



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Finishing what He starts by curtis doenges

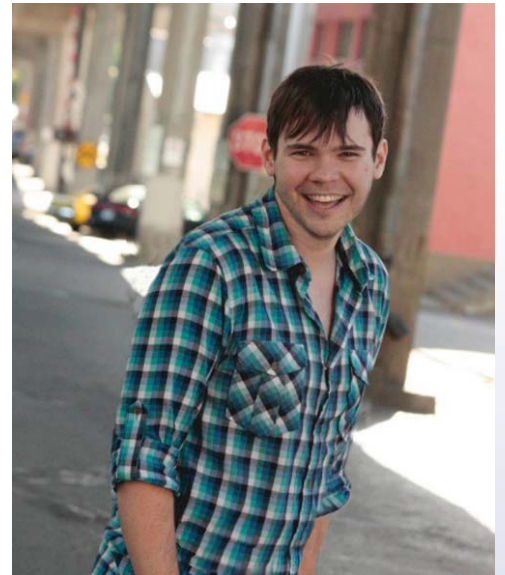
*As a child, I loved attending church, worshiping God and sharing God with others, even once asking a public bus driver if she knew Jesus. I was involved in the kid's choir, Sunday school, and many other church activities and loved it all. Yet, though I knew about God, and His sacrifice, I struggled knowing if I had ever really experienced the love of God as Father. I felt that something was deeply missing.*

I am the youngest of three children, and have two older sisters who are nine and six years older than me. I knew I was loved and adored by my mother and two older sisters, and my parents were good providers, but connection with dad and other boys was simply not there. When I entered junior high I didn't feel like I was one of the boys. Boys were difficult to understand, while girls were both understandable and relatable. Although I didn't feel comfortable being around other boys, I longed to be just like them. I was frustrated and confused. Life became even more difficult when my attractions developed for guys rather than girls. Because I didn't identify with other boys, I always gravitated toward friendship with girls. I was even told that I was considered to be 'one of the girls'. But what I really wanted was to be one of the guys. Over time, I started to feel like I was a girl. I felt that I thought like a girl, talked, walked, and acted like one of the girls. I saw myself becoming more interested in feminine things and rejecting masculine things.

I became less interested in church, and lost the passion I once had for God. I didn't have many close friends in church, and I became less involved. I didn't seem to understand church life, and I started to think that maybe my feelings and beliefs were different than that of most people I knew. As I grew into my teenage years it was difficult for me to understand God and the Bible. Christians seemed legalistic and unapproachable. During high school I claimed to be a Christian, but my actions said otherwise. I was briefly involved with another guy around my age, which only a few people knew about. I believed that my homosexual struggle would not be accepted in church, or by my family, so I turned to people, relationships, books, and other media that would help me make sense of these desires. Still questioning Christianity, I prayed often to God and tried reading the Bible, but God no longer seemed to be evident in my life. Although God seemed void in me, I continued to have questions about Him, the Bible, faith, prayer, creation, the purpose of life, etc. But all these questions seemed unanswerable.

After high school I lived at home with my parents for two years while I attended community college. During that time I enjoyed school and work, but was still trying to figure out my spiritual beliefs. I occasionally went to church to please my parents, but never really felt connected. Having faith in God didn't seem to fit into my equation of life. I thought that if I took God out of the equation then things would make more sense. I realized I didn't have to have the same beliefs as my parents, and decided to believe that God wasn't real. My life seemed to make more sense after that. I was old enough to have a choice, so I chose to disregard my childhood faith, and began living according to my new beliefs.

After I made that decision, my life seemed easier and more purposeful. No more talking to God, or praying, or reading the Bible because God was not real. After all, I saw the Bible as a book of rules that must be followed. And, if you followed well, the reward was heaven; and if you broke the rules, the punishment was



*Curtis completed the 2-year Taking Back Ground program and now participates in the Upper Room Community*

hell. It felt like freedom to not have to live according to all that nonsense.

