires. A scripture that I leaned on in my recovery process is Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Karen and I both feel God is calling us to continue at PF as part of the leadership team. We want to offer other married couples the Hope of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are continuing to experience. God alone can transform lives. I am no longer playing "god" over my struggles; I am allowing God to be in control of my life, and that has made all the difference.

K: Tom and I bear witness to the power of God at work in the lives of His people. Time and time again, we have known the power of Philippians 1:6 - "We are confident that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." We are living testimonies to His power of healing. God is good and He is so faithful.

facing AIDS: where do we begin? by Steve Baliko

If you witnessed a terrible car accident and stopped to help, would you ask the injured people, "Now was this your fault?" This and many other powerful reminders were heard during the recent conference on HIV/AIDS held at Saddleback Church in California. For the first time, evangelical leaders from around the globe were asked to gather and wrestle with the following four questions about the AIDS pandemic: Is anybody listening? Does anybody understand? Will anybody help? Does anybody care?

Approximately 1,700 church leaders, medical professionals and international politicians assembled to listen to up-to-the-minute research, advances in prevention strategies, sobering facts of the severity of the problem, and several perspectives on what it means to bring hope into this crisis. It was reported that worldwide over 8,000 people die everyday from AIDS – if the deaths that occurred in the 9/11 tragedy occurred twice a day every day, every month, every year it would not equal the lives lost to AIDS. Even though this is not the leading cause of death in the world, it is the only one in the top 6 that has **no cure**. Annually, North America sees approximately 18,000 adult and child deaths from AIDS, while Sub-Saharan Africa witness over 2,100,000. Stop and consider these numbers for just a moment.

AIDS is not a gay disease. In the United States, however, the majority of those infected with HIV are from the population of men having sex with other men. Recent statistics point to an increase of the numbers of women who are testing positive. Some have suggested that this rise in new infections is due to infidelity amongst married men. Coupled with the expansion of the disease is the continued stigma placed on men and women who are living with a positive diagnosis. There remains to this day a gross level of ignorance about how the disease is transmitted and a high level of fear about being tested and finding out, for certain, one's HIV status. The distress over mis-information and the significant lack of loving, supportive communities for those who are HIV-positive was the topic of many of the break-out sessions and workshops during the conference.

Frankly, I was overwhelmed. The scope of these needs at home and internationally seemed beyond what could be accomplished in our lifetime. At the same time I realized that churches and ministries like Portland Fellowship have a distinct opportunity to be the hands of Christ to embrace hurt and dying people. Some perspective can be brought to bear on the situation when we consider these words from Mother Theresa: "God does not call me to be successful, He calls me to be faithful." It is too large of a task for any of us to consider how we will fix this problem, but that is not what we are being asked to do. Jesus is asking us to love others and in doing so loving Him. The question is: Where do we begin to be faithful in responding to the realm of HIV/AIDS?

We are beginning to ask ourselves this question at Portland Fellowship; and, we are asking you our friends, supporters and advocates to prayerfully consider this question as well. The conference did not provide me with a book full of answers or a seven-step plan to eliminate pain and suffering from all who experience it. But I have a deeper ache in my heart and an intense desire to have my eyes and ears open to the Voice of the Spirit of God, however, He chooses to speak to me. I think He is speaking to many to us, if we will take the time to stop and listen.

Throughout this process we want to hear from you. What is God stirring up in your heart? What visions for your church or churches are you seeing come into focus? What aspects of prevention do you think need to be explored? What types of needs and heart ache are you hearing in the homosexuality community that can be addressed by men and women who are Christ followers? How should the church be involved in the de-stigmatizing of HIV testing, caring for those with AIDS, and speaking out for healthy relationships and the value of all human life? Are we willing to rejoice with these who rejoice and weep with those who weep? Are we willing to walk into the messy fray of fear and pain and stay there with people who are convinced that they are all alone?

Only God can answer these questions. We must pray and act. We can no longer ask God what He's going to do about "this problem" or "those people." Let us rise to the occasion in His strength and begin the long obedience that glorifies Him and meets people right where they live.

If you are interested in participating in future meetings, discussions or prayer times addressing how the believers in Portland will begin to reach out, please email me at the office and I will keep you apprised of events and opportunities to join this conversation: steve@portlandfellowship.com



save the date: joe dallas seminar

On Saturday April 8th, Portland Fellowship will be hosting a one day seminar titled *Homosexuality and Truth*, featuring author and speaker Joe Dallas. This seminar is designed to equip Christians who want to better understand this issue, develop effective dialogue with homosexual friends and loved ones, and enhance their ability to take an uncompromising, loving stand on this difficult and controversial subject. Whether you're a pastor, counselor, or health worker-- whether you have a gay family member, co-worker or friend-- or whether you're a concerned believer, this seminar is for you. Please join us as we seek, together, to tackle this tough, relevant and challenging subject.

january - february calendar & services

january 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

february 7, 14, 21, 28

Taking Back Ground

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

january 6th

Annual Planning Meeting

PF staff and board of directors spend a full day planning for the next year.

january 13 & february 10

Family & Friends Group

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

january 16-17

Pregnancy Resource Centers

Catherine will be speaking at two training sessions on responding to the needs and issues with lesbian clients.

january 23-26

Exodus Leadership Conference

Jason will be speaking on ministry to youth at this conference in Orlando, Florida.

january 28

Western Seminary

Network for Women in Leadership Conference

Jason Thompson -Homosexuality
Steve Baliko - Dealing with HIV/AIDS

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.

leaders honored at festive dinner

Fellowship House was glorious in its Christmas decor as our ministry volunteers were served an appreciation dinner on December 10. The elegant meal was prepared and served by a number of participants. Other participants in the *Taking Back Ground*



program were featured in a video where they told of the life-changing experience the program was for them. They were especially grateful to their group leaders, and to the members of the praise team, as well as PF's board and staff.

Each member of the board and staff spoke briefly about various aspects of the ministry.

Jason reminded the guests that PF would have virtually no ministry without the commitment of our volunteers. In addition to serving as group leaders, intercessors, praise team members, and board members, PF's work is supported by many who contribute with their prayers and gifts. We wish they all could be gathered for an occasion such as the one we enjoyed this night.

thank you!

The staff and Board of Portland Fellowship thank those who are faithfully supporting this ministry. Your generous gifts and prayers allow us to continue in the work of ministry to those seeking healing from sexual brokenness.

In addition to the blessing we receive from God when we give from our hearts, we also receive a blessing from our government – in the form of tax deductions! For those who have given financially to Portland Fellowship, you will soon receive your annual statement of giving for tax purposes.

If you have not been able to partner with us in the past, would you consider doing so this year? We have great plans for the year ahead and desire your help in accomplishing them.

Finally, we have enclosed a newly printed brochure for you. Please share this brochure with your pastor, family member, friend, or neighbor. Let everyone know that freedom in Christ is available for all who seek it.



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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