



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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<http://www.reachtruth.com> by Jason Thompson

Sitting in my dorm room, in the fall of 1991, I wrote and pinned to the corkboard next to my desk a verse from James 5, *"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."* A few years earlier I had been the one wandering from the truth, yet with the support of Portland Fellowship, I found real freedom. I don't want to even imagine what my life could have been without being turned away the error of my ways.

Although it was only two years after arriving at Portland Fellowship, I was already passionate about sharing with others the **truth** and **hope** God had given me: the truth that I was not defined by my homosexual feelings and the hope of a transformed life. I wanted to give back. I wanted to be that "whoever" from James 5- to be used by God in whatever way he desired. I prayed God would give me opportunities to minister to the sexually broken, specifically by serving at Portland Fellowship. And shortly thereafter my prayer was answered.

I started by working part time at Portland Fellowship answering phones and folding newsletters. A friend, Randy Wright, was already on staff. We shared a small office space in the Fellowship house with one phone and one computer. Randy had been on staff for about a year, so he was teaching me all the ins and outs of the office. Initially, he would answer the phone and talk with people who would call for support and direction. I would eaves drop as much as possible to hear how he did it. I didn't know what I would say the first time someone called and said, "I am gay but don't want to be, what do I do?" What could I possibly say when a parent called to say, "My daughter just told me she's a lesbian and wants me to fully accept her life.?" Or how would I respond when a current participant called and shared, "Last night I had a sexual fall and I'm totally devastated.?" To be honest, I was petrified to be the one who answered the phone, but the desire to share life changing truth to those in need trumped my fears.

A few weeks later, I finally answered my first ministry related call. And thankfully, God gave me the words, the kind of insight that could only come from him. He provided me words of encouragement and hope. I can still remember a young man, ten times more nervous than myself, asking if he could speak to someone about some "personal stuff." I assured him that he is safe to say anything. It was a lengthy call and I can only hope it was helpful, but I remember feeling that my hands were tied. The caller was 17 years old and lived in Southern Oregon. There was no chance of him coming to the Tuesday night support group in Portland, yet he desperately needed personal attention, not just a phone call with a stranger in a far away city. After I hung up, I asked Randy what we could offer someone who is out of the area. He replied, "We can offer prayer, um, one of those books, a pamphlet, and the opportunity to call every now and then." I felt sad and discouraged that there wasn't something more.



1992:
Excited and
nervous to
be used by
God in
ministry

In 1993, the ministry was introduced to a new form of communication: email. A tech friend installed our first modem, connected a phone line and gave us the email - pf@teleport.com. Once we began to share this email address we saw that it was an effective way for nervous people to safely contact us to receive encouragement. I was excited about checking email. Every morning I'd come into the office, brew some coffee, and hear the screeching sound of the modem trying to connect to this newfound cyber world. Week after week, the email traffic increased. Email ministry was good, because it gave me a little more time to think about an effective response to some of the more difficult questions. For those outside the area, email became a lifeline for ongoing help. Yet, it came with some drawbacks. The amount of time it took to respond to numerous emails became difficult and at times unmanageable. And of course, email also gave those who opposed us an anonymous opportunity to speak their mind or vent their anger. I made a decision many years ago to respond to every personal email, even if it was rude and demeaning, in the hopes that God would use my words for his purposes.

By 1997, the amount of phone calls and emails from outside our area continued to grow. Many people were calling just to know more about us, the services we provide, and calendar information. Along came another helpful form of technology: the webpage. Although websites were already spreading, it was completely beyond us as to how to create and manage one. Another friend of the ministry approached us with the desire to build a website for Portland Fellowship, and we were excited to take him up on the offer. As we know all too well today, internet websites are significant in how many people find information. www.portlandfellowship.com became another great way for people to learn about this ministry 24 hours a day, in an extremely confidential manner. We could not only inform the public of our mission statement, services, and resources, but we could place encouraging articles and testimonies that would speak truth and life to all who visited.

