



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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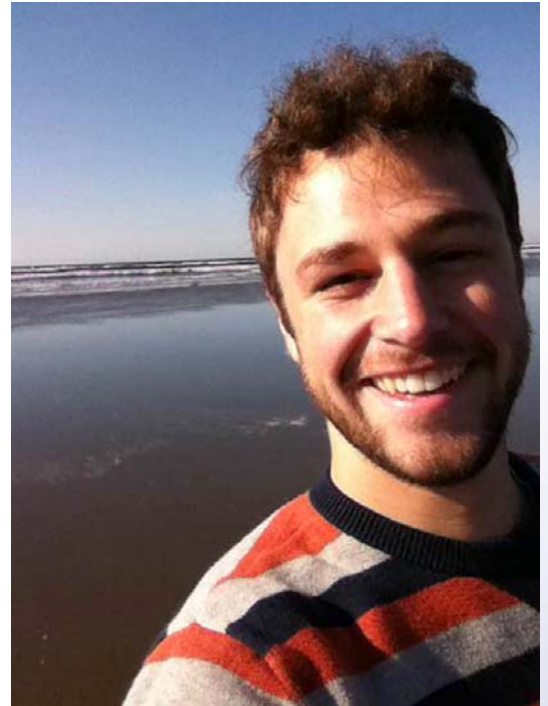
Finding Home by Graham Black

Used to be that the word "home" was very frustrating to me, mainly because I didn't know where home was. And because my parents were missionaries, growing up involved some pretty substantial transitions.

My first home was in Asia, as my parents were doing missions work in Pakistan. They had moved there in the early 80's and had three children before I was born in 1992. My older siblings were all off in boarding school, so I didn't see them much. My Dad worked full time, and my mom stayed at home, however both of them were quite busy working with different Pakistani Muslims and Christians. I don't remember spending quality time with either of them very much, though I saw them every day. As a kid, I was very artistic and jovial. I remember singing and dancing and dressing up in costumes every day. But these quality traits made me stick out in the family, so even if I had opportunity to connect with them, it was hard because I was just very different.

In 1999, we moved back to Canada, into a small town on the prairies. I was six years old and just started school as my family settled. Elementary school was difficult. The teasing began early on, and grew as more kids realized how different I was. I was always the shortest in my class, I didn't know how to connect with people very well, and my artsy personality made me a very obvious target for bullies. My mom signed me up for ballet class later in elementary, and with that came a wave of bullying that sent me home crying every day. I started to believe that it was my fault I was being tormented. It was because I was different. I believed my personality caused a rift between me and my family, and I deserved to be punished by bullies. Because no one was saying anything different, I accepted the lies about who I was, and started to hide my personality to protect myself.

In 2005, after my older brothers moved out, my parents, sister and I moved back to Pakistan. Again, I felt the familiar fear and pain not only of losing the thing I had called home, but starting somewhere new again. To make things worse, boarding school was even harder than elementary. Puberty began, the teasing started again, and my life was ruled by insecurities. It was during this time that my homosexual struggle began to emerge. I didn't understand my feelings, and they scared me. I knew that I had no one safe to talk to, so I buried everything. My fears of being gay combined with my confusion about where I belonged made me a very angry kid. I didn't know how to process any of my feelings, so I lashed out in tantrums and rage. But eventually I learned to conceal my anger too. It was around that same time that I discovered I had a musical gifting. I had begun learning to play the guitar and other instruments as well. I used music to impress people, and also as a means to "minister" to others. Through this, I learned a way to avoid rejection and gain acceptance and praise. When I graduated, I was looked up to by many students



Graham is in his second year of the Upper Room Program and is a student at Multnomah University.

as a great role model. However, the whole time I was wearing a mask of perfection, so that people didn't know how messed up I was underneath.

After graduating and returning back to Canada, I continued to wear the same mask I had perfected in high school. Between worship leading at church and my two jobs, I used distraction as my main tool in avoiding my internal struggles. Although this was what I was using to hide from my pain, wearing my "perfection mask" everywhere I went became my biggest burden. There wasn't a place I could go to safely take off my mask. I gave up hope that there would ever be a safe place for me where I could ever be honest about what I was struggling with. The only option was to keep up the façade.

