



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Blessings Turn Into More Blessings... by Sean Harlow

In the Fall of 2000, I was attending a Portland missions conference to share my experiences on the mission field, with the hopes of recruiting new missionaries to serve the Lord oversea. It was at this conference that I learned about the ministry of Portland Fellowship. Phil Hobizal, the founder of Portland Fellowship, was giving a presentation about his own testimony and the work God called him to do. I was completely flabbergasted to find out that a ministry like PF even existed.

For years, I had been searching feverishly to find a Christian counselor or pastor who could help me understand how to overcome my struggle with unwanted homosexual feelings. It wasn't until this conference that I learned what my heart already knew. Phil gave an amazing presentation of the roots of same-sex attraction and an overview of how Portland Fellowship had helped hundreds of men and woman walk away from their struggle though the power of Jesus Christ. I was amazed that God began this work in the early 80's and over the years has grown the ministry to what it is today. I wanted to be involved. I wanted to learn more. But most importantly, I wanted to get connected to deal with my own personal wounds and needs.

Unfortunately, I was living and working in St. Louis, MO, and there was no ministry like Portland Fellowship near me to participate in. Phil Hobizal was very gracious and met with me once a week on Mondays for counseling over the phone. I began to feel a sense of hope and new found courage about the possibility of being able to work through this lifelong issue that began when I was just 9 years old.

In 2003, I was laid off from my job with the Lutheran church headquarters in St. Louis. This opened up an opportunity for the Lord to move me and my entire life out to Portland, Oregon, in order to participate in the Taking Back Ground Program (TBG). I sold my condo that summer, packed up my car and headed west. This transition for me was both exciting and a bit frightening at the same time.

During this same period of time, Portland Fellowship was also going through its own transition period as well. Phil Hobizal, who had been serving as the Executive Director since its inception, made a decision to move onto other endeavors, and Jason Thompson began serving as the new director of PF. I was really nervous because I had been working with Phil for over 2 years, and now I would need to start all over again, building trust and getting to know someone else.

I knew the Lord was in control the first moment I walked through the doors of Portland Fellowship, and felt a calming peace and presence within the house. This was furthermore felt when I met some of the men living there at the time.



Sean is a graduate of TBG and, an Upper Room participant, 2003 - 2005. He is currently serving as a missionary in the Philippines.

Meeting with Jason Thompson for the first time, I was put completely at ease as he made me feel very warm, welcome and safe as I settled in to make Portland Fellowship my home for the next two years. Unfortunately, I was unable to find work right away and had a difficult time making ends meet. Jason continued to be full of grace and was quite generous in allowing me to work and do odd jobs around the house, in order to pay for my rent at the house. Furthermore, I was in a place where I was amongst both men and women who were dealing with the same struggle that I had been tormented with for the past 27 years.

I felt very safe at Portland Fellowship, being able to learn more about my struggle through the stories and testimonies of others who had gone through very difficult times and experiences in their lives. I also felt a complete sense of genuine love and understanding from these same people as they listened to my struggles and experiences, yet were also willing and ready to encourage me, pray for me, and hold me accountable for my actions. I was with people who had the same goals as I had- becoming completely free from the torture and persecution I felt by the chains of my homosexual feelings and past actions.

Because of the ministry and services of Portland Fellowship, and, of course by the grace of my loving Father God, I have been completely sober from any homosexual activity since February of 2002. I value the time and experiences that I have been privileged to encounter at PF. After completing the program with Portland Fellowship in 2005, I decided to remain active with it's ministry and assist by serving on the worship team and as a prayer person during the nights of the TBG program. I wanted so much to give back to Portland Fellowship because of the gratitude and appreciation I had in my heart for how they had helped and served me in such a powerful life-changing way. I was able to remain active with Portland Fellowship through the summer of 2008. During those 3 years, not only was I able to serve with PF on TBG nights, but the Lord enabled and to continue supporting Portland Fellowship financially because of how the Lord continued to richly bless me in many ways.

The Lord has also given me the joy of sharing my testimony with my church family and many friends, who in

turn wanted to be supportive as well. Since then, there have been quite a number of acquaintances from my personal social network who continue to support Portland Fellowship, through prayer, finances, and encouragement of the ministry.

In 2008, the Lord opened up the opportunity to have me pick up my life once again and move to China. I was to assist with relief efforts that were needed following the devastating earthquake that took nearly 100,000 lives near the town of Cheng Du, in the Sichuan Province.

