



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Staying in Step by Jason Thompson

In 1995, I was invited to New York City to appear on 'Geraldo', a daytime talk show that usually involved controversial guests and content. The producers were vague about the purpose of the show, but were seemingly excited to give me the opportunity to share my story. The title of the show ended up being: "Gay To Straight", and although catchy, it's a phrase that doesn't effectively communicate my process or purpose of sharing. At one point in the show, Geraldo walked over to me and said, "So, Jason, what happened to you [to become 'straight']? Did you get hit by lightning or something?"

What did happen to me? What happens to many men and women who experience unwanted desire, romantically or sexually, toward the same gender? Many testify that they once were filled with those desires, but over the years, through a process, they experience a genuine change to one degree or another and discover that they have become a new person. Obviously, something has happened in their lives, as in my life, so how do we explain it with honesty and accuracy?

As believers in Christ, we have some understanding of how change takes place, but we may never fully understand this mystery. Kathy Grace, a leader and teacher at Portland Fellowship, shares in her teaching on 'Transformation' that this process can be much like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It takes place in a sealed cocoon, and eventually, out emerges something quite different than before. While we can't directly see the actual transformation process, we can see the remarkable outcome.

We see the transformation of people's lives happen all around us and we celebrate: drug addicts find true freedom and live new sober lives; women who once sold their bodies for sex now understand their real value and worth; those who were once greedy and materialistic now serve a very humble life in the far reaches of Africa. I realize that some might be merely conforming to what is right or appears right, but we cannot deny a real transformation for many. Paul instructs us in Romans: "Do not **conform** to the pattern of this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Although we have acknowledged real changes for so many with life-dominating pain and struggle, when it comes to same-sex attraction/ambivalence, it can be difficult for many to believe a real transformation can or does occur. I even have personal friends that I've known for many years, who now, sadly, question the reality of change, and even the significance of the ministry of Portland Fellowship.

I understand why there is so much controversy or doubt about this specific transformation. There is a loud voice in our culture which proclaims that homosexuality is natural and good and should be celebrated. That "pro-gay" message is not just the world's message, but has impacted our churches where many are proclaiming the same worldly message, or more recently, denying the power of real change. I find it noteworthy that homosexual behavior is the only sin that is celebrated in many liberal or confused churches. Churches are not celebrating adultery, pride, drunkenness, debauchery, or even gossip and gluttony, and the like. Yes, they certainly may be involved in these practices and even allowing them to continue, but there is not a public



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celebration that these things are good and blessed by God — at least not yet. But, for those who have deep convictions that their sexuality is in conflict with their faith, the persuasion of the world and the confusion of the church cannot trump the call of Jesus to walk out an amazing, difficult, painful, sacrificial, and hopeful process. But what is the process? How does it happen? Did I get hit by lightning, as Geraldo asked?

The answer is simple and complex. Jesus made it happen. That's really the bottom line. Jesus is the author of life and the sustainer of life. We live, we breathe, we move, all because of him. He, and he alone, receives all the glory, honor, and praise for both who he is and for every good and perfect gift he gives. He is our Savior and our Healer. He is our all in all.

All of that is true. So, for some believers, the transformation process is all about praying and waiting on Jesus to transform our lives. The belief is that we can do nothing... absolutely nothing, to advance the process of healing. After all, it is grace that saves us, not works; therefore the thinking is that the process of transformation must be the same... not by any of our works, but to rest and hope in the grace and will of God to do it all. The opposite view is that God is waiting for us to do better, try harder, get our stuff together, engage our will, read more books, go to support groups, attend conferences, confess our sins more, etc; and, if you do those things, you will begin to see changes. Of course, there are problems with both extremes. But, are there elements of both, that are a part of the big picture of God's transforming work?

Last week, I had the privilege of going to lunch with my dad. We went to one of our favorite lunch spots, a small Thai food restaurant on 'Keep Portland Weird' Hawthorne Blvd. While there, we talked about our concerns regarding Exodus, as well as the amazing feedback from many of you regarding last month's letter. Our conversation led to this question of change and how it happens. I appreciate my dad's perspective, as he loves imagery and abstract thought. Since I'm rather concrete and sequential, we didn't quite connect relationally while I was growing up, but now I cherish the difference.

His imagery of this process of transformation was that of a beautiful dance with the Lord. As we know, a dance requires a leader and the partner's participation, preferably with a delight to dance and not just a duty to get it over and done with. God always takes the lead, takes a step and carries us through, and our response is to follow. A dance doesn't happen with one person making all the moves (that would just be awkward), but rather it is a partnership. And just like that dance illustration, partnering with the Spirit of God is absolutely essential in our transforming process.