My 'live-for-self' attitude led me into a brief relationship with another guy that did not last long. Shortly after that relationship I had an encounter with another man. After a while I started to feel empty. I felt that I wasn't needed at school or work, or even in my family. I felt that I had given myself to nothing and I had nothing left to give. I started to become depressed. I felt that something inside of me had died, and that my life was meaningless. I felt so dead that all that was left was to start talking to God again. I asked God, "God if you are real, can you please get me out of this?"

My parents and I had a mutual agreement that it was time for me to move out, and they suggested I attend Bible college. Of course, not having the same beliefs as my parents, I thought their suggestion was utterly ridiculous. However, my dad told me that if I went he would pay for my tuition completely for at least the first two years. Bible college wasn't exactly my idea of a dream school, but I decided to take my dad up on his offer.

I looked at it as an opportunity to move away from my parents, and move to a bigger city for free. I figured I wouldn't have to tell anyone what I really believed, and that I could pretend to be a Christian, and simply hide my homosexual attractions.

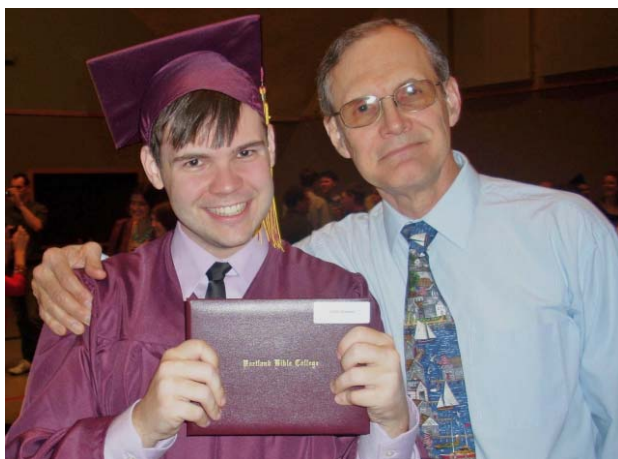
When I first went to Bible college I felt that I had made a huge mistake. It was obvious to many people that I really didn't have faith in God, and that I struggled with homosexuality. I began opening up about my lack of faith in God, and even argued with several people about Christianity. During the first couple of months I made friends with a couple of people who seemed to be different than most Christians I knew. Through these friends, Christianity was presented to me in a way that I had never thought about before - relationship. I had never thought about Christianity as a relationship with God.

I became close friends with my resident advisor and confessed everything to him; everything from struggling with faith, to struggling with homosexuality. After a while of knowing and trusting him, I thought that I would give Christianity another chance. So he prayed with me as I asked Jesus into my heart. While praying I felt that someone, other than him, was with me, guiding my thoughts and telling me what to say. It was the most amazing prayer I have ever prayed. After I prayed a prayer of confession and surrender, I felt that a weight was lifted off me. I felt lighter, brighter, and all of a sudden I was really excited to say that I was a Christian - a follower of Christ.

I soon realized that being a follower of Christ wasn't easy and I grew discouraged, and again questioned my faith. Although I was discouraged, the Lord was faithful. During a prayer meeting God lovingly reminded me that when He starts something He finishes it. In Philippians 1:6 Paul writes, "And I am sure that God,

who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again." (NLT). During that season I relied on that Scripture to help me move forward with God, and to remind me that He completes what He starts.

I met with a teacher on a regular basis and he recommended that I contact Portland Fellowship. At first, I was very hesitant, but eventually joined the two-year *Taking Back Ground* discipleship program. During those two years, God showed me that I had relational and emotional issues that needed to be addressed, particularly relating to male peers and my father. I didn't completely understand God's purpose for me to attend *Taking Back Ground* nor did I feel that I had the strength to confront homosexuality, but God again, was faithful. Isaiah 40:3 I says, "But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." (NLT). I settled in the truth that when God



leads you to do something seemingly insurmountable, He will provide the strength and support to complete it. During that time, God asked me to start calling Him 'Father', and to give up things I once used as my escape or identity, such as homosexuality. God soon brought people into my life to help change my perspective of Him, and even gave me amazing male friends who affirmed me as a man, and even accepted me for who I was, even though I openly struggled with same-sex attractions. I no longer see God as a set of rules to follow, but rather, as my Father who loves me.

