



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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The Doors of PF *by Luke Cirillo*

When I was going to Multnomah Bible College (now University) we did a day of outreach every semester. The school has connections with people in the community and seeks to show them tangible expressions of love through service. As spiritual as I would like to think I was, there was always the fear that I would be stuck cleaning out a muddy gutter in the rain. Naturally, a job working at a ministry house in the Hawthorne district was a much more appealing alternative.

That's how I was first introduced to Portland Fellowship. Beginning in the spring of 2004, and every semester after that for 3 years, I would find my way to Portland Fellowship. I cleaned windows, vacuumed carpets, dusted offices and painted hallways. Sometimes I wouldn't sign up in time and the work slots at PF would get filled up before I could get my name on the list. I was so drawn to PF that I would just go anyway. It was on these days of outreach that I met a man that would later become a great friend and mentor, Drew Berryessa.

Drew was in charge of the Multnomah work crews whenever we came out and he always took some time to introduce us to the ministry. I was immediately captivated by what was going on in that house. It was a sanctuary for oppressed and outcast individuals who wanted redemption. I smelled life there and even after I stopped going on those days of outreach the scent never really left my nose. Soon after, I finished school, got married and relocated to Portland, OR with the intention of a life commitment to the work of Jesus in that city. During that period I began to pray very intentionally about what God wanted next and in what ways he desired to prepare me for the ministry that I was ultimately headed toward. In the midst of those conversations with God two things consistently came up: sexual and emotional redemption.

Those that have experienced it, myself included, know that it takes a great deal of work to come to a place of emotional and sexual health. These two areas are of course not the only ones for which recovery is needed: they're just what God laid on my heart. In thinking about Portland, the first issue in sexual recovery that I began to consider was homosexuality. Admittedly, this was in part due to my own frustration with churches crusading against "the gays" rather than becoming equipped to do the hard work of partnering with Jesus in their healing and redemption. At the same time, I knew I couldn't love Jesus without loving His bride and seeking her purity: that means that rather than complain that churches seem to be failing in this area of redemption, I ought to myself be equipped for this task.

I began to remember my time at Portland Fellowship and be excited about the possibility of learning from the people there. I emailed Drew and asked him if there was any sort of training for church leaders



Luke serves at PF as a worship leader and small group co-leader.

that wanted to have a handle on this issue. I figured that they must have something because there are probably a lot of people that feel the way I do. Drew confessed that they didn't really have anything formal because not many people have asked. Though I was grieved by that, I was thankful that Drew was willing to meet with me, even over a cup of coffee, and help me get a grasp on this issue. When we first sat down to talk I didn't have any intention of becoming a leader. I just wanted to understand how biblical recovery takes place, especially with the issue of homosexuality and how I can be a part of redemption in this area. I have become convinced that if the church doesn't learn from PF, and other ministries like it, the long-term effects could be devastating. I am thankful that churches send people who struggle with this issue to Portland Fellowship; I just hope that we would also learn from what they are doing and do it.

During my meetings with Drew, I began to learn about biblical recovery and really appreciated his story and insight into this struggle. After about three months of meeting together for coffee I asked about volunteer positions at PF; he jokingly said that if I played guitar, there might be a place for me. It just so happened that I did and a month or so later I began the leadership training for Portland Fellowship. My first night there, all the leaders shared what brought them to PF and why they wanted to be leaders in the ministry. These were stories of redemption from really messed up past, broken marriages and hurt from friends and leaders alike. It was refreshing and humbling to hear from people that had obviously walked a bit with Jesus. I have been continually reminded by the lives of this crew that the best ministers of reconciliation are those that have been reconciled themselves.

I have become a part of a community on the margins that worships with an authenticity and passion that I have experienced in few other places. The songs are not so different than what I have sung in almost every other church I've been to. We have an acoustic guitar, a few vocalists and some congas. Nothing fancy or big, it's just that when expressions of worship are met with honesty something great happens. It also has never felt like a group of broken people with no hope muttering out their chorus of despair. Rather, it is a bunch of people that are experiencing great hope for redemption, many for the first time. I've been humbled and encouraged, because I know that this is the hope of the gospel for everyone and I am grateful to be even a small part.