Make no mistake; there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. Jesus did it all and accomplished it all and, likewise, the 'dance' of sanctification always begins with and will always be led by God. John writes, "*We love because he first loved us.*" Without him initiating the transformation, there will be none. However, once the process has begun, God requires us to participate with him, as it is written, "*Let us stay in step with the Spirit...*" *Galatians 5:25*. This participation in the 'dance' can be hard! Learning a

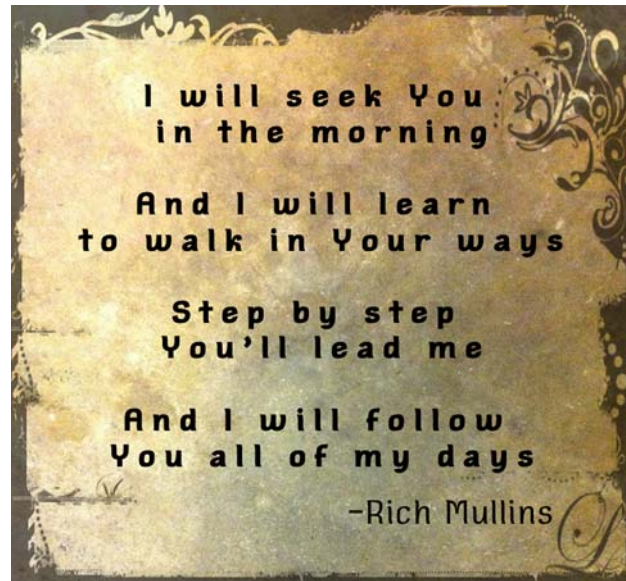
new step, keeping in step, and even enjoying the dance partner, while you struggle to figure out the move can be difficult, frustrating, and maybe even at times hopeless. But when I mess up, I'm determined to do better. I'm determined to try harder to get this 'dance' right, and to stay in step with the Spirit, not because I will be punished, but because I love the Lord and all that he has for me.

In the office the other day, I asked Drew why the words "try harder" are somewhat of a taboo thing to say in living out the Christian life. I suppose it is because those words imply that we have the strength in ourselves to do better,

and to make right choices. Yes, of course we have the choice to do better and make right choices, but only because God has given us that ability to do so. "*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" *Eph 2:10*.

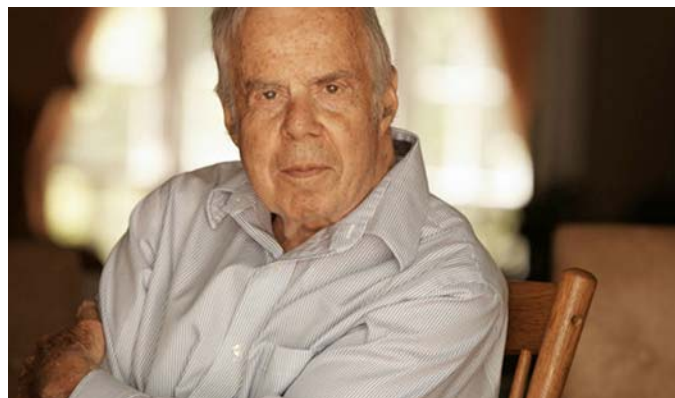
I am a transformed life in Christ. It was not by my power or strength, but rather an ongoing response to the Holy Spirit and his amazing, unmatched work in me. Unlike the past, today I don't hunger for the counterfeit, I don't crave unhealthy relating, and I don't seek to meet my romantic and/or sexual needs anywhere beyond my wife. This does not mean I am perfect and that the lure of the world isn't from time to time present in my life. Of course, it is. Therefore, I must continue to 'dance' with the Lord, because if I don't, the world is more than ready to cut in. And with immense thankfulness, when I do get out of step with the Spirit and fall short, the grace and love of God covers me and draws me back.

Listen to the Lord's leading today. How is he asking you to stay in step with him? Maybe it is to surrender something or somebody that is keeping you from the 'dance'; maybe he's inviting you to a discipleship program like *Taking Back Ground* or a purity group at your church. Maybe he is encouraging you to seek a counselor to help resolve pain and hurt, or maybe he is putting on your heart the need for you to share your struggles with a friend or family member. There is no formula for God's transforming work, and the 'dance' can be unpredictable, but as you stay in step with the Spirit, every day of your life, you will experience a newness that will bring pure joy and lasting freedom.



study recanted, truth remains by phil hobizal

A few weeks ago, as I was doing my normal perusing of our local paper, I came across an article about a prominent member of the APA, Dr. Robert Spitzer. He was somewhat famous for two things. First, in 1973, he championed the removal of homosexuality as a personality disorder from the DSMIII, leaving only the category of treatment to homosexuals, referred to as ego-dystonic homosexuality (in layman's terms, when one's homosexuality causes internal conflict and distress.) Truth be told, this change was the result of lobbying within the organization by gay rights advocates, which he had collaborated with and it was seen as an endorsement that homosexuality was normal behavior. The second thing that he's most noted for was his controversial study released in 2001, which stated that there was evidence that a person's sexual orientation could change through various forms of treatment, including religious counsel. I happened to be one of the participants of Dr. Spitzer's study. Recently, Spitzer has decided that his research was flawed, and in order to clear his conscience, he needed to recant his findings. The end result of his recantation was to call into question the sincerity of those who had chosen to participate-like me.