During Bible college I started attending church more frequently. I got involved in various student ministries, such as a homeless outreach. God changed my heart for church and for people by showing me the real reason as to why we serve and proclaim His love. I once wanted a life that was pleasing only to my flesh, which was full of brokenness, and hopelessness. But now I want a life that is peaceful, a life that does not rely on sexual relationships for fulfillment, and a life that is pleasing and fulfilling through Christ. God also healed the brokenness in my family that I had with my parents, and even redeemed the distance in my relationship with my own father.

I no longer argue constantly with my parents, but now seek to respect them. I am thankful that God was able to use my parents to bring me to Him. I can't pay back my parents for everything they have done for me, but I can give them my love and respect. I think healing is a continual lifelong process that God plans to finish in each of our hearts as it glorifies Him and His kingdom. Even though relational healing is a gradual series of changes that may take time, God wants to complete the process He started, and will continue to fulfill His Word through the power of redemption through Christ (Phil. 1:6).

## frequently asked questions by jason thompson

We continue this month answering another frequently asked question. This month I am responding to the question:

### Can you be both 'gay' and 'Christian'?

With the significant changes happening in our culture and churches, such as the emergence of gay Christian social networking, the momentum in liberal church theology and an attempt to love others, at seemingly all cost (including truth), we find many asking, can you be a 'Gay Christian'? The assumption is that this person is identifying the label 'gay' as their true identity. They feel attraction toward the same gender, and have accepted those attractions and desires as part of who they are. Rather than struggling against their desires and submitting them to the Lordship of Christ, they are willfully holding onto and embracing them. Some 'Gay Christians' believe acting on those desires is sinful, so they choose to be celibate, but continue to hold onto the gay label out of need to be authentic to their 'true desires'.

Yet Scripture teaches an amazing, life-changing truth. Galatians 5:24 says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Although Christians struggle and are tempted, in one way or another, we don't label ourselves as non-practicing 'Adulterous Christians', 'Gluttonous Christians', or 'Lying Christians'; but rather, in Christ, we rest in our identity as a loved child of God. We are a new creation in Christ, the old has gone, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17). Even for those who consider their homosexuality as a minority status, need not make this a descriptor of their Christian faith. To do so allows for their identity to become dependent on something other than Christ.



Acknowledging our true identity as 'Christ-follower' provides the foundation necessary for maturity, hope, and freedom. We chose to cast off labels that hinder this growth. Over the years some have asked, "Doesn't Portland Fellowship work with gays and lesbians?" The answer is no. The men and women who are in our Taking Back Ground program are not gay or lesbian, but rather men and women who are learning to live out their true identity in Christ while surrendering the fleshly desires. Others have questioned, "Well, aren't you just denying who you are?" And the answer is simple, beautiful, and true. Yes, we are denying ourselves for the hope found in following Jesus. "Then He (Jesus) said to them all, "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me." (Luke 9:23).



As mentioned, there are those who take the celibate 'Gay Christian' position, but there are others who believe Gay Christianity can include acting on those sexual desires. There is a wide range of reasons for this belief. Some hold to a pro-gay theology, some read the Bible, but reject its ultimate authority, while others simply live an experiential 'Christian' existence and do not concern themselves with Biblical teaching or sound doctrine. Regardless of where a person lands, the Word of God has not changed and is full of real hope. The Apostle Paul identifies destructive life choices in 1 Cor. 6:9, teaching the severity of living a life for the flesh, homosexual behavior being one of many, rather than living for the Lord. And although God does care about how we behave, it's not simply about the behavior, but rather the heart of the person. Anyone who has children knows that the heart and the behavior are tightly linked together, and both require attention and submission, but the heart holds our true intentions.

