



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Forgiveness in the Present Tense Ron and Heidi interviewed by Steve Baliko

*I swear this is going to be the last time, Ron thought to himself as he walked back to his car and drove away from his most recent sexual encounter. I'm going to tell Heidi, I'm going to tell her tonight.*

Over and over he repeated this to himself as he got closer to home. She would still be at work. This was just how it went: Find someone, do something, break down, pull myself together, be warm and welcoming when she got home. One man, two lives, two sets of lies.

*I can't take this much more, Ron would think to himself. And then the lies would start up: She'll divorce you! You'll never get to see your kids. And as the years went by: the kids will hate you and never want to be around you. And after more than twenty years: you'll never get to be around your grandkids if anyone finds out. The fear of the truth coming out was blackmail; it had become a command to keep quiet, to keep playing the game, to manage two lives, both untrue. But the lies were not the only voice that he could hear.*

Many times, God had spoken calmly and gently to Ron: *If you tell your wife I will deliver you. If you open up and tell the truth I will save your marriage.* And as often as Jesus would whisper these promises, the lies would rise up and stoke the fires of fear, desire, deception, shame and guilt. And God responded with Isaiah 1: 18-20: "Come, let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow...if you consent and obey." In 1997, he took the first step toward God's promise of deliverance: Twenty-four years into marriage Ron sat down to talk with his wife: "Heidi, I have to tell you something, something really hard..."

Recently, my wife and I sat with Ron and Heidi in their newly-renovated condo to talk about their healing process and how their service together at Portland Fellowship has been deepening the reality of Faith, Hope and Love in their lives.

### What were those first few weeks, months like for each of you after Ron's disclosure?

**Heidi:** Ron shared some things the first night and it took weeks for him to tell me all of it, all the things he needed to confess and unload. It was like being given all of his heavy baggage and being asked to carry it without any preparation or knowledge of what to do with it. I was shocked and kept asking myself, "Where was I? How could I have missed all of this? What kind of wife was I, that my spouse could not share his deepest fears and faults?"

**Ron:** I had been afraid of Heidi divorcing me, which she had every right to do, and at the same time I didn't think that she would. My bigger fear was what life would look like without *this* in my life? I didn't know if I could live differently. I was sincerely convinced that I deserved all my fears and self-hatreds. To live without them was both a deep desire and a terrifying unknown. And that slowly began to change.

**H:** It was horrible. We were both so upset and we could hardly talk at all. I kept telling myself: *Okay I'll stay with him for three months. Okay I'll stay with him for six months.* And I was angry. I felt ripped off in every area of my life.



Ron and Heidi  
serve on PF's  
Taking Back Ground  
Leadership Team.

**R:** Heidi did some digging for help and found Portland Fellowship. Despite initial resistance on my part, I was so relieved to find a place that could actually help, a place where people understood the struggles that had haunted me. PF allowed us to be scared and angry and confused throughout the process. The people who walked alongside of us helped us recognize the strengths of our marriage that were valid even in the face of sinfulness. I wanted our marriage to work. I wanted God's promises to be true.

**H:** I had to rethink why I was attracted to him in the first place and I had to remember why I loved him. I had to allow him to woo me again and to receive the work he wanted to do by stepping towards me in love. Even though I had plenty of hurt, he was still the man I loved and that didn't change. We read the Bible to each other. Mostly Ron read to me and it allowed us to communicate without our own words getting in the way. Honestly, it allowed me to tolerate his voice again. Reading allowed us time together that wasn't spent in conflict. It was incredibly calming.

### **What are some of the biggest differences in your marriage after the disclosure?**

**R:** Changes came slowly, but when I look back I see that freedom and honesty have become central in our relationship.

**H:** It is true that time heals things, but only if those things are committed to God and entrusted to His way of doing things. We are now able to give and receive honest blessings in our marriage and it is much easier to talk about hard issues than ever before. Neither of us is so quick to take personal offense at things we say or do.

### **Are there any specific parts of the Bible that have sustained you?**

**R:** (Ron walks over and takes a framed verse off the wall) "...He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him...**" Psalm 103: 9-14

**H:** All of the Psalms were an anchor to me and we wanted lasting change from the inside out. "...return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." **Rend your heart and not your garments.** Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love..." Joel 2: 12-14

### **What would you want to tell a couple who is early in the healing and recovery process?**

**H:** I am serious when I tell women who are struggling to stay in their marriages: You can love again! I remind them that there is hope and that God will enable them to do what they think they can't do. Forgiveness is not a conditional command. Jesus offers it to us in the present tense and we can offer forgiveness as well.

