



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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God begins the Healing Process

Most of us have stopped writing real letters to each other in this digital age. However, sometimes putting pen to paper is just what we need to get to the heart of what we are thinking. This month we are pleased to share with you a pen-and-ink letter from a person at the beginning of his recovery process. "Jeff" has written to encourage another person struggling to come to terms with his homosexuality as well as HIV / AIDS status. His letter is raw and filled with the type of honest and hard-hitting realities that face many of our participants. We are grateful for his willingness to share this letter with all of us. We have edited the content for this newsletter, but an unedited version has been posted on our website.

Dear Garrett,

I am so glad to have received your letter! It seems you and I are going through similar emotions at the moment. First of all, a little background on me. I am 31. I have been sexually active with men my entire life. I came out of the closet officially as gay when I was 16 or 17, my Junior year of high school. At 22 I found out I have HIV. Less than a year later I met the man who would be my partner for 8 years. Just over a year ago, I was saved by God, who drew me to Jesus on that day and revealed himself in an awesome, powerful and unmistakable way. But wait, what does God want with some queer with AIDS? Shouldn't I just die and go to hell? I mean, one less reject for society to have to deal with – right?

Man, I was thrilled that God noticed me and chose me – ME! God is pretty awesome, right? The church I walked into on that foggy autumn day was awesome. I got just what was necessary so I could get to know God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It was a cake walk for the first six months. He provided for my needs left and right...and then came the big bomb. God pressed on my consciousness that I needed to separate from my partner, Roger. Somehow, I was able to move...about a mile away. I would still walk home and have dinner with him, do laundry, etc. Okay, okay. So I didn't know really how to take care of myself. I relied on men to protect me. But honestly, Roger wasn't God; he was my substitute for God. In order for God to be God in my life, I needed to let Roger go.

It was around that time I stopped taking my HIV meds after 6 years or so. I made the decision to have faith that God would miraculously heal me, if only I did the right things, made the right choices, basically get over my homosexuality. I knew I was saved, but healing was the driving force, the main motivator for obeying, praying and seeking God. Hmm...so how to get rid of my gayness. Never mind I have been involved in sexual activity with men for almost twenty odd years; never had a hetero thought in my life, didn't know of any other identity. All my friends were gay, my parents loved their gay son, my sisters loved their gay brother, my coworkers loved their new gay gardener. Okay, God, I'll try to make it go away, though I love my homosexuality and don't particularly want to part with it. But it seems like a good swap for healing from AIDS.

So a few months go by, praying, learning about God, only snuggling with Roger, but no sex. See, God, I went two whole weeks – aren't you proud of me? I totally cut sex and porn out of my diet. I was getting close to healing! I was so full of faith when I went in for my first blood test. This was it; my destiny was going to begin. I went in for my results, after enjoying zero viral load and a high CD4 count for years. I was expecting the



same. The doctor gave me the shocking news that my viral load was near 100,000. (My CD4 count was still not too horrible, around 500.) I was devastated. How could I have been such a fool. I gave in to lust just before my blood was drawn! Surely God decided to withhold healing until I was clear of the sin that got me into this awful predicament. Take this sin away, God. I'll be one of those monks whose lives aren't complicated by sexual desire, I promise.

This, my friend, went on for a year. As my viral load kept going up and my CD4 count was going down, I still clung to my faith that I was healed.

In January of 2006, I stumbled across Portland Fellowship's website, and immediately felt a spark. I felt God stir me up. I asked God if it was his desire for me to participate at PF. If so, he had to make a way for me. He did, and by May I moved down from Seattle to Portland. This was my chance to start over as the sexless, healed Christian man of God that I felt I had to be. I was to be healed of AIDS, damn it. God says it in his Word, and if his Word is true, it will happen!

I got settled into Portland quickly, and got involved with *Living Well*, an HIV / AIDS support ministry of Portland Fellowship. This group of guys truly understands me and I can openly express myself about dealing with HIV/AIDS and the rest of life, as well. After a year and a half of praying for this, God felt I must be ready for this and what was to come.

