



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

Jan/ Feb 2011 volume 15, number 1

Grace Did Much More Abound.... by Mark

Psalm 139:8 ends by saying, "If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there." That is one scripture my life has put to the test too many times to count. The curtain rose on the stage of my life in December of 84', and what began then was destined to be an unpredictable romantic comedic musical tragedy.

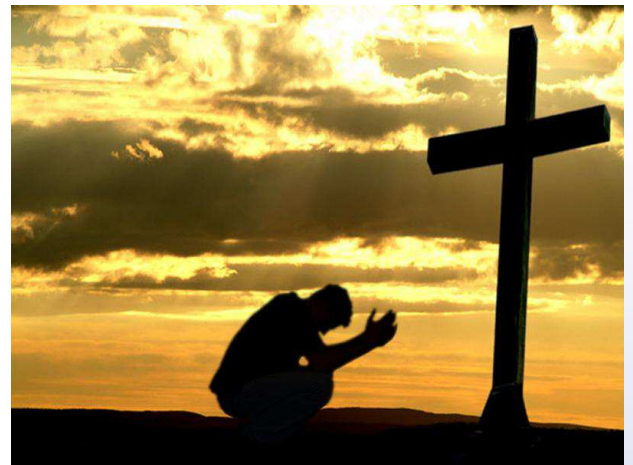
For as far back as I can remember, abuse had always played a major role in my life. I was six-months old when physical abuse became a common occurrence for me shortly after, emotional and verbal abuse became daily rituals that were never skipped. By the time I came to know sexual abuse at the age of nine by a schoolmate, I was completely resigned to the fact that my role in life was to serve as a whipping post for anyone who saw fit. By the age of twelve I was convinced that I would undoubtedly go to hell, believing there was nothing redeemable about a boy who had tried killing himself at the age of six.

My mind and soul were scarred with feelings of worthlessness and self-hate. As if the plot wasn't complicated enough, my same-sex struggle rushed to center stage with the arrival of Junior High. Junior Hell, as I like to call it, was when I really began to address the fact that I wanted a leading man in my life...not a leading lady. Now if growing up in a spiritually abusive church had taught me anything at all, it had at least taught me that being gay was so wrong, it couldn't even be talked about. So I stayed silent and began to pray that God would take away my homosexual desires.

At age 15, I began researching homosexuality; what it was, what it looked like, and how I could "conquer it." I had always been a high-spirited tenacious fighter, and this was one battle I wasn't going to surrender to. Little did I know that the most wounded part of my life would prove to be my emotionality, not my sexuality...I truly believed I

was unlovable. In between the time High School ended and College began I had raised the white flag of surrender and whole-heartedly embraced the gay identity I had tried so hard to escape. This decision immediately began to devastate every part of my life. When I shared with my Pastor what I was dealing with, he decided to give me three days to change my mind or he would have to expose my sin to the church congregation from the pulpit. Wanting to save my family the embarrassment of public humiliation, I decided to leave the church behind and pursue as healthy a life as possible.

What began to unfold in my life was anything but healthy. I began a lifestyle that selfishly catered to every desire and every hurt. I quickly fell into a pattern of sinful sexual encounters spurred on by a dangerous addiction to pornography. Before I knew it, the lack of self-worth that was nurtured in me from a young age began to push me towards even more dangerous and destructive habits. I began experimenting with drugs and abusing alcohol in an attempt to silence the anguish and pain that loudly echoed in my heart and mind. Through out the next five years, I would make many futile attempts to



Mark participated in our programs.

reconcile my destructive lifestyle with the God I still longed to feel connected to. I was clawing around in the dark for any way possible to find the peace that I knew only Jesus could give, but I wanted it to be one that didn't require me to change the abusive way I was living.

The abuse I was suffering was no longer at the hand of others but by my own hand, I was now the most abusive and dangerous person in my life. By 22, I was so deluded into thinking that my end would be destruction that I began to purposefully engage in encounters that would put me at risk for contracting the AIDS virus. I wanted to die but still so desperately wanted to be

loved. In 2007, I entered into a relationship with a man who was HIV+, believing that if I knowingly contracted HIV from him, he would have to love me. I was going to be loved...no matter the cost.

