



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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The Steadfast Love of Christ by Cole Atkinson

My attractions toward other men had started in middle school, seemingly a passing curiosity at first. By high school it had become a permanent resident. My mind raged with a whole slew of questions, familiar to most who face this same struggle. "Why is this happening to me? Why am I different? What's wrong with me? What does this mean?"

It is a terribly paralyzing thing to be completely confused with yourself. I had no answers, barely able to comprehend anything beyond the shame of feeling dirty and different. All I knew was that this hurt, that this was painful and it didn't seem to be leaving. And so I sank into a deep depression, total collapse, thinking that my future was doomed to suffering under the dictation of an oppressive tyrant named same-sex attraction. I had completely resigned myself to hopelessness; this challenge was too big to possibly overcome.

The depression lasted for a little more than a year, during which I spent most of my time trying to will myself into non-existence. I was too scared to tell anyone about my unwanted attractions; I was too afraid of them myself. They seemed twisted and ominous, and certainly too big for me to handle. God was a non-entity during my depression and I called out to Him only out of rote conditioning. And yet it was only by His grace that I was gently lifted out of my depression. I made an arrangement with myself to sweep my same-sex attractions under the rug – out of sight out of mind! I would ignore it as often as it would allow me to and simply try to be someone who didn't struggle. I would become two people: an actor for everyone else and the broken me in the private hours and inner mind.

It worked for a few years, and sustained me enough to go about life as a high functioning member of society. By the time I graduated high school I was beginning to lift my eyes and allow myself to see the God who never left me. I believed He had delivered me from depression and I was exceedingly grateful, but I approached Him cautiously, unsure how to proceed in our relationship. I continued to talk to Jesus, but kept Him in the doorway of my heart, for fear that if I let Him all the way in He'd see the secrets I kept locked in the closet. I was still trying to ignore away my problems.

It was in my sophomore year of college that the spell of disillusion broke. That year just about every one of my friends left the school. I had no community and only a handful of acquaintances. I turned to porn; it was my primary means for coping with the pressures of school, work and loneliness. In the midst of the addiction I began to realize that this was something that I could no longer ignore. I tried reaching out to some campus ministries, but without the bravery or resolve to confess my same-sex attractions to anyone, any spiritual communion just felt shallow. My unwillingness to address my unwanted attractions



or seek help had allowed them to fester and rot, poisoning my heart and soul. The rest of my years in college were filled with moments of both sin and crying out for help and forgiveness. Depression came and went regularly. I wrestled daily with the Lord. I had struggled with these attractions for so long that I adopted them as my identity. If that was my identity then I believed that *who I was* was in direct opposition to the Word of God. How could God even look at me when stamped across my chest was the word "Homosexual." I didn't even think the Lord could see me behind those huge, ominous letters.

I came to a crossroads with the Lord where I was tired of feeling shame in my life. So I decided to do a trial run where I completely let go of God. I remember God being very clear in saying to me, "Okay, you do that. But I will always be right here for you – and you will come back to Me." At first it was exciting, and I became ok with things like porn, masturbation and alcohol. I had to consciously push God from my mind, as He would occasionally tap me on the head and say, "I'm still here. Are you ready to come back to Me?" In my stubbornness I tried to push forth in my "new found freedom." But there is no freedom apart from Christ, and I quickly discovered how hollow I was without Him. I tried to construct a life from carnal pleasures and found that they were nothing but shadows; they held no reality and no weight. Life was much, much worse without God. I didn't want to live without Him anymore. It was in this state that the Lord reached out His hand and lifted my head. I received a call from my parents and learned that my brother had just come to receive Christ and was now filled with new life – and I wanted more than anything to have it too.

"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that which is lame may not be put out of joint but be healed." - Hebrews 12:12-13

I turned to God that day and said, "Ok, I'm coming back," and apologized for taking so long to come round. He didn't care, He was just glad to have me home. I knew then that I was going to be committed to Christ forever. If He could love me this much, me, still struggling with same-sex attraction, and welcome me back the way He did, even after all I'd done, then I knew He was worth more than any suffering I had to endure under His name. I knew I couldn't continue living the way I had before, stuck in my old ways, unable reconcile the

shame I felt from my homosexual desires with a life for Christ. Something had to change, only this time God was going to be the constant I believed in, not my attractions.

So I decided to get help. I had visited the Portland Fellowship website in the past and knew it was where I needed to go. After graduating college I worked at a youth camp in eastern Oregon. The day it ended I moved to



A hike through the westhills of Portland.

Portland with nothing but my car and a duffle bag. God met me in the most miraculous ways. He found me housing through a friend. I found God to be Jehovah-Jireh, The God Who Provides.

As I started the Taking Back Ground program the Lord showed me that my struggle wasn't some insurmountable affliction, but the result of genuine wounds and circumstances from my past. It gave my struggle

context and definition. I began to grasp it. All I used to see was the struggle, but God was beginning to fill me with hope. I began to see God, not my same-sex attractions, as the dominant and controlling force in my life.

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" - John 9:2-3

This verse completely changed the way I viewed my struggle. I began to see the way God was using it to deepen my love and understanding of Him. My wounds gave me the chance to experience God as healer; my weaknesses, the opportunity to show the Lord's strength; my brokenness, to show our Father's righteousness. God is constantly redeeming my struggle and turning it into a platform to display his infinite love.

