



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Looking Past the "What" to See the "Why"

by Drew Berryessa

We here at Portland Fellowship occasionally get the opportunity to share our ministry within the larger body of Christ. Most of the time, the invitation to do so comes as an opportunity to share our personal testimonies. Other times, the invitation may be to present a teaching on the nature of homosexuality. Whatever the invitation, we love the opportunity to share the redemptive work of Christ that we have both experienced personally, and have the privilege of offering to those who come to Portland Fellowship

However, on a recent ministry trip to southern Oregon, a pastor friend of mine asked me to share with his congregation something different. This pastor was interested in my perspective on how their church could become a safer and more healing environment for people who struggle with homosexuality, or any life controlling sin struggle for that matter. For me, this was a wonderful opportunity to share a concept that I believe could benefit all believers engaged in the discipleship of others-- Looking past the "what" to see the "why".

What is the "what"? Essentially the "what" is our sinful behavior, our sinful thoughts, which are our symptoms. Now, we don't really have any problem identifying when there is sin in our lives. Hopefully we recognize that sin, whether in thought or deed, hurts us and diminishes our relationship with God and with others. For the ministers and churches that we interact with here at PF, communicating the consequences of sin, and the need to repent of sin is not a problem. Consequently, most people have heard several sermons that would compel them to abstain from sinful behavior. A lack of awareness of sin is not the problem. If we look around, we recognize people who know they should not sin, know there are consequences for sin, and know that God is calling them to live without this sin. Yet with all this knowledge, they continue to live as prisoners to sinful thoughts and behavior. I certainly know this was true in my own life, and is evident in the lives of many of the people who come to Portland Fellowship for help. This scenario is both frustrating and discouraging not only for those caught in this cycle, but for those who genuinely want to help lead people to new life. Simply addressing the "what" is not leading most people to freedom. If we want to be truly free to live fully as God intends us to live, then have to get past the "what" to see the "why".

The "why" is a bit more complicated, and often either minimized or overlooked. After all, it is easy to make judgments by what we see people doing outwardly, like judging a tree by its fruit, right? Although looking at the external fruit in a person's life is important, you would not just pick bad fruit off the tree and expect good fruit to be produced the next season. In the same way, when we focus simply on "sin management", all we are doing is picking the fruit, hoping next season will bring a different harvest. Let



Drew is the Program Manager for Portland Fellowship and has been on staff since 2004.

me explain. Proverbs 27:7 says, “A person who is full refuses honey, but even bitter food tastes sweet to the hungry.” This simple passage is so helpful to understanding motivation towards sin. The person who is full in this passage refuses honey, meaning, they are satisfied and are not driven by their hunger. In contrast, the hungry person is so driven by their hunger that it does not matter if the food is bitter, because even bitter food is sweet when you are starving.

This played out in my own life: I was so starved for love and affirmation, and was so driven by my hunger for it, that even bitter things like fantasy, pornography, or a gay relationship tasted sweet. I could have easily identified my actions during that time as sin, but I was honestly unaware of the deep motivations pushing me towards sin. The “why” is our motivation toward sin. Motivations vary, but more often than not, they are legitimate needs that have been affected or exaggerated by offenses, abuses, or as the previous verse states, starvation.

If you have read our newsletters for any amount of time, you have probably seen a recurrent theme in the stories that we share. Somewhere along the way, the God-given needs for love, identity, and affirmation, were not met as God intended. This left us vulnerable and often living from a place of starvation, not fulfillment. Among the people who come to Portland Fellowship, it does not take long for these roots to become clear, and the hunger exposed for what it is. I remember when I first began to see past the sinful symptoms, and past the motivations, to the root of the issue in my life. It was a difficult journey to get there, but when that revelation happened, I finally had a starting point to begin healing.

For the person seeking healing, knowing and addressing the motivations of the heart is more helpful than just trying to manage symptoms. Although it is important to address our behavior, that alone does not lead us to healing. God desires complete healing for his children. Through my own journey, I have seen how God was more concerned with proving Himself faithful to address and meet the needs reflected in my behavior, than He was with removing or healing the behavior itself. Psalm 103:5 and Psalm 37:4 both allude to the fact that God cares about the deep desires of our hearts, and purposes to meet these needs in good ways. In fact, I believe that God did not answer my consistent prayer to “take away my homosexual desires” so that He could lead me to discover what was

really behind these desires, and then meet them in His perfect way.

