



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Becoming the Beloved by Chris Mesa

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."—Romans 8:18

I don't have any children, but I often times put myself in a father's shoes and imagine how I would feel about my own kids. I would want to do everything in my power to provide for my children and help them in their trials. Yet, the best intentions we have to fix things for our kids and love them here on earth are nothing in comparison to the love and intentions of our Father in heaven: *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11).*

Most of the brokenness in my story stems from a very marred image of the Father. In fact, for most of my life, my thoughts toward the Father would default to *"run away and hide in shame; the Father is not safe; He's upset and angry with me."* You can imagine how such a deep-rooted lie about our loving Father really put a wedge between us. This lie about God's character was planted early on for me. I was born to a set of very young parents, and the foundation of my upbringing was marked by some very brutal realities. My mother and my biological father never married, and he exited the scene of my life when I was only one year old. Growing up, I never knew him or my paternal grandfather. My mom was married and divorced before I was six years old, and she, my brother and I moved into my grandparents' house shortly thereafter. It was there that I was repeatedly sexually abused by my uncle, with whom I shared a room. At a very young age I was confused, broken and now had a big secret to hide.

Growing up into adolescence was excruciatingly difficult. I desired so much to be affirmed, accepted and wanted. The sexual thoughts I had toward my peers were uncontrollable. This brokenness led to several sexual encounters with peers between 5th grade and high school. The message of sex equaling love was hardwired into my head from a very early age, and it was my mantra and reason for existence. If I could get an attractive guy to use me sexually, I *believed* that it made me important, desirable, and worth something. Going into high school I struggled with porn and masturbation, which only led to more shame, guilt, condemnation and self hatred. However, during my sophomore year of high school I discovered a real relationship with Jesus. I felt Him in my corner, and I had these moments with Him where I felt safe. It made me believe there might be hope beyond my brokenness, but I had no idea how that could ever be possible. I became very passionate about my newfound love in Jesus, and I surrounded myself with peers who loved Jesus and wanted to live it out on our high school campus. It was exciting, and there's no doubt God moved in our hearts, but I was still living with a huge secret that I couldn't tell *anyone*.



Chris is a graduate of PF's Taking Back Ground and Upper Room Community programs.

For a long time, I woke up looking at myself in the mirror and saw Two-Face from *Batman* staring back at me. By day, I was the good Christian kid who wouldn't do anything wrong, proclaiming freedom and how to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. By night, I was overwhelmed by my fleshly lusts, committing the very sins I preached against, imprisoned by my own brokenness and strife. By the time I graduated from high school, I had a real dilemma going on in my heart. Trying to fill the huge male deficit in my soul through porn, masturbation, and emotionally-dependent relationships with other boys had created a powerful and unstoppable monster, one that was chomping at the bit to be released. Sure enough, soon after going away to college I came out to my friends and family with a gay identity. My parents and family were devastated, while close Christian friends were supportive and affirming of my new identity. Between the ages of 18-22, I attempted to reconcile being gay with being a Christian, and I fully indulged in this new lifestyle. Looking back, I see it for the deceitful whirlwind that it was, and I am amazed by God's hand of protection and grace on my life as I threw myself into the enemy's territory.



My life quickly spiraled out of control. I found myself in recurring patterns of toxic relationships, and I became addicted to sexual "companionship." I would date a guy, and when one of us got tired of the other, we would have a dramatic break up; moments later, I would go online and find myself the next boyfriend. My soul ached for relationship and physical touch, and I used people in attempts to fill the hollow feelings inside me. After every one-night stand, every relationship that didn't work out and every night of binge drinking and getting high, that hole got deeper, felt darker and even hollower.

