



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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A Portrait of Redemption

Portland Fellowship is honored to be hosting Sy Rogers, a gifted international communicator, award-winning talk show host, recording artist and pastor for our annual seminar this month. Sy has served for over two decades in ministry as a pastoral care specialist regarding sexuality and related concerns. His seminars and speaking events are conducted trans-denominationally on six continents for a wide variety of audiences including leadership conferences, counseling training, youth festivals, and men's events such as Promise Keepers. This month's newsletter presents a portrait of Sy that was adapted from his testimony as shared on his video "One of the Boys".

People think that talking about sexual themes in a church context may not seem comfortable, and some of us come from church cultures where we just don't talk about this stuff. I always say that does not make you holier, it doesn't make you healthier, and it doesn't enable you to become more relevant in a world that is talking about sexuality everyday, but not from a redemptive point of view, but from a fallen point of view.

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 a relationship with God. Christians are often surprised and disillusioned because they still have sexual struggles. We haven't had realistic expectations, or an informed understanding of 'why' we struggle, much less 'what' to do about it. Pastors and Bible college graduates lament the fact that they may have a head full of theology, but that is not the same as knowing how to actually help someone, or effectively manage their own sexuality.

If you have been born again for more than 15 minutes, you know that while the blood of Jesus washes away guilt and sin, it doesn't wash away memory, history, humanity and its attendant vulnerabilities. And yet we serve a God who does have redemptive solutions.

The best lessons I have learned in my life come from my own life journey, not just as a pastoral care giver working cross culturally, but as a man who has to practice everything that I preach and teach others.

The first half of my life was an emotional concentration camp. My alcoholic mother was killed in a car wreck when I was four. Prior to that, I was sexually molested by a family "friend". After my mom's death, I was separated from my father for a year. I lived in an emotional vacuum. My identity and security as a male was left unaffirmed and unnourished. Later in school, I was routinely ridiculed, rejected, and



Sy Rogers has been in sexual redemption ministry for over two decades, speaking on three to six continents every year.

physically abused due to my effeminate mannerisms. Even though I tried to “conform to the norm,” I was continually labeled a homosexual and a failure as a man. It’s no wonder I had problems!

As a teenager, I had not yet identified myself as a homosexual. Yet I was certainly aware of my attractions to the same sex and I felt fear and shame. A few years later after eventually involving myself in the gay scene, I felt such a sense of relief. I felt accepted and understood. At last, I had a place to belong. It was great for a while. Soon I was living in the fast lane, and always surrounding myself with others who would reaffirm and reinforce the gay life. When living in Hawaii, my two gay roommates became husband and husband in a gay wedding in a pro-gay church. However, years later they would be the first to tell me that overcoming homosexuality was possible – they had just began the effort themselves. They said God was helping them and that they were praying for me. I laughed in contempt, thinking they were some kind of traitors. My attitude was: I am born gay, can’t change, I shouldn’t need to, gay is good and they’re crazy because everyone knows once gay always gay. That was the mantra I had drilled in to my head and heart.



Sy speaking at Mega-Church ‘City Harvest Church’ in Singapore

My own journey out of the gay life first began with my attempt at securing male love by becoming a woman through a sex change. Though I did not get around to ever having the surgery, I was on hormone therapy and lived as a woman for about a year and a half. Yet, even then I realized that surgery couldn’t really solve my problems and wouldn’t secure love for me. Realizing that I hadn’t managed my life very well on my own, I finally began earnestly seeking God. It was my re-ignited faith in God that led me to a new path I once thought impossible for me. It wasn’t that I was trying to stop being gay. I didn’t know how – or if it was even possible. I was, however, willing to stop living my life on my terms. Instead, I yielded to God on His terms. That was at the end of 1979.

At that time, my gay friends thought I was crazy. They said I would be back in the bars in a week, a month, a year. I never went back. But it wasn’t easy. I did have a lot of struggles in the beginning, but like most worthwhile efforts, the perseverance paid off. Today I very much enjoy the opportunity to live beyond my past problems. I’ve enjoyed being a husband since 1982 and a father of a lovely daughter. This isn’t proof that I’m not gay, but it is evidence of a life I never thought possible. As you grow, things change – what once

was undesirable and unattainable became both desirable and attainable for me.

