



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

sept / oct 2006 volume 11, number 5

Secure in Trusting God *by Robyn Gates*

For many years of my life, I thought I didn't need others. I was convinced that since Love was not an "essential" need, I could survive without it. God revealed this to be a huge lie. But could I trust Him to provide for me with a need so vast and real?

Early in my life, I questioned whether I was truly a Christian or if I even could be one. I was convinced that being a Christian meant that I was expected to be perfect. But despite my fears, I took a step of faith, in seventh grade, and was baptized with a willing but naive heart. This was the start of God showing me the truth about many misconceptions in my life. While I believed in Him, I didn't seem to see Him anywhere outside of church — certainly not in my home life. My mother raised us the best she could; but, I never felt affirmed that she loved me. I sorely missed out on the physical affection and emotional nourishment that I wanted from her. My dad only partially fulfilled these longings in my life. I knew that my dad loved me but I constantly questioned whether my mom did. I could not talk to her about my feelings or what was going on in my life without her responding in anger or making fun of me. As a young girl I had learned that in order to be safe, I had to hold everything in and put on a smile. I thought this was the best way to live life for many years.

I managed to cope this way until the hunger became too great for me to manage or ignore. The void caused me to search for love from female figures around me. It started out as fantasies about "dream moms" in elementary school, then "dream sisters" in middle school. By my first year in high school this line of thinking emerged as lesbian longings for other girls. In order to numb my confused feelings, I immersed myself in activities at school, and spent as much time away from home as I could.

After I graduated from high school, I attended a community college while still living at home. During this time, I realized I was increasingly seeking acceptance from the world. I prayed to be yoked with other Christians and to find some support and encouragement. God answered my prayers. Within months I had a circle of Christian friends from church, including an accountability partner. Living with my mother became increasingly difficult; so, I decided it was time to move out of my parent's house. In order to do this, I had to quit school and work so I could save the money to make it on my own. I didn't know how the heck I would afford it but I didn't care. I prayed to God for provision. He soon provided an open door with a friend from church and I walked through it. God proved His faithfulness in finances as well as a new unexpected definition of home life. My new roommate was truly heaven sent during that time in my life. She was a safe person, in that, I did not battle with any lesbian attractions towards her. She showed me that it was good and right to express emotions and to be the real Robyn. I was encouraged to express my anger or sadness or happiness which was nearly the opposite from how I had known to live for the previous 18 years! To this day I have never met anyone with a more caring or loving heart.

Around the time I moved out, I disclosed my struggle with lesbianism for the first time. I first confessed to my accountability partner and then gradually to my other Christian friends. In the beginning they didn't



Robyn will begin her internship at PF this september

know how to help me, but they did the best they could. Since I believed homosexuality was a sin, I thought my only options were: to be with a lesbian companion while displeasing God or be single and unhappy while pleasing Him. Fortunately, a few weeks later God put into my hands a book of testimonies about people who came out of homosexuality. Initially, I was skeptical that God could change people, especially gay people! Still, I longed for the peace that the men and women described in their stories. I decided to trust Him and believe that it was His will to bring about change in my life.

It was through this book, *Portraits of Freedom*, by Bob Davies, that I found Portland Fellowship (the closest ministry that helped people find healing from homosexuality). However it was a 50 mile commute and I was concerned about my car being able to make it to the meetings every week. I had seen God work powerfully in the recent months concerning my living situation, finances, and friendships. For the first time in my life I was beginning to see God as my Father, not just religion... I was seeing Him in my everyday home life, not just at church on Sundays. I decided to trust Him to get me to Portland Fellowship and back home every week, and so I committed to the Taking Back Ground program. Once again, He provided. During the three years I have been involved at PF, I have never had problems with transportation. He has always given me what I needed to get there.

As I went through my first year, the most powerful aspect of being involved was simply being there. I was among people who knew what I was going through and taught by leaders who had walked through the same process. I was naïve and thought my attraction to women was the biggest issue on my list to deal with and cross off. I thought this was unrelated to other problems in my life. But later in the year, I realized that many of them were intertwined with my struggles for: approval, control, acceptance, self-worth, value, identity, relating to other people, and most importantly trust issues. I thought I knew how to have healthy friendships. In reality I was simply swinging between being emotionally dependent or physically attracted to most of my women friends.