In 1999, we were grateful to have phones, email and the website as ways of communication, but the staff continued to struggle to find more methods to offer personal help to those who lived miles away. I especially had a desire to reach youth with innovative resources that are not only informative but interesting as well. One day the Lord gave me an inspiration. We could use the popular technology of CD ROMs' to create an interactive program that could be sent to youth all around the country. The idea was formed into *The Map*. This CD was

packed full of video testimonies (using an old movie theater setting), Question and answers, (conducted in an old 50s' diner), and a twenty week lesson plan (with audio included). It really was the only thing of its kind and allowed young adults to sit at their home computer and explore God's truth in a relevant and dynamic way. Since 2000 we have given away and sold thousands of copies of *The Map*.

In 2003 I was riding high on the completion of *The Map* and was enjoying the impact of this innovative technology, but as it goes, technology changes constantly. With an increasing number of fast internet providers, video downloads, and online programs, I realized that *The Map* was becoming dinosaur material. In addition to the advancements of technology, I was also very aware that *The Map* was still very impersonal. We have always said that homosexuality is not a sexual issue at its core, it is a relational issue. The solution isn't just information, but rather engaging and growing in healthy relationship with God and with others. Yet, we still had the problem of ministering to people hundreds and even thousands of miles away.

A new inspiration came to create an online support program that provided the interaction of a personal mentor. The desire was to take the material from *The Map* and mature it, make it web-based and make it as



Exciting new online discipleship program: www.reachtruth.com

relational as possible. We gave it the name *Reach Truth*.

The idea sat in the "think, hope, and pray" tank for a few years while we struggled with ministry changes, time constraints, a lack of available programmers, and the staffing to make it all happen. Yet the idea never dimmed in passion or potential.

With a recent grant from Juan Young Trust, and the interest of an internet programmer, we went full steam ahead. Through the contributions of many people, *Reach Truth* began to take shape and on June 1, 2008 we officially launched this amazing program. We have integrated the years of material created by Portland Fellowship with recent technological advancements to create a one-of-a-kind, interactive discipleship series for those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions.

I reflect back to 1991, answering the phone and wanting to offer something more than a few words of encouragement and a brochure. Now we can provide ongoing personal support to every person seeking hope and healing for their lives. If you are a supporter of Portland Fellowship, you helped make this happen. I can't thank you enough for being the "whoever" of James 5 and for helping them reach truth in Christ.

wanna go on a journey?

Thousands of people struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions and are looking for support that leads them to a life of maturity and growth that pleases the Lord. Yet for many it is very difficult to get the help they seek. *Reach Truth* gives you the opportunity to experience an interactive, intimate, and personal opportunity to engage in the healing process.

If you've ever taken a trip you know that it takes a bit of preparation and research to make it the best it can be. The theme of *Reach Truth* revolves around a journey, both the preparation and hitting the road. Some trips are fun and exciting, and some are difficult and arduous. This journey will probably be both. One thing is for sure, you will be impacted and changed by prayerful time spent going through this material. We want to invite you take a look at this exciting resource by going to www.reachtruth.com and choosing the "Travel Plan" option to get a complete overview of the program.



Some people take trips by themselves, but this journey should not be done alone. It will be required to have at least one other person with you on this pathway. With this in mind, we will ask that you seek a mentor to join you. A mentor is someone who has experienced life a bit longer than you and can offer spiritual guidance, practical insight, prayer, and genuine encouragement. We highly recommend it be someone of the same gender and someone with whom you already have a trusted relationship. This can include a parent, a relative, a pastor, a counselor, or a friend of the family. Encourage them to check out the website and consider supporting you through this process. They will need to register as your specific mentor. Mentors are available from PF for those who don't have any current options.

Once you decide to move forward, you will get your passport, which will sign you up for the program, complete a short intake form and after we connect you with your mentor you are ready to go!

There are 20 destinations in this journey. When you walk through a lesson (or destination), you will write comments or answers online to the questions asked. You will also have the chance to watch several videos that highlight the lesson or offer relevant illustrations. After you complete your destination, an email will go to your mentor letting him/her know that they can now view what you wrote and then THEY will get a chance to respond to what you shared. When they're finished, you will receive an email that lets you know they are done. At that time, you will reflect on their comments and then begin the next destination. This makes each lesson personal. You are not simply writing responses in a workbook, but rather communicating with someone who cares for you and shares their life with you. For those that plan to be mentors, we offer helpful tips for almost every question to give some direction if needed.

