



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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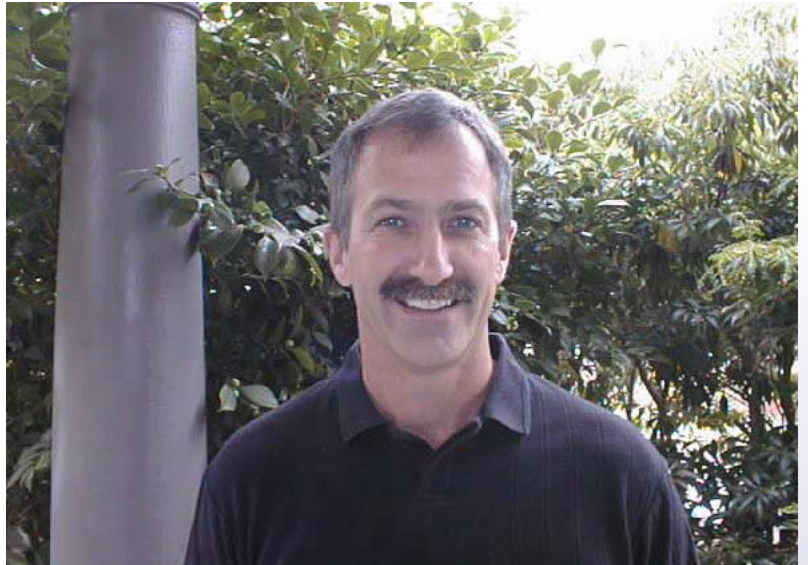
When We Wander.... by Phil Hobizal

The God we serve is a jealous God, as we find in Exodus 20:5, and that emotion compels Him to not tolerate a heart that is divided. Either you love God and serve Him alone, or receive the sad existence of an unfulfilled life, tossed back and forth by your own will.

It has been nine years since I was asked to step down from my position as director of Portland Fellowship. The circumstances of my leaving, as I look back, were not as salacious as some might want to think – it was an unhealthy relationship, which was headed in the wrong direction. But the pain and disappointment it brought to those who had trusted me, especially my wife, forced me to face the root of my poor choices - a selfish unbelieving heart. The years that followed were filled with uncertainty, want, recovery and eventually, healing and new found direction. To be honest, the problems had started years before. This confrontation was really God's loving intervention, though I can't say at the time I fully realized it. He had had enough of my playing around with my commitment to serve Him. I do know that when my sin was brought to light, I felt a certain freedom, like a spell had been broken. I experienced God's anger over my transgressions, but I also knew that He was treating me as a son.....His loving discipline led me back to Himself. This ending, was really the beginning of what God had in store for my life "...I know the plans I have for you..." He said.

Few excuses can justify my actions. How could a person who has enjoyed the rich blessings of a wife and children, loving friends and family, and relative success in ministry ponder walking away to indulge in selfish fulfillment? It wasn't as if I had changed what I believed with regards to same-sex behavior. In fact, it has only proven to strengthen my convictions. But, what did change was how I saw the process. Knowledge and understanding about root causes does not bring true, lasting change; it brings insight. Finding healthy relationships is only part of the repair process. Only a heart that is devoted to God will know His liberating power. I realized that I had put way too much personal emphasis on the "why's" and 'how's" and had strayed from the 'Who', namely God, to find my answers.

The beauty in all this is that God is not limited by our failures. His will is that none of us should perish, and that ALL should enjoy the saving grace of God. This love reaches out to those who are His (someone like me) even though we may choose to stray from His loving grace. He is willing to leave those who are secure to pursue the ones who are off wandering into dangerous territory. One of my favorite books, *A Shepherd's Look at the 23rd Psalm* by Phillip Keller, brings this truth into full focus for me. In Chapter 8, "Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me", we see how the shepherd uses the tool of his trade, his rod, to bring about



Phil Hobizal
founded Portland
Fellowship in 1988.
Phil and his wife
Patty, have 5
children.

the discipline necessary to safeguard the sheep. *"The rod was ... an extension of the owner's own right arm. It stood as a symbol of his strength, his power, his authority in any serious situation.if the shepherd saw the sheep wandering away on its own or approaching poisonous weeds, or getting too close to danger of one sort or another, the club would go whistling through the air to send the wayward animal scurrying back to the herd."* Sheep, by nature, are rather hapless creatures and are in constant need of guidance by a shepherd to lead them. In the gospel of John, we see that Christ is portrayed as the Good Shepherd, willing to pursue us in our waywardness. Sometimes, it takes nothing less than a knock on the head to get our attention. But, there is comfort in knowing that God pursues us for our good.

