



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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There is no difference *by Suzanne Berryessa*

"What could I possibly have to offer?" This was the nagging question that I had been battling with since my husband Drew asked me to be part of the woman's ministry at Portland Fellowship. It was during that first year, sitting and listening that my eyes were opened wide to the realization that I could truly relate to the brokenness that the women were expressing.

I began my time in women's ministry at PF as a prayer intercessor, sitting in the women's small group. I knew that even if I felt I could offer nothing else, I could pray. Prayer is often such an under-estimated gift, but I knew that I could definitely offer that much. The decision to be part of Portland Fellowship has since then blown my narrow-minded world apart. Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." It doesn't say that we each have turned to the same wrong way, but that we each have turned to our individual ways. Even though that is true, I have come to learn that our starting point is all the same. We all, at our core, are relationally broken people and it is out of that brokenness that many, if not all, of our actions are born. One woman in our group would talk about how frustrated she was with herself for continuing to struggle with the same issue repeatedly, that she just felt stupid for not being able to let something go and just get over it. Another would breakdown in tears over the realization that she was never given the chance to be a little girl. At a young age, she was forced to grow up and act as an adult. Because of that she now, as a woman, does not know how to rest and be secure in God's love and provision for her. And all of them would share how exasperating it was to try and figure out how to just relate to other women. My experiences in life may not have led me to the same actions or struggles, but the heart beat behind these women's pain has been a familiar one to me. I have felt the deep frustration of being my own worst enemy, of desperately wanting meaningful relationships but having no idea how to have them. It has been in the week-after-week meetings that I have come to know and understand that no matter what our outward life is looking like, there truly is no difference between us when we stand before our Father.



Suzanne (with daughter Elaina) serves on the ministry team as a women's leader, and is the wife of Ministry Coordinator Drew Berryessa

The way that Portland Fellowship has designed the two year program must have been inspired by God. It is said time and again that the goal of PF isn't to turn people straight. It is to help them draw into a closer relationship with Christ Jesus and that it is He alone that should define them. People come in with such a specific focus, to somehow deal with and to heal from unwanted homosexual desires, but that is just what gets them in the door. There is so much more that happens after that. All who walk

into PF knows that they are broken, but not all really understand how they have been wounded, and how that is now playing out in their lives. Nevertheless, each woman coming here has made the decision that regardless of emotion and desire, they have to contend with how our Creator created us to live. I am reminded of a quote that I heard last summer, "Courage doesn't always roar, sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'" The women who I have gotten to know through these last four years are undeniably some of the most courageous people I have seen. Choosing to leave the false comfort of darkness and to battle with their true selves week after week in front of each other displays more courage than I have seen in most Christians.

Growing up, one of the key memory verses that I remember saying is, Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sadly, it hasn't been until these last several years that my understanding has truly grown to include the two verses around that one. Romans 3:22-24 says, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." It just makes me laugh knowing that I grew up memorizing the middle section of a sentence! But we can't stop at the knowing that we have all sinned and fall short of God, because the concept doesn't stop there. The greater message surrounding that scripture is: there is no difference among us, whether we are liars, gossips, cheats, adulterers, idolaters, or sexually immoral, there is no difference among us. We are all broken, yet we are all justified freely by God's grace through Christ Jesus. There is nothing more needed to be justified, Jesus redeems us all exactly where we are at by no merit of our own. These are concepts and words that I know I have grown up hearing but I never saw lived out as powerfully as at Portland Fellowship.



Suzanne with former Women's Director Catherine Chapman, and former intern Robyn Gates. Suzanne has served at PF for the last three years.

Each of the women comes with different life stories and even different Christian beliefs. Sitting in a circle these courageous women honestly share with one another. True gut wrenching honesty and confession rarely occur in the real world, but here it happens every week. As that happens, each one of us sees our own selves reflected in the eyes of our sisters. Without this honesty how could anyone possibly understand the truth that there is no difference among us? Every week, I am so indescribably blessed to be a small part of that process, with a small group of women choosing to expose their wounded hearts and wrestle with what God might possibly have for them or what He might desire to do in them. There isn't perfection in this

process, but there is understanding and forgiveness. God is there with us, letting us know that we are his children and that He will not bring shame but delight in the very innocence that He intended for us. These daughters of the King are delighting Him just by their presence and their honesty. I have been privileged to experience raw beating and bleeding hearts, and to see how God so graciously heals those

hearts and walks with each of those willing to let Him. The way is unknown but the leader is not.

I am so deeply humbled by the amount of grace that God has shown me. It has taken sitting among people whose courage has far out weighed my own to see how narrow-minded I have been through my journey with Jesus. I will be forever thankful to my Leader and King for allowing me to experience and begin to understand the truth of Romans 3:22-24, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

twenty years and counting

Twenty years ago God officially birthed this amazing ministry. It all started with a small group of men and women seeking encouragement and direction in their journey out of homosexuality. This small group believed that God would do something remarkable in each person's life and they wanted to see God build on foundations that were already being laid. They took the necessary steps to become a recognized 501c3 organization; formed a Board of Directors; commissioned Phil Hobizal as the ministry director; took the name 'Portland Fellowship' from an inactive PO Box formally used by 'Homosexuals Anonymous'; and set up office in the Hinson annex. The responsiveness of the church community grew and many began to contact PF for help.

Now here we are, 20 years later, and God continues to faithfully grow Portland Fellowship. This vision from the early days has not only stayed on target, but is maturing and expanding. It's amazing to reflect back to the early days and compare it what God is now doing.

