



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Hope to the Hopeless by Karen Bolger

*Then it came, like a sonic boom to my soul. "Yes, I'm gay!" At that moment I began the process of finding my identity in what I did, not in who I was.*

As a senior in high school it became evident to me that the circumstances surrounding my youth had caused thick walls to encompass my heart. My attendance was lax at best, and I was on my way to flunking out. The only thing that kept me going was volleyball. Even though I was far from being the superstar, I loved to play. Coming back from one of the away games I found myself listening to a fellow student as she began to tell me about Jesus. "He's always there for me," she said. "He brings me comfort, peace, joy and love." Being raised in a Catholic home, I knew who Jesus was and what he had done on the cross, but this was the first time I had heard anyone speak of Him as passionately as she had. Giving in to the tears, I confessed Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Over the course of the months that followed I told everyone what I had done, and what Jesus had done for me. I was recklessly on fire for God. Unfortunately, this spiritual high was about to come crashing down.

Soon after graduating from high school, I found myself in great despair. My fear of facing life alone was emotionally crippling, as I lost hope in the purpose of my life. With the familiar feelings of loneliness came the instantaneous yank of my heart, as I recalled the moments when my fears were founded. There I was, standing in front of my locker, which I had received just a week prior. Only now, the door had been kicked in and all the contents burned. For being so new, I was amazed at just how popular I had become. Unfortunately, none of it was friendly. More threats followed that same day from a gal whose lip was swollen, due to my elbow making a connection during a basketball game. I attempted to convince myself that I was better off alone, but this didn't take away the fear of being alone, nor the feelings of loneliness. If anything, it became a stronghold that would eventually lead me down a path of destruction.

As hopelessness spearheaded my depression, my doubt for a future became my truth. With a bottle of wine in the car, I headed to the beach. My plan consisted of swimming in the ocean while under the influence; however, that would not be the case. Driving down the road, I recognized Christine, whom I had met in church. She was struggling to juggle several bags of groceries while she walked on the road. Pulling over, I asked her if I could give her a ride home, which she gratefully accepted. Just before I dropped her off she asked me where I was going, so I told her. When we reached her house, she took the bags and asked if I could wait just one minute. "Sure," I said, not knowing what I was waiting for. Within



*Karen serves on our Taking Back Ground leadership team.*

minutes she was out of the house and in my car, requesting to come along. That night I drank, but instead of swimming, I was driven back to my house, and left to live another day. With my persistent thoughts of wanting this life to be over, came the fear of how I would carry it out. Looking back, it's obvious that I didn't want to die; I just needed hope. There were several instances where Christine was used by God to intervene. Unfortunately, I did not see God in that, only her.

It was the God of hope that planted hope within me, which carried me into salvation; a hope that initially produced peace and joy; a hope that was meant to pave my path of trust in who God is; and on the path I was to travel, to obtain His promises. Unfortunately, it was that very hope that was gone as quickly as it came, as if it was snatched up from under my feet. My hope was not in Christ, nor in His promise. I had placed my hope in the process of my reality, which was based on my momentary pleasures. What started out being a relationship ordained by God, quickly became dysfunctional. Christine was a rescuer, and I needed to be rescued.

Within that relationship, I experienced an emotional and physical excitement I had never known. I did not see myself as being a lesbian. Instead, I saw myself as being someone who fell in love with another of the same sex. That's what you tell yourself when you're walking in a life of taboo. Even though I don't recall anyone telling me that being gay was wrong, I knew it had to be hidden, and that is what we did. To everyone else we were best friends, but to me, she was everything. Eventually, the combination of her circumstances and her convictions led her to breaking off our relationship. I can recall sitting on the lawn weeping as I watched her and my hope drive away. There I was again, dealing with depression, hopelessness and despair. Only this time, confusion entered the picture as I attempted to process my feelings over the loss of that relationship.

