



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Who I am.... by Eddie Keener

To be honest, I'm a little bit apprehensive (okay more that a little bit) about telling my story in the Portland Fellowship newsletter. Once this is published, it will be out there in the universe for all to see, and I will have lost control of who sees it and what they do with the information. For those who know me well, you'll understand my concern about giving up control!

But, in 1 John, chapter 1, it says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin." To me, that darkness includes the secrets we keep, and I believe Satan uses our secrets, our struggles, and our unwillingness to share what God has done in our lives to keep us from experiencing God's total healing, forgiveness and blessing. Over the past several years, the truth of this scripture has had a profound impact on my life, so I'm going to view this article as just the next step in my journey of "walking in the light."

A lot of people believe they are born gay, and others believe that it's a choice. I have sometimes wished I could blame it all on God, that He made me this way and there's nothing I can do about it. I don't recall ever choosing to have my same-sex feelings, but I am responsible for the choices I've made throughout my life in response to those feelings. As I struggled with these feelings in my early adult years, I read books and sought counsel in an attempt to gain some understanding as to why. I learned that every child has inborn needs that have to be met to ensure healthy emotional growth and maturing, some needs that should be met by mom, other needs that can only be met by dad, other needs met by same-sex peers, and so on. A sense of identity should be passed down and affirmed from the father to the son. If these needs aren't met and affirmed, they don't go away. We just look to meet those needs in other, often unhealthy, ways. Although I was raised in a Christian home, my life growing up pretty much mirrored a lot of what I heard and read about childhood experiences that can lead to homosexual behavior in adulthood: My mom died when I was born; I had a not-so-good relationship with my dad; I was artistic instead of athletic; I was not accepted and was made fun of by my male peers; I was sexually abused by older boys for several years; I felt unloved, misunderstood, unworthy...

By the time I was in high school, I knew I was different from other guys. I dated girls and tried to act like I was "normal." Of course, I didn't have sex with the girls because that was a sin and I was told repeatedly that I would go to hell if I had sex with girls. Ironically, I don't remember ever being told I would go to hell if I had sex with other guys. I did know it was wrong, but it was never really discussed, and I certainly wasn't going to tell anyone what I was feeling.



Eddie serves on the Taking Back Ground leadership team, leading worship, teaching, and leading a small group.

I went to college and continued trying to be “normal,” dating girls and pushing the envelope sexually. But, my homosexual thoughts and desires continued to grow stronger. Then, I started noticing other guys who struggled with the same thing, and started building relationships with them. Eventually, I had my first real sexual encounter with a guy, apart from the abuse earlier in my life. I was freaked out afterward, and the next day asked one of my best female friends to marry me. She said yes, and I thought that would fix everything. Needless to say, it didn't. Fortunately, I came to realize that marriage was not going to fix me so I broke it off before I ruined her life, too.

As college ended, I began a career in theatre which put me around a lot of openly gay men. I discovered gay bars and fell headfirst into the gay lifestyle. I kept going to church during this time, and was quite successful at living two completely separate lives. I usually felt guilty about what I was doing, but didn't know how to stop the feelings. Occasionally I would decide to just stop the behavior and suppress the feelings. But they always came back, usually stronger, and I eventually decided that I was gay and there was nothing I could do to change. I never fully came out to the whole world – I was very selective about who knew and who didn't (my control issue).

I continued pursuing my career in L.A. and then New York. At this point, I was pretty much living a full-blown gay life and church was something I did occasionally. On Easter Sunday in 1994, I woke up, realized it was Easter, and immediately started to feel the guilt again. I finally decided to go to church ... after all, that's what you're supposed to do on Easter. I went to a church I had visited once or twice before. I felt so empty, unhappy and out of place that I got up and left.

Later that night, I was flipping through channels and came across the movie, “The Ten Commandments.” As I watched, I pulled out my Bible for the first time in a very long time and started reading the commandments. I then read all of the scriptures that speak about homosexuality being a sin. That night, I came face to face with the reality that I was living apart from God, I was lost, and if I died I would be lost forever. I felt God saying to me, “Okay, I've been very patient with you; I've let you do what you've wanted, but now it's time for you to make a decision about your life.” Heaviness came over me, a feeling that I had to make a choice and I had to

make it that night. I remember feeling this might be my last opportunity ever to choose God- that if I put Him off this time, my heart would be hardened (just like Pharaoh's) and I would never again have the opportunity or the desire to make this choice. I also knew that if I chose to follow God, I would have to be willing to give up everything, to completely change my life if God asked me to, and I knew that He would. I felt a very real spiritual battle going on inside me that night like I had never experienced before. As much as I knew I was wrong and living in sin, I didn't want to give up what had become so comfortable to me. I had struggled for so many years to accept myself as a gay man, and I just didn't think it was possible to change. But

God would not let me go. He fought hard for me that night – He was not going to let Satan have me. By the time the movie was over, I had made my choice...I got down on my knees and surrendered my life back to God. I was scared of the future, the possibility of failing again to overcome this huge, mountainous issue that I had been dragging around my whole life. But, I just kept praying, and God gave me a peace I had never known before.