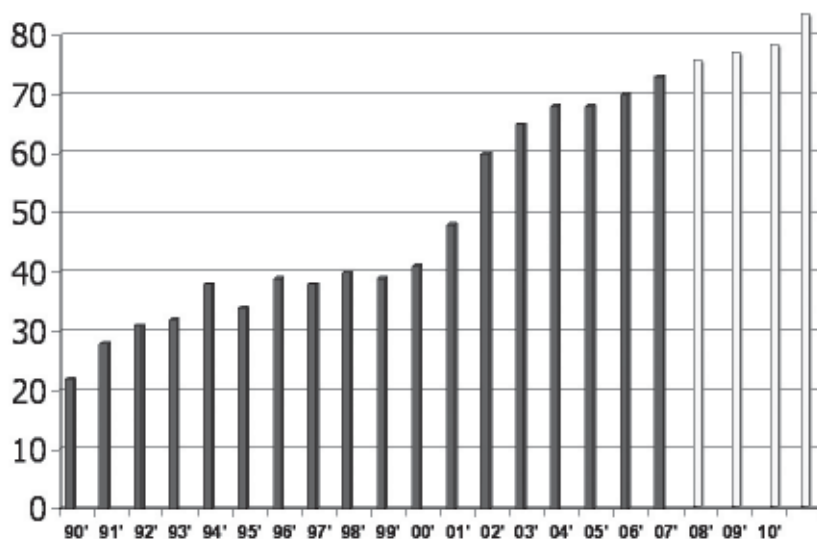
Currently we have over 70 men and women each year coming through *Taking Back Ground (TBG)*. In addition to those struggling against same sex attractions, our *TBG* group includes a group of wives committed to walking out this journey with their husbands. Our *TBG* curriculum (which has been published in two volumes) is being used in many different sexual redemption ministries around the country and around the world. Our *Upper Room Intern Program* is now in its sixth year, with several former interns working in ministries around the country. Our Family and Friends group continues to be a safe place for those hurting for their homosexual loved one; and *Living Well*, our support ministry to those living with HIV/AIDS continues to grow and become established as a reputable resource in our community. In addition to these, the provisions and gifts that God has given along the way are to numerous to recount. Certainly what God initiates, He makes happen.

God is still pouring out vision and since we know that whatever God initiates, he also brings to completion, it is incredibly exciting when we began to hear, see, or sense where He may be leading.

Our desire in 2008 is to encourage you, our partners, to join us in participating in practical ways to impact the churches in our community. Of course, your financial commitment to Portland Fellowship is vital to its growth; but we desire to have your assistance in making a difference from your own unique perspectives and experiences. You have much to offer.

In the months ahead, you will hear about an opportunity to help put together a resource kit for churches in our community. The desire is to increase understanding in our pastors and church leaders on the issues of sexual and relational wholeness. As you can imagine, many churches are ill-equipped to respond to those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction; but with your help, we will begin communicating with these churches personally by offering our experiences, stories, and resources. We will need your help in accomplishing this task. Stay tuned to upcoming newsletters and websites for detailed steps.

As we continue to celebrate our 20th year of ministry we want to thank you for being an important part of God's work in the ongoing work of transforming lives in powerful and dramatic ways.



Growth in Taking Back Ground participation over the years. White bars projects future growth

january - february calendar & services

january 8, 15, 22, 29

february 5, 12, 19, 26

Taking Back Ground

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

january / february

Living Well

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

january 18

Annual Planning Meeting

The PF staff and Board of Directors meet for a day to review the previous year and plan for the year ahead.

january 18 & february 15

Family & Friends Group

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

january 22-25

Exodus Leadership Conference

Jason will be speaking on ministry to youth at this conference in Orlando, Florida.

february 2

Spokane Seminar

Jason and Drew will be travelling to Spokane WA to present a day long seminar. Call office for details.

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.

an invitation to pray

There are many ways that you can personally support and further the work of Portland Fellowship. Certainly through financial partnership, which is essential for us to continue this work, but also through faithful partnership in prayer.

Although this may seem like a less tangible way to offer your support to Portland Fellowship, it is a much-needed aspect of sustaining this ministry. The work done here is difficult, and knowing that there are people faithfully lifting us up in prayer is a great encouragement. Here are some areas of specific prayer need that we would like to ask you to commit to praying for. God bless you for your partnership!

For God's continued protection of the staff's hearts as we deal with the brokenness of those who come to this place. There is great warfare for those who are helping men and women find freedom from sexual bondage.

For ever increasing opportunities to minister to and within the Body of Christ this next year. Many churches, pastors, and lay people still don't know that we exist. Pray that the Lord gives us favor as we seek to come alongside the Body of Christ.

For an increase in the provision for this ministry, including volunteers, financial partners, and open doors. The need for this ministry continues to grow and we want to be able to meet the need.

Pray for wisdom and resources as we continue to develop our staffing and programs to accommodate the growing need. Pray that we would distinguish between what God is bringing to us as vision and ministry, and what is just simply a "good idea".

Pray for our current ministry team personally, Jason, Drew, Jim and Steve, Sue, Suzanne and Heidi- that the Lord would continue to lead and sustain us, that he would give us great vision, great ability, and great joy in our specific areas of calling and responsibility within PF. Pray for our families as well- they also carry this ministry with us!

Pray for all of those who come into contact with Portland Fellowship- our interns, volunteers, participants, wives group, friends and family group, HIV/AIDS support group, and all else we find ourselves ministering to this next year- that they would encounter the transforming love and grace of God.



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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Upper Room Assistant

Sue & Suzanne
Women's support

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