



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Celebrating Restoration by Eric and Michelle

I really don't remember when I started looking at pornography. But it was a secret that I would keep and it would begin the destruction of me. Like cancer it ate my soul, my beliefs, my family, and most importantly my relationship to God. What had I done to allow such a thing? As this cancer grew, I became more and more upset and short-tempered. I became an enemy of God and of my family.

My kids would say, "Mom, I don't want Daddy to come home because he will yell at me." It wasn't long before I started using profanity and joking sexually. I would drink heavily at parties to the point that I could barely walk. I began pulling myself further and further away from Christ. I needed something to ease the pain. I was getting sicker and sicker, weaker and weaker. But it didn't start that way.

I was a mama's boy for as long as can remember. My mother was my comfort. Her words were soothing and comforting. I remember getting hurt and running into the house for her to comfort me. She picked me up and held me on her lap and sung "Hush Little Baby." I remember just laying my head on her chest and hearing those words echo in her chest. "Mama's going to buy you a happy heart, a happy heart." I wanted that "happy heart" more than anything in the world.

Happy was usually the last thing I felt in my heart. In school, I was called a girl, a faggot, a sissy, a baby, a homo. All these words plagued me day after day. Most of my friendships were girls because I related to them better. I tried playing basketball one year, but was made fun of the entire time. I thought that perhaps by going to a Christian college and majoring in Missions I could win God's approval. Maybe this would bring me that "happy heart."

My big move to California was terrifying. Would people accept me? Would I fail college? Would I be able to find a woman to spend the rest of my life with? During my first year of college I was violated by my roommate in my sleep. I woke up to him fondling me and I was embarrassed and humiliated. But when I confronted him he said, "I thought you wanted it." Stunned, I wondered where in the world would he have gotten that idea? What did I do or say? Again I bottled it up not telling anyone of the added pain.

Yet, God was good. As the year went on I developed many friendships. I met four people that would define true friendship for me. We did everything together. These friends were the first people with whom I shared that I struggled with homosexuality. This was my first attempt to obtain freedom. We went to a prayer meeting and I asked God for a blessing and I heard Him tell me, "a wife and a family." At the time Michelle and I were just friends, but about 2-3 weeks later we were dating and I had fallen in love with a wonderful woman. She and I were married January 8, 1994 in California and went to Hawaii for our honeymoon. It did not seem real. Was I finally free?

Married life was good. Yet, Michelle and I had a rough time financially. I was still going to school and in two years we had two beautiful children but we weren't making it. Eventually we were deep in debt



Eric and Michelle, a couple with renewed hope, love, and commitment

with no home to our name. In June of 2000 we filed for bankruptcy. I felt like I had failed as a man. I failed to provide for my family. By December 2003 Michelle gave birth to our second son. I seemed to be a proud father and husband. But I kept pushing God further and further away. I guess I had felt that I had done all this on my own. How many times had I asked God to help out with problems in my life and I ended up taking care of the issue on my own. At least I thought I was. I couldn't have been more wrong.

The "cancer" of porn was taking a toll and I started seeking a sexual relationship with another man. My fantasy life had been a part of me for as long I can remember and I was numb to the fantasies, needing something more to fulfill the sexual desire. It then happened. I was unfaithful to my wife with another man. The destruction intensified and so did the pain. I became more and more upset at Michelle. I eventually went to a doctor and was put on Prozac - another band-aid to mask the unresolved anger and hurt.

Michelle left for California because her Dad had been fighting cancer for a number of years and it looked like this time the cancer would win. For me it was freedom, time to do what I wanted. The kids were with her so I had no worries of being caught. I started the very first day looking at pornography, then looking at personals, but I was too scared. I knew what guilt it caused last time. The night Michelle's father died, I was watching a pornographic movie. It made me sick. My struggle was out of control and I was trying to destroy everything around me.