**R:** It is so worth it taking the time to woo your wife back: To honestly pursue her and God is amazing freedom. You cannot pay for all the wrong you've done, but Jesus can and did. Let him give you peace by being the One in control of the healing and recovery process. Stop trying to do it by yourself.

### **What would you want to tell a man or woman who is trying to work up the courage to come clean with the secret life they are living?**

**R:** Don't waste time thinking that there will be a perfect time. The cycle of self-hate will continue to be a never-ending nauseating spiral. You have to decide that you want *freedom* more than you want yourself or that other person or the idea of the other person fulfilling something in you. If you want freedom, it is possible. If you don't want to be free you won't do anything.

### **How has your view of God changed over the years? Who is God to you today?**

**H:** In the midst of utter chaos and desperation, God's unconditional love and compassion guided us through troubled times. He brought a small group of friends and family who helped us through the reconciliation. Best of all, His grace met us just where we were and continues to sustain us.

**R:** We truly see Him as the God who is full of mercy, truth, and faithfulness. He has re-claimed our hearts in ways we didn't even know was possible. He was everything that He promised that He would be in our lives, and continues to be so much more.

### **How has God grown and strengthened your marriage through being able to serve together at PF?**

**R:** Going through *Taking Back Ground* and now serving as a small group leader at PF helped me understand that I didn't have a fighting chance to not struggle with this but that the attractions and my acting out were far from the final word. The opportunity to give back hope to other men who are struggling is beautiful. And that hope feeds right back into our own marriage. We feel like a team in praying for these couples and wanting God's best for them, knowing that is truly God's heart for Heidi and me, too. I love hearing the testimonies of people walking in freedom; I can never get enough of those.

**H:** Working with wives who are going through the pain and the heartbreak that I went through is a remarkable opportunity to feel the sadness of our hard times - but to not stay there - by offering real hope and comfort. It is so powerful to see victory taking hold in these women's lives. We understand each other more and more as we serve at PF.

*We are grateful to Ron and Heidi for sharing part of their story with us and for their faithful service at Portland Fellowship. Our ministry exists because of the hope of Jesus Christ being actively lived out in the lives of our many faithful and prayerfully committed volunteers. We are grateful for each and everyone who serves, prays for and supports this work.*



*Ron and Heidi with others at this year's TBG retreat*

## deeply rooted: summer series 2007

Portland Fellowship announces the 2007 Summer Session: *Deeply Rooted: Growing in the Spiritual Disciplines*. Last year we started a tradition that is going to be an annual opportunity for us to regroup and reinvigorate our relationships with God. Here are some of the reactions to last year's series:

*"The small group discussions really gave us the opportunity to open up and think hard."*

*"I was really impressed with the cohesiveness of this series."*

*"I tend to not like small group times but I really grew from the ones this summer."*

*"Making the pottery leaves during the discipline of celebration was a great way to walk away with a visual reminder of God's new creation in me."*

*"I learned that there are lots of things that can be mourned about in life and that you can release that pain."*

*"I committed to reading my Bible on a regular basis after the series."*



Many people remarked that the disciplines of Silence and Solitude afforded them a new way to find a resting place in their over-filled lives. Taking time out to explore the tools that help us grow in our relationship with God is never wasted time. Learning about worship and scripture, about dying to self, and rejoicing in God's provision are ways to expand the way we fellowship with God. *Deeply Rooted 2007* will continue this process. The staff has been expanding the list of spiritual disciplines and is excited at how this year's series is taking shape.