One of my biggest fears was realizing that I would be nearly 9,000 miles away from Portland Fellowship and its' ministry which had blessed me and empowered me to walk a life of purity for over 5 years. I wanted to remain close, but was not sure how. I decided to continue using the TBG materials even while I was in China, which really helped me stay connected. I even did my best to hold a personal time of

worship and study of the program at the same time (10 AM on Wednesday mornings – China time). This proved to be extremely helpful and beneficial. I was even able to stay connected to several PF leaders and former TBG participants, who served as accountability partners and encouragers, even across several oceans.

Furthermore, the Lord has continued to bless me in such a way that has allowed me to carry on in using financial resources to give back to

Portland Fellowship as they have given so much to me; hope, grace, love, mercy and peace. I realize that there are so many organizations that I could be supporting and giving to financially, but I honestly cannot think of even one that has abundantly impacted my life more than Portland Fellowship.

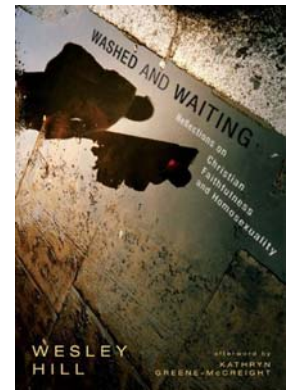
I say this, not to boast of my giving, but rather to express my extreme gratitude of what God is doing through the ministry of PF. I've seen the abundance of ministry that is offered with the little they receive. This only makes me desire to bless them more and encourage others to do the same.

I have made a commitment to the Lord and to the ministry of Portland Fellowship that I will continue to support them through prayer, financial gifts, and encouragement as long as I am alive. May the Lord continue to bless you richly as you have blessed me these past 11 years!



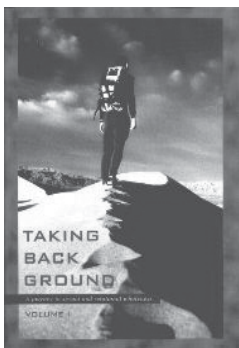
## book review: washed and waiting -drew berryessa

I remember on my first night at PF, I heard for the first time a statement that is a foundational belief here at PF: Heterosexuality is not the goal; holiness is. Now, with that said, PF always will uphold that heterosexual expression within the context of marriage is God's intention for sexual expression, and that we firmly believe that God can transform our sexuality and give us the capacity to live beyond homosexual attraction. Our lives, and many of the lives and testimonies shared in this ministry and in our newsletters, certainly reflect that fact. Jason and I both love the fact that when we share our testimonies of how God has met us in our struggle, our stories include God's gifts to us, represented in our incredible wives and children. Certainly we are more than blessed. At its core, however, a call to holiness for those struggling with same-sex attraction is not about healing...it is about trust and obedience. In fact, when I first began my time at PF, I did not believe that I would experience healing of my homosexual desires to the point where I could consider heterosexual marriage an option. My joke, as I began this process, was that I would most likely be a "bachelor til the rapture". I came to PF for answers and discipleship, and hoped that I would experience healing in my emotions and develop the ability to stand up under temptation. Somewhere in the process, my life and attractions changed... but that is not everyone's story.



In his book "Washed and Waiting", author Wesley Hill writes about his experience as a "gay Christian". Unlike many in our current culture who would identify themselves as gay and Christian, Hill holds to an apostolic and traditional teaching that "homosexuality was not God's original creative intention for humanity, that it is, on the contrary, a tragic sign of human nature and relationship being fractured by sin, and therefore that homosexual practice goes against God's expressed will for all human beings, especially those who trust in Christ." Hill has not, at this point in his journey with Jesus, experienced healing of his homosexual desires. They are just as prominent and unchanging as they ever were. Hill acknowledges the legitimacy of stories of change, like those we often share here at PF. He writes, "Although I don't want to dispute that this is evidence of the love, grace, and power of God, and without wanting to diminish anyone's hope in God's ability to change homosexual desires in this way (for some), I do want to say that this has not been my experience. Nor has it been the experience of many gay and lesbian Christians who are silently struggling to remain faithful as they worship and serve with us, day after day, in the fellowship of the church."

