



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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The Father's Beloved Son by Michael Brown

I grew up in a home where Jesus Christ was not Lord, but a swear word, and the concept of God's grace was unknown to me.

The God in my mind was a stern taskmaster who held me to a standard of perfection I could never attain. I grew into a child with a keen sense of shame and an inexpressible understanding that something was wrong with me.

We were a military family and never really had a place to call our own, and by the time I turned ten we had moved ten different times. We were constantly adjusting to a new house, a new school and a new set of neighbors. Because I was an introvert and extremely shy, I became an easy target for bullying and name calling. Add to the mix a few episodes of inappropriate sexual contact and I became further confused and retreated into a place of fear, guilt and shame. During the years when I was supposed to be bonding with my own gender, I would retreat to my bedroom to do my homework or read library books. I learned that being a good student elicited praise from adults, so I put most of my energy into becoming a straight-A student.

As we moved, yet again, to a new military base in the Hawaiian Islands, I started high school and realized that I was at a new disadvantage: I was a military brat *and* an outsider. They even had a Hawaiian word for me – *haole*. I don't remember how my brain rationalized it, but in an attempt at self-preservation I joined a group of students known as the "stoners." My substance abuse started with marijuana and progressed to barbiturates, amphetamines, and psychedelics. No drug was off limits for me as I sought out the comradery of students who would recognize me at school and call me by name. As I skipped school and partied, I was learning to hide my fears and insecurities by pretending to be someone else—no one could ever know who I really was.

At the end of my senior year, I found Jesus in the simplest way. Take a seeking heart with a believing next-door neighbor and you have the foundation for a daily drug user to receive Jesus as Savior. God led me away from destructive influences and towards a church that gave me a solid foundation in the Word. But my walk with Christ lasted only a year or so. It was interrupted by the same hurts that surfaced in my childhood, precipitated by the breakup of a dating relationship. Old feelings of unworthiness and rejection resurfaced, and I didn't know how to handle them. Like a "dog returning to his own vomit," one backward step led to another and it wasn't long before I was back in the rebellious lifestyle I had been called out of, only now I was angry at the church and at God. I felt worse off than before I became a Christian, much like the man with unclean spirits whom Jesus describes in Luke 11. My descent into darkness had only just begun.

During my freshman year in college I added sexual promiscuity to my list of available medications and spent the next ten years living out the anthem of the 80's: sex, drugs, and rock & roll. During these years, I had my first consensual same-sex encounter, and with the help of "friends" reasoned that I must be bisexual. The decision to take on that identity gave me a green light to



Mike has been involved in TBG and Celebrate Recovery for over three years.

explore the gay lifestyle and eventually self-identify as exclusively gay. As I aged out of the gay club scene, I started a same-sex relationship that would last for twenty years. I joined the culture around me and proudly came out to co-workers, friends and family.

The seeds which God planted inside of me as a youth did not sprout for decades, but they did grow, and a longing for God eventually overcame my aversion to Christianity. Repentance for me was not an event on the calendar, but a process, and it started with me listening to Christian radio. I was overwhelmed by the message of God's love and acceptance. I later subscribed to a podcast to read the Bible in a year, and I fell in love with Jesus all over again. As I began filling my heart with God's message, however, a storm brewed within me. *What was I to do about my identity as a gay man, or my relationship to the man I had married?* These questions became the lever that God used to push me into the great church debate about what God and the Bible say about homosexuality.

I had been living an openly gay lifestyle for decades and was at peace with my identity as a gay man. I was convinced that homosexuality was a genetic trait and the idea of me being anything different didn't even seem possible. What else could account for those feelings of "not being like other boys" from my childhood? This reasoning led me to embrace alternative interpretations of the Old and New Testament "clobber" passages that address homosexuality. I reasoned that God did not condemn any committed relationship, even same-sex relationships, and so I embraced the identity of a gay Christian. This worked for a while, until God convinced me otherwise.

