



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## How do you respond? Jason Thompson

*A few years back I was given the opportunity to share about Portland Fellowship with the leadership team of my church. After sharing my heart for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction one of the leaders pulled me aside and said, "I'm glad you are doing what you're doing, because there is no way I could do it." I wasn't sure what to feel: grateful for his gratitude or saddened that my church leader could not minister to the sexually broken?*

Christians, over the past few years, are becoming increasingly uncertain as to how to respond to the homosexual. And I'm not surprised. Turn on your television tonight, surf a few channels and you will find homosexuality displayed with humor and acceptance. Look at your movie listings and you will notice movies such as *Brokeback Mountain*, which blames culture as the reason why these two sheep herders cannot openly love one another. Or simply watch the news tonight to see battles between the seemingly angry conservative and the loving homosexual couple wanting to adopt the child that no one else wants. Now add your loved one to the mix. Your daughter wants to get into relationship with another woman and your co-worker is making joyous plans to have a civil union with his lover. How can this be so wrong? And how does the Christian respond in light of his convictions? We will look at four general responses to the issue of homosexuality. How do you respond?

### "I love and support the homosexual"

In April of 1998, I was asked to speak a church in a mainline denomination. The denomination was forming groups to evaluate whether the church should allow the ordination of homosexuals. At this event there were three speakers: a gay minister of an evangelical church in Portland, a mom of a homosexual, and myself. I already felt a bit outnumbered, and when it was my turn to share I found myself being frowned at by most of the crowd. To keep my nerves from getting the best of me, I fixed my eyes on the few nodding heads. I honestly could not believe I was in a church!

After the class ended, I approached the mom to thank her for sharing her love and support of her gay son and invited her to learn more about our family and friends group that compassionately addresses this issue. Before finishing my invitation she began to lash out at me with accusations of spreading hate and promoting suicide because of my message. The facilitator, siding with the hostile mother, told me to leave the room which I did, quickly. I stepped into a side room and stood paralyzed, confused, and extremely saddened.

This mom truly loved her son and the church's desire was to love the unloved. I certainly could not fault them for that, but something very important was missing in their desire to love. Love does not originate in our emotions and our feelings, but rather through the will of God. The truth "God is love" has been sadly replaced with "Love is God." According to this thinking, whatever seems like love, whatever feels like love, must be the will of God. The truth is that the world is filled with lies and our hearts are filled with deceit. To know God's good and perfect will require us to lay down our own personal ambitions, believe God's Word, and walk in humility with one another in the body of Christ. As we do this, we will be able to love the homosexual with truth.

### "I'm against the homosexual"

The "Rev" Fred Phelps may not be a name you know, but undoubtedly you have heard of his mission. Phelps is very open about his anger and hatred for the homosexual. You may remember the young man, Matthew Shepherd, who was beaten to death by a couple of young men in a field in Laramie, Wyoming. Matthew was not allowed to have a quiet or respectful funeral as Phelps and his crew showed up to picket. Their claim was, and is, that homosexuals



Jason Thompson serves as Executive Director of Portland Fellowship.

do not deserve a funeral. On Phelps' website, he has a perpetual animated picture of Matthew burning in hell, with a counter of how long he has been there.

Phelps is an extreme. But do we include a message of compassion, grace, and mercy when countering the homosexual agenda? I'm convinced that the Body of Christ has many functions and God is calling each of us according to the gifts, passions, and vision we have been given. If God is calling you to uphold morality in our culture, I pray that you might be effective as well as humble. I also pray that we practice a redemptive approach. Share Christ's redemption for all lost in sin; uphold morality in whatever way God is calling you; and finish by again sharing Christ's redemption for all.

### **"I don't care about the homosexual"**

You may not be embracing homosexuality as good and healthy or, conversely, condemning homosexuals as sinful and wrong; rather you may not think much of the matter at all. It can be easy to see homosexuality as a geographically located issue in major cities like San Francisco or downtown Portland, and believe that this is an issue we don't need to worry about. I'm amazed of how many times I've heard pastors say, "Well, we don't have any homosexuals in our church." Our staff has the unique and confidential responsibility of helping individuals who attend those churches. Unfortunately, many men and women feel their church is unsafe and therefore refuse to disclose their struggle. Because these men, women, parents, siblings, spouses don't feel safe, the leadership of many churches have no idea the amount of collective pain present in their congregations.



It is important to communicate the fact that your church does indeed have strugglers or loved ones of those who are openly gay or lesbian. The leadership has a choice; ignore this pain, quietly deal with individuals when they find the courage to disclose, or proactively make an open invitation for all affected by homosexuality to come and receive ministry. Portland Fellowship has ministered to members of the body of Christ for close to 20 years, yet we still hear of men and women in the church that have never heard of effective ministry to those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction.