As I stated earlier, my personal problems started long before the actual manifestation of rebellion. A few years earlier I had enjoyed a rich friendship that had blessed me in many ways. For me, it was one of the few times that I had a male friend I could confide in and enjoy as a peer in ministry. But maybe I had put too much stock in this friendship. Sadly, that relationship came to an abrupt end. It really hurt. It was implied that I became too needy and made him feel uncomfortable. I felt rejected and labeled. This injury festered into a strong bitter wound that eventually led to careless actions. Then, when the opportunity came to put salve on those wounds (with affirmation from someone who made me feel important), I abandoned caution for excitement and pleasure. Although it was not necessarily sexual, it was an immature, selfish pursuit. God would confront me several times along the way, but eventually I declared to Him that I just didn't care anymore; I wanted to have fun. Slowly the voice of the Lord grew silent to me. I cringe now to think of my actions. Untended wounds can have a powerful effect, especially when allowed to fester. Could I ever trust in friendship again? I am grateful for those men who did walk alongside me through my recent journey, showing me the love and compassion that gave me courage to work through my 'issues'.

One day, not long ago, I met with a former member of PF to catch up. Within the course of our conversation, he shared with me that he was upset with God. He felt that God had dealt unfairly with me and was hurt by the losses I had endured. This anger had affected his relationship with God. A bit stunned,

I looked him squarely in the eyes and said, "God hasn't treated me wrong. I needed to know God's severity, in order to understand His uncompromising commitment to make me like Himself." Though I appreciated his concern for me, I realized my friend had an incorrect view of how God deals with sin. God is not waiting to strike us with punishment when we fail Him. Rather, He knows that the love of this world is opposed to His love for us. I needed to sober up to that fact and experience a personal stripping of my fleshly desires. Along the way, I have gained a new appreciation for the story of Jonah, and especially the whale.

I was reminded by God of how He had called Jonah to bring a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. Instead of obeying, Jonah ran away by ship, only to be

thrown overboard once the sailors realized his sin. There waiting for him in the waters was God's form of rescue - the stomach of a whale. I can just imagine what kind of a stench was in there. Jonah was kept safe there for three days before being vomited up onto the shore. It was a dark, forsaken place, and yet it was God's provision for Jonah, it was also Jonah's personal wake-up call to experience the length God would go to get him to fulfill His calling. The whale was a hero - much like the dark and desperate times

we experience- as God allows hardship to get us to the place of being able to obey His will for us. I, like Jonah, was running from the calling on my life. There have been many days when I felt as if I were sitting in the most god-forsaken place, spiritually. I guess you could call it my "Dark Night of the Soul" But God, not willing to let me go, allowed pain and hardship to bring about my transportation to the place He wanted me to be.... *"Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."* Ps 30:5

My life has been forever altered - not just by my poor choices, but primarily by the mercy I have found in God's loving pursuit of me; and it's the same for all who call on the name of the Lord, who enjoy His salvation and seek to walk in His calling. He promises that*when we wander, He will pursue us and bring us back to Himself - because He "knows the plans (He) has for usplans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future."* Jer.29:11



Phil and Drew leading worship for a recent TBG night

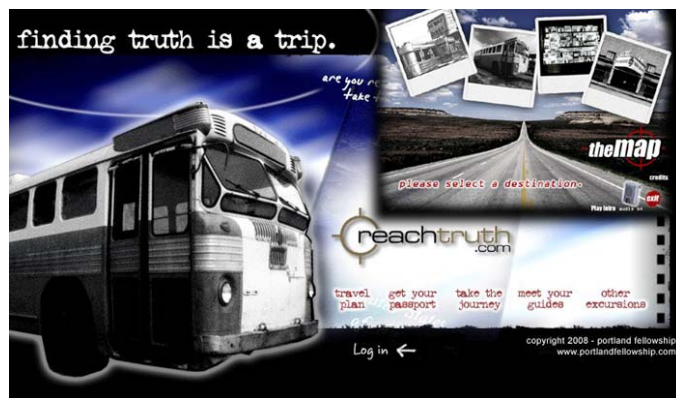
unveiling tbg in a whole new way by jason thompson

If you are a long-time friend and supporter of Portland Fellowship, you know that we, as a ministry team, are often dreaming about new and relevant ways to reach men and women who are searching for hope and freedom found in Christ. As technology has evolved, the ability to apply to it, foundational and unchanging truth has been both exciting and extremely beneficial.

In 2000, the Interactive CD ROM, The Map was formed; it was a groundbreaking resource then, a technological dinosaur today. In 2008, the material from The Map evolved into the more relational www.reachtruth.com program. Since its inception, over 800 participants and mentors have utilized this online resource. Although the video teachings and the written content are a major part of the Reach Truth program, one of the more essential elements

of this program is the relational connection between participant and mentor, something that was not available in The Map format. Our hope was to offer support from our own office to those needing a mentor, but within a matter of weeks, we realized that we would not be able to handle the overwhelming global response. To resolve this issue, we required participants to find their own mentors. In the end, this was a better option for the participant because they personally knew their mentor and could potentially receive deeper and more personalized support.