As I grew in my faith, my conviction that God would bless committed same-sex relationships faltered. I was no longer certain that sexual relations were permissible outside of a traditional marriage, and these doubts led to a crisis of conscience with my partner. I was casually sharing my faith with him when he asked me point blank, "What do you believe about the Bible and homosexuality?" It was my moment of reckoning. I answered him by saying that I believed I was a gay Christian, but that God was calling me to live a celibate life. Soon afterwards, he moved into another room of our house and we became housemates. He eventually moved out of our home and I was left alone for the first time in 20 years. This triggered an overwhelming sense of rejection and despair. I was filled with shame and told no one about this life-changing event for almost three months. My life started to spiral out of control, and this time my substance abuse was accompanied by a suicidal depression.



I now realize that my reaction to this breakup was exactly like the episode I experienced as a teenager. I wasn't any more emotionally mature than I was at 19, and just as before, I coped by numbing myself with chemicals and placing blame everywhere except where it belonged—squarely on my shoulders. I refused to see that God was calling me to something new and He was using these difficult circumstances to bring me to the end of my rebellious lifestyle. The Lord did this by leading me to two key ministries: Celebrate Recovery and Portland Fellowship.

I started Celebrate Recovery (CR) under the premise that I was a backslidden Christian who needed help to get back on the right path with Jesus. What I learned in CR is that I was in deep denial about the severity of my hurts, habits and hang-ups. When I started working through the Christian 12-steps I began to understand that I needed to stop playing God and turn my life and will over to the care of Jesus. Am I healed from those hurts today? Not completely, but I know that through Christ I can overcome them one day at a time. Today, because of Jesus, I am drug and alcohol free and I also serve at CR, helping others find the same freedom in Christ.

I started the Taking Back Ground (TBG) program at Portland Fellowship (PF) after the pastoral staff at CR urged me to investigate PF. I was 100% convinced my identity as a gay Christian was something that would never change, until my intake interview with Jason Thompson. He gently sympathized with my pain, yet never wavered in his assertion that Jesus wanted to set me free from my gay identity.

Breakthrough happened for me during my first-year TBG retreat. I had been anticipating the "powerful surrender service" that was talked about by the 2nd year participants. I was ready to lay down the memory of my ex-partner, but during the worship service I received a message from a CR friend that changed my world. It simply read: "You're a believer in Jesus Christ, God's child, filled with His Holy Spirit, born again...I don't think there's any room left for the word gay." I came to the TBG retreat prepared to surrender an old relationship, but God had much bigger plans for me. In that moment I was convinced He wanted me to surrender my gay identity to Him instead, and so I did.

That powerful weekend was the start of my journey out of sexual brokenness and into my true identity as a child of God in Christ. I have ceased referring to myself as a gay Christian, and each day I am more and more convinced that my identity is not based on who I've slept with but on who God says I am. Who does God say I am? Today, because of Jesus, I proudly proclaim that I am the Father's beloved son. And not only that, I know I am well pleasing to Him!

Program Update: *Taking Back Ground Online*

Portland Fellowship has always been deeply committed to seeing people find healing in their hearts for the offenses and wounds that they have endured. Despite what our culture and media tell us, people are still seeking Jesus and submitting their sexuality and identity to the Lordship of Christ. For the last 20 years, we have sought to serve individuals across the globe through various online resources and programs. We started off with interactive CD-ROMs (remember those?) and have progressed to our dynamic discipleship program, **Taking Back Ground Online (TBGO)**.

TBGO is a discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction. It utilizes video teaching, interactive questions and reflection material. Some of the topics covered are *Understanding the Roots of our Sexual Struggle, Defensive Detachment, Accountability, Forgiveness, Reconciliation* and much more. Our goal is to provide an easily-accessible resource for people on their journey towards emotional and relational wholeness.

Here's a testimony from one of our recent TBGO graduates, Christie: "Today I completed my last lesson, and this experience that has ended up taking me almost 68 weeks to complete has changed my life. Because my situation (like yours) is unique, not all of the material applied to me, but ALL the information in this study was incredibly necessary and helpful. I can't thank Portland Fellowship enough for making TBGO available! My heart is filled with gratitude. God has used this resource in an amazing way. I will actually miss it. Thanks again!"

Christie says she will miss our program, but we have good news for her and for you too. Matthew 28:18-19 says, "Therefore, go and make disciples... Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." Christie has received a measure of healing that she can now administer to others in turn. We look forward to having her come alongside others on their healing journey and even utilizing our program in that process. And you can as well!

