



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Jesus the Center by Steve Baliko

One of the joys of producing the newsletter is the opportunity to provide our faithful network with the real-life stories of men and women who have found themselves in conflict with their same-sex attractions. In those same stories you have encountered the amazing work of God, as He has precisely and lovingly orchestrated hope in each person's life.

Regardless of your specific struggles and frustrations, there is no way to deny that God is the source and strength of the people who courageously offer up their stories as gifts to you. Eugene Peterson has said that the sharing of our stories are "acts of hospitality." Indeed, you have been welcomed into the lives of men and women you may never meet this side of heaven. And we are going to keep sharing those stories because they are significant and breathtaking glimpses of our Savior at work.

I want to share about someone else whose life matters in this walk of faith and healing: Jesus Christ. It is His story that makes our lives hold together with any sense at all. And God has loved each of us through Jesus with His eyes wide open to the nature of our sin and the abilities He has given us to serve and glorify Him.

Recently, I've given a lot of thought to how the stories of our relationships change over time. My wife and I are expecting our first baby in a few weeks and we have both been somewhat grieved by the fact that our relationship is going to be altered forever. No doubt there is going to be a significant change in how things have operated so far. And there are uncharted waters ahead in terms of how we will find time and energy to provide intimate space for our joys, sorrows and interests. At the same time, she and I are also going to be amazed to see Jesus providing grace and goodness in circumstances of the new life that we have no idea how to navigate on our own. He is enough now and He will be sufficient then. The hard part to admit is that we are not sufficient now and won't be then either.

Many times in this walk of faith we wrongly assume that we will arrive at a point of having fixed or solved any number of problems in our lives. We certainly can and will stop doing particular sinful patterns of thinking and behaving; but we will never reach a point of not needing Jesus in our lives. In fact, older and wiser believers will confess a deep and desperate necessity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their lives. These may be men who have seen drastic differences in their same-sex attractions, they may be women who have come to abiding peace with their God given expressions of womanhood, and they are certainly people who know that sin continues to crouch at the door wishing to master them in a dozen wicked ways.

None of us will arrive at a status where we can tell Jesus to take a few days off. It is clear from Scripture that the Son of God is the one who holds the very molecules of our bodies together – no question we need Him. And to that end, it is vital to recognize that He is with us at the center of our struggles and inhabits the center of the way through our struggles, be it same-sex attraction or pride or gluttony or gossip or bitterness or anger or envy or greed.



There is a stunning passage in 2 Corinthians 1:20-21: “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through Him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you to stand firm in Christ.” In moments of doubt and in moments of joy, God offers us this reminder that we are not at the center of the fulfillment of his work and commitments. Jesus is. The word *Amen* means “it is true,” and when Jesus stands as the “it is true” we declare, there is no lie that can stand up to us in Christ. Amazing!

And this is vital because we are daily plagued by lies. Lies about what we should look like, what we should own, what our homes should look like, where we should live, how white our teeth should be, how stress-free our days should appear and the list goes on and on. All of these lies attempt to position us at the center. Another set of lies comes from our deep and abiding weaknesses, our broken places, the wounds that we have limped along with (some self inflicted others sustained by being in relationships with others). This is a clever attempt to get us to only see ourselves and to be consumed with fixing ourselves.



If we stay at the center of these swirling deceptions then we will be lost and without hope, confusion will reign and we will buy whatever the enemy of our souls is selling. If, on the other hand, Jesus is at the center we will find a very present help in time of need and we will know that peace will guard our hearts and minds even in the midst of the storm.

Jesus is at the center of all time and space, and He is at the center of every believer’s life. However, He also gives us the ability to lean on Him or to choose to lean on our own understanding. Jesus does not force our love or our submission, nor does He knock us off the idolatrous throne of Self in our hearts. Remember it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance, not a divine dictatorship.

Whether you are a new follower of Jesus or one who has been confessing Him as your Lord and Savior for decades, it is important to recall that Jesus is more abundantly available to us than we realize. We can rant and rave about Jesus not being our next door neighbor who can be reached via cell phone or who can reach out to us when we need a flesh and blood embrace. But He is the one who will never leave us or abandon us.

There is a new children’s book on the market called *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* (by Sally

Lloyd-Jones). Did you catch that subtitle? This is how Lloyd-Jones introduces the book: “You see, the best thing about this Story is: it’s true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves His children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers His name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together.” I can’t wait to pass this Story on to our children, teaching them and reminding me about this dramatic Truth.

The belief that Jesus is at the center of every story, including your story and my story, is a belief that Jesus can

be pursued, seen and known on the pages of the Bible and in our lives. The beloved poet William Cowper wrote these words centuries ago: *Jesus, I love to trace/ throughout the sacred page/ the footsteps of Thy grace/ the same in every age!*

The less we intentionally sit and look for Jesus in the Bible, the less prepared we are to walk through the struggles and temptations of

daily life. This is not to say that the Bible magically makes our troubles go away. Far from it. However, Jesus lived in a way that modeled gracious living and abundant life in a way that is real and possible through His leading and strength. Remember Jesus is the Yes that pushes back against the lies of No (no hope, no future, no peace, no rest, no healing, no victory, no community.)

