



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Truth and Healing by Richard & Vicki Bernstein

Their journey started when their daughter was very young. She was the youngest of four and identified primarily with her dad. Their connection was evident as she enjoyed spending time with him on the job sites when she was young, and as she got older they shared a love of sports together. One day, on a visit home from college, she disclosed to her mom that she had same-sex attractions and had been in a few relationships, starting back in high school. This is their story of how that revelation impacted them as parents, and what God has done in their lives since then.

Richard -

My wife was concerned how I would take the news of my daughter's same-sex attractions since I was already under pressing stresses from work and other family situations. During this time, we had many friends and family who were suffering from serious illnesses, and several who had passed away within a short time. Her concern was valid, as I was already in a pretty dark place, and didn't take our daughter's news all that well. I was heartbroken. It felt like one of the most important people in my life had died.

For many years, I was an independent and self-sufficient man. Work was my identity and my only goal was to make sure my family was taken care of. When I realized I couldn't fix my daughter's problem, it drove me deeper into despair. Business had slowed down, and I stopped answering calls from different work contacts. For about two months, I basically checked out of life.

Yet, even in this dark place, God was pursuing me. In the following months, He spoke to me through spoken and written words. While attending two different funerals, two different times I heard a pastor say that the person who had died "wanted me to know God". I wasn't a Christian at the time, so I wasn't fully open to knowing God. But seeing how these godly people had impacted so many others sparked something deep inside me. I started reading a Christian book my wife had given me years ago and then kept reading other books including the Bible. Little by little, God revealed to me who I was. The words, thoughts and deeds of my life convicted me. In the lowest point of my life, I came to the end of my self-sufficiency and called out to the Sovereign God that I wanted to know. I told Him I couldn't do this on my own anymore. He answered my prayer, and I was delivered overnight with the peace that surpasses all understanding. My life was forever changed.



Richard and Vicki are members of Portland Fellowship's Hope Group program.

With this new relationship with God, I had to know where He stood on homosexuality. Vicki and I heard about Portland Fellowship through a few people that we confided in, and decided to meet with Jason Thompson to see if it was a place where we could gain some wisdom and understanding. Our initial hope was to learn how to help our daughter with her problem, but as time went on we were discovering so much more. Guest speakers gave us hope through their testimonies. Drew Berryessa gave us insights on family dynamics and how we all develop our own perspectives. We also felt the comfort of others struggling with the same feelings and emotions we were experiencing. These are just some of the ways in which we began to heal and gain wisdom.

Today I continue to grow in my faith and wrestle through different theological subjects. I'm thankful that even though it's been painful, God has changed my course and I'm on a more hopeful path now than I ever have been. I know it is by His power and grace alone I am saved—in the midst of my sin and pain, *He pursued me.*

Vicki -

As her mother, I knew the night she shared about her same-sex attractions, that our family would be forever changed, maybe even divided. My thoughts went back to the worries I had while she was growing up. I knew she was different than other typical girls by her actions, comments and the way she liked to dress. I prayed many times that God would help her to be at peace with who He created her to be. Every time I had a thought or worry I would just dismiss it, believing that it was in the Lord's hands.

The days following the news were so difficult for me and my husband. I soul searched and asked a lot of "what if" questions. What if I had been stronger in her eyes? What if I hadn't allowed her to dress like a boy? What if I had addressed my concerns to her early on? What if she hadn't felt the pressures and demands that were put on her in soccer and basketball? I wished I could go back and re-do many things.

But God is so good! He did answer one of my deepest prayers. At such a desperate time God revealed who He was to my husband. Before coming to Christ, Richard was focused on providing for his family, and didn't see God or church as all that important. Because we didn't

believe the same thing for many years, we struggled connecting.

Through Richard coming to know God, we became equally yoked during the most difficult time in all of our marriage. I could see the Holy Spirit changing his heart in the little things he did and said each day, and it was a relief and a joy to know that we believed in the same God and in living for His purposes. Knowing we were on the same page was crucial in processing our daughter's struggle.

As we began the grieving process together, we found Portland Fellowship. It was so difficult for me to walk up those steps when we went to the Hope Group for the first time. I didn't want to have to be there. Yet God knew what we really needed. We felt a caring and a safety there that we hadn't felt elsewhere. Portland Fellowship continues to be a safe place of understanding, a place to learn, to rejoice, to weep and to have fellowship and hope. There, I was able to share my "what if" questions with others, and receive prayer and encouragement in my own process. We've also really benefitted from learning about family dynamics and the different roles people play in a family. This has not only helped me understand my daughter better and her perceived role in our family, but



it has also helped me relate better to my other three children. In fact, many of the relational tools we've learned at Hope Group have helped us in other relationships in our lives.

Portland Fellowship has helped us learn how to have a better relationship with our daughter. There are things that we haven't discussed that, in time, we know will come up, but she knows we love her and that love will never change! She also knows we have our own beliefs and convictions, and we are all learning to love each other even when we don't agree.