Shortly after the break up, while at work, my manager called me outside and began to ask me how I was doing. It was as if with my every word of denial she pressed deeper. Then it came, the words that broke me. "Why can't you just admit you're gay?" she said, as if it was a known fact. "No, I'm not!" I demanded as I began to cry. "Yes, you are," she said. "Just say it." She was not letting up and I was giving in. The more she

spoke, the more I began to clothe myself in that identity. Then it came, as a sonic boom to my soul. I loudly said, "Yes, I'm gay!" At that moment, I began the process of finding my identity in what I did, not in who I was.

For the next 20 years, I would hear statements of hope coming from both camps. In one camp were women who had apparently found peace with God while living a lesbian lifestyle; and in the other were Christians who claimed to be ex-gay. Neither of which I believed.

During one of my "on fire for Jesus" seasons, I lived with a couple who, not only loved Jesus, but walked the talk. Even though it was a safe place, full of love and support, I still found myself dealing with a belief that I was gay, and that I didn't belong where I was. Sharing my continual struggle with them, I received the Biblical response that I would later believe was the pat answer for many sins.

*"Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."*  
2 Corinthians 5:17

I heard everything being said, but I did not understand it. How could I be new when everything in me felt old? It was as if I wasn't supposed to feel the way I did, and if that were true, then why was I feeling it? What I didn't

understand was that God wasn't talking about renewing my passions, appetites, or the desires of my flesh. He was talking about surrendering my desires over to Him; allowing my sin to be forgiven, and accepting His grace to continue. He was talking about understanding my new identity, which, despite how I felt, I had in Him.

Four years ago, I was humbled as the Lord directed me to attend the two year Taking Back Ground program at Portland Fellowship. To my surprise, God brought me to a point of complete surrender; to knowing what it means to be sanctified, justified and completely freed from sin and death. The summer before last, I was sitting in a meeting where others were sharing their doubts concerning God's ability to change their desires. Without thinking, I spoke up and said, "I'm not gay." That was the first time ever that those words came out of my mouth and I knew it was true. Even as I sat there, I was overwhelmed with amazement and gratitude. "Really, Lord..... Really, You did this for me!"



*Karen enjoying a favorite pastime, cycling.*

## He gives and takes away... by jason thompson

For a significant season in my life, the passage in Job chapter one, has spoken to my heart, of both joy and pain with these words: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Like you, over the course of my life, I have been given amazing gifts from the Lord. Specifically, God has blessed me with an amazing wife, a gift I did not deserve but truly cherish. The Lord has also given me and my wife the privilege of raising and loving two healthy and active boys. In addition, the Lord has also allowed me the pleasure of serving at Portland Fellowship for over two decades now, even providing for all our needs, and then some. And it's not only in my own life that I see the dispersing of the Lord's amazing blessings, but throughout the ministry --through the staff and volunteers, as well as in the many men and women who come searching for the favor of the Lord, and find it. God truly is a Father who loves to lavish His gifts on His children.

I wish that this passage in Job simply began and ended with, "The Lord gave... blessed be the name of the LORD". That sure would make life more agreeable. But as we know, that simply is not the reality for our Christian walk. The truth is, God does take away. Sometimes we can understand why He takes away, as it interferes with our walk with Him, such as an unhealthy relationship, or possessions and power that seek to keep our eyes off Jesus. While at other times, it does not make any sense why the Lord would take something precious away from us. Sometimes we will never know God's plans. As it is written, "My thoughts are *not* your thoughts, neither are *your ways* my ways," declares the LORD."

Never was that more true for me then when, in 2001, God chose to take away my first born child at the newborn age of three months. During the pregnancy, Amy and I learned that Abigail had a heart defect, and although it was a shock to us, it was not to God. He not only knew that it would happen, He actually knit her together like that. In His sovereignty and understanding, He foreknew that we would be given a delicate and precious gift that would soon be taken away. True to the promises of God, the day she passed away, even through deep sadness, my wife and I experienced the love and presence of God that brought comfort and peace that only He could give. It was one of many moments that reminded us that although God takes away, He will never leave nor forsake us.