Dr. Robert Spitzer

This brought an old wound to the surface. It was 1976, when in desperation, I had come clean with my parents about my homosexual struggles. Not a believer in God at the time, I asked if they would help by sending me to counseling. I started to see a therapist to address my 'problem'. It wasn't long until the therapist gave me the startling news – "Phil, what I think would be best for you is to go into group therapy to help you accept your homosexuality." "What?" I replied. "There isn't another choice?" "No" was his answer. The news was devastating. I didn't want to be gay. But I wasn't given a choice. That encounter catapulted me into a life of searching. I tried Eastern philosophy, self-help books, and even took classes at the local university on psychology. I was on a search, but sadly, nothing seemed to work. I was at the point of just giving in and accepting my sexuality, when a co-worker began sharing about his conversion to Christianity. Hesitantly I listened, and soon discovered the hope that is found in Christ.

In 1988, a psychoanalyst from England, Dr Elizabeth Moberly, published a book that would have a profound effect on ministry to people who struggle with homosexuality. Her analysis of available data became the foundation for her work, *"Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic."* The principles gleaned from her work would become the basis for work done by Dr. Nicolosi. The title of his book *"Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach"* would become synonymous with her work. Nicolosi would go on to be one of the founding members of NARTH, a group within the APA that advocated continued research and treatment of homosexuality. I got the chance to attend a few national conferences and found the therapists genuine in their desire to help those who found their homosexual feelings and desires incompatible with their beliefs. There has been much good that has come out of this emergence of clinical work. Their work gave insight to persons like me who needed some understanding about the cause and effect aspects of our sexual attraction. It gave insight into how we could pray for each other and what areas of hurt, abuse, and neglect would need a touch of God's hand to bring about personal healing and wholeness. This knowledge, I believe, was a gift to us from God.

It is not surprising that Dr. Spitzer has succumbed to the unending pressure he has received since his study came out. This same pressure has been bearing down hard on our society to accept and call same sex behavior "normal". We have watched over recent years as it has set its sights on the church. For years, gay activists have worked round the clock within denominations to change church doctrinal stands. Their goal is ultimately to have the "blessing of God" on their orientation, lifestyle, and relationships. Sadly, today's young adults have grown up within a post-modern era whose thought processes have eroded the basis for absolutes. As my friend Andy Comiskey has said, "Sentimentality has replaced our adherence to biblical truths" and we have become willing to let our feelings guide us rather than God's word.

We, as the Body of Christ, stand at a crossroads. God has set His plumb line and we are asked who we will align our lives with; the world and culture that believes and espouses the lie that sexual fulfillment is the goal for humanity, even going so far as to promote it as a right, or the Holy Word of God? We are truly living in an increasingly sexually depraved society reminiscent of Romans 1 *"...thinking they were wise, they abandoned the creator to worship created things..."*

The hope for healing today, as it was for me 35 years ago, is found in the power of Jesus Christ. Every day, a choice must be made to follow Him (or not). Ministries like Portland Fellowship are like life boats for those who are courageously abandoning this sexually idolatrous culture and surrendering to the life changing power of Christ. We must stand together in prayer that God's truth will prevail; we must speak out in love to a generation that doesn't know God; and we must not lose hope – God has, and will, work in us to accomplish His will.

sept - oct calendar & services

**tuesday nights
leadership training**
Jason will be leading a series to prepare our leadership team for the 2012-13 Taking Back Ground program year.

**september 14 & october 12
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.

**september 11
Multnomah University**
Jason will be teaching an undergrad class.

**september 12
Pacific University**
Jason will be speaking to a LGBT class. This is a liberal class that is pro-gay. His talk will be the only voice during the semester that speaks of redemption and healing.

**september 20-23
Restored Hope**
A new network is forming. Jason will attend to learn more and consider PF's involvement. To learn more about this network: facebook.com/RestoredHopeNetwork

**october 2
TBG Begins!**
Please call or sign-up online for your place in the program.

additional updates
www.portlandfellowship.com

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

local ministry - global impact

Portland Fellowship has been supporting the work of Camino de Salida, in Ecuador, ever since Phil Hobizal went to Quito to speak at their international conference in 2000. I, Jason Thompson, had the privilege of going to Quito in 2008 to speak, and then last month went to Guayaquil, a city closer to the coast, for two weeks of amazing ministry opportunities.

It was a great time for both teaching and speaking, but also for receiving from the men and women of Camino de Salida. Omar Erazo, an intern last year in the Upper Room program, was my host and translator. We spoke at the international conference, a local TBN television station, a stadium event of over 1000 people, and a 3-day leadership conference, as well as several personal conversations that required translation. The events were great, but it was the time spent with some amazing men, with very painful yet hopeful stories, that made this trip very personal to me. Elsa and Veronica, the leaders of Camino de Salida, Guayaquil, are two amazing women who carry a huge responsibility as they lead the ministry. They are in constant prayer for me and the work of Portland Fellowship. It is a joy to be in partnership with Camino de Salida, not just financially, but relationally and through service.



Please pray for the ministry in Ecuador. Their ministry is located in a very humble facility, with limited resources, and Elsa and Veronica give freely of their time after working full time jobs. Pray for God's blessings, protection, and provision over their work as they continue to serve the Lord.



PORTLAND
fellowship

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Portland Fellowship,
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from homosexuality through
the power of Jesus Christ

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