It wasn't until my second year at PF, that God began to use both the circumstances of unexpectedly living alone (something which I never thought I could do) and, for a season, losing contact with most of my Christian female friends. It was during this time that God opened up my eyes to a powerful lie I had believed all my life. I had grown up as a child believing that only basic necessities were needs. Needs were food, water and shelter, but not love. The

thought had never occurred to me that this was a faulty and dangerous belief. I wasn't aware that I was being deceived. When I finally connected the dots I was really angry at God. Suddenly, I knew that I was wrong but I didn't know how to have healthy relationships and live any differently. Sure I had been single all my life, never had a romantic or sexual relationship with a woman [or man], but I also had never had a healthy model of functional living, especially relating to other woman. I thought, "If God didn't provide my love needs from my mother the first 18 years of my life why would He provide my love needs from women now?" That second year was the most painful and most transforming year of my life. When I was hitting rock bottom and I wanted to give up, there were times when I felt that having my needs met wrongfully with a woman would be better than not having any needs met at all. In spite of my feelings, I decided to keep going forward and God protected me during those times. I knew deep down that only He could permanently satisfy the needs I was longing to fill.

It was at the Fellowship's retreat in the Spring of 2005 that I surrendered my deepest struggle. I had a constant doubt as to whether God would relationally provide for my needs for love and show me the way to healthiness. If I hadn't seen God's faithfulness in the areas I had trusted Him prior [moving out, getting my car to Portland, etc.], I would not have been able to do it. Since, I had witnessed God providing for me in so many areas of my life I knew that I could trust Him with my relational needs and He would provide.

It hasn't been an easy road since then, and I didn't magically have a new definition of healthy relating overnight. However, God has shown me healthy paths to walk in both my old and new friendships. I have learned tremendously from the different experiences, perspectives and support found in each friend. I have also learned that it is impossible to trust God if

I am looking too far ahead into the future. God says to not worry about tomorrow, that He provides for the birds so He will provide for us. When you are running a race you can only take one step at a time, not five. The same is true in our spiritual walk and journey of healing. I still have struggles, I am still in the process of learning what healthy looks like, but I have seen His work powerfully step by step in my life. I have a different heart than I did three years ago. I know that each day I wake up He will provide. I don't worry about how, I just know He will, and in the ways He knows are best for me. He always does and always will.



Robyn enjoying a moment at last years retreat with Catherine Chapman and Suzanne Berryessa.



Former intern Jeremy Gordon-Smith's heart for Latin America has enabled PF to provide resources to a whole new people group.

pf making a world impact

Former PF intern, **Jeremy Gordon-Smith**, went to Buenos Aires, Argentina this summer to visit several YWAM (Youth With a Mission) bases in order to see old friends and share the ministry experience gained at Portland Fellowship. He was able to give multiple seminars on sexual identity to those attending YWAM's counseling ministry night schools and in the main base. These teachings prompted plenty of much needed conversation and allowed him to minister into the lives of several young men who are struggling with same-sex attraction. It was a reminder to the leaders of how common sexual identity struggles are within the mission. Many times people feel ill-equipped to deal with them, either in their own lives or ministering to others. Jeremy was able to provide some tools to address the core issues.

Stuffed into his suitcase were 10 copies of the recently completed Taking Back Ground Volume One in Spanish. This type of material is practically non-existent in Latin America, so it was received with much excitement and gratitude. In the end, another 20 copies had to be printed to distribute to various people within the mission. Copies are now in the hands of 7 strugglers, leaders from 4 different YWAM bases, counseling night school students, counseling ministry staff and 2 ministry directors who are affiliated with Exodus Latin America. One of these directors was thrilled with the Spanish workbook and wants to get it printed locally for use within his group, as well as, a resource available for churches and other ministries. The trip seemed very much orchestrated by God and was a roaring success!

former intern to establish mid-valley ministry

For many years, Portland Fellowship has been the only Exodus ministry in the state of Oregon. As a result, participants have traveled from all around the state on a weekly basis to be a part of the *Taking Back Ground* program. One specific area of need is in the Mid-Willamette Valley. Albany, Corvallis, Eugene, Salem, and Lebanon are collectively home to nearly 400,000 people, as well as, several higher education institutions where the predominant message is that there is no hope for change.



