



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

march / april 2010 volume 14, number 2

Losing life, Finding life. by Drew Berryessa

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:25) What do you do with these words from the mouth of Jesus? How do they affect the course of your life? For me, 12 years ago, these words were both an instruction, and a promise.

When I first began the process of surrendering my same sex attractions and desires to the Lordship of Christ, I had never heard of the ministry of Portland Fellowship. In fact, I had never heard of anyone living a life beyond their former homosexuality. Over 12 years ago, I was living in a small town in central Washington. I was struggling deeply with my attractions, and had not long before, ended a secret relationship with another young man. By this point in my life, God had convicted me of my actions, and I knew that I could no longer indulge in behavior or thoughts that fed my homosexuality. To be honest with you, I was terrified to give those things up. It was in that time that I was confronted with these words from Jesus. I don't know any other way to interpret these words, except that Christ calls us to lose our lives. In fact, he states that if we try to hold on to our lives, we will lose them regardless. It is only in losing our lives **for him** that we actually find life.

I was confronted with a choice. Would I lose my life for Christ? What does that even look like? Would I really find life if I lost it? Having never heard a testimony like the ones that built the ministry of Portland Fellowship, my choice to lose my life came with absolutely no precedent of what this surrendered life could result in. The only promises I had were from the words of Christ himself, "whoever loses his life for me will find it", and the ever present promise from John 10:10 "the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Whatever life I would find by surrendering to Jesus, according to his own words, would be life to the full. The only question was "did I trust his word"? I believe that as Christians we all have to contend with the words of Jesus in this passage. This certainly is not just the privilege of those who struggle with same sex attraction. Each of us have to wrestle with what it means to surrender the life we are holding on to, and be willing to let it go for the sake of Jesus. For many, that may be a career, status, possessions, comfort, family... the list could go on. But for those who are making the decision to surrender same sex desires, there is an important aspect that raises the stakes considerably.

From the time that a person becomes aware of their struggle with same sex attraction, and really, even before that, the message from the world is "this is not just what you feel, this is who you are." For



*Program Manager
Drew Berryessa
pictured with his wife
Suzanne, Womens
Ministry Leader, and
their two daughters
Elaina and Olivia.*

a person who struggles with same sex attraction, what the Bible names as temptation, lust, or sinful behavior, the world names as your identity. Think about that for a moment. Do you hear people say, “I behave homosexually” or do you hear them say “I am gay”? Thoughts and behavior becomes the distinguisher of identity. Even for people who come here to PF and who passionately want to surrender their lives to Jesus, there is still often that default identity.

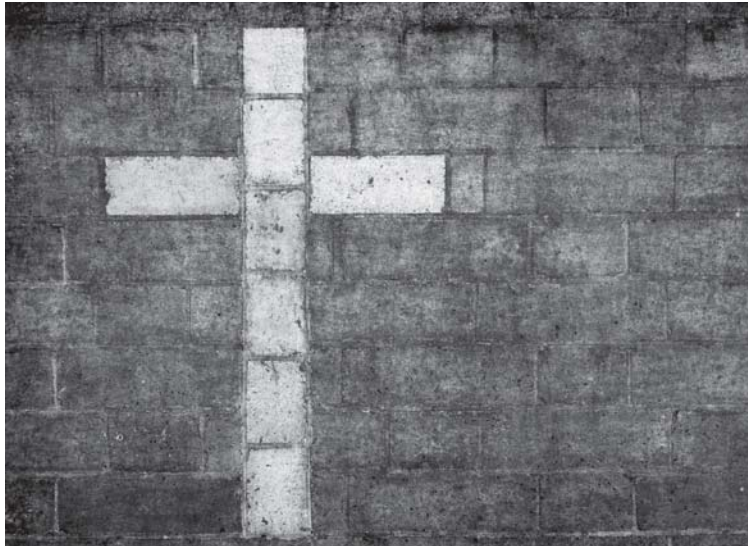
Looking back 12 years ago, I remember the fears that I had while contending with the idea of surrender. Behavior seemed simple enough to surrender. I just had to stop doing what I had been doing. Conceptually, that seemed easy, practically, it was more difficult, but, even so, it did not threaten my identity. Many Christians who are in this struggle resolve to maintain an identity of a “celibate gay”. At first, this is where I found myself.