I couldn't answer Michelle when she asked me if I had "been good" while she had been gone. After three days of silence she made the first move. She told me that she was ready to leave me. My heart sank. She continued to tell me how hurt and betrayed she was. I was scared. She said that she did not believe in divorce but she did not know what to do. She loved me, but she needed to know that my love for her was real. This is where God began to break me.

I made an appointment to see a counselor who understood sexual addiction. He referred me to Portland Fellowship. My first meeting there I heard Drew talking about things that reassured me he knew what it was like to be in my shoes and he was talking about the reality of freedom. As I left that first meeting I felt refreshed, but still scared. I knew I needed to confess it all to Michelle and I didn't know how. But God had a plan. As we were driving home from a summer meeting at PF, Michelle and I

had a great talk. Michelle asked me, "okay, is there anything you need to tell me?" I knew God was prodding me, so I told her everything that she needed to know. I was terrified.

That night Michelle asked me to sleep in the other room. Michelle went into the hot tub and sobbed. I had broken her heart. I kept asking the Lord what do I do? He kept saying, "Give her space," so I did. That afternoon Michelle met with her counselor. After the session, I had to call her. "How did it go?" She said, "I want to hold you and give you a hug." There and then I knew then that she was going to be by my side through this process.

Later that summer Michelle and I spent some time in the mountains each off on our own with God. When we came back together and Michelle gave me a list of her needs. The one that hit me hardest was "to not be teased or laughed at." I was appalled that I had hurt the woman I loved by doing the very thing that had hurt me so deeply in my own life. She said she still loved me, but would not and could not stand for me to stay the way I was. Now we would need to rebuild trust, love, and romance.

The road to a happy heart has been hard and continues to be a challenge, as all wonderful things will be. There are times where I am running on a plateau and others I feel as if I am in a pit. Yet God continues to give us the peace we need.

PF has been a sanctuary for both my wife and I. We were in our darkest place when we first

walked through the front door. Both of us were confused, angry, hurt, and afraid and when we needed it most PF showed us grace, unconditional love and real fellowship with God and His people. Since we have gone through TBG so much has happened: We renewed our vows at PF on June 29; I've seen my relationship with my father reconciled; I no longer get drunk to numb pain in my life; I've stopped lying to myself and to Michelle; we both have matured beyond our expectations; and we have conversations where I listen intently to my wonderful wife.

I look back on this year and a half and I cannot believe all the things God has done. He has absolutely amazed me. I have so much more growing up to do and so many more issues to address, but we are taking it one day at a time. The pursuit of a happy heart has not been easy, but I hold on to the fact that I have a wife that did not leave me, I have parents that have stood by me and proudly say "this is our son," and most importantly I have a God who has lifted me up and is shaping me into the man he called me to be.



introducing our 2008-2009 upper room interns

Every fall, Portland Fellowship is blessed with a new set of interns who committ to a nine-month program of training, mentoring, and spiritual growth. They would greatly appreciate your ongoing prayers this year as God blesses, stretches and stregthens them for the work of His Kingdom.

Hello, I'm Cynthia Lopez. I originally hail from the Bronx, of New York City and I am 27 years old. In some way shape or form, I have always been exposed to homosexuality. As a child, I was raised by my lesbian grandmother and her partner. This led me to grow up in the homosexual community. Since 2000, I have dedicated my life to Jesus Christ and have sought to serve Him and those around me. Even after becoming a born-again Christian God sent many people into my life who dealt with same-sex attractions. I learned that the Christian community was not exempt from this issue.

From my upbringing, and from my continual exposure to homosexuality, God has placed a burden and a passion within me for serving and loving the homosexual. He has also placed an urgency in my heart to equip the church to do the same. I am excited that God has led me to Portland Fellowship to allow me to receive the tools and the training that I need to minister in this area.