When I first decided to join Portland Fellowship, I was only considering leading worship. Drew, however, convinced me that I ought to also be a small group leader. This was one of the best decisions I could have made. If I had not had the opportunity to be on the ground with guys that are seriously seeking to give every area of their life to God, I would have missed out on my favorite part of PF. Ephesians 5 talks about the way the community of believers exposes darkness to light. Things that have been hidden in shadows behind guilt and shame ought to be brought out into the day when the people of God are together. This openness is not a time for judgment but an opportunity to speak life into places that have never seen the light of day. Being a part of seeing darkness hit by light and the freedom it can bring has been an incredible privilege.

To be fair, this work has also been messy and challenging. The darkness that gets exposed at PF is just that - darkness. There is a lot of raw pain in the lives of PF participants and knowing what to say and how to say it can be daunting. Sexual abuse, absent fathers, no healthy relationships to speak of; these are all things to be met with compassion and honesty. There is a necessary dependence on Jesus to give apt words at the right time and apply them to hearts. Apart from His grace, the worship, teaching and small groups would be a great waste of our energy. Thankfully, I have already seen that what is happening at PF is anything but a waste.



Luke with his wife Allison in Paris

The doors of Portland Fellowship have come to represent something very sweet in my weekly routine. I pull up to the house every Tuesday a little early for worship practice and leadership hour, park my Subaru, grab my guitar and walk up the old steps and into transparency. Whether it is welcomed by me or not, I don't really have the option of hiding when I show up on Tuesdays. The grace and truth of Jesus are applied liberally at PF. It's not just the struggles of the participants that are dealt with in that house, but of the staff as well. We are not just ministers, but people that receive ministry; as a result, we are becoming better ministers.

It is an exciting prospect to take this out with me into life and whatever ministry God, by his grace, lets me be a part of. I am convinced that Jesus intends to do the work of redemption in the lives of his children and that to miss out on partnering in that would be a great travesty. God will certainly do this work in our churches if we would seek after Him for it. I pray that we will.

a row boat in south korea by Jason Thomson

With a passport in hand and two carry-ons, I boarded a plane to Busan, South Korea, having no idea what I was getting myself into. I've never traveled further west than Hawaii, and having been on trips to Quito, Ecuador, and several places around the country, I assumed this trip would not be that much different. I knew very little about the culture, the church, and those who struggle with sexual sin in Korea, but thought it couldn't be much different than anywhere else I'd been. I was wrong.

Mark, a young man who went through our *Taking Back Ground* program five years ago invited me to come. I remember the day he graduated, sharing with me that he was going to teach English in Korea and wanted to see this ministry take place over there. I appreciated his desire and blessed him in his journey.

Five years later I was sent a copy of the *Taking Back Ground* material translated into Korean and shortly thereafter, I was invited by Mark, now living in Busan, and Ali, the director of Wellspring, the only ministry in Seoul to the sexually broken, to come and speak and teach for 10 days.

On the first full day, with the challenge of jet lag, I spoke at a morning service and then an afternoon service, followed by a two-hour Question and Answer event. After sharing for a few moments, an older Korean man raised his hand and said in broken English, "Jason, we don't have homosexuals in our country. Homosexuality is an American problem." I think I would have actually believed him, if not for a man just an hour before privately pulling me aside to confess that he has been having sexual encounters with other Korean men and he is fearful of his wife and church finding out. I began to ask around and found both English foreigners and Korean natives who struggle. It was then that I learned how widespread homosexuality is in Korea.

The Korean church and the culture paint a picture of health and wholeness, yet the underground world of homosexual saunas, bars and sex motels are rampant. It can be compared to 1950's America. Homosexuality was obviously a reality then, yet there were no parades, bumper stickers, and media celebrating homosexuality. That actually sounds refreshing, but the downside was that the body of Christ as a whole did not understand the reality of the struggle for so many. And the downside to that is that the church was not offering ministry to this great need.