Another positive feature from this online program was the ability to hear back from those going through the program. Each time someone completes Reach Truth, an 'outtake' is sent to my inbox. We use these evaluations to improve the program, but what they mostly do is offer encouragement to my staff and I. In a recent evaluation, a 17 year old participant writes about the importance of his personal mentor:



CD ROM "The Map" and www.reachtruth.com

"The feedback from a real person that is willing to go through this journey with you is extremely encouraging and provides much insight regarding life on the other side of this brick wall called 'homosexuality'. It is specific to the responses of the participant, and consequently gives incentive to return and view the mentor's responses. Also being able to be mentored by someone that I know personally and am very close with was very helpful, because it provided a feeling of fellowship and community — the reassurance that I wasn't going at this journey alone."

This participant shares a note to all of us:

"This ministry is incredible, and I believe that what you are doing to reach out to those of us struggling with belief in God and dealing with same sex attraction is truly the work of the Lord. He led me (and my mentor) to this website and ministry, which must mean that it is - in some way or another -

doing good works for His kingdom. I appreciated very much the personal testimonies, and want to express my gratitude to those that shared their stories of God's work in their hearts and lives. This ministry topic is somewhat rare, and the amount of work that went into developing this website must have been tremendous, but it is bringing God glory everyday through my life as it is continually transformed to bring Him fame each and every day! Keep doing the work that the Lord has prepared for you to do, and know that this ministry and its contributors are in my prayers."

As you may guess, we are not settling for the completed work of www.reachtruth.com, but are rather taking the next step in offering new and powerful online resources to the world. Next month, Lord willing, we will unveil our newest online project. We look forward to directing countless men and women, who don't have access to a local ministry or support system, to material we use every week in our Tuesday night's Taking Back Ground program.

Thank you, sincerely, for helping to make this happen. Your prayers, your time, and your gifts to Portland Fellowship are changing lives each and every day. **To be continued...**



march - april calendar & services

tuesday nights

taking back ground

Our discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions: 7p.m.

mar 4

jason speaking

St. John Lutheran Church
youth group and parents

mar 8

drew speaking

SW PDX Youth Network

Drew will be sharing with youth pastors about identity issues among youth.

mar 9-11

annual tbg retreat

TBG participants and leaders will be headed to the Oregon Coast for a time of worship, reflection, and surrender..

mar 16 - apr 20

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.

mar 24

drew speaking

Drew will be speaking at a youth retreat in Olympia, WA.

low cost counseling

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

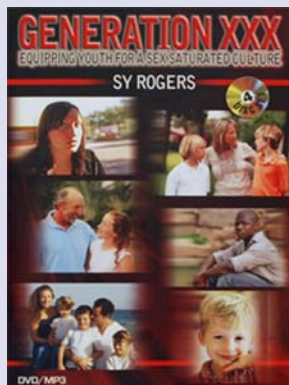
additional updates

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

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

new parenting resource

There is a brand new resource available from Sy Rogers, one of the most powerful and prolific speakers in the field of sexual redemption. Generation XXX is an eight part DVD teaching series that will inspire conversation and provide insight and instruction to guide today's youth through the minefield of our sex-saturated culture. Most parents haven't been adequately prepared to navigate their children through the risks awaiting this generation. Sy draws from his own journey of sexual healing, parenting, and three decades as a pastoral care specialist to deliver this powerful resource. The series includes: Introduction & Overview - Defining Expectations About Your Child's Sexuality - God's Intention for Sexuality: Maturity & Security - A Model for Healthy Growth & Development - Factors Affecting Sexual Development - Four Basic Indicators of Teen Sexuality - Establishing Plan B: What to Do When Things Go Wrong. To order this powerful resource; go to www.syrogers.com



partnering in prayer

Please pray for our upcoming tbg retreat:

-pray for participants' walls to come down and that they would be open and obedient to receive the supernatural healing that occurs at the retreat.

-pray for the preparations needed in each participants' heart to be willing to publicly surrender during Saturday evening's surrender service. (strength and willingness)

-pray for wisdom, strength and anointing upon each staff and volunteer to love and serve like Jesus that weekend

-pray that each one of us would have a fresh encounter with the living God and that the ears of our hearts will be opened to hear Him.

-pray special blessings and favor to them who are volunteering their time, funds and talents to make the retreat possible (kitchen staff, worship teams, and donors).

Thank you for praying for such an important event of our Taking Back Ground program. Lives are continually changed and blessed and we are grateful that you are a part of it!



PORTLAND
fellowship

The Fellowship Message
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Portland Fellowship,
a ministry proclaiming freedom
from homosexuality through
the power of Jesus Christ

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