Jason, PF's Director, remembers clearly when he had this realization: “I cried out to God to take away my homosexuality and kept pleading ‘take it away, take it away!’ About a year into my process of healing, I heard God speak to me, “Jason, I don’t want to take away your homosexuality... that’s not my goal or desire.” “Huh?” I said. “No, my plan isn’t to take away anything, but rather to GIVE to you. GIVE you a new way of relating to Me, to men, and to women. GIVE you a new identity that is found in Me. GIVE you hope and restoration. I desire to help you reclaim the ground that was taken from you and GIVE you a new life in Me!” God cares deeply about what motivates us toward our behaviors, and has no desire just to take from us, but rather to give fully, fulfilling our desires with only good things.

But back to the main point: How does looking past the “what” to see the “why” help a local church, minister, family, brother, or sister in Christ to become a safe and healing presence in a struggler’s life? When we take the time to look past a person’s sin to see the motivations, and consequently, discern their need, we are being imitators of Christ.

In John 4, we see Christ interacting with a Samaritan woman at a well. In this brief conversation, Christ addresses her sinful actions (*5 broken marriages and a current live-in boyfriend*) but does not stop there, He addresses her thirst, the very thing this woman was being driven by. Simply telling her to stop her bad behavior would not have done much to heal her or address her true thirst. Instead, in this story, Christ pointed her to “living water” that would truly satisfy her. How gracious of God not to condemn her for her actions, but rather, address her true desires and meet the true longings of her heart. I believe we are called to do the same.

How desperate is the need for this kind of understanding and compassion toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. How many people do you think are bound by sinful thoughts and actions, and yet have no real understanding of the deep seated longing in their hearts that keep them bound? If we, as the hands and feet of Jesus, will purpose to look past the “what” to see the “why”, and then take the next step in love and compassion to address the needs represented in the “why”, I believe we will see our churches, homes, and relationships become places of healing.



the hope group - drew berryessa

Have you ever felt completely and utterly alone? A moment when you were filled with a sense of isolation and hopelessness? A single moment with that feeling can be difficult, but imagine it lasts for days... or maybe even months.

There are many people who contact Portland Fellowship for help and support. Although it is true that people who contact us are primarily searching for support and guidance for their individual struggle with homosexuality, there is also a large group of people who contact us for a slightly different purpose - help in dealing with the homosexuality of a loved one. These individuals are parents, siblings, and friends. No matter the relational position that these people have, their emotional experience is consistent; they feel alone, confused, hurting, and in need of support.

When someone you love "comes out" (announces their homosexuality), it can be very difficult to know how to respond. Most of the people coming to PF for support are believers in Christ who hold to a traditional biblical view of homosexuality. The conflict of love for the person, versus conviction and concern over their actions and newly adopted beliefs, puts these family and friends in a very difficult place. Family, parents in particular, often experience a great deal of shame, guilt, grief, self-condemnation, and isolation. For a lot of parents, the conflict of keeping the disclosure secret, or sharing their burden with others can be particularly difficult, especially if the loved one has not "come out" to everybody. Susan, a mom of a young man who was struggling with homosexuality, recalled her feelings as she was dealing with her son's disclosure:

"It was like my inner world was collapsing, and I could no longer hide in the safety of denial. I cried the entire summer until it felt like I was turned inside out, and I spent hours late into the night groaning out my painful pleadings to God for some hope, some comfort. It felt like my son had died."

For Susan, she felt completely alone, and all she wanted was some hope and some understanding. In addition to

comfort and hope, people who are dealing with the homosexuality of a loved one are also looking for answers. Part of the reason that shame, guilt, and self-condemnation creep in, is because there are many unanswered questions. Emotions range from overwhelming guilt to confusion, anger, and often betrayal. Without a place to process these emotions, there can seem to be no hope. The loved one's disclosure has just changed the dynamics of the relationship. The questions of "Why" and "What now" are haunting. Feelings have to be addressed. Questions need to have a place to be asked, and hopefully, addressed. Understanding, comfort, and consolation begin to bring hope. The mother of a gay-identified son reflected on what it was like to begin to experience this sort of understanding:

"Understanding how all these feelings affected our lives was where our healing began. It was like God had opened a window on our stifled emotions, and fresh air started to pour in! There were patterns in our family life that could have contributed to our son's choice. We came to see that there wasn't any difference between the choice our son made to embrace homosexuality, and any other choices that disappoints or displease parents."