Ali, one of the only workers doing ministry like Portland Fellowship in Korea, shared with me that at first glance, it looks like a beautiful calm sea. But when you look a bit closer you began to see hundreds of people drowning and fighting for their lives. She said we needed rescue teams and helicopters and hospital ships. In her hopes and dreams she desired to see them. Well-equipped, well-trained rescue teams plucking people out of the water and taking them by helicopter to waiting hospital ships where they could fully recover from their ordeal.

But the rescue teams had not yet arrived; and in their place, is one solitary rowboat passing between the people, pulling one person at a time out of the water and giving them a blanket and a hot drink.

In many Korean churches, what looks like a beautiful calm sea has unknowingly thousands of people who are fighting for their spiritual and emotional survival. They need rescue teams, helicopters, and hospital ships in the form of recovery programs, counseling, prayer, helpful material, and above all, communities of Christians who will love and support them on the long difficult road to recovery.

But at the moment there are none of these in sight. There is only Ali, and one or two workers, leading the way. While I was with her, I saw her ministry as that solitary rowboat offering one person at a time a blanket and a hot drink. A blanket and a hot drink for a drowning person is considerably better than nothing. But so much more is needed.

God gave me amazing opportunities to be in that rowboat for 10 days in both Busan and then up in Seoul. Everywhere I went I had new opportunities to speak to groups, churches, and individuals. I was interviewed for a Korean Christian Newspaper, Korean Guidepost Magazine, Christian Television, and conducted a day-long seminar. The stories that I heard each day were gut-wrenching and sad: men and women who were in a tremendous amount of pain and hurt and desperate to hear a message of hope and healing. Yet at each opportunity, I saw men and women find new encouragement and hope. Hope that I pray will continue and grow and multiply.

I hope to return one day and see a fleet of rescue teams. Until then I pray for Ali and her rowboat and for each person who receives the love of God and the hope of a transformed life. I invite you to pray as well.





march / april calendar & services

march 10, 17, 24, 31

Open Group

The name says it all. Opportunity for anyone to come and participate in a group discussion about same-sex attraction and related topics. 7.p.m. (please note there will **NOT** be a meeting on March 3rd)

april 7, 14, 21, 28

Taking Back Ground

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

march & april

Living Well

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

march 20 & april 17

Family & Friends Group

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

Speaking Engagements

march 17 & 19

Portland Bible College

Jason Thompson will be presenting to the Advanced Counseling class

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

postcards from the road: upper room intern - jimmy d'agosta

The Upper Room Program (URP) provided me with many great skills, resources, and experiences to prepare me for my future path. Following the URP in 2006, I returned to Salem, OR and finished my M.A. in Ministry Management at Multnomah Seminary. During that time I served as an intern at Corban College, my alma mater. Little did I know that the Lord would provide a full-time job for me at Corban.

Within a month of graduation, I was hired on as the Director of Residence Life. One of the greatest joys of my new job is the opportunity to help students deal with the day-to-day struggles when college and growing up collide. So far I have been able to put a great deal of my training from Portland Fellowship into practice. I've gotten to introduce www.ReachTruth.com to several of our students as a powerful way to seek freedom. Additionally, I've gotten to help in training staff and student leaders on a wide range of topics, including same-sex attraction. Many of the counseling skills I picked up through the URP have served me well listening and advising students in crisis.

Most of all, I am seeing the effect the URP is continuing to have in my understanding and development of the personal gifts and talents God has given me. Through mentoring and many conversations at PF, I was able to perceive the unique blending of managerial and people skills that I had not previously recognized as part of me. My current position has allowed such a mixture to work together, and I am excited to see how the Lord will work in this during my time at Corban. I strongly believe that Christ has allowed me to learn from experiences in the Upper Room Internship and apply them to me each day to make a difference in my life, in my community, and in this world for Him.

prayer

...for the annual PF retreat at the coast. Our text this year will be the First Letter of John. Join us from home by reading and praying through the book the first weekend in March.

...for those who heard the hope of healing and redemption in Alaska and South Korea. Pray for protection of those who are taking new steps of growth and change.

...for the women and men of TBG as they take a one month break.



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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