



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Leap of Faith *by Jason Bigelow*

I took the risk of losing everything I held dear when I "came out of the closet" and chose to live as openly gay. When God called me out of that life, and into eternal life with him, I had to face that risk again.

I grew up in a small northern Michigan town. My family was one of much love, but also many unseen issues. My father, whom I have grown to love dearly, was an alcoholic until I was 3 years old. Although I am glad he stopped drinking then, it left him with a lot of anger and bitterness, much of which was directed at me. My mother and I were very close, even too close at times. I was the sounding board for much of her emotional issues, especially those having to do with my dad. I grew up with little respect for my father and made a vow to never be like him. I rejected his attempts to love me, even later into my teens, and made every attempt to be a different person than he was. This left me with a void for male love that I desperately needed. I knew as a young child that I was different than the other boys my age, and didn't quite know how to connect with them, but was aware of my strong desire to connect with them in some way. As with many men who struggle with homosexuality, this factored into the development of my same sex attraction. As soon as my teenage hormones kicked in, they were meshed into this desire for connection with men. I started to believe that what I wanted, what I needed, was a sexual relationship with another guy. It didn't help that an acquaintance of mine at that time, another guy my age, introduced me to some sexual experimentation. While I was extremely scared of the consequences, it felt like that was just what I needed. I also fed this secret desire with pornography and masturbation for many years. This lustful desire was growing inside me very rapidly, but I was hiding it really well.

On the outside, I was a model Christian young man. I dated girls in high school. I got good grades. I went to church. I was even a leader at youth events and in other church functions. Thankfully I had accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior at an early age of around 5 years old, and really had a deep love for Jesus growing up. However, the inner struggles I was dealing with were in sharp contrast to what I believed. The only time I had ever heard about homosexuality was in jokes my friends and family would make, or in church where it was quickly portrayed as a one way ticket to hell. I grew to believe that my family, my friends, my church, and God all hated gay people. This left me assured that I must keep my feelings a secret. I pleaded with the Lord for years to take away these desires. What I didn't understand then was that God wasn't going to take away my need for male love and connection that had gone unmet. He's the one who put it there in the first place. It was his desire that my needs would be met in healthy, holy ways. I wish I would have heard this from someone then.

My struggle really came to a head shortly after I turned 21. I was having a harder and harder time keeping my secret desires in. I basically came to the conclusion that either I had been fooled and that God did not exist, or that he was just ignoring my earnest prayers for help, and I wanted nothing to do with a God like that. So, dropping my values at the curb, I started to tell a few friends. Well, in small town Michigan, word travels fast and soon I found that I was openly gay. I lost a few friends and my family was devastated. I was not surprised at their reaction, but I was still



Jason is serving as an intern this year in the Upper Room Internship Program

extremely hurt. I decided that I needed to move away from there and create a life away from the repression of home I was feeling. So I moved to a town only 3 hours away from home, which wasn't really far, but enough distance that I could build a new life that I thought would make me happy. I was in college, working a decent job, and in my first gay relationship, but this so called happiness didn't last long.

Walking away from God had left a giant void in my heart, which I tried to fill with many different things. Within 6 months time I found myself unemployed, dropped out of school, homeless, addicted to alcohol, dabbling in drugs, and being quite promiscuous. So much for my new found freedom. Nevertheless, my pride kept me from returning home, so I pushed on. I thought that if I just get a job, if I can just get an apartment, if I just meet a nice guy I will be happy again. However, even when I got those things, I wasn't happy. I tried different jobs, I lived different places, I dated a few seriously great guys, but it just didn't work. At one point I even tried to end my life with a mixture of various prescription pain pills and a bottle of liquor. Obviously it didn't work. I just ended up really sick for a few days. Rock bottom was a place that had become very real, and there wasn't an ounce of hope left in me. I had really screwed up my life.

During the last year I lived in that town, a few different things happened that I am now aware was God's way of calling out to me. First there was the death of my Grandmother, whom I loved dearly and had neglected to visit for an entire year as she suffered from cancer. My selfish life didn't allow me the time to visit her. When she died, I cursed God. Hadn't I been through enough? In retrospect it was the first time I had acknowledged him in over 2 years. Then there was the lovely co-worker of mine that talked of nothing but God. She didn't know of my struggles, but just knew I wasn't living a very healthy life. She told me that she knew I had a kind heart and that even though I might not see it, she could see Jesus in my eyes. Little did she know the impact her words had on my heart. I soon began to realize that the joy I saw in her, and the peace my Grandmother had, even on her deathbed were from Christ. I remember that I used to have that peace and joy. I knew then that it was God I needed in my life again, but how could I come back to him now? Would he even take me back? It's amazing the lies the enemy will have us believe.