Several years ago, God began developing in Duan Walker a passion to reach those affected by homosexuality. This past year, he took the first step by completing the internship at Portland Fellowship. Now he is taking the next step by beginning a ministry named Mid-Valley Fellowship to reach those in Albany and the surrounding areas. Over the last few months, God has been doing many things to start this ministry. One of the biggest answered prayers was a passionate and committed co-worker in the ministry: Kendra Hanes. In addition, God has opened the doors for Mid-Valley Fellowship to acquire non-profit status. Volunteers have stepped forward to help lead the program, financial supporters have expressed a desire to support this work, and Mid-Valley Fellowship's Board is well into the formation process. Duan says, *"Along the way, crazy things happen that we could not have constructed or imagined. And it reminds us that God is growing and establishing this ministry – not us."*

strengthening our unity

Redemptive ministries can function fine with good organization, healthy boundaries, financial gifts, and the alike. Yet, without the healthy relational unity between staff members things can easily become disjointed and even destructive.

Last month, Jason, Catherine, Jim, Drew, and Steve spent two days praying, sharing, planning, and playing. The unity of our staff was already pretty tight but the retreat only strengthened our love for one another as well as our passion for the work God has given us to do. We are looking forward to all the programs that begin this fall as well as new plans on the horizon. Although our readers were not at the retreat, you were all there in Spirit as we acknowledged our love for those who continue to befriend PF. Please pray that we keep our unity in Christ strong and that it would be fully evident in everything we do in the coming year.



The PF staff enjoyed the secluded beauty of the Alton Collins Conference Center for our staff retreat.

special family and friends presentation

Our Family and Friends Group now meets on the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m. At the September 18th meeting, Catherine Chapman, PF's Women's Ministry Director, will be available to discuss the needs of women affected by homosexuality. This is an open group; no registration is required. Call for additional information.

september - october calendar & services

september 5, 12, 19, 26

Leadership Training

Small group training for the leaders of the *Taking Back Ground* 2006-07 program. 7 p.m.

sept 7, 14, 21, 28

october 5, 12, 19, 26

Upper Room Intern Program

These first two months of training will include: orientation, personality testing, basic counseling skills, and small group dynamics.

sept 18 & oct 16

Family & Friends Group

For those who have a loved one involved in homosexuality and want guidance, encouragement and support. Join us the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

sept 18

Special Family and Friends Presentation

Our Family and Friends Group now meets on the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m. At the September 18th meeting, Catherine Chapman, PF's Women's Ministry Director will be available to discuss the needs of women affected by homosexuality. This is an open group; no registration is required.

october 4, 11, 18, 25

Taking Back Ground

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

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.

welcome two new interns

Upper Room interns participate in the work of PF by teaching, leading small groups, mentoring and assisting in the day to day work of the ministry. The interns meet weekly for classes and are equipped with a range of skills for ministry. Additionally, they are involved in weekly mentoring sessions for personal and spiritual growth.



Robyn Gates, whose story is featured in this month's newsletter, will begin the Upper Room Intern Program this month. Robyn, who is from Salem, Oregon, completed her second year of *Taking Back Ground* last spring, and served on our music team. She has worked with children and youth in several ministry settings.



Danny Harvey holds a degree in Industrial Engineering, and has studied at Multnomah Seminary. He will begin a counseling degree at Western Seminary this fall in Portland. Over the years he has worked with campus ministry groups, served the homeless, worked as a camp counselor and participated in music ministry.

prayers and praises

For God's continued protection of the staff's hearts as we deal with the brokenness of those who come to this place.

Please pray for those who are approaching Portland Fellowship for the first time, seeking freedom from shame and fear.

We ask your prayers for those who are beginning the internship this fall. Pray that God will provide for all their needs, and make their hearts ready for a life-changing year.

Our new and returning participants, that God will bring them healing beyond their expectations.

Praise God for his consistent provision – showing us each day new wonders of his love, mercy and protection.

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.



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

MINISTRY STAFF

Jason Thompson
Executive Director

Catherine Chapman
Women's Ministry Director

Jim Thompson
Pastoral Support

Drew Berryessa
Ministry Assistant

Steve Baliko
Upper Room Assistant

The Fellowship Message is sent free upon request. (An annual donation of \$15 is appreciated to cover printing and postage costs.) No part of this newsletter may be reproduced or reprinted without permission.

post office box 14841
portland, oregon 97293
telephone 503.235.6364
fax 503.235.3896

e-mail: pf@portlandfellowship.com
portlandfellowship.com

Portland Fellowship is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) nondenominational organization. We are exclusively supported through private donations, support services, and offerings.