



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## The Choices We Make.... by Brandon Wallace

*On a cold, dark, and rainy Saturday morning a choice was made. Shamefully, and without hope, I sat in the small church office with Art Matheny, a good friend and pastor at my church. As I sat there, I feared what he would think of me.*

I feared that I'd be rejected after serving with him in the new church plant for the past year. However, very patiently he asked what was wrong. My face spoke volumes about what I was feeling. Then, finally, the words fell from my lips, "Art, I have a problem with same-sex attractions and I don't know what to do about it."

Like a lot of people who struggle with same-sex attractions, things started when I was child. As a child I really didn't relate to my same-gender peers because I was always picked on and teased, and then, as a middle schooler, I was physically abused by a group of boys between classes. However, instead of working through this pain, I started to internalize my feelings. I chose instead to put on a face that communicated that my life was going well. I would also seclude myself in my room.

This seclusion then started to have a negative affect on me. One night after my family went to bed, I set up our VCR to record a TV show that I wanted to watch. I wanted to tape the show because it had suggestive gay themes and content, and I was curious. The next morning, before I got up, my mom came down and found the videotape of the TV show I recorded. She confronted me, and told me that she was going to talk to my dad. It was then that I realized I had made a very bad choice. Panicked, I quickly stole the tape, and ran down my street looking for a garbage can to dump it in. Later, when my dad got home from work, he confronted me and I reluctantly confessed that I had gotten rid of it. He was relieved to hear that it was gone and we quickly moved on with life. Unfortunately, we never really dealt with the real issue.

I moved on through high school and college living a double life, secretly indulging my homosexual struggle. Most people viewed me as a Christian man who enjoyed serving at church and helping others. However, I habitually looked up gay pornography on the internet and started to develop a fantasy life in my head of what it would be like to have gay encounters. Even in my double life, I had strong convictions of how the Lord views homosexual behavior, and so I could never bring myself to act on my desires with another person.

After college, I wanted to live by myself and so I moved into my own apartment for two years and then moved into a townhome where I lived by myself for another year. During these three years, I became extremely isolated from my friends, feeling disconnected emotionally from my church (even though I was attending and serving each Sunday), and becoming very lazy at home after work. My struggle with gay pornography and masturbation intensified during these years because they became a



Brandon is an intern this year in PF's Upper Room Program.

way of escape and medicating the pain of being alone. This isolation, coupled with my sexual struggle, intensified my desire to connect with someone on a physical level.

Then one weekend, out of desperation, I decided that touch from a man, even though it was sinful and destructive, seemed better than no touch at all. Against all that I knew about homosexuality, I posted a personal ad online and then started emailing an older man. A few days later, I had an encounter with the man. Afterwards, I felt intense guilt and shame for what I had done. I feared all of these choices were leading me down a destructive path that I did not desire.

However, I wasn't sure what I needed to do in order to confront my same-sex attractions. I wasn't sure whom I could talk to about this struggle in my life and feared what my friends, and people at my church would think of me if they found out. In the midst of these inner feelings, and over the course of 2008, I became friends with Art Matheny, who was starting a new church plant in Dundee, Oregon. After my sexual fall, I decided that Art was the only safe person I could turn to about my struggle with same-sex attractions.

So on that cold and rainy Saturday morning, I met with Art and shared with him what had happened. After sharing, I sat there sobbing before my friend as a broken man. I was vulnerable, ashamed, and disgusted with myself. Instead of rejecting me, Art made the choice to love me and accept me for who I am and look beyond the mistakes I had made. This love he demonstrated to me was indescribable, and felt like I was in the presence of Christ.

We then spent the next day or two talking about ministries that support men and women who struggle with same-sex attractions. Art had heard about Living Waters, a program offered through Desert Stream Ministries. Unfortunately, we couldn't find Living Waters in the Portland area. Art didn't give up and continued to look for help for me. Through his pursuit he found out about Exodus International and encouraged me to look into it. While looking through their website, I learned about Portland Fellowship and Taking Back Ground (TBG). I called Portland Fellowship and met with Jason Thompson for my intake interview for the TBG program and was excited that I had somewhere to go to begin dealing with my struggle.

