



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Amazing Love: Reflections and Recollections by Jim Thompson

They come back as snapshots, the memories do – a vivid album spanning six unexpected years of teaching, mentoring, writing, and collaborating with beloved colleagues – of loving and being loved by countless friends. How many of these snapshots tell a story!

The most striking images are of those scenes where it became clear that this ministry was not the work of people alone, however competent (and I work among unquestionably competent professionals), but rather this was the co-operation of men and women with God to bring about His purposes.

Snapshot: I am standing in front of the *Taking Back Ground* crowd armed only with a dry-erase marker...thinking- *how did I get here?*

I began my work at PF, in 2004, when my son Jason (the director during all these years) asked me to teach a class – "Our Relational Nature". I remember staring that night into the faces of four or five dozen nervous men and women. I saw Jason crouching down in the corner, wondering, I'm sure, if this plane was going to fly. So was I. Realizing that I might as well do what comes naturally, I told a story on myself, drew a few diagrams, brought out some theology and peppered it with a few Greek words. Job done, I went home thinking that was probably my first and last evening at PF! In the morning a call came from my son telling me that I would, in fact, be back.

Jason and I found ourselves in a unique position: the only son and father to be working together in an Exodus-affiliated ministry (as far as we know). Since almost all of our participants report unsatisfying or non-existent relationships with their father, all eyes were on us. Can this really work? PF's board was, understandably, nervous. It was pointed out that many ministries are based in father/son leadership. So why not son/father? A plan was tested: at work I became "Jim", and was "Dad" only off-site. My son would be my boss. (Jason encourages everyone who gets an opportunity to have this arrangement to go for it!)

At the end of May, I'm going to get Jason back as full-time son. Behind us are a myriad of wonderful experiences of working together to bring about new endeavors for the ministry. Sure, there were some difficult moments. They only testify to the worth of what was in progress. Perhaps the best moments were when we could share the joy of seeing lives changed by the touch of God's love, and especially when that touch came by witnessing our love for each other.

My life was changed as well. I came to PF in what would be the final year of serving my church for over 25 years. That came to a painful end when members of the church expressed that my involvement with PF was incompatible with the church's views on homosexuality. When our denomination ordained its first openly gay bishop, I came to the same conclusion. For several years, I was cast adrift. I also was growing older. Two years into this, I began to suffer hearing loss. Other health issues began to surface, one giving us a fright. My medicine made me into an emotional yo-yo for a while, settling down into a summer-long depression. Early



Jim, hard at work, practicing for retirement.

in this time, my step-father died, then several friends. The rift with my church began to become real and increasingly hurtful.

When serving as a counselor, it is important not to let your counselee become a source of support for you. You are there for them, period. While that's also a general rule for pastors, there are exceptions. Sometimes a congregation shows its maturity by coming to the help of its pastor and his family. In mentoring, and in the staff relationships of a helping ministry, the relationships are often more open to mutual support. This, I found to be the case over and again. I remember how hard it was, at first, to talk about my own needs, my own brokenness. But there is no way, when demonstrating a family map or a personal timeline to interns, to avoid touching upon things that need healing. As never before in my life, I was ushered into the challenge of *receiving* love.

Snapshot: I've just made myself proud with a teaching in the summer series. I'm standing in front of the class about to tear open a loaf of bread. My arthritic fingers can't seem to break the loaf. I strain, flush with embarrassment. Suddenly, a participant comes up, and with perfect grace takes the loaf and passes it among dozens of hands who are soon tearing the loaf, quietly "taking and eating". I felt as though I saw a reflection of God: the reciprocal dance of love between Christians: hands, mouths, radiant faces at work.

Snapshot: Interns in the Upper Room, praying for each other. Anger, fright, confession, tears, hugs. How hard it is to love and be loved!

Having had a long stretch as a pastor, I came to PF familiar with the enormous privilege of sitting with people during significant events in their lives. I have prepared young couples for marriage, placed my hands on people whom God would heal, and sat with people in grief. I have had a child die in my arms.