When you finish a destination, you will be asked to wait at least 5 days before beginning the next destination. These 5 days are an opportunity to, "Be Still." Scripture says, "Be still and know that I am God," **Ps 46:10** – and "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him," **Ps 37:7** and also "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." **Ex 14:14**. Each of the 5 days between destinations, you will receive email that contain devotional materials that reflect a part of the destination you just worked on. This will give you some questions to think about, activities to consider, and prayers to speak.

Visit the site www.reachtruth.com today and consider taking the journey or mentoring someone you know. Your life will never be the same.

upper room interns heading home

After a fantastic year of learning, service, and growth our interns are moving on to the next season of life and ministry. Jason Bigelow will be returning to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to work with the Salvation Army. Josh Coy will be moving back to Ohio to work on the Bowling Green State in partnership with Campus Crusade for Christ. Daniel Pullman, our only Oregonian this past year, will continue living in the area and assisting us expand our work with youth in the Portland area and beyond. Rick Reed heads to Oklahoma with the intention of serving and speaking at many of the area churches that are interested in working with men and women desiring freedom from the bondage of same-sex attraction. God Bless you guys, you will be missed!



interns and staff enjoying the celebration of a great year

july - august calendar & services

july 18 & august 15

Family & Friends Group

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

july / august

Living Well

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

july 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 aug 5, 12, 19

Deeply Rooted

Summer Series on the Spiritual Disciplines. Join us each week for teaching, small groups and weekly practice opportunities. 7:00 p.m.

july 31

Camp Crestview

Jason speaking : 10:00-12:00.

august 3

Faith Evangelical Church

Jason speaking : 9:00-11:00.

prayer

...for our staff as they work with men and women investigating various avenues for help and support.

...for our UpperRoom alumni as they settle back into the next season of ministry life. Join us in praying for the next class of Interns as they prepare to arrive in late August.

...for continued opportunities for churches to hear about the resources of Portland Fellowship thru www.hopeinitiative.com

...for God to put in place the leadership team he has in mind to work with participants this fall.

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

women's ministry update

On the last Saturday in May, Sue and Suzanne invited all the women participants to come together for a afternoon to fellowship and work on a art project. Rumor had it that there was a movie playing, but everyone was so caught up in working and enjoying each other's company that no one stopped to watch. Suzanne described the afternoon this way: "The art project was simply a pine wood framed mirror that everyone was given to decorate however she wanted. It was an opportunity to reflect and express what God had been speaking to each woman. Everyone of them turned out beautifully. It seemed that each mirror held a deep intimacy between the creator and the Creator. The experience of creating something so personal with a group of people could be rather intimidating, but it didn't seem to be the case at all. We had such a great time fellowshiping with one another, being light hearted and joyful in a setting more casual than a usual Tuesday night! I'm sure this won't be the last time we take a break and do something like this."



a beautifully painted mirror

evening of music and celebration

special invitation: saturday july 12, 7:00p.m.

Enclosed in this month's newsletter is an invitation to a special evening of music and celebration. International musician Jodi Penner and friends will be here at Portland Fellowship for an exclusive evening concert. She will be joined by Connie Mitchell who will share about her life before and after the tragic death of her husband Scott (former Portland Fellowship Board Chairman).

Jodi Penner is a voice teacher, actress, performer and songwriter. She plays piano, guitar as well as conducts. She has sung opera in Italy as well as the US national anthem for the San Francisco Giants. She also performs extensively in jazz, celtic, folk, and musical theater all over the U.S. and Canada. Her CD "Tree in a Storm" was released in 2007.

Please RSVP by Wednesday July 9th to the PF office or thru email: steve@portlandfellowship.com. Gourmet desserts, coffee and tea will be provided. Space is limited and a free will offering will be appreciated.



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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Steve Baliko
Upper Room Manager

Sue & Suzanne
Women's Support

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