That night was the first major turning point in my walk with God. I was amazed how God met me right where I was and began working in my life. The first several months were almost euphoric as I hungered for more of God's word and spent time daily in worship, seeking His will for my new life. My journey was not without obstacles, and even a few failures, but God continued to be gracious and forgiving. However, with the exception of a very few select people, I still held on very tightly to my secret (control issue again). After a while, **my** efforts to change weren't working so well for me anymore. I had altered a lot of my behavior, I was trying to do all the right things, but the feelings and desires were still there. Why wasn't God changing the way I felt?

I left New York, relocated to Florida for a few years and eventually moved to Portland. In June 2003, I attended a Love Won Out conference put on by Focus on the Family. This was the first time I had ever attended a conference that dealt with homosexuality. I was scared to go, afraid people would automatically think I was gay because I was there, especially the people from my church who were also attending the conference. But, God wanted me to be there. The testimony of one man touched me deeper than anyone's story ever had, perhaps because his story was



almost identical to my own. I sat there using every ounce of energy to keep from totally breaking down. Although his testimony reminded me of the pain and suffering in my own life, it also provided me with a sense of hope for real change and a desire to experience the same freedom to stand before others, admit my struggles and know that I would still be loved and accepted. I had become complacent, and God let me know this at the conference. He also re-ignited a desire within me to experience a deeper level of healing and spiritual maturity, not only in overcoming my same sex feelings, but in every aspect of my life.

A common theme at the conference was the importance of being honest and transparent with other Christian men, to build godly relationships and seek accountability in dealing with my struggles. It was no longer good enough for me to hide behind the “don’t ask, don’t tell” rule. If it’s not a secret anymore, then Satan can’t use it against me. I began to share my struggle more openly, especially with my close friends and church family, and my relationships with other Christian men began to grow and deepen in ways I had never experienced.

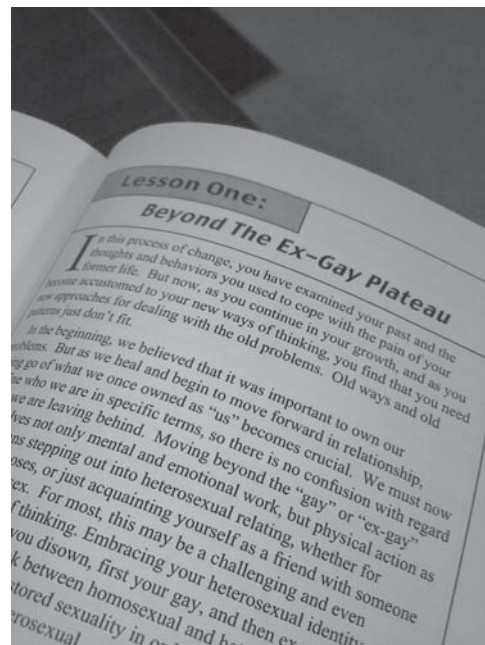
It was just after the Love Won Out conference that a close friend did some research online and discovered Portland Fellowship. He encouraged me to check it out, and I began the Taking Back Ground program in the fall of 2003. I was a bit stubborn at first (control issue again!), but God used the worship, teaching and small group time of TBG to begin chipping away at the façade I had spent years building to impress others and protect myself. After a couple of months, I fully engaged in the process, which included acknowledging and dealing with the issues with my dad, as well as the hurt and sexual abuse I had suffered growing up. It was very painful, but I was finally getting to the root of the problem. God was peeling off the layers of my life, just like peeling an onion, revealing the hurt and giving me the strength and courage to finally deal with it all. As the weeks and months went by, true healing and change began to take place.