For those who continue to act according to the sinful nature, a strong warning is given in 1 Cor 6:9, but then the remarkable truth is proclaimed in verse 11, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Fresh water and salt water cannot co-exist in the same pool, nor do light and darkness have fellowship with one another; likewise, the Lord is asking us to choose today whom we will serve. Will we serve the passions of our flesh or the passion of Christ? Remembering all along that God is a patient God, slow to anger and abounding in love, while calling us to repentance and surrender.

## march - april calendar & services

### tuesday nights in april taking back ground

Our discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction: Section 3 begins April 2 at 7p.m.

### monday nights upper room program

Portland Fellowship's live-in discipleship program

mar 5 & 7

### portland bible college

Jason will be teaching in the advanced counseling program.

mar 8-10

### annual tbg retreat

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

march 8 & april 12

### the hope group

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

mar 12-13

### project PATCH youth ranch

Jason will be sharing with the staff and students in Garden Valley, Idaho.

### additional updates

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

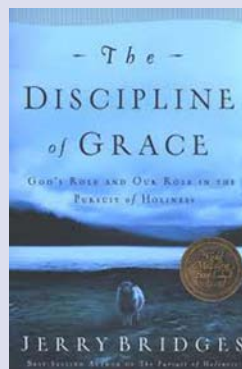
Please take advantage of your online profile. If you don't have a username, please email or call us to access your record.

### speakers, counseling and youth support

can be arranged through the office.

## Book Review: *The Discipline of Grace*: by Drew

If you have been following our newsletter over the last year, you have no doubt seen many of our writings focusing on the issues of discipleship and sanctification. In September of last year, Jason wrote an article called "Staying in Step" which highlights the partnership we share with the Holy Spirit in this work of grace. Jason wrote in that article about his own transformation process, "It was not by my power or strength, but rather an ongoing response to the Holy Spirit and His amazing, unmatched work in me."



One of the reasons that this theme has been so prevalent in our newsletter over the last year is because of the increasingly disturbing trend among Believers to adopt a distorted understanding of grace. Recently, a friend recommended a book to me titled *The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges. I cannot recommend this book enough.

In *The Discipline of Grace*, Bridges examines the shared responsibility of God and the Believer in, as Bridges puts it, 'the pursuit of holiness'. Being transformed into the image of Christ is a lifelong and sometimes difficult process. But God, by His Holy Spirit, enables us to pursue holiness through His Grace. Bridges makes a clear, compelling, and most importantly, Biblically-balanced argument that the grace of God and personal discipline must go hand-in-hand. As Bridges illustrates in his chapter titled "Dependant Discipline", just as a plane must have two wings to fly, as Believers we must be both dependant on the grace of God, and personally disciplined in the pursuit of holiness. There must be a balance.

The heart of the book, chapters seven through thirteen, discusses how God matures us through obedience, dependence, commitment, convictions, choices, watching and adversity. Each topic is examined in light of Scripture. In a season where this topic has been so distorted and misunderstood, few books bring the kind of clarity and balance as *The Discipline of Grace*. I highly encourage everyone to put this on your 'must read' list. I believe any follower of Christ would benefit from it greatly.



**PORTLAND**  
fellowship

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

#### MINISTRY TEAM

**Jason Thompson**  
Executive Director

**Drew Berryessa**  
Program Manager

**Cynthia Beaudry**  
Ministry Assistant

**Karen Sherwood**  
**Heidi Perry**  
Support for Wives

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post office box 14841  
portland, oregon 97293  
telephone 503.235.6364  
fax 503.235.3896

e-mail: [pf@portlandfellowship.com](mailto:pf@portlandfellowship.com)  
[portlandfellowship.com](http://portlandfellowship.com)

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