



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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When Trust Doesn't Come Easily By Drew Berryessa

It has become a familiar position for me; standing in front of a crowd sharing unreservedly, and as 1 Peter 3:15 instructs "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks ... the reason for the hope that you have." And of course, as the verse also says, doing so "with gentleness and respect." In all honesty, sometimes "gentleness and respect" comes easier when those you are speaking to agrees with what you have to say.

This, however, was not the case at a recent speaking engagement in which I shared my story and engaged in dialog. By and large, the crowd that I was speaking to was not "on board" with the message that I was sharing. 'Relatively hostile' would probably be a better way to describe a good portion of the meeting. The truth is, it goes with the territory. As a part of the staff of Portland Fellowship, the reality that you share your testimony is implicit with the position. Sometimes, in our sharing, we are met with agreement and encouragement, and sometimes we are met with hostility and rejection. Either way, God's instruction is the same, that we always are ready to give an answer for the hope that we have.

Walking away from that speaking engagement, my emotions were a mixed bag. Even though I was somewhat grieved by the reluctance of some to accept the truth of God's word, I knew that I had been obedient in doing and saying what God had asked of me. Knowing I have been faithful to my task often helps me move on and trust the Lord with whatever harvest he chooses to bring. With a speaking engagement, it is easy to trust. There are other times, however, when trust does not come easily and I am left wondering if there will ever be a harvest.

Three years ago, I was confronted with a reality that shook me more deeply than I was prepared for. Someone I love dearly, and have been very close to my whole life, came out as gay. Over the years, I have talked with numerous family and friends of gay individuals, and have listened as they have shared the pain and grief that they have experienced at their loved ones disclosure. No doubt, I have witnessed the effects this has on these individuals first hand. In addition, having walked through a process of recovery from my own personal struggle with same sex attraction, and now spending my life sharing the redemptive work that God has done, and continues to do in my life, I am no stranger to this issue. On paper, it would seem that I should have been more prepared. I was not.

In his book "When Homosexuality Hits Home" author Joe Dallas likens how we experience our loved one's disclosure to that of a death, not of the death of our loved one physically, but rather, the death of the assumptions we have made about them and about our relationship with them. He writes:



“We realize that he or she has had a secret problem- a secret life perhaps-that we have known nothing about. We may have been lied to, directly or indirectly, shattering the assumptions that our relationship was founded on honesty. Our loved one may not, we learn, share our values, and our future with this person is now anything but predictable.”

Because this experience is so close to that of death, Dallas notes that we often will go through the same stages of grief that accompany the death of a loved one: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I can honestly say that this is what I experienced. In retrospect, given the insight that I have on this struggle, I can honestly say that my “denial” stage started well before the disclosure. Once the undeniable truth came out, it was quickly followed by each one of the other stages.

What I was not prepared for was the overwhelming sense of helplessness and failure that I experienced. After all... “Why was my witness and testimony not enough to change my loved ones mind? How effective of a minister could I possibly be if I could not even lead someone I loved as much as I did him into an understanding of God’s intent and available healing? Was my witness to him worth nothing at all? He has heard me speak, he knows where I stand, he knows my life, what more could I possibly say or do? Have I said enough? Have I done enough to show him that I love him, that God loves him, and wants better for him than this?” Speaking to an anonymous crowd, it is easier to leave the harvest in God’s hands, but this is someone that I love deeply and I have been in relationship with for my whole life, trusting is much more difficult.

In truth, I knew the answer to these questions. I have answered questions very similar to these on the phone, or in direct meetings with people who’s loved one has just announced their homosexuality. I know that my loved one’s choice to embrace homosexuality had nothing to do with my witness or testimony, it was a decision that they came to on their own. I know that it is God’s responsibility to convict people of sin and to draw them into submission to His will, not my job to convince them to surrender. I know that I am responsible to tell the truth of my testimony and give an answer for the hope that I have regardless of the results in someone else’s life, whether that be family or stranger. And I know that I am called

to love my “neighbor as myself” no matter what. I also know that this is not my failure, and it is also not within my ability to change. Yet even with knowing all of this, knowing somehow didn’t make the pain go away, and having well meaning people “speak truth” to me during the first several months after the disclosure did not ease my mind or my pain.

