



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## **An answered prayer** *by Cynthia Lopez*

I struggle with homosexuality. I struggle with the Church and its response to homosexuality and reactions toward homosexuals. I struggle watching some of my best friends wrestle silently for victory in this area. I struggle with how my gay loved ones are consumed with rejection. I struggle with it as I watch the media, see politics unfold, and observe how it is portrayed in Hollywood. I have struggled with the confusion in my own life as I was raised by two women. And though I do not have feelings of same sex attractions I find myself struggling with homosexuality on a daily basis.

As a baby, my mother left me in the custody of my grandmother and her partner so that she could pursue her drug habit. As a very young child, I remember feeling that she had chosen a life of drugs over a relationship with me. When she did want to spend time with me it was only so that she could go through my jewelry box and look for things to steal so that she could support her habit. Sometimes she would want to be parental and pick me up from school. She would ask my grandmother for money so that she could take me out to eat afterwards. All day I would wait in expectancy over the chance to spend special time with my mother. When the school bell rang I would wait eagerly. But as the noisy crowd of children and parents dissipated I would sit on the concrete steps of Mount Carmel Holy Rosary Elementary still waiting...and I was old enough to know that she wasn't going to show. My grandmother would eventually come get me, always with a look of frustration on her face. Despite experiences like those, I still desperately wanted a relationship with my mother who apparently had no desire to have one with me. I felt powerless to get what I deeply desired.

Being raised by my grandmother and her partner meant I was being raised in the gay community. This meant that I was exposed to some women who looked like men and some men who resembled women. Gender roles were blurred. My grandmother's relationship with her partner confused me. How come there were women in my life who seemed to love each other like a mommy and daddy did on TV? How come I had two women parents and none of my classmates did and why did I feel ashamed about this? If all the women I knew were married to other women, did that mean I had to marry a woman one day too? If I didn't, would my family disown me?

Feeling the rejection of a same sex parent and the confusion of being raised in a homosexual home were just some of the feelings that I experienced growing up; but, probably the hardest thing for me was feeling estranged from God. The relationship that I had with my biological father was somewhat difficult and contributed to these feelings. He was young, when I was born, and due to his involvement in gangs I barely saw him. Our encounters were brief, yet my desire for relationship with him was strong. Tragically, when I was four he was murdered and any opportunity that I had to know him vanished. In my young mind the only person I could



*Cynthia is an intern and helps lead worship and is a small group leader for Taking Back Ground.*

hold responsible for this loss was God. To me, I felt unloved, abandoned, and forgotten by God. He didn't love me enough to give me a "normal" family.

Through a miraculous series of divine interventions, I became a Christian in 2000. And at that time I thought that dealing with homosexuality was a thing of the past. However, God had a different plan. So many believers that I knew were struggling with same sex attractions in the church, but didn't feel like they could tell anyone. Roommates, best friends, ministers, associates... the list just kept expanding. Because of my familiarity with homosexuality growing up I was able to empathize in a deep and very natural way with them because of the wounds and the rejection I endured early and throughout my life. Through this God gave me supernatural boldness and love to encourage honesty and transparency in my relationships.

But it was about this time when the passions in my heart began to grow faint. I found myself wrestling with internal conflicts about homosexuality. I had seen God move mightily in so many areas but I began to ask: *Can God really deliver the homosexual?* God was bringing people in my life and I wanted to offer them hope. In an answer to prayer, God introduced me to Exodus International and brought an incredible woman into my life that had walked away from homosexuality. I was truly able to see God's glorious power of transformation through her life.