And then an amazing thing happened in April, 2005. I was in the final months of TBG, I was at home, working on the lesson for the coming week, “Beyond the Ex-Gay Plateau.” I was reading the material and responding to the questions in the workbook, when I heard a clear voice in my head. It was God, and He said, “Eddie, you’re not gay anymore.” I stopped what I was doing, thought about what I had just heard and then asked, “So, if someone were to ask me if I was gay, and I told them ‘no’, I would be telling the truth?” And God responded, “Yes, you would be telling the truth. You are not gay anymore.” I thought about God’s response for a moment, and then went back to doing the lesson! A few minutes later, I realized the significance of what had just happened. I had been waiting my whole life to hear those words! I became overwhelmed with emotion and knew I needed to tell someone. I called my best friend and his wife and told them what had happened. He said, “Stay put, we’ll be right there.” They came to my house, I retold them my conversation with God, and the three of us rejoiced, cried and prayed. In the days that followed, I continued to share what had happened with all the people who had been walking with me through this process of healing, receiving affirmation of the truth God had spoken into my life.

It’s been 5½ years since God spoke that truth into my life. I often think about that night and remind myself of the significance of what God has done for me since that Easter in 1994. It’s really all about identity – who I am because of who’s I AM (and learning to give up control!). I spent so many years letting the circumstances in my life deceive me, creating and embracing an identity that God never intended me to have. Satan used that false identity to hold me captive. But, God has changed me and given me the identity He always intended me to have...a holy man of God, His son, redeemed, loved, understood, worthy.

One of my favorite scriptures is I Corinthians 6: 9-11: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And that is what some of you were.* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (emphasis mine).

“Were”...past tense...forgiven...forgotten...changed.....Hallelujah!



Has Portland Fellowship been a significant part of your journey? Would you like to share how God has used this ministry in your life with our readers? We would love to hear from you!

november - december calendar & services

nov 5-6

people in pain

Jason will be speaking at this conference sponsored by Western Seminary.

nov 6

bridges conference

Drew will be teaching in workshops at this youth ministry training event sponsored by Western Seminary and New Hope Community Church.

nov 7

door of hope

Jason will be speaking at the evening service 6 pm.

nov 11

the alumni group

Graduates of *Taking Back Ground* are invited to receive ongoing support and encouragement. 7pm.

nov 18-19

multnomah class

Jason Thompson will be teaching a counseling class at Multnomah on sexual and relational wholeness.

nov 19

the hope group

Join us for our family and friends program for a time of prayer, encouragement, support, and a great meal. 7 pm.

tuesday nights

taking back ground

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

additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

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

partnering in prayer

The work we do here at Portland Fellowship is difficult, but knowing that there are people faithfully lifting us up in prayer is a great encouragement. We often share prayer requests for the ministry, but this month we would like to share specific prayer requests from our staff:

Jason - God continues to bless the Thompson house in so many different ways and I'm thankful that I currently don't have a crisis or painful season that requires special prayer, but I do cherish your prayers for me and my family. Here is a quick personal update as you feel led to pray for us: My wife Amy is working part time at the church in the children's department, but her real passion is to be home to raise our two boys, something she has desired to do since childhood. Trevor (7) is in second grade. He loves people and can chat with you for hours about most anything. A prayer for the coming year is the need for eye surgery. His left eye has a shortened optic nerve and needs to be extended. Cody (3) is in preschool and is just trying to keep up with his big brother. Both are such a joy to raise! My personal update is that I just turned 40. I've been told by many that life is just now getting going. I ask, "Downhill"? But truly, I look forward to the years ahead. I thank you so much for your love and support of the ministry God has called me to do. My wife and I are extremely grateful.

Drew - I am constantly amazed by the goodness of God and all that he has blessed me with. Life is full for the Berryessa household, and my prayer requests center around the great things that God has given me... My wife Suzanne and I are thoroughly enjoying raising our two amazing girls Elaina (4) and Olivia (2) who, as I type this, are probably spinning around the house in their ballerina outfits. Please pray that in the middle of busy and challenging ministry, I would not miss opportunities to first and foremost minister to my wife and girls. God has also blessed me with the opportunity to finish my degree, a chance that I never thought I would have. I will graduate from Multnomah University this next fall. Please pray for endurance as I work through the final year of school work. I am so blessed to be directing our Upper Room Program this year; please pray that God gives me wisdom, grace, and perspective as I work with the men of this program. Thank you so much for your prayer support!

Cynthia - God is my compensator and as I work on partnering my life with God's best for me I would love prayer over the following things: I am getting married! Please pray for me in this process. I know that is God is being glorified and pray that He will be continued to be magnified in and through our marriage. Please pray for me in my work at PF. Pray for continued strength as I take on more task and duties, that I will have a continued and desperate dependence on Christ. Pray that I would be able to effectively administer His Hope to those I come in contact with. I am excited about having Christ be the center of my life, my marriage, my ministry, and my work. Your prayer support is so appreciated! Thank you so much!



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

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