On that note, I think it is also important to thank several churches in Oregon and Southwest Washington who openly talk about hope and healing for the homosexual from the pulpit. Your love has literally given new life to so many who would otherwise been lost in their sin.

### **"My heart is for the restoration of a homosexual person"**

There are countless of stories of men and women who have come to PF because someone shared the good news of freedom from homosexuality. God has given me plenty of opportunities to share, but one evening remains my favorite.

In 1991, a group of friends from Multnomah Bible College decided to go downtown to the gay community to simply be available to how God would want to use us. After an hour of praying, a young man approached me. The following except is from his own story:

I walked around the block several times. On each pass I would stand on the corner, smoke a cigarette, and wait for him to approach me. He would not, although it was obvious that we had both noticed each other. Finally, I nervously went up and asked, "Excuse me, do you know what time it is?" He told me the time. I turned to go, palms sweating, stomach dropping.

"What's going on?" he asked, before I had walked away.

"Nothing."

"My name is Jason."

"I'm Bill." We shook hands.

"Do you go to school around here?"

"Yeah," I enthusiastically started to answer, but then decided to be vague on the details.

"What are you doing hanging out in the gay part of town?" he asked.

"Just curious." I gave a safe answer.

Jason asked, "Do you ever think about where you'll be in 20 years? Married to some guy?"

Married to some guy? Why did he say that? I looked again at the older men milling around a mysterious red door across the street.

"Do you want to get something to eat?," Jason asked me.

"Yeah, sure," I said, although I wasn't hungry. Jason told me as we walked away that he was not going to have sex with me tonight. OK, I thought, very blunt. I was interested in what he was doing there himself.

Then he started to share why he was hanging out on that particular street

corner. He told me about his struggle with homosexuality and about how his life was different now because of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

I had never heard this before. I had searched psychological textbooks for answers about how to change but couldn't find any way. I was raised in a Christian family and had always admired the man Jesus, but had never really known people who struggled to live Christ-like lives. I had never heard of the life-changing power of the Gospel.

I had the privilege of being best man in Bill's wedding and he in mine and am excited to see Bill and his wife having their second child this year.

My desire for all who struggle with sin is to know the power of Jesus and his ability to forgive and to cleanse. Would you join me in this work of restoration? If you have anger toward the homosexual person, I invite you to lay down your stones and learn more about the pain, hurt, and confusion. If you have chosen to embrace homosexuality as good and healthy, would you ask God to show you his good and perfect will, and if you are dispassionate, would you ask God for a heart for the hurting?

I invite you to learn more about homosexuality through our upcoming one-day seminar titled *Homosexuality & Truth*. I hope you and members of your church will attend as we struggle and learn together how to love those who embrace homosexuality. I look forward to seeing you there.

## homosexuality and truth: a joe dallas seminar

On Saturday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 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 important 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, have a gay family member, co-worker or friend -- or whether you're a concerned believer, this seminar is for you.

Not only is this seminar for you, it is for the rest of the body of Christ as well. Many in our church families are dealing with the confusion and frustration that comes from not knowing how to respond to those effected by homosexuality. We would love to see all of you at this conference.

In addition we want encourage you to share the enclosed brochure with you pastor or church body and by doing so partner with us in promoting this seminar. Please join us as we seek, together, to tackle this tough, relevant and challenging subject. Please visit our website for more information to register.



## a participant reflects on his journey

Every Tuesday night during the *Taking Back Ground* program the PF house is filled with music, teaching, confession, prayer - and many people. Each person has their own journey that has brought them here. We, as a staff, count it a blessing when one of our participants chooses to share with us what that journey has looked like for them.

This last month one of our participants e-mailed Jason with his thoughts about his journey. We hope this letter will not only give you insight into a participant's journey, but will bring inspiration as to what God is doing in the lives of men and women who struggle with sexual brokenness.

Dear Jason,

It's hard to believe how fast time has gone and that in a few more months I will be completing my second year of *Taking Back Ground*.

When my wife and I first came to meet with you, I was deep in clinical depression and as a result, off work on a mental health disability for three months. Just prior to this time, I had disclosed to my wife, two children and a few other close family members my same-sex attraction and the behaviors it fostered for many years. For the first time I told of an abusive sexual relationship I had with a youth pastor at age 18.

Like most, if not all of the participants in TBG, I too suffered the mental, emotional and relational effects of low self-esteem, and the unresolved guilt and feelings of non-acceptance or rejection by others—particularly male peers. I have been seeing both a Christian counselor and secular psychiatrist alongside my participation in TBG.