It took a couple of months living in Portland before the strain began to wear me down. Living in a new city away from family and friends, newly single, and living in a city with lots of temptation, I began to feel the need for a man in my life. I needed a boyfriend! I actually went on a few dates with different men, only to become very frustrated that I couldn't build a relationship, a sexual relationship with a man, now that God had brought me too far for it to work. This, in turn, made me feel very upset and angry. I felt that God would not let me have one of the essential experiences we as humans long for and need, a sexual relationship with someone they love. #?@%* great! I'm gay, right? It's not fair that I'm not allowed to hold and be held, kiss and be kissed, touch and be touched, walk down the street holding hands with, daydream about, snuggle with, laugh with, share my pain with, have a sexual relationship with...a man that I love. What kind of insanity have I got myself into? Thanks a lot, God for bringing me this far just so I can go through this life alone, while other people are enjoying what comes naturally to them! Why is what I want so wrong? Why have I always been this way? I feel like I've been set up only to be denied love. I'm going to just pack my bags, load up my car, drive back up to Seattle and move back in with Roger. Roger was right. I can't survive on my own. I am like a little boy who can't cope with life.

However, before I could pull out my suitcase, God reminded me of something – where he brought me from. It seemed great, my past. The beautiful boyfriend who was my rock, my partner in life, lots of

friends, house with a great view of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains, two cats. Did I forget to mention I was also suffering from panic disorder, anxiety disorder, other psychological disorders, drug problems, major depression and a suicide attempt...and, oh yeah, AIDS! I had been through the ringer, it seems, with chemotherapy for Kaposi's sarcoma and pancreatitis, among a few other things. I wasn't living, I was dying - painfully.

On that first day of Fall 2004, God chose me...the one who is angry at him; me, the one who almost abandoned him for a boyfriend; me, the chronic curser; me, who didn't know the first thing about Him or Jesus; me, the one who desperately needs a relationship...with God. Romans 9:15-16 says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not depend on man's desire or effort, but God's mercy. Wow! We were singled out by God and blessed with His mercy. Mercy on the guy who just recently screamed and cried to God, "I hate this joke called life. You are a cruel God. How could you possibly love me if you created me?" Not of my own efforts? So God wants to have a relationship with this queer, reject, sexual struggler with AIDS?

Wow, God is awesome! I still can't get over the fact that he loves me. Will I still be all of those things a year from now? Five years from now? I don't know, but I do know that God has begun the healing process. Only as much as I am ready for and can handle. Painful, yes! Every time I cry from heartache, I feel God chipping away a tiny piece of hurt and replacing it with Him. So I guess I'll be doing lots of crying, screaming and arguing with God. In the process of that, he'll be healing me: the hurt, the unforgiveness, heartache, loneliness. Why? Because He has promised us, and if His Word is true, it will happen. God does approve of us; why else would a father teach his sons? Teach his sons how to live in goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly love and love? God

is coming to us injured sons with Bactine in his hand! It's going to sting like hell, but our wounds will heal free of infection, in time. I love you brother, and please, I want to hear more about you soon!

Grace and peace to you.

Jeff

Also forgot mention...

I still have AIDS. Will God heal me? I don't know, but God pressed me to go back on my meds which I started almost a month ago. I'm beginning to realize that this is just something I need to rely on God for, my health. I thank God daily for health, and believe he has cool things in store for me. I'm beginning to learn Spanish and look at a map of the world in anticipation. Will I die of AIDS? Perhaps, but God will still use me, and give me an adventurous life. He is awesome indeed!



an important day

December 1st may have passed many of us by as just another Friday. But for the 5,000+ men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS in Oregon and the more than 40,000,000 people world wide it was anything but another day. Portland Fellowship was involved with two separate events that helped bring increased awareness and action on behalf of those living with HIV/AIDS. We were invited to speak at North West Medical Teams' Conference on International and Domestic Issues surrounding the churches' response to the pandemic of HIV/AIDS. Staff member Steve Baliko shared a powerful vision of what the church could be doing as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in Portland. He reminded the gathering of church leaders of what the Body did not do in response to the AIDS crisis that began 25 years ago. Suggestions of a better road forward and of the Hope that Christians can bring to people living with HIV/AIDS were also part of the message that he shared with those gathered. A follow-up meeting is planned to discuss some of the practical ways that the churches can be engaged in meeting the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.

