



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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A Conversation about Conversations

by Jim Thompson and Steve Baliko

Mentoring is an ancient way of teaching a craft, or passing on life skills. It's being revived these days – in businesses, churches, and especially in training for ministry. Jesus' rabbi-student relationship with the disciples, and Paul's teaching of Timothy, Titus and others give us a Biblical context for these intentional relationships that are enjoying a resurgence in the realm of training and spiritual growth.

One of the most visible ways we see this being utilized at Portland Fellowship is through our Upper Room Intern Program. The nine-month intensive ministry training utilizes a combination of classroom instruction, ministry experience, community living, as well as, individual mentoring to assist each intern to learn new skills, continue their healing process, and make vocational decisions. We at PF are convinced that being a mentor and having a mentor are helpful to our growth as followers of the living Christ. This month we wanted to let you eavesdrop in on a conversation between staff members, Jim Thompson— Upper Room Intern Program Director and Steve Baliko—a former intern and now assistant to the program, as they discuss how mentoring works at PF and for them personally.

Jim: You and I have now been on both sides of the mentoring experience, at PF and elsewhere in our lives. What do you think are some of the most beneficial aspects of being a mentor or being mentored?

Steve: The answer seems to be the same in both cases – mentoring reminds you that you aren't alone in this wonderfully difficult walk of faith. There is an intentional choice to bring two people's worlds close together and with that closeness you begin to feel the gravity of another person's life...the joys, sorrows, dreams, secrets, prayers, the grace.

Jim: That proximity can create surprising results for both the mentor and the one being mentored. I know that frequently I sense God nudging and pushing at areas of my own life as I'm listening to someone pour out their heart or smile with joy as they recount a passion being realized and lived out. It never feels like a passive encounter.

In fact here is much of what it is: fellowship with Jesus: there are three of us in the mentoring room or on a walk in the park or talking while we eat lunch.

Steve: It's amazing what happens as mentoring relationships become a sacred space where Christ indwells the conversation. To know the presence of God in the midst of an interaction about life is a powerful and precious experience. Rarely is it a splashy burning-bush moment. Often it feels a lot like two people letting a pleasant silence settle on their shoulders. Each person knows that God is the focus of the time together.

Jim: And at times it is not so pleasant. Mentoring means that you share in the peaceful moments *and* the messiness. I have learned a sober respect for the suffering that gets shared in these relationships. As a mentor you have to be willing to walk into the pain that another person is feeling. Jesus is serious when he tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who are weeping. You can't weep with someone without feeling a portion of the pain they are feeling.

Steve: As God has brought healing into my life, I have been willing to trust a process that involves the help and assistance of other people – both the giving and receiving of that aid. Some of that help came in the form of knowing



Jim and Steve work together mentoring both interns and participants of Taking Back Ground.

that other people were willing to hurt along with me. There is incredible value in a willingness to comfort one other with the comfort one has received. (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

Jim: We do experience some suffering. This is one area where the relationship really is more of a one-way street. They are not there for us, we are there for them. But the “being there” takes us close to the pain. It’s clear that if we aren’t emotionally available to the interns, we’re not going to be trusted or effective. At the same time, the most poignant internships are those which are difficult, where that pain is not too quickly taken away.

Steve: I tell people that my internship was the “best-hardest year” of my life because of that pain and because of the support I found from those mentoring me. I have observed, over the past few years, that those who come and surrender themselves to God – not just to get more tools in their ministry tool belt, but those who allow God to reach their hearts – these folk really get blessed.

Jim: It certainly can be a motivating factor, as you work through problem areas, to know that other people are directly affected by the joys and the sorrows that you are going through. It goes back to that idea of not being alone in the journey. We are surrounded, both spiritually and physically by the “great cloud of witnesses.” Mentoring brings us closer to some of those witnesses or allows us to draw closer to others in our witness to the Hope.

Steve: And who among us doesn’t need to be reminded of that daily!

Jim: I need those reminders of God’s promises and His hope just like the next guy. I am intentional about reading the word and rehearsing the truths of scripture in prayer and my conversations with ministry peers. Fortunately I’ve also had some great models of mentoring that continue to impact and feed me in my life as a mentor.

Steve: You’ve mentioned some of those men before. If I recall correctly, one of them was a bishop that you served under in your early ministry.

Jim: Yes, his name was Matthew. I had the opportunity to work side-by-side with him for seven years. I thought of him as a sort of “papa”. We’d talk about professional stuff, by day, but on some of our long car rides back from Sunday night services our conversation would be about everything from how we loved our moms’ cooking to how it was that we wanted to die. Wow, how I relished those rich times! And I’d just watch him. Maybe most of my learning came by simply watching how he handled situations, how he took a phone call, how he wrote letters. Now, thirty years later, every once in a while I’ll be writing a note and realize I’m using his words and phrases.