I would often joke with those at church that I was a “bachelor til the rapture”. Although, certainly it was true that celibacy was part of what God was calling me to, *which is at least a temporary calling for anyone who is not married*, I honestly did not believe that my feelings were going to change. I believed that the best that I could do was to “take every thought captive” as instructed in 2 Corinthians 10:5, and hope to live a life that did not offend God. But in the midst of my wrestling, I could not escape the feeling that God was asking more of me than that. It was not until coming to PF 10 years ago that I began to understand that I had been basing my identity in my homosexual thoughts, attractions, and behaviors. Even as a celibate gay, my identity was rooted in the wrong place, and Christ was relentless in calling me to lose that identity as well.

Even though, at this point, I was surrounded with the living testimonies of life change at Portland Fellowship, I still did not have the promise that my life would mirror the lives of people like the PF staff. Again, I just had the call to die, and the promise that if I did, I would have life. I believe that all who contend with this struggle have a similar dilemma to deal with. Again, this comes down to a simple question: Do we trust the promises of Jesus? It is easy for us as Christians to immediately reply to that question with a resounding

“YES”, but in all honesty, it is not that easy. If you do not struggle with same sex attraction, could you imagine the difficulty you might face if God were to ask you to surrender your heterosexuality? By that, I mean, what if God were to ask you to surrender any hope of marriage, or if you are married, surrendering that relationship and any promise of sexual intimacy ever again? If you can grasp the weight that scenario might create for you, you can begin to understand the weight that many face here at PF. Even with the testimonies of those who have walked through this ministry and have gone on to marriage, or had broken marriages restored, these are just examples of what God **can and has** done. These are not promises of what God **will do** for everyone who comes here. It all comes down to the promises of Jesus to bring us life, life to the full, if we will lose our lives for him. Whatever that life might look like, do

we trust him with it? Do we trust that the life he gives us in exchange will be “life to the full”?



When you consider what is at stake for those who come to PF, is it any wonder that there are those who struggle to faithfully walk this road? You do not “lose your life” easily or quickly. It is not just a one-time decision, but a daily choice to lose our lives for the sake of Christ, trusting that he is faithful and true to his word.

Considering this, would you please pray for these men and women? The choice to place your faith in Christ is a risk for anyone, but to have to re-forge your whole identity is particularly difficult. The battle to surrender same sex desires to the Lordship of Christ is deeper than just altering our behaviors; it is a calling of deep trust in the character and the faithfulness of God. This is not an easy road, and the men and women walking it could use all the prayer support and encouragement they can get.

By walking this road, and by trusting in the promises of Jesus, there is new life. For me, and for many others, that new life has included marriage; for some, purposeful and fulfilling singleness. For all who lose their lives for him, there is a life worth living. It is our prayer at PF that we will continue to see men and women choose to surrender their lives for Christ, only to find life to the full at the other end.

an exciting new way to partner with PF

So, you want to take the next step in your level of involvement with Portland Fellowship. You believe in the work and you see the value in PF's mission and you may already support this ministry financially, but would like to do more. Here is one way that you can help with a new idea we're implementing. Consider hosting a "**House Party**". A house party is an opportunity for you to get the word out regarding this amazing ministry, and an opportunity for you to enjoy some time with friends.

It's really simple: You set the time and place and then invite your guests. You may want to invite those who are interested in partnering with Portland Fellowships' mission. Or, you may know of people who would like to learn more regarding how to relate to someone who is struggling with homosexuality or has embraced a gay identity.

With the comfort level of *your guests* in mind, you choose the refreshments to serve. Some groups would prefer an evening of dessert and coffee. Other groups might enjoy having wine and cheese. Some may enjoy a nice sit down dinner. It can be a very simple evening or something much more. It's completely up to you as a host.

Through your participation in this way, you give us the opportunity to tell folks about the resources available here. By hosting this in *your home*, you help to remove the awkwardness or anxiety that some people may experience in learning more about Portland Fellowship. We believe this will be a valuable time for all those who participate. Give Gregg Naslund a call at 503.235.6364 or email gregg@portlandfellowship.com if you would like to participate as a host. We have more information available to help with all steps of hosting the evening. Thanks again for your partnership in the ministry of Portland Fellowship. We look forward to hearing from you soon.



transforming lives online

If you have been connected with Portland Fellowship for some time now, you know that we developed an online program called www.reachtruth.com. This program was meant to reach all those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions that do not have a local ministry to attend. The program has been online for over a year and a half and has about 500 participants and mentors going or having gone through the program. Many have completed the twenty destinations and have offered feedback.