Throughout my whole testimony God never let me go, never let me get away. In my depression, in my addictions, even when I purposefully walked away, the Lord never stopped pouring out His love and grace on me. The depths of the pain I went through have served to heighten the joy of His faithfulness to me. Though this struggle has not disappeared, and I wrestle with it daily, God has proved to be infinitely more desirable than anything that a life given over to same-sex attractions could provide. His hope abundant is assured in me; it is the steadfast love of Christ.

celebrating the upper room by Drew Berryessa

This time of year is very significant around Portland Fellowship. The month of May, in particular, is the month that both our Taking Back Ground and Upper Room programs come to completion. It is always a season that brings a great deal of reflection while thinking about the collective works of redemption that God does in the lives of those in these two programs. This year is no different. One of the privileges that I most cherish here at PF is the oversight of the Upper Room Community. For those that don't know, or need a reminder, the Upper Room is Portland Fellowship's live-in discipleship community. Every year, this group, consisting of between 4-7 men and women, come to Portland Fellowship to live together in intentional community for nine months, participating in weekly meetings led by the PF staff, and receiving mentoring and counseling geared toward continued emotional and relational healing, spiritual disciplines and personal development. The program is a rich mixture of instruction and introspection and the relationships that are fostered in the community provide a wonderful place to directly apply the revelations and insights provided through the program. This is a life changing experience for those participating in this community. The majority of the wounds that people walk into Portland Fellowship with were created in the context of relationship, and it is only in relationship that those wounds can effectively heal. The Upper Room provides a context where that relational healing can occur, and it is amazing to have a front row seat to watch that happen!



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

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This year we were fortunate to have six interns; five men and one woman. Each of the interns added something unique and special to this community. The staff loved our time with each of them. Here are just a few bits about these amazing people.

We were fortunate to have Jared intern with us this year. Not only is Jared passionate for the Lord, but he is passionate to use his gifts to serve God's kingdom. Jared worked many hours for PF behind the scenes in a very vital way. With his help, we were able to film all of our online Taking Back Ground year two videos and also have them edited as well. This is huge! We are so grateful for Jared, not just for his gifts but for who he is and we are grateful to be in community with him.

This is Patrick's second year in the program. Patrick has been on an incredible journey. God brought Patrick to us directly from the mission field in Mexico. Since being here he has committed himself wholeheartedly to establishing himself in community, growing in maturity and confronting the issues of his heart. He has worked so hard and the fruit of his life is overwhelmingly evident. We are so excited for this next season of life for him, knowing that he is rooted and grounded in faith.

Joe chose to continue his TBG discipleship by enrolling in the Upper Room Program. We are so glad that he did! Joe has had some pretty intense hurdles to work through, and he has done so with great resolve. We are so proud of the work he has done. God has supernaturally instilled upon Joe a newfound worth, a heart of discernment and gift to love others through prayer and relationship. Joe is also a small group leader for our TBG program. We have been blessed by him!

Cole made extensive sacrifices in his healing and God honored him for those efforts (*1 Samuel 2:30*). While a participant of TBG, Cole stepped out in faith for provision and housing, often driving hours just to just attend TBG. Needless to say we were overjoyed to offer him a spot in our Upper Room program. Having him in community has been such a rich experience. He loves the Lord with exuberance and has a passion to communicate His truth to others.

This is also Graham's second year as an intern. If you stop to survey the personal character growth of this man, you would be amazed. Graham's heart is to live outside of himself and to pour out into the lives of others. Wow! Alongside his discipleship process, Graham served PF with his musical abilities. He truly has the heart of a worshipper and is anointed to lead others into God's presence. These two years for Graham, we believe, are the catalyst that will propel him to continue to walk in God's perfect and pleasing will for his life. (*Romans 12:2*)

Julie was full of courage to embark in the Program as the only female of the bunch. However, God knew that this would be powerful in her life to perfect His purpose for her. Julie is an incredible lover of God, who now walks in assurance of her identity as a woman. Her heart to love and serve others selflessly is tremendous. We truly love her for who God has created her to be.

This year's interns were hand selected by God to not only receive His care through us but also to enrich our lives in the process. What a beautiful exchange. God the great multi-tasker has enriched this community with these amazing and holy souls.

may - june calendar & services

tuesday nights in may
taking back ground
Our discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction, and for wives seeking encouragement and support. Our completion celebration will be on May 27.

may 1
drew speaking
Multnomah youth ministry class.

may 15
jason speaking
Pastor and counselor lunch and a Family and Friend's support program in Tampa, FL.

may 6 and june 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.

june 25
rhn membership day
A gathering of member ministries of Restored Hope Network.

june 26
rhn leadership day
For leaders, pastors & counselors.

june 27-28
rhn annual conference
Annual Hope Conference.
See right for details.

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.

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

hope 2014 ministry week



For all who have been affected by the culture of gender and relational confusion, we invite you to join us and be encouraged at the Restored Hope Network Annual Conference here in Portland, Oregon. You will be blessed by the event's speakers, workshops, testimonies, prayer and worship.

"...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." ROMANS 5:5

Special Guests: Dr. Larry Crabb, Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, Drs Sandy and Earl Wilson. Worship Leaders: Dan and Georgene Rice

Additional Speakers/Workshop Teachers Include: Andrew Comiskey, Frank Worthen, Anne Paulk, Dr. David Foster, Dr. Rob Gagnon, and many more...

This conference features over 24 workshops during the two days, keynotes from our special guests, and opportunity to respond to God. We will also be premiering the documentary, Such Were Some of You, produced by Mastering Life Ministries.

Friday, June 27th, 2014 Registration opens at 8am, the event begins at 9am. On Friday only, there will be an evening session that ends at 9pm.

Saturday, June 28th, 2014 Registration opens at 8am. Event begins at 9am and the day ends at 5:30pm. For the full schedule, visit www.restoredhopenetwork.org

Leader Training Day on June 26th
Additional day of training and renewal on June 26th for counselors, pastors, & leaders who minister in the area of sexual and relational restoration, please consider joining us from 9-5pm for this focused equipping time. For more details, contact info@restoredhopenetwork.org



Dr. Larry Crabb



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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