There are some regular disciplines that we recognize as wonderful ideals but we never follow thru to see them developed in our lives. Forgiveness, Self-control, Simplicity, Confession, and Innocence are some of the new disciplines that we are working on for this summer. As always, this eight-week series is open to alumni, current participants, future participants and friends of Portland Fellowship who desire the cultivation of a richer and wider conversation with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their daily lives. Consider this ancient powerful prayer, packed full of the truth of Jesus' character as you make plans to join us this summer for *Deeply Rooted 2007*:

*You are Christ, my Holy Lord, my Tender God, my Great King, my Good Shepherd, my Only Master, my Best Helper, my Most Beautiful and my Beloved, my Living Bread, my Priest Forever, my Leader to my Country, my True Light, my Holy Sweetness, my Straight Way, my Excellent Wisdom, my Pure Simplicity, my Peaceful Harmony, my Entire Provision, my Good Portion, my Everlasting Salvation. AMEN.*

## pf friends and family group



*"I can't talk to anybody at my church?"*

*"I feel so guilty."*

*"I feel like my dreams are dying."*

*"We don't know how to tell people. Should we tell people?"*

*"We need hope."*

Each month, PF is host to a group of parents, family members and friends of persons who are affected by homosexuality. We are there to provide each other mutual support. Together, we seek wisdom from God about how to love in truth. The sharing of stories often brings clarity and hope.

Over the years, participants in our meetings have reported that these gatherings were an important part of the support they needed to get through the long process of loving someone whose choices (and demands) have caused hurt and bewilderment. One evening, one of PF's interns spoke of this time as being a "holy waiting room", a time when we need to grow in our capacities to love, and care, and pray while God does his

work in the life of someone we love. As in many support groups, there is a comprehension and empathy that can come only from those who have had similar experiences.

The meetings are open to all who have a concern for someone impacted by same-sex attraction. Some come just to listen, but most want to share. Usually, the discussion is unstructured. Our leader is Jim Thompson, a PF staff member, a former pastor, and father of Jason Thompson, PF's director. Sometimes, we have a guest speaker who leads us in a particular topic. From time-to-time, that will be a person who has struggled and overcome the power of unwanted attraction. Always, we pray for each other.

There is no need to pre-register, and no cost. Meetings are held the third Friday of every Month at 7 p.m.

## may - june calendar & services

may 6  
9:30-10:30

### In-Town Presbyterian

Jason will be speaking in their morning service.

may 8

### Teleconference for Exodus Directors

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

may 18 & june 15

### Family & Friends Group

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

may 24

### TBG graduation

Open to current participants and invited guests. An evening of celebration for those completing the *Taking Back Ground* program.

june 5, 12, 19, 26

### Open Group

Portland Fellowship invites anyone interested in learning more about the ministry, share their story, or simply listen to others to join us in March at 7p.m. All are welcome!

june 26 - july 1

### Exodus: Annual Conference

Jason Thompson will be attending. For registration information: [www.exodus.to](http://www.exodus.to)

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

### Counseling and youth support

Can be arranged through the office.

## a visitor from ecuador

For a number of years, PF has had a companion ministry in Quito, Ecuador, *Camino de Salida* (Way Out). PF has been able to provide some financial support, and have, in the past, had individuals visit the ministry. Now, we have been blessed with a return visit. Betty Van Engen, the founder of the ministry and a current board member, spent four days in Portland, attending various events including the *Upper Room Intern Program* and *Taking Back Ground*. Betty is a registered nurse who works with HIV/AIDS patients. As an outgrowth of that work, she recognized the need for counseling for those struggling with homosexuality.

Jason Thompson, our director is planning a trip to Ecuador in August to assist with an area conference and to provide some training for ministry leaders. PF recently published a Spanish language version of the first-year volume of *Taking Back Ground* (*Recuperando Lo Que Nos Pertenece*), and is making it available to Hispanic ministries in the United States as well as ministries in Latin America.

As a token of appreciation, Betty gave PF a beautifully woven tapestry showing scenes representative of Ecuador.

## annual seminar wrap-up



Sy with the staff of PF

people attended the Saturday workshop.

On March 30 and 31, PF hosted Sy Rogers for our annual seminar. This year's event included an evening open to anyone to attend where Sy shared his powerful testimony. Over 350 people attended this session and over 250

This was a wonderful event and many were encouraged, equipped and inspired by the teachings that Sy shared. Thank you to everyone who made this event possible.

## prayer and praise

**Prayer for:** Betty and everyone at Camino de Salida as they expand their ministry around Ecuador.

**Prayer for:** Our interns, Danny and Robyn, as they finish their internship, that God would give them wisdom and direction for the next season of life.

**Prayer for:** Our staff as we prayerfully consider which applicants are a good match for the 2007-08 Upper Room Intern Program.

**Prayer for:** Our staff, for continued wisdom, strength, protection and passion as we continue to serve.



## 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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