I still remember vividly the night in my room that I got down on my knees and cried out to the God I had betrayed, the God who gave me the life I had so quickly trashed. My prayer was something along the lines of "God, I have no idea what I'm doing, but I do know that what I need is you." At that moment I felt the Holy Spirit wash over me, and it was as though Jesus was letting me feel the sadness he had been feeling for me over the past few years. To say that I cried would be an understatement. I cried out to him with all my shame, "Can you ever forgive me?" and his response was "My precious and beautiful boy, I have always loved you. I've known your pain, and I have been

with you the entire way." God showed me that it was time to go home. I had no idea what that meant or what life was going to look like. I was so afraid, because I had given up my life once when I first "came out". I now had a new life established that I thought I wanted with new people I loved. Could I give up my life again?

On May 7th, 2006 I moved home. I got to know my family again, and learned how much the Lord had grown them through my struggle. I opened up about my struggles in church. During the first month, I discovered Exodus International on line. In July, I went to the Exodus Annual Freedom Conference. The people I met there showed me that I wasn't alone in this struggle. Just because a person has same-sex attractions doesn't mean their only chance of happiness is to embrace a gay identity. It was there that the calling to ministry I had felt in my teen years started to make sense. Actually, everything started to make sense. I understood why God would allow me to have this struggle, and how he was going to make something beautiful out of it. I quickly

contacted Exodus as to where I could be of help in the ministry and they wisely told me to seek my own healing first. Although, if I wanted to experience healing and learn of this type of ministry at the same time, Portland Fellowship was the place to go. I first applied for the Upper Room intern program, but was also wisely told I wasn't ready. However, there was a new session of Taking Back Ground starting soon, and an extra room for rent at the PF house that they had been praying to fill. So, despite my fears of moving across the country to place far from where I had ever been, where I

knew absolutely no one, I knew it was God's will that I move to Portland.

Last year I was able to participate in the TBG program, and it was the best, but hardest year of my life. I was stretched in many ways, and grew closer to the Lord than I ever thought possible. At the end of the year, I re-applied for internship and, thankfully, I was accepted. So, here I am. There is still so much I need to work on, and I am quite honest in saying that I still struggle with many things including my sexual desires. However, I now know the source of my strength, and that He is greater than any struggle I could ever have. I now understand the passage in 2 Corinthians that says "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I boast of my weaknesses, because they have brought me closer to Christ than I could have ever been without them. It is my hope that I can be a light to those who need it, and that I can be there for those who are struggling like I have, so they don't feel so alone. I have seen that God uses his people to reach the hearts of the lost and the broken-hearted. I want to be one of those people.



Jason with Jim and his fellow interns at a recent event.

Why I give to Portland Fellowship by Chanda Bosanac

I recently heard someone say with respect to his giving that he wants to follow the apostle James when he states “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” I know that God is a giver. He is the most generous giver I know. He even GAVE His own Son for me. You can even think beyond the financial realm into emotional, spiritual and material. It’s amazing to me when I am in the Word and actually “doing what it says” the amount of resources pouring forth from my life from yet another gift, Holy Spirit. What an incredible partner in giving! When I am plugged into Holy Spirit, I am constantly able to be a generous giver not only with finances but a giver of my time, energy and creative resources! To me it seems like that is what Holy Spirit’s occupation is...to give to us in order that we might give.

I have been given the distinct privilege the last five years of serving individuals and families in their personal giving to charity through the Northwest Christian Community Foundation. As far as givers go, I have seen various types. From ultimate givers, to fearful, to wise, to stingy! I am able to identify with each kind but have decided to set my heights on some of the givers that when I am around them I walk away refreshed and inspired. I am surrounded by giving, and as a result I often wonder about my own. What percentage should I be giving and where do I give this year? Do I really need this or does such and such ministry need it more?! I even ask God about how I would rather have my giving leveraged to the extent that it matches what my heart is truly passionate for instead of just giving 10% at church and being done with it.

I recently had a conversation with a former missionary pilot responsible for raising millions of dollars to further the gospel of Christ in Africa. His passion for his cause is far greater than any dollar amount. I was surprised but gratefully challenged to find out that he and his wife do not support their local church like my preconceived mind would expect them to. Years ago, they realized that their 15-20% is of greater use to those they ministered to in Africa. There are many reasons for their decision but the most obvious one is that their dollars gather significant leverage over the amount of lives that they can touch. This ultimately won out over funding their local church’s renovation, media equipment or sound system. Ouch. He has a point – those projects will have no problem being funded. However – what is your heart towards when it is in the context of furthering the gospel of Christ?