My recovery process took time, work, and the encouragement and accountability of my supportive friends. More importantly, my recovery depended on my willingness to cooperate with God. Over the years and around the globe, everyone that I personally know – or know of – that has overcome homosexuality has been enabled to do so as a direct consequence of a life yielded to God and committed to the lordship of Christ. I always like to say, God takes all that manure and turns it into fertilizer. I joke, but I had no choice about the setup in my life, and I didn’t understand how I reacted to it. I am very glad that the Lord is

able to take all of that and somehow in the alchemy of God’s redemption, turns it into something that helps other people, that encourages other people, indeed that there is hope, there is encouragement beyond brokenness and pain. We are made to mend, we are made to grow, we are made to go on, and you can. I am so thankful I yielded to God. The best decision I ever made in my life was that I just stopped resisting Him.

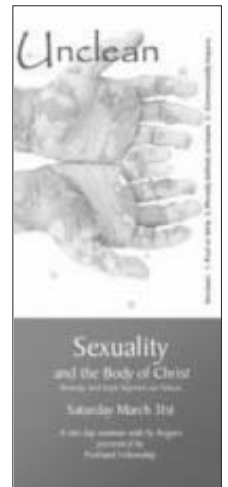
I often share in my story, Isaiah chapter 1:18-20, (paraphrased) “Come now says the Lord, let’s talk this thing through, let’s reason it out. If you’ll just stop resisting Me, you’ll have My best, but if you insist on your own path, you are going to destroy yourself. You choose. I want to bless you, I want better for you than this.” You know, I love that God takes responsibility for the stuff that happens in our life. He did allow all these bad things to happen to me, but now that I am yielded to God, He now has permission to take the bad and work it into something good. It’s the classic story of God, and I’m just thankful that it’s not just something that you can hear about or read about, but that I have experienced it, and anyone can.

I’ve had people say to me, ‘You’re the LAST person I’d ever pick as a representative of sexual redemption!’ I can only agree and say, I know—and that’s probably exactly why God would deliberately pick someone like me...after all, it is God who first originated the idea of not judging a book by its cover...of picking ‘the reject’, ‘the weak one’, the ‘least likely to succeed’. Though I’ll never live my life as if I had not been a homosexual, I am able to live BEYOND that now.

unclean: sexuality and the body of christ

There is a reality that we must face: The church at large has a major problem on its hands. In 2004, the Barna research group showed that the rate of divorce was identical in the church as it was in the world, roughly thirty-nine percent. The statistics reveal sexual misconduct with leaders and laymen alike. According to an article in Christianity Today, fifty-one percent of pastors say cyber-porn is a temptation. Thirty-seven percent say it is a current struggle, and forty-seven percent of Christians admit that pornography is a major problem in their homes. These are all indications of sexual brokenness within the Body of Christ.

Each year, Portland Fellowship offers an educational seminar to the community. This year, we have invited international speaker and teacher Sy Rogers to offer his insight in the area of sexual brokenness and redemption. Sy observes, "Sexual issues are confronting Christian leadership not just in culture, but within every congregation. Yet it's my observation that the majority of Bible colleges do little to adequately prepare Christian workers for this reality...resulting in ineffective discipleship, poor self management and diminished redemptive impact on the community".



Please consider attending the seminar. In addition we want to encourage you to share the enclosed brochure with your 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. For more information or to register for the seminar, please visit www.portlandfellowship.com

a letter from ecuador

Churches often sponsor a missionary in a foreign country. For a number of years, PF has made a financial contribution to a ministry in Ecuador. Betty Van Engen, a leader in that ministry has provided us the following report of their progress, which we are pleased to share with you this month. It is our prayer that this partnership will grow, strengthening the bonds between us:



Portland Fellowship recently published Volume 1 of Taking Back Ground in Spanish. We are excited to see this resource available to ministries like Camino de Salida.

