



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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My Story is Painful Too by Marie

At the very young age of three, I learned to associate rejection and its pain with being a girl. I spent my childhood and adolescence building on the thought the only way to stop the pain was to be a boy. When I started going to TBG (Taking Back Ground) at the age of 33, in addition to gender identity, I now was associating pain with my identity in Christ. I was walking down a path to change both in order to avoid experiencing the tremendous hurt my heart was under.

Like many new participants, I did not know what to expect from TBG. I chose to fill the unknown with cynicism. I convinced myself nothing here could address my struggle; God's silence would prove He did not have an answer. With this "proof" I reasoned that my response to pursue a sex change and no longer identify myself with Christ would be justified. Against my expectations, TBG simply started with people telling their stories. In one powerful night, a woman told of how she too desired to be a boy during childhood and lived as a man during young adulthood—and she had the pictures to prove it. But the LORD called her to a difficult process of walking in Truth, being the woman He created her to be—and she had the life to prove it. In 5 minutes, the LORD spoke through the story of this woman, and it was I who was left speechless and proven wrong. This was just one of many defenses that the LORD would tear down to reach my heart.

Approaching the opportunity as an assignment rather than as a way to share myself with others, I was the first member of my small group to share my story. I came with a checklist in hand to make sure I did not forget what I wanted to communicate. After I was finished, something unplanned happened. I began to sob uncontrollably. I think the truth was clear to everyone but me: I hurt. But all I wanted in that moment was to desperately stop my expression of pain in front of these strangers. Even after finally regaining some amount of composure and another woman thankfully beginning her story, every once in a while my internal turmoil would audibly seep out. When small group was over, I was the first to leave and I vowed in my heart never to return to this place. Although I did not physically keep that vow, emotionally I did. My approach to small group mirrored my approach to life—I detached myself from emotions so I could get through. If the healing and freedom I truly desired deep down, buried beneath my defenses, was to be mine, somehow this strong defense of detachment would have to be broken—I would have to feel and own my pain. Five months went by before I was vulnerable with my group again.

During that time, I started to return my heart to the LORD after 2 years of running away from Him. I read a Psalm and went on a hike every day for many months, come (mostly) rain or shine, with the desire to hear His voice again. One day on my hike, I came upon a place where the earth was violently and massively split as a result of an uprooted tree. I remembered Psalm 29 and expressed anger toward the LORD. "You say your voice thunders. You say your voice can break the cedars. You say your voice can move the earth. So why don't You speak to me?" The LORD was up to my challenge. He was about to speak, but this time His voice would not split the earth. He was about to break another defensive wall around my heart.

I was having a hard time relating my particular struggle with the rest of my group. I eventually talked to my small group leader about my difficulties and she encouraged me to open up my struggle to the others. I



Marie has completed the Taking Back Ground program and now serves on our prayer team.

decided to capture scenarios in short sentences of how my struggle played out in my mind and interactions with people on a daily basis. Once again I had a list, but this time my heart was on those two pieces of paper. I had to remove myself from what I wrote or else I would not get through it. I spent the whole day before small group mentally detaching myself from what I was about to read out loud. It was almost as if I removed my heart from my body, put it on the sheets of paper, and became a hollow shell as I pretended I was reading about someone else's life. The next day, my group leader asked how I was doing. I was feeling something, but I did not know what it was. At the time I was going to another PF ministry called Process Group, a place where only emotions could be expressed. Without giving the details of what I shared, I asked the men and women present to help me put a word to what I was feeling after being so vulnerable with the women of my small group earlier in the week. Shame? No, although I shared some embarrassing things everyone was so supportive and encouraging. Exposure? Well, yes, but that was sort of the point. Pain? Oh..., yes..., that is what my heart was feeling. The process group leader then asked me to turn to the person next to me and say, "My story is painful." Now with the added feeling of defeat, I refused. I could not take ownership of my pain. I chose to remain detached.

The next day I went on my trail, not engaging the LORD but wallowing in my failure to accept a challenge put before me. My self pity was more miserable than the cold, rainy February-in-Oregon day. And then for the first time in over two years the LORD broke His silence and spoke to my heart: "MY story is painful too." The impact of those words was like the thundering uprooting of a mighty tree, even though the tone was as soft as a whispering breeze. I was stopped dead in my tracks. It soon became difficult to discern the boundaries between my tears and the rain.