In October 2009, I walked through PF's doors and began the TBG program. That first night I had made the choice (and later wrote it in my first year personal assessment) that I would do whatever it takes, go through any topic, deal with any issue, do any workbook or other assignment, and process whatever feelings may come up.

The first year of TBG, I really dove into the teaching and materials on understanding homosexuality, how we can know God in our struggle, and how to walk out the process. During our small group times, I was challenged to address the perceptions I had of my father, along with many other topics. I finally made the difficult choice to meet with my father to address the perceptions I had of him. That meeting was one of the hardest things I did during the first year of TBG, but it was beneficial in my communication with my father.

The second year of TBG was a very challenging season of my life. God began challenging me to trust Him with the direction and provision for my life. Along with this choice of trusting in God, I humbled myself and accepted housing in a small room in my friend's garage and began opening myself up to whatever God wanted for me. As I did this, the Lord, in his wisdom and timing, provided a great opportunity to continue my growth. Drew Berryessa asked me to consider being a part of the Upper Room for the 2011-2012 program year. Over the next couple of months, I met with Drew to talk about the Upper Room

program. After these meetings with Drew, I made the choice to be a part of the 2011-2012 Upper Room program.

Since I started in the Upper Room program in September 2011, I have learned so much more about myself and how the choices I have made have affected me. Do I continue to make mistakes? Of course, but I'm now at a better place where I'm not only learning to accept responsibility for my mistakes and learning from them, but I'm also better enabled to make healthy choices. I know in all of this that God continues to mold and shape me and I hold strongly to the words of Philippians 1:6 that says "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."



*Brandon with the other Upper Room Interns*

## freedom in christ by Drew

“Do you still struggle?” It is probably one of the most frequently asked questions that I have at any speaking engagement or first time meeting. So when the question is asked, “Do you still struggle?”, the question is loaded with assumptions. There is really only one appropriate response to this question... “What do you mean by ‘struggle?’”

Growing up in the church, I, like many believers, mistakenly took from my church experience that “good Christians” are supposed to be free from sin and failure. There was a subtle expectation that if I had a healthy relationship with Christ, then all the big struggles should be a thing of the past. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reads, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, and the new is here.” This can feel like condemnation rather than a source of hope for those wrestling with sin. After all, if I was really made new, then why is the old struggle still here?

According to this view, claiming that I am free in Christ would require that I no longer struggle with sin; and if I did, my claim would be invalid. This view sets people up to struggle in secret, for fear of being judged a fraud.

How many Christian leaders have we seen crash and burn morally because, when their struggle did not completely find resolution, and their sin began to emerge, the cost of honesty was just too high? This is a graceless standard that is not only unrealistic, it is simply not biblical. Conversely, many Christians have taken the opposing view that is steeped in apathy and disillusionment, holding to little or no expectation of transformation or growth. This is an equally unbiblical view that devalues God’s transforming work in our lives.

The reality is that there are two very distinct types of “struggle” in the Christian life. For example, if I am drunk, walking will be a struggle for me. This is because I am compromised and my capacity to walk is diminished. Likewise, if a person is “drinking in” immorality and impurity, he will definitely struggle with his thoughts, with remaining pure in his actions, with hopelessness, and with life beyond his impairment. This person is struggling because of the immature, impure, and destructive choices that have been made. He is sowing to please the flesh, and the result will be destruction (Gal 6:7-8).

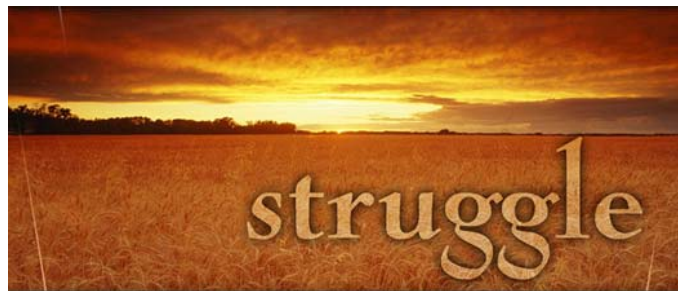
The second type of “struggle” is different. If a person is injured, for example, and their leg is broken through no fault of their own; that person would struggle to walk. Not only would he struggle to walk, but he would need to struggle through the pain of recovery, which could include surgery and painful physical therapy. He may have not chosen the injury, or the corresponding struggle, but nevertheless, he would have to press through the pain in order to heal and gain back the ability to walk.