One morning, weeks after my loved one’s disclosure, I walked into Jason’s office, probably to ask some administrative question. Within a few minutes, the weight of my grief came out and I poured out my thoughts and feelings, both the rational and irrational, and Jason did something that profoundly ministered to me; he listened. It was the first time that my grief and frustrations were not met with advice, instruction, and anecdotes. Words like “Well Drew, you just need to trust the Lord and cast all your cares on him” may be true, but they did not feel very caring or comforting. All Jason did in that moment was sit with me, listen to me, and grieve with me. Answers are important, but they are no substitute for what is so desperately needed in times of grief and loss; consolation.



PF's Family and Friends group meets every third Friday of the month at 7 p.m.

Every third Friday of the month, Portland Fellowship offers such a place. Our family and friends group gives an opportunity for those dealing with this same reality a place to do what may not feel safe any other place, speak about the grief and loss that they are experiencing. It is a place to share our broken dreams, our damaged hearts, our confusion, our frustration, and our sorrow. It is a place where we know that the burden on our hearts resonate with the others around the circle. It is a place to receive encouragement, understanding, and yes, sometimes advice. More than anything else, it is a

place to be heard, a place of consolation.

If you are struggling to deal with this same reality, we invite you come and be part of this group. In his book “A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss” author Gerald Sittser says, of grief and loss, “...it will transform us or destroy us, but it will never leave us the same. There is no going back to the past, which is gone forever, only going ahead to the future which has yet to be discovered.” We welcome you to join us as we trust our Lord with that future together, even when trust does not come easily.

two decades and going strong

Through more than 20 years of ministry here at Portland Fellowship we have seen a lot of changes—new faces, curriculum, leaders, programs and supporters. And yet the one thing that has never changed is the scripture that undergirds the purpose of this work. A portion of Isaiah 61:1 has appeared on our materials for as long as newsletters have been produced at PF. ***He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.*** It was a verse important enough to appear again in the Gospel of Luke as Jesus announced that this exact Scripture was being fulfilled as he read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue. At the heart of God's purpose and intent is to restore lost and broken people to himself.

As Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus is indeed the One through whom all possible healing and hope is realized. We are all in a position of needing God's proclamation of real life change. Men and women who contact Portland Fellowship have lived many years convinced that such change was not even a remote chance. In many cases hope has shriveled beyond recognition and the weight of the broken heart is nearly too heavy to carry through the door. And yet something happens in this place that must be acknowledged...lives change. As hope grows in people's lives same-sex attraction dims as the main issue and people are freed up to deal with deep pain and to reacquire themselves with long lost talents and gifts. No one walks out of here with everything solved and yet invariably intimacy with God becomes richer and deeper than ever imagined as healing truly happens.

PF has remained committed to the guiding principle found in our foundational Scripture verse. All of us who serve, support and lead PF are in as much need of Jesus' miraculous work as each person who walks through the door, calls on the phone, or contacts us through the website. We know that in the years ahead many things will grow and change but our deep desire is that we will never change our adherence to the powerful reality that is found in this verse. We are convinced that with each passing year more and more men and women are rejoicing in the freedom and liberty of a growing relationship with Jesus, what an amazing joy!

postcards from the road:

2007-2008 upper room intern Josh Coy shares about PF's impact on campus ministry in Ohio



It's 9pm on a Monday night in the college town of Bowling Green, Ohio. I find myself seated among 15 college students in a small, warm college apartment. The smell of brownies tempts to lead me elsewhere before I'm shaken back to the reality that I am the one who is leading this group of students tonight. I proceed to engage these eager students with a style, confidence, and sincerity that is the fruit of my rooted time as an intern with Portland Fellowship. The word intern doesn't quite seem to do justice to the rich depth that I experienced in my ten months engaged with the concentrated wisdom found in an old home on the east side of the Willamette River.