For a lifetime, my response to pain and rejection was to reject myself. The LORD's response was very different—He related to me. His solution was to feel my pain with me. His desire was for me to bring my pain to Him so He could meet me in that place where I hurt, to bring healing and freedom. I could bring my pain to Him. It still amazes me 3 years later to think after I turned my back on the LORD, His first words to me did not carry condemnation or rejection, but brought the attraction found in relating.

As with most revelations from the LORD, this was just the beginning of walking this out. It is work to bring our pain and other emotions before the LORD. It has been said while our self created defenses separate us from hurtful things and people, we incur the additional, unintended, and more costly expense of keeping out those things and people we ultimately need and desire in our lives. My emotional detachment reduced life to

the one dimensional world of hurt to be avoided at all costs. But by doing so, I desensitized myself from emotions in general. I robbed myself of the complex, multidimensional life God intended my heart to experience. Along with pain, things like joy, healthy mourning, and passion were blocked too. Not being able to enter into these things myself, I was stunted in celebrating, consoling, partnering, and in many other ways our hearts were fashioned to relate to one another.

Yes, it is work to bring our hearts before the LORD. But as I am walking this out, I am discovering the reality behind the emotions I feel and I am entering into relationship with others.



Sometimes all the emotional energy I expend is generated from perceptions that do not match reality. I need to align myself with Truth. Sometimes emotions like self pity reveal there is sin in my heart. I need to let go of self love and other things and turn to the LORD to fill my void. Learning the hard way, sometimes processing emotions does not include telling someone how I feel. I need to own my emotions in silence so

that someone else is not destroyed in my process. Sometimes, I am just not ready or able to process my emotions, and darkness remains on that part of my heart. And sometimes, anger or disappointments are, in fact, lined up with reality. I can just allow myself to feel, knowing the LORD is right there with me, but at the same time realizing His Truth is bigger than my reality.

And, oh yes, I am embracing being the woman the LORD created me to be. I am learning it is not men, other women, or even I who define what it is to be a woman. It is the LORD. From the beginning, He said being a woman is very good. Just like my emotions, I can bring my womanhood to Him because He fashioned it. The LORD has never degraded, belittled, abused, patronized, despised, or rejected me for being a woman. Instead He has affirmed me. I like how God the Father and God the Son treat women.

Not too long ago, while on the same hike I walked during my time at PF, I came upon another fallen tree. Originally rooted near but not directly on the path, it caused serious but not impassable trail damage. Pain and rejection are similar to that fallen tree. God never intended rejection. But it happens to all of us along the way. When it comes, you and I have a choice. We can continue on the path God has for us, walking with Him in that pain, despite the way now being made difficult and broken for a while. Or we can blaze our own path that appears to open in the clearing when rejection falls, deciding to go our own way and carrying pain's weight on our shoulders. My encouragement to stay on the path comes from the LORD, who took my rejection as His very own through His Body on the tree He bore, willingly making His story painful too.

responding to jennifer knapp's "coming out" ... Randy Thomas - Executive Vice President of Exodus

As you all are probably aware, Jennifer Knapp stated last week that she has embraced her same sex attraction and is now identifying as gay.



Jennifer has made a lot of money and fame in the contemporary Christian music scene. Just as she rightfully earned her recognition as an amazing artist, she has also earned the scrutiny that comes along with all of that celebrity. At the same time, we as Christians are called to see beyond the hype and to the real principles being played out on the national stage in front of us. With the Spirit's help we can consider Jesus' sacrifice for us corporately and for us individually. The Spirit will also help us consider Jesus' sacrifice for Jennifer as well. One example of the objectification of Jennifer came when someone who was obviously very angry with her decision asked me:

So when do we come to the point of just flat out telling her that her "loving relationship" with this woman isn't love at all? ... that she is offending a Holy God?

I told this person that we need to step back and realize that God is fully aware of Jennifer's love for her partner. He understands the legitimate needs seeking to be expressed in both of their hearts and He also, fully understands the reasons

why both have turned to sinful behavior to try to meet those needs. The truth is, Jennifer probably really does love her partner. We don't need to minimize or dismiss that. The beautiful and sometimes tragic nature of love is that we have free will on where and with whom we invest it. Jennifer is investing hers into her partner. This ability to steward love is why God is so jealous for our love, it's a huge investment of our entire being. He entrusted that to us with free will so that it would be authentic. Rightly or wrongly, when one invests love in another ... that's an investment of the heart, soul and sometimes body of the person. A very big deal indeed.