Camino de Salida (The Way Out) ministry in Ecuador maintains two offices, in Quito and Guayaquil, where there are daily provisions of Christian counseling for sexuality, affection, and relational issues. We hope some day to have an extension office in each major city of Ecuador. Our ministry is affiliated with Exodus Latinamerica. Portland Fellowship has supported this ministry with financial gifts and prayers since 2003.

In 2006, after five years of effort, *Camino de Salida* reached an important milestone – receiving our official registration papers and being recognized by the government as a legal foundation in Ecuador. We see it as an important act of obedience before God to be in compliance with the law; and this status allows us the opportunity to import equipment tax-free and possibly receive tax-deductible donations in the country. At the same time this is a stretching experience as it requires more detailed performance in administration. We would request your prayers as we walk through this growth period.

During this past year, we were able to run three support groups for people at different places in the healing process. We praise God for the growth and development of our group facilitators and the faithful attendance and participation of those who have come to us looking for help and support.

Another major goal we had for 2006 was the development of new counselors. Early in the year, we were seeing more people in need just as two of our main counselors had to move away. We had greatly desired to have one of our potential counselors attend the Upper Room Program of Portland Fellowship, but due to the denial of his request for a USA visa this became impossible. Consequently two of us with counseling experience developed a Basic Christian Counseling course that lasted several months with weekly meetings in order to train up leaders in our midst. We are grateful to God that five new counselors graduated from the course and are now actively working in the ministry.

Camino de Salida is also involved in the teaching and training of others in the church in Ecuador and also in other countries. In August, God provided for six of us in leadership to travel to Lima, Peru to help a sister ministry there with their first national conference.

We are very grateful to God for His provision of wisdom and guidance this year. Thank you, Portland Fellowship, for your partnership with us in declaring freedom through Jesus Christ.

march - april calendar & services

march 9-11 **TBG Retreat**

Open to current participants and alumni of the *Taking Back Ground* program. Contact the office for details, or register online.

march 13, 20, 27 **Open Group**

Portland Fellowship invites anyone interested in learning more about the ministry, sharing their story, or simply listening to others to join us. 7 p.m.

march 13 **Teleconference for Exodus Directors**

Jason will be hosting this monthly teleconference. Contact Jason for info.

march 19 & april 16 **Family & Friends Group**

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

march 30, 31 **Seminar: "Unclean"**

Portland Fellowship will be presenting the seminar "Unclean: Sexuality and the Body of Christ" with guest speaker Sy Rogers. The Friday night portion of this seminar is free of charge, and everyone is welcome to attend. To register for Saturdays event: go online at portlandfellowship.com

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.

taking back ground retreat, march 9-11



A retreat is a time set aside to enter a quiet and meaningful place to learn more of God's loving relationship with us—and to discover how to recognize the presence of our Lord in the moments of very ordinary living.

There is evidence among many people—especially those seeking specific healing – of a hunger for a genuine renewal with the Spirit of God. Reflection and prayer are the components that nourish the spirit; and the

retreat experience focuses on those very aspects.

Our *Taking Back Ground* retreat will be a time for participants to examine their life, and to discover God's Will as they continue in this life changing journey. We are pleased to know that we have several alumni joining us this year. If you are interested in joining us, please contact the office or sign up for the retreat online.

upper room applications available

We are excited about the continued blessings and opportunities afforded by the Upper Room Intern Program. Prayerfully consider and ask God to bring to mind someone who might be qualified and passionate in the area of ministering to men and women desiring to come out of homosexuality. If you are interested in a 9-month in-depth training and mentoring program contact Jim to receive our new brochure and/or an application. Applications are currently being accepted and will be through early summer for the class of 2007-2008.

prayer and praise

Praise for: Jason and Amy Thompson who are expecting another child in September.

Prayer for: those whom God is calling to be interns in the 2007-08 program, that they will respond to God's call.

Prayer for: our seminar, that the Lord would speak through Sy, and that all who are supposed to attend will register.

Prayer for: our participants and leaders as we spend time with the Lord at the Retreat this month.



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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