We have received so much from PF and the Hope Group, and now we feel that we have been placed in a role of support, not only for the staff and members of Portland Fellowship, but also for the other family members and friends that come to the Hope Group. We continue to thank God for all the blessings and difficult times that have come from this journey on which we've been placed so that He might be glorified.

what's new this year

God is at work here at Portland Fellowship and we are excited to announce several new programs for 2015. We are so grateful to you for helping make this happen.

hope group online



We are constantly amazed at how people all over the world seek out Portland Fellowship for help. It is for this very reason we have created online programs to serve and support people outside our local area. For a while now, Taking Back Ground Online and Reach Truth have been our main online resources. Both of these programs exist to disciple those struggling with same-sex attraction. Along with strugglers, we also get many calls and emails from family and friends from all around the US who are looking to find support. Our heart is to offer support for those in need who have family members or friends struggling with (or have embraced) a gay identity. For this reason we are creating an exciting new online resource called **Hope Group Online**.

This online program will include 10 lessons that will walk a parent, family member or

friend of a gay-identified loved one through their own process of healing and encouragement. Some of the topics will include:

**Dealing with Grief * Roots of Sexual Brokenness * Boundaries * Family Dynamics * And more...*

The Hope Group Online will also be a great program for church groups to have as a resource for those in their communities that are dealing with the pain and discouragement of their loved one's struggle. This program features dynamic video teachings, in-depth material for processing and self-reflection, as well a forum to connect with other family members! If you or someone you know could benefit from Hope Group Online, please refer them to our website: www.portlandfellowship.com. Our timeline is to have the site available by the end of this month.

home groups are now available!

If you've ever been a part of our monthly Hope Group meetings and thought, "I wish we could meet more than once a month," hold onto your hats--Hope Home Groups are here! We are launching three brand-new groups for friends and family to connect and encourage one another in someone's home or meeting place. Joining one of these groups is a great way to be in community with like-minded believers and grow together as you pray for each other and your loved one who has embraced a homosexual identity. Our three new Home Groups and leaders are:



- **Tigard**--Diego & Yanick--diego@portlandfellowship.com
- **Oregon City**--Brett, Kathy & LeeAnn--brett@portlandfellowship.com
- **Gaston**--Richard & Vicki--richard@portlandfellowship.com

To join a group near you, please sign up on our website (sign in and then click "join a program"). You can also email the group leader, or call the PF office (503-235-6364). Groups will meet on the last Friday of each month.



Wives Group

Taking Back Ground is for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions. We encourage the wives of those struggling (or gay identified) to join us for support and encouragement. The Wives Group will be meeting the 2nd Friday of each month in conjunction with the Hope Group. Dinner will be provided for everyone and then the wives will break off for their own time of sharing and prayer. This group, led by Heidi Perry and Amy Thompson, starts January 9, 2015, 6:30 p.m. at the PF house. Please sign up online or call for more information.

jan - feb calendar & services

tuesday nights

taking back ground + solid ground

Our discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction, both alumni and new participants. First night on January 6 at 7pm.

january 9 & february 20 the hope group + wives group

Join our family and friends program for a time of prayer, encouragement, support and a great meal. Wives meet together separately after dinner. 6:30 p.m.

january 30 & february 27 home groups

Friends & family of SSA-strugglers connect, share and pray together in host homes. Groups are in Tigard, Oregon City and Gaston. Call the office for more information.

january 10 annual planning

The Board of Directors will meet with the staff of Portland Fellowship to review 2014 and plan for 2015.

january 11-14 restored hope network board retreat

Jason will be spending the week with the RHN board on the Oregon coast.

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 support for youth

can be arranged through the office.

Taking Back Ground

We are pleased to announce an official start date for our Taking Back Ground program. On Tuesday, January 6th, we will gather together at the Portland Fellowship house for teaching, discipleship, small group accountability and encouragement. Our heart is to come alongside those in their sexual brokenness and administer to them God's healing truth and power. We experience our offenses and wounds in the context of relationships (or lack thereof), and it is within the context of biblical, life-giving relationships that God will bring His healing.

If you are struggling with same-sex attraction, don't struggle alone any longer. Let those who have experienced healing and transformation for themselves walk through this difficult issue with you in community. We desire for you to know true biblical masculinity and femininity. Don't let the enemy rob you of your God-given identity and purpose—take back the ground that has been stolen from you—and walk with us in the strength that Christ gives us. For more information, or to register for Taking Back Ground, please contact a staff member for an intake form: 503.235.6364.



Solid Ground

Our alumni group will continue meeting for the remainder of the year. Both Taking Back Ground participants and alumni will merge on Tuesday evenings. We will start the evening together as one community! For the worship and teaching time both programs will be combined, and then we'll break separately for small group time.

We hope that the merging of these two communities can be a huge source of encouragement and benefit. We desire to be a blessing to our Alumni and continue supporting them wherever they are in their journey! If you are a TBG graduate and have been attending our alumni group, or would like to attend, we invite you to join us on Tuesday evenings starting January 6th for our Solid Ground program. Please go online and register for "TBG/Solid Ground". We will continue to remind each other of His goodness and forget not His benefits (Psalm 103:2).



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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