I didn't trust people. I doubted their love and acceptance of me, because I believed that if all they saw of me was my mask, then that's all they could love. I had also learned, through my experiences as a kid, that people would reject me if they knew who I really was. I stayed up many nights tossing and turning, fearing the next day, and what people might do to me if they found out.

During this time I became deeply depressed. I was losing sleep, eating poorly, and eventually began to have thoughts of suicide. By God's grace, I discovered Portland Fellowship online, and decided to call up and ask for some advice. After several months of communication, I was invited to move to Portland and join PF's Upper Room program. I quit my jobs, and with encouragement from Drew, my mentor, decided to confess my struggle to my church. At first, I confessed to a handful of close friends. Soon after, I found myself standing in front of my congregation, explaining that I was broken and I needed help. Everyone responded with love and acceptance. I was sent off to Portland with a new support behind me that I had never experienced before. I joined both programs that Portland Fellowship offered: Upper Room, the live-in discipleship program; and Taking Back Ground, a program for people struggling with same-sex attraction.

The beginning of Upper Room was very difficult. Because of my lack of trust in people, I had a lot of defense mechanisms that made relationships difficult. Our first few projects in the UR were to open up to one another and critically look at ourselves, with help and encouragement from the community. I had never really dealt openly with any of my struggles before, and this felt terrifying. This was very difficult for me, as it involved realizing the lies I had believed my whole life. It

became a daily struggle to rebuke them and walk in truth. I began experiencing a great deal of internal tension. I was having trouble believing the truth about who I was in Christ, and that I was accepted and loved. I still thought that the love from people was conditional, and that they would stop loving me if I did wrong. That tension even grew stronger in the next few months. I was slowly realizing more and more of the lies that I had believed and was contending with hurtful memories. Dealing with this was hard and I began to

make bad decisions to medicate my pain.

Eventually, I made a mistake that hurt the whole Upper Room community. I was caught, and my sin was openly confessed to the other interns. I was forgiven, but the staff at PF decided that, for my health and safety, it would be better to move out of the PF house for a few weeks, and so I moved in with Drew and his family.

Growing up, my experience was when I did something wrong,

punishment came swift and harsh, and I always felt shame. I believed that to be right with people again, I had to either be punished, or punish myself. I took the decision for me to move out of the Fellowship house as punishment for my mess-up and I needed to gain back the love I had lost. But something happened that I didn't expect. Or rather, something didn't happen. Drew and his wife Suz did not treat me badly. They didn't shame me, deprive me of anything, or lecture me. What they did instead was love on me deeply. Every time I sat down I was given a blanket and something warm to drink. I ate every meal with them and we had genuine conversation where we laughed and teased each other. We did all the sorts of things that a family was supposed to do.

I didn't get it. After a week of staying with Drew, we were sitting alone together one night in the living room, Drew in his comfy chair and I on the floor. Before I left for bed, I turned to Drew and said, "You know, you're pretty bad at giving punishments." "What do you mean?" he asked with a slight smile. "Well, you and Suz have been so nice to me. That's not how punishments work." He gently responded, "We're not punishing you. We took you out of the house to protect you, and to let you experience some of the consequences of what happens when you sin. But we're not punishing you."

He went on to explain how even though I had messed up, I had been forgiven. They did not love me based on



Patrick, Drew, Joe, Jared, Cole, Julie, Graham, Jason

frequently asked questions by drew berryessa

We conclude our frequently asked questions series with this month's question: **"How do I respond if my gay loved one asks to bring their partner / love interest home for holiday events?"**

As the holiday season inches closer and closer, this has to be one of the most common questions we get from parents and family members with gay loved ones. The problem is, this is not an easy question to answer, as each circumstance is different. So rather than giving a definitive formula as to how to address this issue, I am going to give some guiding principles that I hope will be of help to those facing this situation, and to respond in a way that is both helpful and redemptive.

The first thing to consider is the level of disclosure there has been about your loved one's sexuality. *Have they disclosed their homosexuality to the rest of the family that will be in attendance or is this still somewhat of a family secret?* If it is still undisclosed, who is keeping the secret? Years ago I was counseling parents of a gay son about this very issue. In conversation, it came up that although their son was out of the closet and partnered, and open about his sexuality, the parents had refused to disclose this information to the rest of the family, partially out of shame, and partially hoping that their son was "just going through a phase, and that he would get over it." I am going to bluntly say that if you do not want to have your loved ones significant other over because you don't want people to know about their homosexuality, this is not a valid reason. This communicates unacceptability and rejection to your loved one. You would be placing your own comfort over communicating love, and that is not a redemptive response.