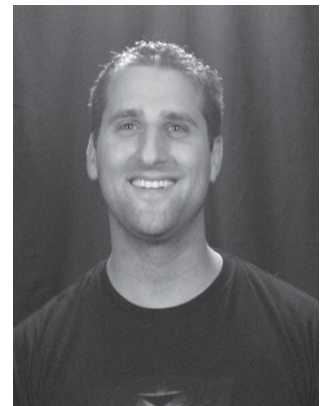
My prayer needs for this season in my life would be that you would keep my family in prayer for their salvation and that I would continue to love them and show them Christ. Also, pray that I can continually trust Christ to be the author and perfecter of my faith, and to meet all of my needs according to his glorious riches (Philippians 4:19). Thanks!



Greetings! I'm Justin Blackwell. I came to Portland from Seattle in the Spring of 2006. I initially became involved with PF through *Living Well* and began *TBG* that Fall. Since childhood I was aware of my homosexuality and finally came out to family and friends during high school. When I tested HIV positive when I was 22, I thought my life was over until months later I met the man who would be my partner for 10 years. It seemed as though my life was set, but life without God began to take its toll. HIV-related illness and emotional stress caused me to begin to realize that that I could not live without Jesus. I gave my life to Christ in autumn of 2004, and six months later I did one of the hardest things of my life - I left my partner. I felt this was necessary to grow and walk this new life Christ has given me. Upon realizing that true fulfillment means to walk in the purposes that God has for me (not being with another person), I've come to see a growing desire is to reach out to men and women and be an example of how God's redemptive power can heal and restore. I'm not sure what God has in store for me this year but I'm willing to go where he leads.

Hi my name is Jason Cohen and I am a current student at Multnomah University here in Portland and an Upper Room Intern this year. I am originally from Maryland but have been living in Portland for three years. Prior to that I was stationed with the Air Force in South Carolina for two years and Germany for four years prior to that. I am currently also in the Air National Guard. I like hanging out with my friends, watching movies, good food (I will eat practically anything. except liver...yuck), going out to eat, drinking bubble tea, reading, hiking, playing games, talking about life, Jesus and theology!

The change that I have seen in myself and those around me at PF has be tremendous and real. I am empowered and motivated to help facilitate the courage and tenacity in all those who want to see this process through. I know that the men and women who come here love Jesus and that He wants all of us to be free by walking in spiritual, emotional and sexual health. Thank you and Lord Bless!



september / october calendar & services

september 19 & october 17 Family & Friends Group

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

september 9, 16, 23, 30 Leadership Training

A great time for our team of fantastic leaders to come together and prepare for the coming year of service and ministry.

september & october Living Well

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

october 7, 14, 21, 28 Taking Back Ground

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

prayer

...for each man and woman who is considering taking the step of faith to join us for TBG this fall. Give them courage, perseverance and HOPE.

...for God to bless and protect the members of our leadership team as they step up to sacrificially give of their time and lives as leaders in the TBG program.

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Speakers, counseling and youth support can be arranged through the office.

taking back ground

With little over a month until the 2008-2009 TBG program starts up, we are anticipating a full house of participants. Applications have been coming in all summer and will be welcomed until we cannot possibly take another person. It is a true faith booster to see all the amazing ways that God brings people to PF each fall. Each person has a different story of how



they reached a point where they wanted God more than all the other people, places or things they had been chasing. Most do not know how to dwell in the posture of surrender, life-change and healing that they desire...and they deeply desire it. God brings the resources of PF across people's path through family, friends, pastors, internet searches, and the testimonies of alumni. It is beautiful to see God's timing and a person's willingness converge. Hard work, honesty, determination, grace, fellowship and peace are characteristics of person who makes the most of a season of discipleship at PF. And they work along side others who are on the exact same journey. In reality we are all on this journey of pursuing Jesus more and more everyday of our lives...what glorious company to keep!

annual staff retreat

We are just back in from a three-day planning retreat. Thank you for your prayers and for understanding if you had to talk to our voice mailboxes. Our annual retreat is a wonderful time to review the previous year and to listen to God for the direction of the ministries at PF this year and in years to come. It is our desire to continue providing excellent service and care to each man and woman that God places in our path. We are excited to see how God will position our resources to an ever increasing number of people.



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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