It's been painful and humbling to see myself as a broken and "profoundly in need of healing" person... as a truly sinful person not only in need of God's salvation through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross but as a Christian person (son, father, husband, brother, co-worker, friend) in need of a mental and emotional healing that comes thru confession of sin, repentance and a daily walk with the Lord that is honest with myself and truthful to who I really am and who God is as well.

I realize more and more how pride stood in the way of my healing. And how disbelief did—could the Lord God really meet me where I was hurting so deeply and turn it around for my own good and His glory? I let self-confidence in my knowledge of the Bible and of "Christian things" hide the pain. For many years I think I had more of a personal relationship with a book and a religious tradition than with the Lord Himself who created me, saved me and loved me enough to desire the best for my life if I would trust and obey Him with it.

Since coming to PF, a burden I carried for so long has been lifted. A joy and a peace with God and myself has been restored. To not simply know about God but to know him personally—His existence and incarnation in Jesus Christ, His love and compassion, His mercy and grace. I was baptized 41 years ago at age 10, and rededicated to the Lord a few years later, but in many ways it feels like I have become a Christian for the first time.

TBG is about a journey in discipleship that the Lord really asks of all his followers no matter what their personal issues in life may be. TBG certainly deals with a common issue all of us in the program face, but the manner in which the program materials address it could be applied to other ones as well.

When I came to your ministry's doorsteps 14 months ago, I knew basically what it was about. I have known about PF for about as long as it has existed. But I was deep in denial. I knew I had a very personal decision to make. Was I going to be the Christian I professed to be and seek and do His will with the issue I faced? Was I willing to cooperate with the convicting and transforming influence of the Holy Spirit in this and all matters of my life and allow God to do His work in me? As a test of my faithfulness to Him?

Thank you for having me as part of the program.

Sincerely, Ron



## march - april calendar & services

march 1

### Cable Access - Live show

7:00 pm - with Jason Thompson

march 7, 14, 21, 28

### Open Group

We invite anyone interested in learning more about PF. You will hear encouraging words from others in our ministry. Tuesday nights in March at 7p.m. All are welcome!

march 10-12

### TBG Fellowship Retreat

Open to current participants and alumni of the *Taking Back Ground* program. Dan and Jody Mayhew will be our special guest speakers.

march 10 & april 14

### Family & Friends Group

Have a loved one who has embraced homosexuality? Please join us. 7 p.m.

march 14

### Stone Church, Yakama, Wa

speaker: Drew Berryessa

march 16

### George Fox University

speaker: Jason Thompson

april 4, 11, 18, 25

### Taking Back Ground

Program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions. Now taking new participants

april 8

### Joe Dallas Seminar

Join us for the one-day seminar "Homosexuality and Truth". See *Brochure*

April 13

### Concordia University

speaker: Jason Thompson

### Additional updates:

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

### Counseling & youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

## much accomplished... more ahead

As mentioned in last month's update, the Fellowship House is now fully owned by Portland Fellowship. Through your faithful gifts and support, we have completed our capital campaign much earlier than expected. We pause to enjoy and thank God for this great gift! May God receive all the glory for the great things he has done and what he continues to do...

### and on we go...



Jody Mayhew

This month we will have our annual *Taking Back Ground* retreat in Gearhart, Oregon. We are excited to have Dan and Jody Mayhew as our speakers and look forward to another powerful time of God's outpouring of favor into our lives. Dan served as chairman of our board and Jody as women's ministry director in the mid 90s. We are excited to have them join us again to share from their years of ministry. If you have completed the *Taking Back Ground* program and desire to attend, please call or register on our website today.

We ask for your prayers as we welcome Joe Dallas to Portland. We are all looking forward to this powerful seminar and pray it will compassionately touch the lives of many.

We also ask for your prayers for an upcoming fundraising event on the evening of May 20. With the assistance of Mission Increase, we are inviting individuals to join us for a banquet at OMSI. If you know of someone who desires to learn more about PF and may choose to support this work financially, please give Jason a call at the office.

Please be in prayer for all our upcoming events and consider how you can participate.

## intern program accepting applications

Portland Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for men and women to learn skills for ministering to sexually broken people. A small number of people are selected each year to work with PF's staff in a program that provides teaching, mentoring, and personal counseling. Community life is a rich and important aspect of the program.

Interns often combine the Upper Room Program with college, seminary, or part-time work.

If interested, please contact Jim Thompson for additional details or visit our website. Our present interns are also available for conversation about their own experiences in the program.



## 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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