Steve: It sounds like a passing-down happened in that relationship. And I have in turn received some of his influence because of our mentoring. It expands my own sense of gratitude for God’s expansive blessings.

Jim: I’m glad to see this. For many years, ministry training was done this way. At Portland Fellowship we have the added dimension of working in an environment where people are seeking help in

some of the deepest areas of need. To walk with someone as they confront sexual struggles and emotional brokenness is powerful stuff. And these places of hurt and isolation are exactly the ones that Jesus wants to touch.

Steve: I have seen men and women, myself included, willing to clean out some of those dark corners because they knew they were not alone in the process. As a mentor you get to remind people that God is advocating for them and helping them.

Jim: I know that we both have had people we are mentoring ask us if they can borrow hope from us when they couldn’t find any for themselves. What an amazing joy to freely offer the real and substantial grace and hope of Jesus.

Steve: And how important that we as mentors are well versed and refreshed by that Truth ourselves. It is tricky hanging out over the cliff of another’s fears in order to offer them encouragement, especially with sexual brokenness as part of the mix. We have to be available as a coach, to be ready to share the parts of our own journey that reassure them – while staying safe and modeling good boundaries at the same time.

Jim: Sure, but that’s where we on staff can and do hang on to one another. I feel a little better dangling out over the cliff when somebody’s holding onto my shirt! I’m seeing the importance of there being a community of mentors – checking in with

each other – not thinking we’re the full and final answer to every question that comes along.

Steve: There is a real danger in trying to do this kind of work in isolation.

Jim: We spend a lot of time talking about our work, making sure that our mentoring relationships are open to input, looking out for each other’s blind spots, and finding ways to push people back towards their life in Christ.

Steve: And on more than one occasion that type of team mentoring has kept us out of troublesome territory or allowed us to walk boldly into uncertain topics.

Jim: I now find that true in my sessions with interns. We set out our agenda – intending to talk about reading, art, or ministry stuff and then God leads us into very different areas – places that need his touch. It’s never predictable, sometimes we stumble on painful places, sometimes onto holy ground...at times they are the same place.

Steve: And we get blessed beyond measure by walking with them. What an incredible privilege it is to be close at hand when God is working so deeply in their lives! We can’t help see his glory at those times.

Jim: I’m bold enough to hope that we’re mentoring people who will, in turn, mentor other people: a passing-down and a passing on.

Steve: With mentoring at the heart of the Upper Room program, I know that will continue to happen for many years to come.



listen, just listen... by catherine chapman



Take a moment to think of the most difficult circumstance you have ever experienced. Maybe a family member died. Your spouse was unfaithful. You received a frightening diagnosis. Loss of job. Your closest friend moved away. An abusive father...or mother...or neighbor. Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember how long those days felt? Like life had stopped. That somehow time stood still and the pain, the awful heaviness in your chest, the chaos in your brain and the aching of your heart, seemed to set in for the long haul. And everyone else just kept living their life as if nothing had changed! Do you remember? And do you remember what you wished for? Can you recall what you longed for more than anything? Didn't you wish that someone would stop their life and just listen for as long as you needed to talk? Just listen... You didn't need advice or platitudes or someone trying to fix you. You needed someone to listen, empathize, hold you, just *be* with you in your pain, so for a moment you didn't have to feel so alone. Many of you did receive the comfort you needed from others, and through their love, you saw the face of Christ. Through their care, you were tangibly held by your Savior.

Here at Portland Fellowship men and women are walking through some of the most difficult circumstances of their lives. Many times, by the time they call us for help, they are on the verge of complete hopelessness. As I listen to the women the common theme is that they are lonelier than they have even been in their whole lives. Some are grieving the loss of a partner and/or supportive gay community, some have been rejected by their churches, and most have felt isolated or different most of their lives. They may have turned their eyes to Christ for healing, but the process seems long and impossible, the pain and loneliness too intense, and hopelessness seeps in. If only someone would stop their life for a little while and listen, just listen...