I have a feeling Jennifer isn't clueless that most Christians believe homosexual behavior is sin. I just wonder if anyone ever offered to share with her a redemptive view of sexuality instead of being heavy handed on condemning the behavior. To ask Jennifer to "repent" is to ask her to give up her hard fought battle to reconcile her life to herself. It's to ask her to sacrifice two of the biggest investments in her life (her partner and identity.) That is no small thing and should not be treated lightly.

Temptations, if they are of any worth as temptations, usually latch on to a legitimate need and point to sinful behavior as a way to meet those needs. However, in Christ, temptations are also an opportunity to recognize legitimate needs and pursue meeting those needs in biblically appropriate ways. Jesus was tempted in every way but never sinned. His Spirit can empower us to discover, learn, and implement ways to meet our needs and turn away from sin. Right now, and not knowing her personally, it would seem that Jennifer is seeking to meet her needs in the only way she knows how or feels is an option. God understands this and I have no doubt is working in her life to provide His redemptive perspective.

Later, I thought about this person saying Jennifer was offending a Holy God. That irritated me at the time and didn't quite know what to say without getting upset. So, I was silent in the conversation but I wished I had said that instead of God manifesting in all His glowing glory and declaring how offended He is, He manifested as Jesus Christ. He didn't cross His golden robed arms, roll His heavenly focused eyes and snarkily guffaw a lightning bolt out of His mouth to express his offense. A tortured, grieving Jesus willingly outstretched His arms and was nailed to a cross. As He died, He didn't lament how badly His Bride, His Church, was treating Him. He asked the Father to forgive us for we know not what we have done.

If anyone had a right to abandon everyone who offended him, Jesus was that person. But He didn't. Instead He paid the highest price possible to forgive us in spite of us. Jennifer says she knows the Lord. I assume that is true. And if it is true, He never lets go. He wants her and her partner (all of us) to know that He offers a greater love than we could ever imagine or think. His love outshines any human love and can satiate any soul.

As the Executive Vice President of Exodus International, Randy Thomas oversees more than 170 professional mental health and church-based member agencies across North America that offer hope and help to individuals wanting to leave homosexuality. Founded in 1976, Exodus has become the largest evangelical organization dealing with homosexual issues in the world today and remains committed to helping those seeking God's healing and transformation. Portland Fellowship is a member ministry of Exodus.



may / june calendar & services

may 22

Cedar Mill Bible

Jason will be speaking at a men's breakfast. 7:00 am.

may 25

TBG Graduation

Second year participants of the Taking Back Ground program will be celebrating their completion of the program with family and friends.

may 21 and june 18

the hope group

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

june 21-22

Exodus Leadership Conference and Exodus Freedom Conference

Jason and Drew will be attending both conferences in Irvine California. Additional information on the right.

Tuesdays in July and August

Sy Roger's video series

We will be offering a video series this summer. Please reserve your Tuesday evenings.

online ministry support

If you are looking for support, but can't join a group, please consider signing up for the www.reachtruth.com program. All the information can be found on the "Travel Plan" page.

personal counseling:

low-cost sliding scale counseling available at PF. Call to make an appointment.

speakers and additional resources

can be addressed by calling a staff member.

exodus freedom conference

Irvine, CA - June 23-26 2010

Moving Forward is the theme for the 2010 Exodus International Freedom Conference.

This is Exodus' 35th year of hosting annual conferences. As those first pioneers, Exodus is committed to speaking a message of grace and truth to those impacted by homosexuality. We choose to honor the past by faithfully continuing their work, despite obstacles and challenges. We rejoice, that by the grace of God, we are **moving forward** in our efforts to help individuals in their pursuit of freedom through our member ministries, professional counselors and church association members. We are **moving forward** in pursuing our mission to mobilize the Body of Christ to minister to many in their congregations and in their local communities.

As individuals, we believe **moving forward** will encourage and inspire you to continue your pursuit of wholeness and freedom. We believe God will minister to you personally through the teaching, the powerful stories of transformation, the insightful workshops, specific ministry groups and fellowship times with other attendees. Most importantly, we pray you will be drawn to **move forward** in following Christ on the path He has prepared for you.

For additional information and registration visit

www.exodusfreedom.org

prayers and thanks

Please pray for our second-year *Taking Back Ground* participants as they approach the end of the program, for God to bring to completion the healing He has appointed for this time.

Please pray for our *Upper Room* interns as they consider their future after the completion of the program this month.

Please pray for those preparing to come to next year's *Upper Room* program.

Please pray for continued provision for the ministry, and for

A special thanks to all who came to the Fellowship House work party. Your valuable time spent was greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support!



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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