These experiences prepared me, but only partially, for the intensity of the work at PF. Sexual brokenness cuts very deep. Some of my mental photos will not be shown to anyone: a young man sobbing because of his shame; parents coming to terms with the damage they have done to their children; a young man who has just learned he is HIV-positive; another who confesses contributing to the suicide of a friend; a group member learning he has inoperable cancer.

Other images are gladly allowed to become community property: freedom from compulsive behavior; a marriage healed; a restored relationship with dad; an excited uncovering of long-suppressed talent; a rekindled relationship with God. These events propel us, leaving no question that God makes use of our faltering efforts (ah, but how God permits us to be His voice, His hands).

I have long known that God uses community to accomplish many of His purposes. For this reason, the Upper Room Program was constituted primarily as a community. Each year the mix would be entirely new, and the new faces would bring a fresh set of opportunities and challenges. The intern community now extends beyond the nine months of the teaching and mentoring afforded by PF. We have over twenty former interns spread over several continents who are continuing their education, doing ministry, and living into the meaning of their time at PF. One didn't leave. Steve Baliko, who came from Alaska in 2004 for his internship, has remained to assist or lead the program, and has become a beloved companion in this work.

Snapshot: not a mental one, but the picture on this page.



Four guys whom, if you look closely, you will see are standing at the peak of a roof. They are my boss (soon-to-be-son-again), Jason, Drew, Steve and myself. Two things you don't see: my canes, tucked behind me, and the very nervous intern-photographer who wasn't in favor of my going up there. I look at the picture and see amazing love. I remember the concern the intern had for me. I recall the love the four of us have shared working together these years. Some snapshots of *that*

community would be like the previously mentioned memories of the interns: anger, fright, confession, tears, hugs. This is the motion of love – loving, being loved.

I will miss being present at regular PF events. At the same time, my retirement plan includes doing as much on-line mentoring as possible in our *ReachTruth* program. I know that no small number of former interns, participants, and ministry friends will stay in touch. And I'll always be welcome to come in and help fold the newsletter!

Recently, I have attempted to reflect as deeply as possible on the meaning of these mental pictures. What was easiest? -overcoming fear. Yes, I really believe that is true. What was best? -sitting quietly with an intern and feeling the presence of God. What is hardest? -receiving love. That has indeed been hardest for me – and perhaps for many others. But God's love is so extraordinary that it finds its way through all our resistance. Which make me smile? -newcomers who sit in my office and say they'll talk about anything except their dad. Which are the snapshots that will never fade or be forgotten? -those things God has done: the healing of old wounds; the gentle touch that removes shame; the discovery of true friendship; a glimpse, during our prayer, of the unending life we are inheriting in God's Kingdom. These things will be ours forever.

Congratulations *Taking Back Ground Grads!*

At the end of May each year a remarkable gathering occurs. Women and men who have completed the rigorous commitment to *TBG* are honored through a night of testimony, celebration, and prayer. Few nights match the intensity of joy and hope radiating from the lives present on that evening. We've asked a few of our soon-to-be grads to share a few of their thoughts on what the past two years have meant to them. Please remember all of our participants in prayer as they transition to all that God has in store for them after PF.



"As I look back on my two-year journey at Portland Fellowship, I find myself incredibly thankful for the experience. I remember the first night of my first year. Even though I had been told what to expect, I was still nervous. A friend had dropped me off, and I remember sitting there wondering if I had made the right decision in coming. When the worship team began singing and playing, a tangible change swept over the room, and I remember thinking that it sounded like roughly 100 broken voices swelling in unison. And mine was one of them. It felt good to be broken before God, and it felt even better to not be alone. It felt good to be with other believers who shared my struggles, and it was incredibly freeing to learn that our past negative experiences don't have to set the tone for the rest of our lives, and our struggles don't have the power to define us unless we let them.

Throughout my two years at PF, I met people among the staff and participants that I will never forget. And I learned so much about a healing process that is ongoing and will continue even after my PF experience reaches an end."