I bumped into Portland Fellowship about 10 years by accident! After snooping around the ministry for years (I was a skeptic at first) and then serving on the board of directors, I must say that PF reflects the body of Christ beautifully. To be honest, PF gives me hope for the bride of Christ like no other group of believers I know. The ministry that takes place resembles that which the New Testament believers received. I am confident that my giving to Portland Fellowship is having a true impact. My giving is significantly leveraged! I have been able to walk in the Lord’s pleasure with my choice of faithfully give to a ministry that demands much giving to others.

Jason Thompson mentioned in a previous board meeting the dilemmas of securing funds for the ministry of Portland Fellowship. That really resonated with me. Not very many business men want to golf for a homosexual struggler! Even though the other board members and Jason laughed...it’s very true. As it pertains to PF I have created my own amplified version of Galatians 6: 9-10. “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers *and especially to those believers who struggle with homosexuality.*” Are you wondering whether you should give to Portland Fellowship? The only way to know is to ASK God and get into His word. He will tell you!



Chanda serves on PF’s Board of Directors and is the Director of Donor Relations for the Northwest Christian Community Foundation.

innovated ways to give to portland fellowship

Of course the simplest way to give to PF is to donate cash or stocks, however, an innovative tax-smart way to give is to give “innovative gifts” such as real estate, business interest, land, and estate gifts.

To learn more about giving to PF through NCCF, call us or visit their website at www.nccf4christ.org. Ask them for a informational video which highlights Portland Fellowship.

november - december calendar & services

november / december

Living Well

Support and fellowship for men living with HIV/AIDS, call for information.

november 6, 13, 20, 27

Taking Back Ground

Struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions? Call for an application.

november 10

Evergreen Christian

Drew will be speaking to the youth group. 6p.m.

november 11

Elim Evangelical Church

Jason will be speaking to both services 6p.m. Puyallup, Washington

november 15

Suicide Intervention Workshop

Jason Thompson will present a workshop on becoming aware of the signs of those who are suicidal as well as the steps to help intervene. We invite all ministry helpers and church leaders to come and join us as we tackle this very important, life saving issue. Dinner will be provided. Please RSVP. 4:00 - 8:00 p.m.

november 16 & december 21

Family & Friends Group

Join us for guidance, encouragement and support. Join us the third Friday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

december 8

TBG Leadership appreciation dinner

A dinner hosted by the staff to celebrate our leadership team. 6pm

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

an invitation to get personal by Jim Thompson

I've never before been on a staff where we've found ourselves discussing our dreams. Truth is, I've never been on a ministry team where it was necessary to talk so *personally* about the effect our work was having on our personal lives.

As we do our work, we are careful to support each other and to be alert to the spiritual and emotional effects working with broken people has upon us. We also share our joys in seeing – close up – lives being transformed by God.

Now entering my seventh decade and having 35 years' ministry experience behind me, I have some perspective on this. No matter to what past experience I compare this ministry, I find no equivalent in terms of the weight I now carry, but joyfully, in my heart. The daily listening, encouraging, and mentoring of people who are struggling to receive God's healing of their deep and painful hurts takes me - takes all of us - very close to the shame and hurts of others. Even though we observe all the important boundaries that helping ministries require, we still find that the men and women we care for end up in our after-hours thinking, in our prayers. It's undeniably personal work.

It's also work that is too heavy for us on staff, or even for staff plus volunteer leaders to bear. We have a profound appreciation for the people who surround us with their prayer, and their tangible support. For many, this giving of support is very personal. It can be hard to be the intercessor for a group when your own family has been touched by homosexuality or other sexual brokenness. It becomes personal for many when they write checks, or volunteer their time, or become a spokesperson for PF at their church. Some do this work quietly, privately; some do it very publicly.

I've come to a conclusion about ministry. *Personal is good.* Being able to let my heart be moved by people, to rejoice with those who rejoice; to weep with those who weep – brings me – brings us – closer to God who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus. We find him there – in a man talking about the loss of his father, in the woman finally speaking of the abuse she received, of the parents who find themselves filled with the chaotic emotions of fear, guilt, anger and hurt as they discuss a son or daughter who has revealed a homosexual struggle or relationship. Jesus is there.

We invite you to personalize your support in whatever way you can: my mixing your gift with prayers, by completing your prayers with tangible support. When we ask how to do that, God will show the way. We like to say, "Be careful what you pray for." We laugh when we say that. God loves to answer our prayers ever so *personally*.



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

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