I encourage you to get to know Jesus on the pages of Scripture. Take this summer to read whole books of the Bible aloud; set aside a weekend to meditate on a single psalm; re-read one of the Gospels and imagine yourself watching Jesus so as to know how to love those around you; pray the words of the Bible as your morning or evening prayer and see if they don’t impact the way you see both joys and frustrations. Joining us for our summer series *Deeply Rooted* in July and August would be another way to practice knowing Jesus as we read, discuss and pray together, weekly.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever and is able to meet us as we face each challenges and joy... He is up to the task. When we are increasingly consumed with Jesus, we will begin and continue to see our lives increasingly mirroring his heart, thoughts and actions. Amen.

a man worthy of celebrating

Early last month, Portland Fellowship hosted a retirement party for one of its own as Jim Thompson finished out five and half wonderful years of service. We are big advocates of grieving things that are worthy of grief and celebrating things worthy of celebration. This party marked an evening of significant joy, as well as a sense of loss. It isn't easy to point out the impact Jim has had around here without feeling how much he will be missed.

Jim, thinking he was meeting his son and daughter-in-law for dinner, was surprised to find friends, family and years of interns waiting to cheer his arrival at the PF house. It took him several minutes to even get through the entry way as he was flooded with well-wishers and enduring embraces.

Many had traveled hours to join in the celebration, with one intern even flying up from California for the occasion. Another former intern found out which Oregon bridge was Jim's favorite and reconstructed an amazing draw bridge (open, mind you) out of cake and frosting. The highlight of the evening came as Jason Thompson opened up the microphone for any and all to share memories about Jim and his impact on their lives.



Jim was greeted with innumerable hugs and expressions of gratitude



Michael and Jim admiring the Burnside Bridge. It tasted as good as it looks!

Funny stories prevailed at the beginning of the evening. Mention of Jim's infamous concrete-bottomed boat that sank on its maiden voyage, his incessant providing of historical information about Oregon to everyone regardless of interest in the subject matter, and curious cases of his use of selective hearing. More than the funny stories were the serious recounting of how Jim had made life-changing contributions in virtually every person who was present. Intern after intern spoke about Jim's gentle and patient approach in mentoring sessions and through some of the darkest moments of their lives. It was remarkable to see and hear how Jim had been a faithful conduit for God's mercy and to be extended to so many.

The evening had several contributions from people who were not able to be in attendance. A former intern sent a video from China. We all got a glimpse of his campus and daily world as he shared his deep appreciation for Jim's ongoing role in his life. Another intern sent a letter to be read in his absence. This last contribution perhaps best sums up the way Jim has and will continue to impact those who have come into his sphere of influence:

"If there is one thing that Jim showed me that stands out above the others, it's that I am a person with tremendous worth. One of the greatest deficits in my life has been a lack of my own self worth, but Jim's love, concern, and appreciation for me allowed me to recognize that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Jim helped me to realize my own gifts, talents, and abilities and how much of a difference I can make in this world. I bet there are a lot of people that can say the same thing about Jim, and that's why I'm glad he is being celebrated tonight."



Many of the past Upper Room interns were in attendance to share funny stories and fond memories with Jim

july / august calendar & services



deeply rooted: Jesus the Center

tuesdays 7-9 pm in
july and august
at Portland Fellowship
Learning together how Jesus is
with us in the middle of our
struggles and our strengths.
Bring your Bible and prepare to
follow Jesus more intimately.
Call the office to sign-up.



exodus international conference: Make Us One

july 14-18, 2009
Wheaton, Illinois
Annual Freedom conference
*"where people impacted by homo-
sexuality unite together for five
power days of worship, teaching and
ministry."*

august living well

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

july 17 & august 21 family & friends group

Join us for guidance, prayer,
encouragement and support.
Meetings are held the third Friday
of each month at 7 pm.

july & august new summer hours

Our offices will be closed on
Fridays throughout the summer.

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com
**Speakers, counseling
and youth support:** can
be arranged through the office.

save the date

Portland Fellowship and Pure Life Alliance are teaming up to sponsor a Sy Rogers seminar this fall. We are excited to bring Sy's message of the healing of sexual and relational brokenness to an ever-expanding audience. This conference will be ideal for all levels of ministry leaders who are looking to be better equipped to meet the needs of men, women, and youth who are struggling. Additionally, if you or someone you know are dealing with an area of sin related to confused sexuality, compulsive sexual problems or troubled relationships there will be opportunities to acquire valuable life-changing information throughout the weekend. Plan to join us at Village Baptist Church in Beaverton, Oregon the 25th and 26th of September. More information will become available as the fall approaches at portlandfellowship.com and purelifealliance.org

leadership training

September is set aside for training of our leaders for the coming ministry year. We have worked with leaders for our own *Taking Back Ground* groups as well as leaders in groups throughout the NorthWest. If you are interested in serving as a leader this fall for the ministries of PF or for another group who will be using the TBG materials please contact the office for a place in our training meetings.

prayer

...for our staff and ministry team as they continue ministering to those in need through the summer and preparing for the fall.

...for all our participants who are seeking to establish strong and healthy relationships in their local church. For continued healing and growth, protection and peace.

...for the team of Upper Room participants that God is bringing together for the fall. Ask for unity of heart, a singleness of mind and a willingness to allow God to have his way with each of them.

...for continued support and provision of the ministries of Portland Fellowship. That we would see an increase in overall giving and a continued trust in God's ability to sustain the work that we are entrusting to Him.



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,
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the power of Jesus Christ

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