Hill offers a unique perspective that I believe is extremely important for the body of Christ. Particularly for those who walk alongside those who struggle with same-sex attraction, who wrestle with these feelings, or who have a loved one immersed in the gay life. Hill paints an honest, theologically sound, and compelling picture of what it looks like for a person to submit to the Lordship of Christ and pursue holiness at great personal cost. Hill's book brings the question of transformation into greater focus. Even though Hill admits that his homosexual desires have remained unchanged, his desires are not the focus of transformation. Hill writes of his experience of being transformed "through" his attraction, not "from" them. He writes: "When we homosexual Christians bring our sexuality before God, we begin or continue a long, costly process of having it transformed...we get a fiercely demanding love, a divine love that will never let us escape from its purifying, renovating, and ultimately healing grip." Hill portrays a life that is submitted to Christ, and which hopes for God's promised redemption, in spite of unchanging feelings. This book poses a crucial question to believers, in particular, the question of how we as the body of Christ can best support those walking this journey. Whether feelings are transformed or not, the journey of submitting your same-sex attractions to God is a difficult, costly, lonely, and painful journey. This book portrays this struggle very well, and gives those who do not struggle with SSA insight into the unique challenges faced by our brothers and sisters in Christ, particularly those who live a celibate and obedient life. I highly recommend it.



## taking back ground begins october 4th -

It is a little over a month until the 2011-2012 TBG program starts up. It is always amazing to see how God brings people to this ministry, and throughout the summer we have been accepting applications and conducting intake interviews. It is awesome to see God's timing converge with a person's willingness to grow. If you are considering attending *Taking Back Ground* please contact the PF office for intake information. We still have space available.

## sept - oct calendar & services

sept 16 & oct 21

### the hope group

Join us for our family and friends program for a time of prayer, encouragement, support, and a great meal. 6:30 pm.

oct 4, 11, 18, 25

### taking back ground: tuesdays 7pm

Discipleship program for men and women struggling with same-sex attractions. Contact the PF office if you are interested in attending.

september and october

### upper room program: thursdays

Our live-in discipleship program begins the first week of September with a welcome dinner for our new Upper Room participants, orientation meeting, and retreat.

### counseling available

As a reminder, Sharon, our intern counselor, is available for personal counseling throughout the summer and into next year. She has agreed to stay with us beyond the ending of her internship, which will be a blessing to many. We desire to still keep counseling extremely affordable by offering a sliding scale. To learn more about this, visit our website and click "resources".

### additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com  
Occasionally we have events that are scheduled between newsletter printings. For a current, up-to-date calendar, please visit our website.

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

## truth reinforced: boundaries

The truth is, every single human has a boundary problem. In the garden, God gave Adam and Eve a boundary and they broke it, and we've been breaking boundaries ever since. Even as Christians we find ourselves living under compulsion, resentment, depression, addictions, and unhealthy relationship cycles and patterns. For the past 8 weeks we have come together to study the DVD series of *Boundaries-When to say YES, When to say NO; to take control of your life*. A core group of about 20 plus came together weekly to learn, study, and be challenged in the area of boundaries. The material encouraged us to value our feelings and our lives. We were taught the difference between being selfish and being good stewards over what God has given to us. We were challenged to cease seeking to gain control and instead exercise self-control to regain our freedom. Every week, as we gathered, truth was spoken into lives. In addition, through our small group time, we were able to build a small community of support to encourage one another in upholding the values that God was teaching us.

The material brought us back to the reality of what recovery from sin and broken boundaries looks like. It looks like lives that are grateful, that take ownership, and that respond with authentic compassion, and that serve out of an overflow of what God has done. These were the types of lives that were shown to us as examples to strive for, and the material pointed us to the tools that we need to live that kind of life. Portland Fellowship is a place to reinforce truth. And this summer series did a great job of teaching the truth about boundaries, and why they are necessary in our lives.

## prayer requests

Please pray for the new Upper Room Community participants: pray that they would partner with Jesus to set aside the next 9 months for intensive discipleship and growth. Pray that every aspect of their experience with PF and URC would be utilized to bring them further into maturity.

Please pray for the new men and women who will be participating in our *Taking Back Ground* program, as well as those returning. May God abundantly exceed their expectations for healing, and for relational and spiritual growth as they commit their hearts wholly to His Lordship.

Pray for our ministry team - that we would be protected, refreshed as needed, and that we would serve from the overflow of the Living Waters that comes from daily believing and trusting in Jesus.



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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