This brings us back to the question at hand, “Do you still struggle?” The answer to this question is yes and no. I still struggle with my sinful nature. I still struggle at times with my masculinity, with my security, with envy, or with loyalty to Christ in my thoughts and attitudes. The reality is that every believer has the capacity to struggle against sins that have been

a source of vulnerability in the past. The difference is that my struggle is no longer because of active sinful choices. I am not reaping the consequences of current sin. My struggle now is that of every believer. It is the struggle to recover a relationship with God that was broken thousands of years before I was born. I still have areas of function that the Lord is helping me heal from. These are injuries that I did not choose, but nevertheless wounded me. This struggle is productive (see Gal 6:9). This makes transformation not only possible, but continual throughout our entire lives.

My life is nothing like what it was twelve years ago when I first walked through the doors of Portland Fellowship. Back then I could not have imagined being free from pornography, masturbation, self-hatred, or daily homosexual temptation. Today, my life is lived free

from the desire of a homosexual encounter or relationship. Today, I am free from the prison of addiction and self-hatred. Twelve years ago I was alone, depressed, addicted, and fearful of the future. Today, I am loved. Today, I am the husband to a wonderful wife and the father of two amazing daughters. Today, I have reconciled and healthy relationships with my parents. Today, I have self-control, peace, and abiding joy. In Christ, and only in Christ, I am free to live a life beyond the grip of sin...and every day. He gives me the grace to make the choice to live surrendered and free.



## january - february calendar & services

tuesday nights  
**taking back ground**  
Our discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions resumes Jan 3rd.

### jan 7 annual planning meeting

The PF Staff and Board of Directors will meet to set the budget and do strategic planning for 2012.

### jan 14 jason speaking

*Calvary Chapel, SE, Milwaukie*  
Jason will be sharing his story and his growth in Christ at this morning men's breakfast.

### jan 16-18 exodus leadership conference

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

### jan 20 - feb 17 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.

### low cost counseling

We have a counselor available onsite for ongoing, low cost, support; available for men, women, youth, family and friends.

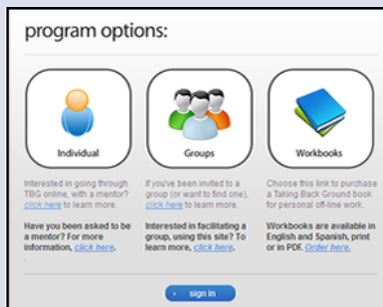
### additional updates

[www.portlandfellowship.com](http://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.

## tbg online

Three years ago Portland Fellowship launched the online discipleship program ReachTruth.com. Since its launch, close to 800 people have benefited from this resource. ReachTruth.com was based on 'The Map': an interactive CD-Rom with a 20 week curriculum that Jason developed over 10 years ago. With the success of ReachTruth.com, and the desire to continue to provide resources, the staff began creating Taking Back Ground online. This effort began in earnest this fall when Jason began working with the web designer who helped us build the ReachTruth.com site. This new resource will be offered to both individuals and for group use. We anticipate the launch of TBG online early 2012.



If you would like to help us get this powerful resource up and running, you can make specific donations towards this project. Just indicate "TBG Online" with your donation of any size.

## partnering in prayer

As we resume TBG, please pray that the participants would continue to do hard work, as tiresome as the process may be, and that they would unite faith and responsibility in their lives.

Pray for a covering of protection over our interns and that God would bring deeper insights to them about His character and theirs. May they pursue the next six months of the Upper Room wholeheartedly.

### specific prayers for our staff and leadership:

*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself. John 12:32* – Please pray that staff and volunteers would be intentional in lifting up Jesus in all that they do as to draw the participants deeper into a love relationship with Jesus.

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35* – Pray for the staff and volunteers to continue walking in unity as they model healthy relating with love for one another.

*...Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15* Pray that as leaders, we will continue in our own process, and that we would be seeking to further grow and mature in Christ.

Pray for wisdom and guidance for our staff and Board of Directors as we plan 2012 at the Annual Planning Meeting.



**PORTLAND**  
fellowship

**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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Support for Wives

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