Portland Fellowship offers a place of support, understanding, and answers: **The Hope Group**. The Hope Group is Portland Fellowship's ministry to family and friends of those who are either struggling with homosexuality, or who have adopted a gay identity.

For more information about The Hope Group, call the PF office or email drew@portlandfellowship.com.



The Hope Group

Meets once a month on the third Friday of each month at 7p.m. We will share a light dinner, listen, and then discuss information on the following topics,

january - Dealing with Grief

february - Acceptance vs. Approval

march - Relinquishment

april - Hope and Expectations

may - Prayer and Intercession

june - Root Causes of Homosexuality

july - Guilt and Shame

august - Dealing with Pain

september - Forgiveness

october - Boundaries in Relationships

november - Disclosure

december - Encouragement

Following discussion, we will have a time of prayer and sharing, and will end the evening by 9 p.m. Please join us as we walk out this journey of hope together!

january calendar & services

january 5, 12, 19, 26

taking back ground

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

january 7, 14, 21, 28

upper room program

The Upper Room Discipleship Program continues as we grow and learn in the context of community. For information about next year's program, visit our website or give us a call.

january 15

family & friends group

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

january 15

annual planning meeting

Staff and members of Portland Fellowship's Board of Directors will meet to evaluate 2009 and plan and prepare for the amazing things ahead in 2010.

online ministry support

Many are unable to attend a local ministry program such as Portland Fellowship's Taking Back Ground program. Because of this, we have created an online program for anyone with internet access. If you are looking for an in depth program to walk through, please consider signing up for the online series www.reachtruth.com. All the information can be found on the "Travel Plan" page.

additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

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

an important message

Portland Fellowship has historically stayed focused on the redemptive work of Christ in the lives of men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions. Cultural and political issues dealing with homosexuality are numerous and could easily sidetrack our work, especially with our limited resources. However, a bill before the Ugandan Parliament that would punish homosexual acts with prison for life or even death has been associated with redemptive ministries in America. Therefore, a clarifying statement regarding this 'Anti-Homosexuality' bill is important for us to communicate.

Last February, Don Schmierer, a Board Member of Exodus International (an organization linking ministries like Portland Fellowship together under one name), spoke at a conference in Uganda on freedom from homosexuality. The information was twisted by some Ugandan leaders who were pushing for this 'Anti-Homosexual' bill and as a result, Exodus Ministries became 'guilty by association'.

Portland Fellowship and Exodus International completely oppose this legislation as it is in direct contradiction to the message of Christ and the Church. Proclaiming the message of freedom in Jesus Christ is not equated to our judgment on the homosexual person; rather, our command is to love, not to condemn. We pray that the church leaders and governing members of Uganda will embrace this truth, and through it, all will come to know the power of God and his transforming power in all our lives.



prayer

...for our TBG participants as they enter the second session of teaching, small groups and hard work. We desire God's protection for each person as they closely examine their lives and seek the Father's help for each new day.

...for our staff and leadership team as they continue to serve and offer support, direction, and encouragement to the men and women in their small groups. Pray that we stay physically healthy this season.

...for continued financial support for the ministry, and that the Lord would bring us the necessary resources to sustain and grow the work that we do.

...for our Upper Room Participants as they walk into the second half of their program year. Pray that the Lord would continue to reveal His presence to them.



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 Portland fellowship, a ministry proclaiming freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ

MINISTRY TEAM

Jason Thompson
Executive Director

Drew Berryessa
Program Manager

Cynthia Lopez
Ministry Assistant

Suzanne Berryessa
Women's Support

Michelle Nash
Support for Wives

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post office box 14841
portland, oregon 97293
telephone 503.235.6364
fax 503.235.3896

e-mail: pf@portlandfellowship.com
portlandfellowship.com

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