Like any unhealthy relationship eventually does, this one came to a bitter end and I was once again left on the empty stage looking for love. By this point in my life I was devoid of any sense of healthy boundaries or

appropriate relating. My main objective was to seduce people into loving me; and my body was my currency. My attempts to find love and acceptance became a means to feel alive and continued to perpetuate a cycle of constant danger and self-debasing behaviors.

Life continued to spin me and in a last ditch effort to try to find some sense of solace and peace, I cried out to God one day and said, "If I'm meant for more than this, show me a way out." That day I came across the Portland Fellowship website and began to entertain the idea that this could be a door of opportunity that would lead to a better life. That fall I began the two-year Taking Back Ground program. I wish I could tell you that my life changed overnight and that I entered into a perfect relationship with Christ but this was not the case. After finishing my first term in the TBG program, I dropped out and went back to pursuing dangerous encounters and crumbs of affection.

My tenacious attitude, which during childhood had kept me alive despite my abusive upbringing, had now turned into a disobedient, defiant, and prideful spirit. Without humility and acknowledgment of my sinful nature, all the "programs" in the world wouldn't substitute a life changing encounter and sustaining relationship with God. I didn't want to accept the

fact that the hardships I had experienced in life could not serve as an excuse for me to blatantly live outside the will of God.

Almost a year had passed and I found myself once again praying, "If I'm meant for more than this, show me a way out." With a broken heart, and a wounded spirit, I began an authentic journey of seeking wholeness and restoration. In humility, I returned to the TBG program and allowed it to serve in my life as a means to draw closer to God and encourage me to keep pursuing a life changing relationship with the Lord. While some of the horrific experiences I have been victim to and/or allowed myself to be part of may

appear to be the most monumental parts of my story, I assure you they are not. The Lord has been present with me from before I was conceived, he was there every time I was being abused, and every time I tried to destroy myself. God made himself manifest to me through the prayers of a faithful Mother & Father, who have been able to walk along side me in my journey to wholeness. The Lord was

with me the day I took my last HIV test and found out that I had not contracted the virus, despite my self-debasing willfulness. He is with me now as I share my story with you and he has continued to order my steps. The Lord has begun a process of redemption that permeates every aspect of my life.

Broken relationships have been mended, I have been granted the strength to accept the things of my past that cannot be changed, and most importantly I can finally see myself as Christ sees me...worthy of love flaws and all. A major part of my healing has come from the chances I have had to share my experience with others and to encourage others to come to know Christ in a life changing way.

I am currently working for a non-profit ministry that offers a faith based solution to men wanting to overcome substance abuse. I no longer have to settle for crumbs of love but I can now accept the lavish love of Jesus that knows no end, which has the power to change us all. The most monumental parts of my story are not the experiences that have scarred my soul or the times that I have made my bed in hell, but the times that I have made my bed in hell...and the Lord was there, which has been every time.



the journey of transformation: upper room by Drew

I had a rare opportunity the other day to sit for a un-interrupted hour and a half and quietly read. It was a Thursday morning a few weeks ago and I had just sent our interns out for a contemplative exercise in downtown Portland. Sitting in the Courthouse Square Starbucks, waiting for them to return, I began reading Gary Thomas's "The Beautiful Fight". As I read through one of the chapters, a particular statement really resonated with me. He wrote "The mere moralist says, "Do not lust." Fair enough, but is "not doing something" a sufficient goal for God's children? Absolutely not! That's the legalist's trap. The gospel of transformation calls me to progress from not lusting to having eyes that honor, respect, and generate compassion. God wants to transform my eyes from being selfish possessors and consumers to being his servants of selfless love."

I love what Thomas was saying, that Christ does not call us to a non-identity, known for what we are not, but a transformed identity, known for what we are! In this ministry, it is so important to remember that distinction. So often, people contact us because they do not want to be gay, but this is missing the point entirely. Our goal here at PF is not to make people stop being gay, but rather, to help people become more Christ like, and as 2 Corinthians 3:18 says be transformed into His image with ever increasing glory! This is at the heart of everything that we do here at PF.