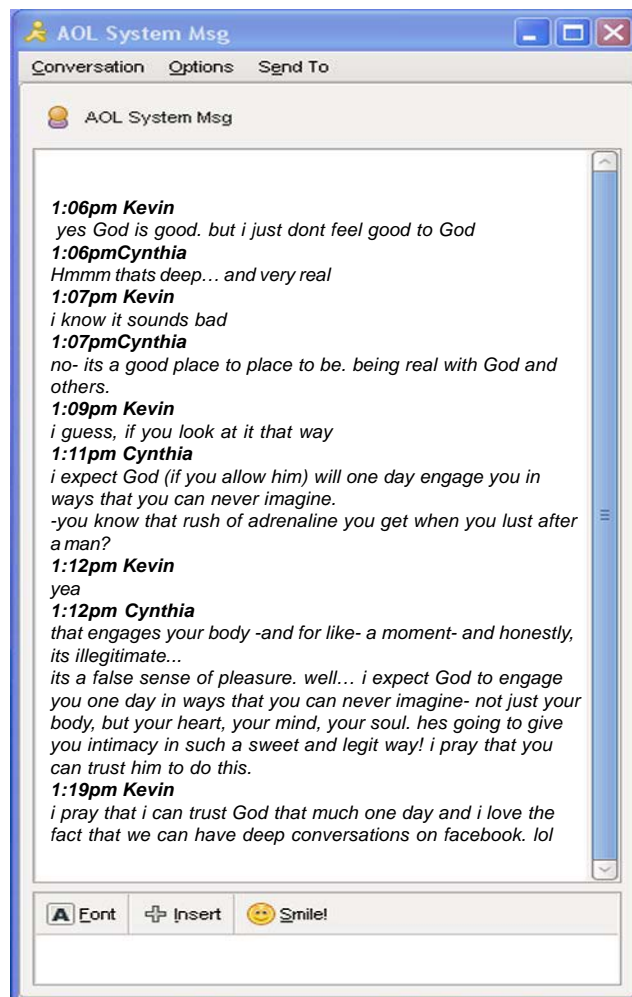
A few years ago, I prayed and asked God to reveal my specific calling and ministry. But it wasn't until recently that he answered me. One evening after finding that several more of my close friends had come out as homosexual, I cried out in frustration: *God, is everyone gay?* It seemed that my life was surrounded by people who struggled. Then God responded to my heart: *No.* I could almost hear Him say it with a smile. *This is just the ministry that I am calling you into.*

These are the people that God wanted me to love and minister His grace too. My heart leapt within me. It was wonderful to have my prayer for purpose answered. And quickly, I realized that I was underequipped to live it out. That's where Portland Fellowship comes in.

God led me to the PF website and I applied for the Upper Room Program. The nine-month internship is designed to provide people with the skills they need to work in a ministry to those who struggle with homosexuality and it seemed a perfect match for helping me get the training I knew I needed.

I have been here for three months and I thank God daily for the work that He is doing here and the practical lessons I'm learning about ministry. The thing that I didn't expect was the internal work that He is doing in me. I expected to come and receive tools to put in my belt. I was actually quite shocked when God began to work on me in the process. Jim Thompson

said profoundly: *God does not use technicians, He uses human hearts.* God is working on my own very human heart. And He is doing it through Portland Fellowship and its programs, through the living with others in community, through mentoring and so many other wonderful things that make PF so uniquely vital to the body. I am not even half way done with the training and I am already putting what I am learning into practice. I have already been ministering hope to the people I love. Last week, I was able to have a conversation with a dear friend of mine who struggles with same-sex attraction through an online chat:



Providing Hope does not mean having all the answers or having a simple thing to say that makes everything better. Hope involves believing that God is good and that He really does have our best interest at heart, at all times. I know, first hand, that knowing His Hope means going through difficult changes, while learning to love Him more than we love ourselves or our own past patterns of doing life. And I also have experienced that Hope means God does show Himself faithful through healing that I never thought possible. Praise God and the work that is done here at Portland Fellowship. My prayer is that all of us would allow God to engage us intimately no matter where we are in our own personal struggle with homosexuality.

## a week-long intensive workshop

For the second year in a row, Ministry Coordinator, Drew Berryessa taught a four-day seminar for Bible and ministry students in Medford, Oregon. Each day provided students with four hours of teaching and afternoons of one-on-one mentoring sessions. *Youth culture is willing to talk about issues of sexuality with less stigma than 10 years ago*, Drew commented, *but they have a blank spot when it comes to imagining how to take those conversations and turn them into purity, obedience and God-given fulfillment.* During the week, the students were exposed to a wide range of topics, including: roots of homosexuality, the pain and endurance through the Discipline of Mourning, renewing the mind and empowering the will, healthy boundaries and how to be renewed in the midst of ministry.