I'm currently spreading my Portland experience in the NW region of Ohio. As a staff member of Campus Crusade for Christ, I have the opportunity to bring a skill set developed during my time with Portland Fellowship that is quite rare among the campus ministry mission. God has given me the opportunity to immediately utilize the training I have received in

regards to teaching, mentoring, and engaging in a life of healthy, balanced ministry. I can say for the first time, I feel the freedom to grow in my relationship with Jesus as I minister to the lost and found students on this campus. Free to be the man God has created specifically, and serving the body out of these gifts - gifts that Portland Fellowship coaxed out of me, whether I liked it or not. Those challenges have indeed changed me. I'm a healthier man because God has chosen to use PF to grow my intimacy with Jesus, my ability to receive loving well, my confidence in leading courageously, and my tangible hope in the true freedom of Christ.

Recently, my heart gleamed with gratitude for my time at PF. About 2 weeks ago, I had lunch with a student who considers himself a gay Christian. I couldn't imagine sitting across from this man, patiently and compassionately, without the wisdom of PF's leadership echoing in my head. I'm ecstatic to say that he is now experiencing the conviction of the Holy Spirit and is considering the call of God to lay his sexuality down at the feet of Jesus.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, engaging in an internship with Portland Fellowship was one of the best decisions of my life, and I would do it again tomorrow.

Thanks for your continued prayers for me and the work God is doing here at Bowling Green!

november / december calendar & services

november 21 & december 19

Family & Friends Group

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

november 4, 11, 18, 25

Taking Back Ground

Discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions

november 2

Harvest Community

Interns will be hosting a display booth for this annual missions fair.

november 15 & 26

Speaking Engagements

Drew at a Youth Leaders Conference. Jason at Multnomah University.

december 2, 9

Open Group

All are welcome to join us for an engaging discussion about same-sex attraction and how that impacts life and faith. A great place to get to know the ministry if you are curious about what PF is all about. 7 pm

december 6

Annual Leadership Appreciation Dinner

We have some of the best volunteers in the world and we are taking an evening to say Thank You!

december 16

TBG Christmas Party

A wonderful casual night of fun and games for TBG participants and alumni. In three words: SUGAR, FUN, LAUGHTER. Bring an appetizer to share! 6-10 pm

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

suicide intervention workshop

Jason Thompson will present a workshop on becoming aware of the signs of those who are suicidal as well as the step to intervene. We invite all ministry helpers and church leaders to come and join us as we tackle this very important and life saving issue. Dinner will be provided. Please RSVP. November 13, from 4:00 - 8:00 PM.



volunteers desired

We have been blessed through out the years with fantastic volunteers who have assisted in a wide range of services and tasks. We are in the process of restructuring our volunteers and establishing an email notification for up coming needs and volunteer opportunities. If you find yourself with a desire to help out and some time to offer we'd love to add your name to that list.

The range of opportunities range from monthly assistance in collating and shipping out the newsletter, fix--it up projects around the house, spring and fall gardening cleaning, fundraiser and conference helpers, and faithful prayer supporters. At other times of the year we would greatly benefit from people or families who would like to host meals for our interns, HIV/AIDS group or a special event. If you have an interest in learning more about how you can volunteer, call or email Drew at the office. drew@portlandfellowship.com

prayer

...for our TBG participants as they enter the second month of teaching, small groups and hard work. We desire God's protection for each person as they closely examine their lives and seek the Father's help for each new day.

...for our staff and leadership team as they continue to serve and offer support, direction, and encouragement to the men and women in their small groups.

...for new support group ministries starting in eastern Washington and south-central Alaska.

...for an attitude of joyful preparation for Christmas and the celebration of Jesus' birth.



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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