-Kevin



"Portland Fellowship started out as a support group for me. A place I could go where people would understand the kind of inward battle I had been fighting for about four years. I found family there where I felt instead of being surrounded by people encouraging me to stop fighting and embrace "who I was," they urged me to seek out who God is. As I worked through the questions in the workbook, I began to be challenged more than I ever had been in my relationship with Christ. The focus was no longer on homosexuality, although that was definitely explored, but more so on getting to know God more intimately straight from the Source.

Words like "intimacy" and "father" that raised nothing but pain and bitterness were explored and I found truth in so many areas that I had relied on only my experience to define. As the two year program of *Taking Back Ground* comes to a close, I am moving forward with excitement to continue in my growth of developing a true knowledge of who I am created to be and a deeper relationship with my Creator."

-Monica



"When I walked into Portland Fellowship two years ago I was desperate. I'd struggled by myself so long, but was in the worst addictive cycle I could imagine. It seemed I was losing the war

At PF I found leaders who've fought the same battles and learned to win. Leaders willing to give of themselves so I can learn to win. I no longer fight alone. I learned to really believe there's never been a moment God's not been loving me.

Things are different today. I've learned, grown, and continue forward. Today, with God's help, I know I'm winning the war."

-Mike

may / june calendar & services

June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

Open Group

Welcoming opportunity for anyone to come and participate in a group discussion about same-sex attraction and related topics. 7 pm.

May 5, 12, 19, 26

Taking Back Ground

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

May & June

Living Well

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

May 15

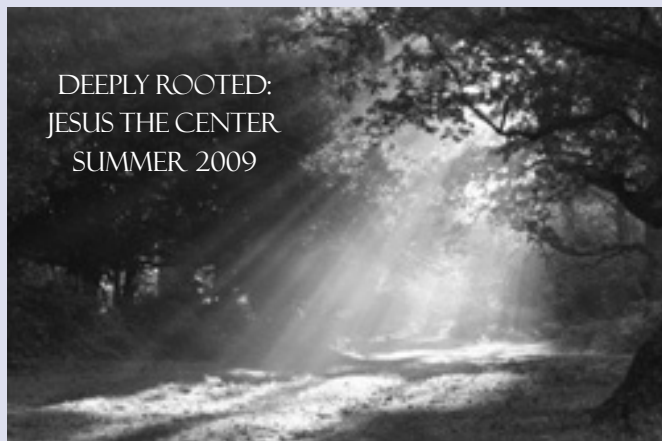
Family & Friends Group

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

June July & August

New Summer Hours

Our offices will be closed on Fridays through out the summer.



In any area of struggle, healing, or recovery it is tempting to put ourselves at the center of what is going on. After all, the pain is happening to me, the transformation is happening to me, the battle is happening to me...right? Not really. As Christians we can often get distracted by ourselves and that distraction takes our attention off of the One who composes and completes of our faith: Jesus Christ.

This summer we will be taking a look at how Jesus' life and testimony impacts every aspect of our own lives and transformation. The ways in which Jesus dealt with suffering, celebration, redemption, rest, freedom, and reconciliation are all vital to our own ability to live these realities out in our day to day lives. Join us for Deeply Rooted every Tuesday night from 7-9 pm from July 7th through August 25th at Portland Fellowship. Contact us for more information or to sign-up for the summer series.



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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Financial Update

Portland Fellowship has always been a work of God through his people to his people. During times of economic surplus and through tough times, it remains a ministry sustained by His hand. It will come as no surprise that personal donations are down and that some churches are reducing their mission's giving. All of us on staff are looking to see how we can make cut backs that allow for the ministry to continue uninterrupted. And to that end we need your continues support and prayer. There are no easy answers and yet the simple childlike trust that Jesus invites us into seems all the more important at times like these. Thank you for being part of the way we see God's faithfulness appear in the form of lives changed and hope restored. We cherish your fellowship as you pray with and for all of us associated with the work of Portland Fellowship.

Additional updates: www.portlandfellowship.com

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

Portland Fellowship is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) nondenominational organization. We are exclusively supported through private donations, support services, and offerings.