On Friday evening, Portland Fellowship, the Well Community Church and Imago Dei sponsored a prayer gathering. Forty people met to pray for the church of Portland and to lift up in prayer those currently living with HIV/AIDS. After a time of confession and repentance on behalf of the larger church's lack of compassionate response to the HIV/AIDS community, each person picked up one or two names of people living with AIDS and committed to pray for them for the next year. Forming small groups, people prayed for the hardships and the stigma that people frequently face because of the disease that is ravaging their bodies. Many prayers were offered that we might see the day when HIV will be freely discussed in all of our churches. One of the men present is currently with HIV/AIDS. His thoughts on the evening were revealing: "I've been waiting for 20 years to see a church do this. I can't not tell you how blessed I feel tonight. God is doing great things." Everyone present that evening would whole heartedly agree. Please continue to pray as Portland Fellowship continues to reach out to churches and continue a conversation about how we as the Body of Christ can speak truth and love into our churches and our world, as we specifically discuss HIV/AIDS and it's continuing impact on our community and our world.



what do we do?

Early this November news broke of the sexual misconduct of Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals. The news and internet was full of reports of his drug abuse and solicitation of the services of a male prostitute. On December 15th, the nearly 170 people claiming they were sexually abused by priests that once worked in Western Oregon agreed to settle their lawsuit against the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland. The Archdiocese of Portland was the first in the nation to seek protection from creditors when it went to federal bankruptcy court to head off a massive sex-abuse lawsuit. These are just two examples of the growing list of local and national church leaders who, in recent months, had their sexual / moral failures exposed in very public and painful ways. It seems everywhere you turn, the reality of sexual sin stands out like muddy footprints on a white carpet.



We as Christians have a problem. While not a new problem, it is becoming more obvious and its consequences increasingly destructive. Our problem is with honesty. In his resignation letter to his congregation, Haggard wrote, "When I stopped communicating about my problems, the darkness increased and finally dominated me. As a result, I did things that were contrary to everything I believe... Then, because of pride, I began deceiving those I love the most because I didn't want to hurt or disappoint them." International speaker and pastor Sy Rogers reveals the driving mentality behind this type of behavior in a profound statement. Quoting Sy, "Christians are often ashamed to admit what everyone knows: Christianity does not make us immune to our sexual passions. Everything doesn't get 'fixed' just because we come into relationship with God." No doubt, a temptation we all at times face is to pretend we have it all together while in reality the darkness is increasing and could be allowed to dominate us. *What do we do with the muddy footprints?*

Every one of us was created with sexual desires. Pair that with the reality that we are living in an increasingly sexually compromised society. If we think that we are beyond vulnerability in the area of sexual struggle, than we are already being dishonest with ourselves. Ignoring the muddy footprints does not make the floor clean. We need to learn how to be better stewards of our gift of sexuality. We need to be living honestly about our struggles. We need to begin giving others the invitation and freedom to be honest about their struggles. Join us March 31st for our annual seminar, as we address the dirty footprints of this often avoided and rarely brought to light area of our lives, our sexuality.

january - february calendar & services

january 9, 16, 23, 30

february 6, 13, 20, 27

Taking Back Ground

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

january 9

Teleconference for Exodus Directors

Jason will be hosting this monthly teleconference with special guest Joseph Nicolosi. Contact Jason for info.

january 15 & february 19

Family & Friends Group

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

january 25th

Annual Planning Meeting

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

january 30- february 2

Exodus Leadership Conference

Jason will be attending this conference in Orlando, Florida.

january and february

Upper Room Intern Program

Our interns will begin acquiring ministry administration skills, including, conference planning, goal setting, financial procedure, newsletter production and continued small group and counseling skills.

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.

spanish edition of TBG

Portland Fellowship is pleased to announce the completion of Taking Back Ground Volume One in Spanish. "Recuperando lo que nos pertenece" is best translated "Recovering what belongs to us". We have connected with Exodus Latin America and have encouraged them to make this new resource available to their ministries. We are excited to offer this resource to Latino Americans who struggle with issues of same sex attraction as well. To order a copy, please visit our website www.portlandfellowship.com. For an order of 10 or more books, please contact us for information about discounts.



thank you!

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

Those who have given financially to Portland Fellowship will soon receive an annual statement of giving for tax purposes.

prayers and praises

Please pray for our participants during the post-Christmas season, especially for those dealing with family issues and depression.

...for those designing our ReachTruth program; for God to open doors to better serve younger strugglers and to assist their pastors and mentors.

...for pastors who are struggling with sexual addiction; for the church to develop the means to support pastors and church workers and to respond to their brokenness. That the churches be unafraid to address these issues.

...for those whom God is preparing to be Upper Room interns this next year; that they might hear God's call and respond faithfully.

...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.

...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.

...for the restoration of those who have been in recovery programs and have fallen away.



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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