The Lord not only continues to give and take away in my home life, but also in the life of Portland Fellowship. I've shared before the amazing gifts God has given, such as the Fellowship House itself, along with the many items within that were donated or labored, including the recent new windows that will keep us much warmer this winter. He has also gifted us with a full house of amazing and lovable interns as well as a packed group of Taking Back Ground participants, eagerly expecting great things from God. Finally, He has give us you, a true gift to us all, through your friendship, financial support, and prayers. You continue to bless this marginalized, often misunderstood, but very important Kingdom work. We are so grateful. I wish I could collect the countless notes and messages from those whose lives have been changed by your giving, your support, and your prayers, and present them to you.

As the Lord continues to give at Portland Fellowship, He also continues to take away. Recently, the Lord has chosen to take away a significant supporting church from our monthly support base. The reason has nothing to do with their belief in our purpose, but rather they are seeking to implement new vision in their church, and need to make the adjustments to follow the Lord's leading during this time. We have very much appreciated their love and partnership over the past 20 years and hope to develop new practical forms of partnership with them in the years to come. It is important for us to have churches in our community to stand alongside us, regardless of whether or not they are able to financially support Portland Fellowship.

As the Lord continues to give and take, we know that this financial loss will open new blessings from other churches and individuals to join us in the years to come. We know that the Lord has this ministry firmly in His hands and will continue to accomplish His will in His way. I boldly ask you to take this matter to God in prayer. How might the Lord move you to partner with us financially and in prayer? There are many lives that need the life-changing, transforming message of Portland Fellowship, and we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. The joy for us, whether the LORD is in the process of giving or taking, is that we will proclaim the amazing words, "**Blessed be the name of the Lord.**"



Jason, Amy, Trevor (9), and Cody (5)



## nov - dec calendar & services

nov 9 & dec 14

### the hope group

Join us for our family and friends program for a time of prayer, encouragement, support, and a great meal. Note: This monthly group has been moved to the second Friday of each month. A meal will be served at 6:30 pm.

nov 9-10

### multnomah class

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

november 12-15

### living waters four-square- medford, or

Drew will be traveling to Medford and speaking to students in "Anthem", the church's School of Ministry.

### low cost counseling

We currently have a counselor available onsite for ongoing, low cost support, for men, women, youth, family and friends. For more information or an appointment, contact us at 503.235.6364.

### online support

Many are unable to attend a local ministry program such as Portland Fellowship's Taking Back Ground program. Because of this, we have created an online program for anyone with internet access. If you are looking for an in depth program to walk through, please consider signing up for the online series [www.takingbackground.com](http://www.takingbackground.com).

### additional updates

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

### speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

## equipping the church

For the last five years, Drew has spent four days in the fall teaching to Bible and ministry students in Medford, Oregon. This has become infamously known to this group as "Drew week". During the week, the students are taught a wide range of topics, including: roots of sexual struggle, emotional development, renewing the mind, empowering the will, healthy boundaries, and how to be healthy in the midst of ministry.



One of the exercises that the students and staff are asked to do is to write down and share a timeline of their lives. This provides an opportunity to acknowledge deeply painful circumstances and events that occurred during their development, and provides insight into their own personal struggles. It also teaches them how to pastorally care for and disciple people who are wounded and hurting.

Although most of the students and staff, do not struggle with the issue of same sex attraction, there have been a few that, through this seminar, courageously disclosed their personal struggle, and have found hope, healing, and direction for their own recovery. Drew has had the privilege of walking alongside them, encouraging them, and even mentoring some of them through PF's online ministry, [Reachtruth.com](http://Reachtruth.com).

Please pray for Drew, and for these students and leaders, as they take what they learn and apply it, both personally, and missionally, living out truth and love wherever God sends them.

## prayer requests

...for all those attending *Taking Back Ground*, pray that they continue to work through their struggles and make Christ Lord of their relationships and sexuality.

.....that God's presence will be tangible this season, to those PF ministers to. The holidays can be a painful reminder of the relational brokenness present in the lives of our participants.

...for continued support and provision of the ministries of Portland Fellowship. For our continued trust in God's ability to sustain the work that we are entrusting to Him.

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**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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