Mentor: 53 years old -- "This was an absolutely wonderful experience for my son and I. It has deepened our relationship. I cannot say enough about how it has helped us. I have thanked God so often for you folks and for your ministry. Your videos were so genuine and helpful. The content was excellent though at times hard to face and deal with. You have produced a powerful program that I pray will be as used of God in other's lives as it has been in my son's and mine."



Participant 16 year old -- "Thank you for all the energy you put into my own personal journey. This has truly been a leap of rewarding faith! I feel more confident in myself and in my faith. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to grow. Thanks to Drew and Jason, your videos really spoke into my life!"

Participant 23 years old -- "It was incredibly helpful to get a different view of the questions and be able to read a more mature person's thoughts and comments. Knowing that I wasn't going through the program alone made it much more effective, too. If I had been answering questions just for the sake of it I wouldn't have put nearly as much of myself into it, but knowing that someone would be reading them and replying made it mean much more."

Mentor - 49 years old -- "Wow - it changed him and his thinking completely - The program was not unhelpful - it was loaded with relevant topics, questions, videos etc. I will pray for all your participants to find the true love of God. My son (mentoree) and I were talking about sponsoring people with SSA. I hope to send you a portfolio of my son's success story - I am astonished with the growth within him."

If you have not already seen the site, please visit www.reachtruth.com. Please share the site with others, via Facebook, blogs, church weblinks, and/or twitter. Your sharing may change a person's life!

march calendar & services

march 5-7

tbg retreat

Participants and alumni of Taking Back Ground will be headed to the Oregon coast for a time of fellowship, worship, prayer and surrender.

march 14

Drew speaking: Adventure of Faith Church: Gig Harbor, WA

Drew will be speaking to the young adults group.

march 19

the hope group

Join us at Portland Fellowship's ministry to family and friends for prayer, encouragement, and support, and a great meal. The topic of our next meeting is **Relinquishment**. Meetings are held the third Friday of each month at 7 pm.

march 23

pf worship night

Participants and alumni of Taking Back Ground, and the family and friends group, are invited to join us for a time of worship and testimony. 7 p.m.

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.

partnering in prayer

There are many ways that you can personally support and further the work of Portland Fellowship. Certainly through financial partnership, which is essential for us to continue this work, but also through faithful partnership in prayer. Although this may seem like a less tangible way to offer your support to Portland Fellowship, it is a much-needed aspect of sustaining this ministry. The work done here is difficult, and knowing that there are people faithfully lifting us up in prayer is a great encouragement. Here are some areas of specific prayer need that we would like to ask you to commit to praying for. God bless you for your partnership!

Pray for God's continued protection of the staff's hearts as we deal with the brokenness of those who come to this place. There is great warfare for those who are helping men and women find freedom from sexual bondage.

Pray for an increase in the provision for this ministry, including volunteers, financial partners, and open doors. In particular, pray for our current fundraising efforts, that we would be able to secure the resources needed to accomplish what we feel God is leading us to do.

Pray for ever increasing opportunities to minister to and within the Body of Christ this next year. Many churches, pastors, and lay people still don't know that we exist. Pray that the Lord gives us favor as we seek to develop greater relationships with, and come alongside the Body of Christ here in Portland.

Pray for our current ministry team that the Lord would continue to lead and sustain us, that he would give us great vision, great ability, and great joy in our specific areas of calling and responsibility within PF. Pray for our families as well- they also carry this ministry with us!

Pray for all of those who come into contact with Portland Fellowship- our interns, volunteers, participants, wives group, friends and family group, and all else we find ourselves ministering to this next year- that they would encounter the transforming love and grace of God.

Pray for those whom God is calling to be a part of the Upper Room Community this next year; that they might hear God's call and respond faithfully, and for those who are currently in the Upper Room Community, that the remainder of their experience will be marked with incredible growth and encouragement in Jesus.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support!



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

The Fellowship Message is sent free upon request. (An annual donation of \$15 is appreciated to cover printing and postage costs.) No part of this newsletter may be reproduced or reprinted without permission.

post office box 14841

portland, oregon 97293

telephone 503.235.6364

fax 503.235.3896

e-mail: pf@portlandfellowship.com

portlandfellowship.com

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