Did you know that *any* church or organization can offer this program in a group format? You too can start your own TBGO program in your church community. By sharing this resource with your church leadership, we can partner with your congregations to minister to those in need. Contact us today for more ideas on how to utilize TBGO in your area. Please remember to pray for Christie and the countless others that are allowing God to bring freedom and wholeness into their hearts. We eagerly await more stories in the future of God using TBGO to redeem and restore lives!

A Message from the Front Lines by Cynthia Beaudry



We love that you receive our newsletter! We understand the world in which we live offers many different voices and opinions that compete for your attention. Thank you for subscribing to our newsletter—your partnership and support is valuable to us! It is a blessing to share the testimonies of lives that are *currently* being impacted by the marriage of God's Truth & Grace, which we strive for here at Portland Fellowship.

I hope you were as encouraged as I was after reading Mike Brown's testimony! Mike's quiet faithfulness and his willingness to surrender to the Lord's work are incredible. The way God continues to transform him and use his story helps spur us on here at PF—we love seeing God's redemption in action.

In addition, our most recent Taking Back Ground Online graduate, Christine, is amazing! She dedicated so much of her time and heart into processing the material and now she is moving forward in healing. Wow!

With all of the amazing things going on in our community and all the initiatives that we have planned to continue ministering in the area of sexual redemption, there is no better time than now to partner with us in His work. I would like to make a personal appeal and ask you to join our work by supporting us with your powerful and effective prayer, your financial generosity and your continued sharing of our resources with those in need.

It doesn't take long to notice that this generation is wayward; even churches have fallen down the slippery slope of compromise. Now is the time to make a clear stand by aligning yourself with *life, truth* and *healing*. We will strive to continue walking in faithfulness and we continue to invite people into the abundant life that Jesus offers.

In Christ,

july - august calendar & services

tuesday nights in july & august summer series: **The Gender Question**

We will be studying Larry Crabb's book *Fully Alive*. This is open to the public--everyone is welcome! Call the office for more information or to register.
7-9 pm.

july 10 & august 14 the hope group + wives support group

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

July 6 board meeting

Portland Fellowship board of Directors meet every other month.

july 31 & august 28 home groups

Friends & family of loved ones who have openly embraced a gay identity are encouraged to connect, share and pray together in host homes. Groups are currently located in Tigard and Oregon City.

july 14 jason speaking

Westside - A Jesus Church
Jason will be speaking at the college group on the ministry of Portland Fellowship. 7 p.m.

additional updates

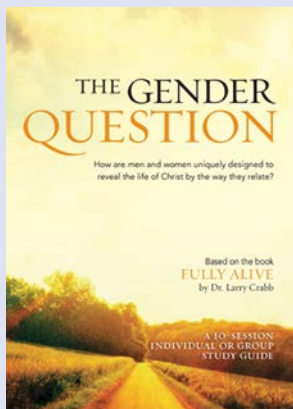
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Please take advantage of your online profile. If you don't have a username, please email or call.

speakers, counseling and support for youth

can be arranged through the office.

SUMMER SERIES: The Gender Question



For our summer series this year, we will be looking further into gender and God's intention for expressing masculinity and femininity. We will be using Larry Crabb's video series and workbook, *Fully Alive: A Biblical Vision of Gender that Frees Men and Women to Live Beyond Stereotypes*.

This series is open to men and women of all ages.

No matter where you are in your walk with Christ, this is a great opportunity to learn more about your true gender and grow in your relationships with both members of the same gender and members of the opposite sex.

The summer program will be on Tuesday evenings in July and August, 7:00 p.m., at the Portland Fellowship House.

If you would like to join us, please email, call or log into your profile at www.portlandfellowship.com to sign up.

PRAYER REQUESTS

***Upper Room Community:** This is our 9-month residential discipleship program. Participants live in intentional community and have weekly devotions, teachings, mentoring, counseling and accountability. Pray that the Lord would guide the right people to this program for the 2015-16 program year! We are currently still accepting applications. Applicants must have a measure of healing and work done in this area—completion of *Taking Back Ground* or a similar program is required. Visit our website or call for more information.

***Financial Support:** We have been experiencing a decline in both one-time gifts and monthly supporters. Please pray the Lord will continue to sustain and provide for His ministry at Portland Fellowship. Please pray as well for wisdom in partnering with new churches and individuals. We want to stay faithful in the work God has called us to do!



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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