During one exercise, the dozen or so students and staff were invited to write down and share a timeline of their lives. As men and women shared their life stories, the joys and traumas that many never knew about each other. The opportunity to acknowledge deeply painful circumstances, applaud remarkable courage, and provide a deeper sense of community caused one of the leaders to remark, *I have never experienced this kind of intense transparency and compassion in a group of believers...this is amazing.* The training time was designed to allow for students to gain both practical ministry information and personal life application. Most of the people participating in the seminar did not struggle with same sex attraction but all of them wanted desperately to know how to have a clear and powerfully formulated way to respond to those who are looking for real answers. We at PF know that it is impossible to move closer to the heart of God and not be radically changed in the process. Pray for these students and leaders as they take what they have learned and live out truth and love wherever God sends them.

## responding to domestic and international invitations to share hope



Portland Fellowship is continuing to be blessed with opportunities to expand the message of hope and redemption around the globe. Executive Director, Jason Thompson will be spending several weeks traveling to Anchorage, Alaska and Seoul, South Korea. Neither city currently has a single group dedicated to working with men and women who want to confront and heal from unwanted same sex attraction. The two cities contain over 23 million people.

Several Anchorage churches have come together after a recent Love Won Out conference and are committed to creating a Taking Back Ground group. Jason will be meeting with church leaders and potential small group coordinators. Several recovery groups exist in the city but none in this area of work. Please keep these leaders in your prayers as they establish an enduring haven of healing and growth.

Seoul is a larger city by far and the home of the team who is working on the Korean version of Taking Back Ground. One of the translators wrote to say this about the environment that Jason will be speaking into:

*Recovery isn't big in Korea. We know of no church in the country that runs a recovery programme for same-sex attraction. Onnri is the only church (as far as we know) running a recovery programme for sexual addiction. This church has the biggest recovery programme in the country and some of the ministers are open to the idea of addressing homosexuality (though with great caution). If we can get you this engagement it will probably be the first time anybody has stood up in a Korean church and said "I struggled with homosexuality but God healed me."*

Both cities comprise more than half of the populations in their state and country respectively. And in both places, there are dedicated men and women who are pioneering this work and we have the privilege of coming along side fellow brothers and sisters and reminded them that they are far from alone in the promised work of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives daily and continually. We are excited to see how God will multiply the impact of these teachings, seminars, and opportunities for encouragement with our fellow believers.



## january / february calendar & services

january 16 & february 20

### Family & Friends Group

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

january 6, 13, 20, 27

february 3, 10, 17, 24

### Taking Back Ground

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

january & february

### Living Well

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

### Speaking Engagements

jan 21 - NW Christian University  
Eugene, OR - Jim Thompson

jan 23-26 - Faith Bible Church  
Anchorage, AK - Jason Thompson

feb 4-9 - Seminars at several  
churches in Busan and Seoul, South  
Korea - Jason Thompson

jan 30 - Seventh Day Adventist youth  
conference in Southern California -  
Drew Berryessa

march 6-8

### Annual Retreat

Save the date! Our Spring Retreat will be a restful weekend of time spent in the Word, interactive responses to eternal Truth, and, as always lots of laughter. Call the office to reserve your spot. Alumni and current TBG participants welcome.

### Additional updates:

[www.portlandfellowship.com](http://www.portlandfellowship.com)

### Speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

## reachtruth.com: reaching people worldwide



We are experiencing an explosion of men and women who are signing up for the reachtruth online mentoring program. Currently we have more than 70 active files and more people signing up everyday. The word is spreading through counselors, college administrators, alumni of PF, and other websites. In early December **reachtruth.com** was featured on **exodusyouth.net** allowing high school and college students around the globe to find out about this new interactive resource. Many people are coming with mentors already in place and many more are seeking out quality mentors to help them along the journey of healing, growth, and life-change.

As you support the work of Portland Fellowship, this is the power of your prayers and financial gifts. Nothing like this program exists in the world and you are making it happen. Your intentional giving is touching the real needs of men and women in places where no ministries currently exist. It is an amazing thing to see the hope of Jesus' whole life redemption being mediated through your willingness to partner in this exciting work. For the lives being impacted...Thank you!

## prayer

...for safety and rest as Jason Thompson travels extensively these next two months.

...for our leadership team as they prayerfully continue their roles as leaders for the participants in Taking Back Ground.

...for each man and woman who is engaged in this process of faith, struggle and growth and healing. Ask that God would remind all of us that He is our strength and very present help in time of need.



## 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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