This year, I have the honor of leading PF's Upper Room Program. This program has for the last nine years invited men and women from around the world a chance to immerse themselves in this life changing journey of transformation. This year, we have six men engaged in this program. We are entering our fifth month and, quite honestly, it has been an intense journey for them. The work of transformation is not easy and there is still a lot of work ahead for these men. Would you please join me in praying for these men; that they would be transformed into the image of Christ, with ever increasing glory, known for what they become, not for what they no longer are? May that be my prayer as well!



reconciliation: movie review by Cynthia

Twice in December, we had the privilege of hosting a film screening of the movie *Reconciliation*. *Reconciliation* is a film about an estranged father and son, who after not speaking over a couple of decades reunite in a tale that is both honest and moving. After discovering that his wife is pregnant, Grant becomes haunted by his unreconciled past and replays vivid memories of the broken relationship that he has of him and his father. With the birth approaching near and his fears and anger surfacing, Grant discovers that his father Jeff does not have long to live and his last request is to reunite with his son. Grant hesitates to meet his father again, being that it has been 24 years since they have spoke. Their relationship came to an end when Grant discovered that his father was gay and was pursuing a homosexual lifestyle. Now a Christian, Grant has to come face to face with not only his father but his past and his unforgiveness.

Reconciliation does a great job at portraying the extreme brokenness that can happen in relationships and portrays most of all the importance of forgiveness and the reconciliation that God so desperately desires to bring about in each one of our lives. Portland Fellowship was excited to show our participants and the Hope group this new film. This was the first movie I have ever seen that gives an accurate, biblical perspective on how to love and reach out to the people in our lives who struggle with same sex attraction. It also gives encouragement and hope for those who find themselves in the struggle.

I enjoyed many things about the movie but one thing that struck me as distinctive about the film was the way that it honestly portrayed both sides of the story. Not one person was the victim, not one person was to blame. Many times, both in Hollywood cinema and within our very lives we get a limited view of the picture. We see our versions, our hurts, the offenses that were caused to us; and almost always there is one hero and one villain to each of these stories. However, in the movie *Reconciliation*, not one character in the film is stereotyped or idealized. We could learn a lot about grace and love from this movie. One of Portland Fellowship's desires is to equip people with a biblical and truthful message about reconciliation between God and man, and with each other. *Reconciliation* is the heartbeat of Portland Fellowship and we are grateful that this film can be another tool to extend that to others. Watch the trailer or order your own copy of the movie at www.reconciliationmovie.com.

january - february calendar & services

tuesday nights

taking back ground

Our discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions resumes on Tuesday Jan 4th. There is still space available in the group, contact the office if you are considering joining.

jan 13

the alumni group

Graduates of *Taking Back Ground* are invited to receive ongoing support and encouragement. 7pm. Call the office for more information.

jan 15

annual planning meeting

The PF Staff and Board of Directors will meet to set the budget and do strategic planning for 2011.

jan 21

the hope group

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

jan 23-27

exodus leadership conference

Jason will be attending the annual Exodus International Leadership Conference in Orlando, Florida.

additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com
Please take a few minutes and check out our newly updated website.

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

a couple united

We are excited to announce the wedding of two dear friends of Portland Fellowship. Cynthia Lopez was on



staff as PF's administrator and Brian Beaudry was an intern in the Upper Room program, when they fell in love and be-

gan secretly dating. They 'secretly dated' because they were unsure of the protocol of staff and interns being in a romantic relationship, a scenario we never would have imagined. But God imagined it and on December 3, 2010, Brian and Cynthia became husband and wife.

Brian and Cynthia were the first couple to actually meet at Portland Fellowship and the first to be married at the Fellowship House. It was a beautiful wedding and an amazing reception celebration. We pray God's blessing on the Beaudry's for many years ahead.

partnering in 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.

...for wisdom and guidance for our staff and Board of Directors as we plan for the next ministry year at our Annual Planning Meeting.

...for the health, stamina, and healing of our staff and their families, as there have been some lingering health and physical issues this last month.



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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