This leads to the next point of clarity - *Acceptance and approval are different and distinct.* Often I hear people share their fear that if they show love and acceptance to their gay loved one and their partner, that it will communicate approval and endorsement of the relationship. It is true that it could be interpreted that way, if you have not communicated your beliefs about sexuality clearly. However, if your loved one knows your stand on Biblical sexuality, then the two remain distinct. Personally, I know that my brother and his partner know exactly where I stand on the issue of homosexuality (with what I do for a living, how could they not!) Even with our differing beliefs, they know that my wife and I love and accept them. Acceptance is recognizing that your loved one is an autonomous being with the power to make their own choices, right or wrong, and that regardless of those choices, they are loved and invited into relationship. Approval goes several steps further, calling decisions and actions of your gay loved one good, right, and even praiseworthy. *Acceptance* affirms the person; *approval* affirms the actions.

The third guiding principle - *Is what your loved one asking of you simply making you uncomfortable, or does it violate your conscience?* For example, if your loved one wants to bring their partner over for a holiday meal, this may simply be uncomfortable. If your objections are about discomfort, I understand. However, if your discomfort is the main objection, I would say that the commandment to "love our neighbor as ourselves" is a command that often leads us to do the uncomfortable. I don't think that any Bible-believing Christian has a leg to stand on if this is your main objection. However, if your loved one is asking you to allow them and their partner to share a bed in your home, this may be a request that legitimately violates your conscience, and if that is the case, you should not do it.

This is the best litmus test. Comfort verse Conscience. Ultimately, you are not responsible for how your loved one responds to your objections on issues that violate your conscience, but you are responsible before God on how you practically love "your neighbor". The best encouragement that we can give you is to go in prayer before the Lord and ask Him to examine your heart, and to reveal His heart to you. Ask Him to clarify for you what areas of your heart are distressed by the circumstances and what aspects of this violate your conscience. Ask Him to give you His empowering grace to do what is simply uncomfortable, and to stand your ground (lovingly) on decisions that are a matter of conscience.

nov - dec calendar & services

november 8 & december 13

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.

nov 9

drew speaking

Drew will be keynoting the 2013 Bridges Youth Workers Conference in Portland.

nov 21

jason speaking

Jason will be sharing Biblical sexuality at the LGBTQ class at Pacific University in Forest Grove.

tuesday evenings

taking back ground

Discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions. Please call for more information or for an intake for the January section.

thursdays

upper room community

Portland Fellowship's live-in discipleship program.

speakers, counseling and youth support:

can be arranged through the office.

additional updates

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.

(continued from pg. 2)

what I could or couldn't do. They didn't love me based on how I had messed up either. They simply loved me because of me. Drew read out a portion of Psalm 103:

⁸The LORD is compassionate and gracious;
slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹He will not always accuse,
nor will He harbor His anger forever;

¹⁰He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His love for those who fear Him;

¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

It took me years to realize that the home I was looking for wasn't a place at all. I was looking for people who would love me where I was at, broken as I was. I was searching for a family; one where I was accepted and safe. It didn't matter where in the world it was, as long as I knew I was at home in it.

After all these years, as I sat on Drew's living room floor staring at the wall, and realized I had stumbled into home. I had found a place full of people that, despite my brokenness and my wayward nature, they were ready to love, accept and protect me. It wasn't just any home- it was my home, and though I didn't know it, it was what I had been searching for. And something else popped up that I didn't expect either. I was struck by grace. God had been preparing this home for me for a long time, and it was He that had forgiven me and loved me for me. Now, several months later, I'm still discovering more about grace and the loving home that God has for me in His family.

partnering in prayer

...for all those needing to attend *Taking Back Ground*, new and returning, that the Lord would lead their hearts to contact PF and sign up for TBG.

...for the Upper Room participants that God has brought together this fall. Pray for unity of heart, a singleness of mind and a willingness to allow God to shape them as He sees fit.

...for continued support and provision of the ministries of Portland Fellowship. That we would see God provide for this work, and have a continued trust in God's ability to protect and direct us.



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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