This is where you come in. I am looking for older women who are solid in their faith and have never struggled with same-sex attractions, who desire to come alongside one of our current female participants as a mentor – a listener, encourager, comforter, and role model – as they walk through this very difficult season of healing. If you are interested, and have somewhere between 2-4 hours per month to dedicate to mentoring, please contact me at Portland Fellowship for more information. I will provide training and support so you don't need to have special understanding of this issue in order to mentor. You only need to remember how it feels to be in a season of pain, then listen and comfort as needed. *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

a night of prayer: we all are impacted by HIV/AIDS by steve baliko

Many of us serving and supporting Portland Fellowship have been praying the following prayer over the past six months: *May the Lord raise up researchers, doctors, nurses, and tens of thousands of caring people to make the light of Christ shine through mercy. Freely we have received, Oh that we might freely give. Show us how to love men and women living with HIV/AIDS in Portland and beyond.* I am excited to report that God is already answering our prayers in a wide range of ways: early in 2006 organizers of a pastor's wives conference asked for a workshop on HIV/AIDS and the church's response; in April a downtown church started serving meals to people living with AIDS; a local Bible college is hosting a two-day seminar on HIV/AIDS; and our own outreach (*Living Well*) has added two more men to the ongoing support, encouragement and fellowship. In addition to these events, God has brought me in contact with Health Department staff, missionaries, medical support staff, pastors and social action advocates who desire to step up and become involved in being the Gospel of Jesus Christ to men and women living with an HIV-positive diagnosis.



God is so clear about his desire to reach into all parts of the world. The HIV/AIDS community in Portland is no exception. As this year was started with a focus on prayer, we think it should come to a close the same way. To that end we are inviting each of you to join us for a night of prayer on World AIDS Day, Friday December 1. There will be a gathering of Christians from many different churches and organizations that desire to see God's work done in this area of hurt and need. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are not called to solve the world's problems, but we are called to live out His ministry and work to everyone around us. The night of prayer will be taking place in the church building at 1734 NE 1st Ave (corner of 1st and Broadway) from 7-10pm. The focus of our time will be to pray for the HIV/AIDS community and to seek God's direction for the coming years of outreach and compassion from the church in Portland. Please feel free to give me a call or email me at steve@portlandfellowship.com with any questions about the event. If you plan to bring a large group of people (15 or more) please let me know so that we can be adequately prepared.

november - december calendar & services

november 7, 14, 21, 28

Taking Back Ground

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

november 13

Harvest Comm. Church

Jason will be hosting a PF booth at the church's missions fair.

november 20 & december 18

Family & Friends Group

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

nov 17, 18

Planning Retreat

Staff and volunteers are spending a weekend planning and writing curriculum for a new online youth ministry.

dec 5, 12

Open Group

For questions about PF or to hear from men and women walking in freedom, come to our open group. 7 p.m.

december 9

Appreciation Dinner

PF staff will serve a special dinner to honor our *Taking Back Ground* Leadership Team. 6 p.m.

december 19

TBG Christmas Party

Those involved with Portland Fellowship are welcome to join us for an evening of food and games. *Evening Begins at 7 p.m.*

Are you interested?

Invite a staff member to speak at your church, youth group, college, or fellowship group. Contact the office.

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Counseling and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

staff member unites in marriage

Upper Room assistant, Steve Baliko, wed Darla Seifert on October 8, in a rustic but elegant barn in Hillsboro, Oregon. The ceremony was filled with much joy and celebration with friends and family from all over the country.

Steve came to Portland from Alaska to attend the Upper Room Intern Program in 2004. Shortly after his arrival, he met Darla at a small group church gathering and the two began to grow in friendship and love. Darla assisted in the *Taking Back Ground* program and began to have a deeper passion for the men and women walking through the process of freedom from homosexuality. The staff of Portland Fellowship knew, along with Steve, that it was just a matter of time before he would ask her hand in marriage. Jason Thompson shares, "It is another great example of God's power in transforming lives. Although marriage is not the goal of healing, it is certainly a blessing that comes from it."

Congratulations Steve and Darla. We pray your marriage will be full of God's love and that you will continue to minister together in the years to come.



Photo by Fritz Liedtke

prayers and praises

Pray for God's provision and protection of this ministry – showing us each day new wonders of his love, mercy and protection.

Pray for those who are currently going through *Taking Back Ground*, that God would give them strength and grace to face the difficulties of this process.

Pray for Jason, Drew, Catherine and Jimmy as they spend time this month planning and writing curriculum for PF's new online youth ministry.

Pray for the leadership team of *Taking Back Ground*, that God would continue to refresh and renew them as they pour out their lives to others.

Pray for those living with the reality of HIV/AIDS; and pray that the churches will respond with the love of Christ to those who have been isolated by this disease.

Praise God for a full group of leaders and participants in this year's *Taking Back Ground* program and for the many ways He demonstrates his goodness here at PF.



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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