In college, my life felt so dark that I began to self-mutilate. After a long distance relationship ended, I attempted to commit suicide to end the pain. In my mind I had no hope, no future, no reason to smile, no reason to live. After being discharged from the hospital, I arrived back to my dorm room, and there I found Jesus. I was at the end of my rope, in the darkest of pits, and I felt Jesus' embrace. He was there, and there was no condemnation in his eyes—nothing but love, an intense love for my soul. I experienced in a very real way the love of a Shepherd that leaves the ninety-nine to pursue the one that was lost. I was the one that went astray, and Jesus my Shepherd came after me. Encountering this true love of the Father made me want to go deeper and attempt

to understand its source. For the first time in my life the Gospel began to come alive to me. "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...."

Experiencing God's love changed my perspective. In times of solitude and prayer, the Holy Spirit showed me the heart of the Father toward me. I was able to zoom out and look at myself through God's eyes, to see myself as His son whom He loves outrageously. I was able to see that there is nothing I could do to make Him love me more, and nothing I could do to cause Him to love me any less. I was able to see myself as a lost orphan that God jealously wanted to rescue, hold and love. In addition, the Lord showed me that He hates sin, yet doesn't hate me. The reason He hates sin is because it hurts me, and He can't stand seeing me hurt myself again and again. This perspective was in stark contrast to how I had always viewed God, as a strict, tyrannical father who does not want to hear excuses, just see results; and as a God that could only be pleased through performance, but mine was never good enough.

This shift in thinking went from my head down into my heart. The Lord continued speaking to me, and our relationship really began to take shape. Through trial and error, falling and getting back up, the Lord intentionally showed me a different side of His loving, graceful nature. Most impactful was how He revealed His goodness, love and faithfulness through His discipline in my life. Though the hard lessons of humility, obedience and self-control were frustrating and painful, the Lord showed me how His rod and staff comfort me, lead me to righteousness and guide me to new territories of health and wholeness. This was not all done through quiet times—in fact, most of these growing moments took place living in community with believers and receiving their discipleship, feedback and wisdom. It was a beautiful example of "iron sharpening iron."

As I follow Christ, the more I become convinced that the goal of this life is not to become perfect, or to live up to a set of moral rules and standards we find in the Bible. Instead, the goal is to daily surrender and become perfected by His incredible life-changing love for us. His desire is to bring us close to Him, heal our wounds and empower us to live righteously for Christ. The love of the Father has made me His Son. The more I know and encounter who He is, the more I know and discover who I am. I don't have to strive to do anything—I can simply be loved. Beloved. That is why my journey's theme is *becoming the beloved*. I continue learning how to get out of my own way and simply *Be Loved*.

new program: Hope Group Online

At the end of February, we launched our brand new online program for friends and families of SSA-struggling loved ones: **Hope Group Online**. Our Taking Back Ground Online and Reach Truth programs have been ministering to SSA-strugglers for several years. Now, we're excited to be able to bless and encourage parents, friends and other family members in their journey of understanding and hope. People all over the world seek out Portland Fellowship for help, and we get many calls and emails from family and friends outside the Portland area who are looking for guidance and support. Hope Group Online will include 9 lessons that will walk a parent, family member or friend of a gay-identified loved one through their own process of healing and encouragement. Important features include dynamic video teachings, in-depth material for processing and self-reflection, as well as a forum to connect with other family members!

Here's an outline of what our HGO videos will cover:

- **Lesson 1: My Loved One Says They're Gay, Help Me Understand**--In this lesson we will address the different dynamics that your loved one may be experiencing as well as how you can begin a process of hope.
- **Lesson 2: Dealing with Grief**--Learning about your loved one's homosexual struggle or identity can be devastating. The following lesson will help you identify this process and prepare you to walk through it.
- **Lesson 3: Roots of Sexual Brokenness**--A loved one's disclosure can be followed by confusion, guilt and a desire to find answers. Working through this lesson will help you understand how and why someone may struggle with homosexual desires, and how to respond to the deeper heart issues behind a loved one's actions and decisions.
- **Lesson 4: Family Dynamics**--Here we address family brokenness and the Drama Triangle. Learn more about how family roles play out in real life and what you can do through your own role in your family.
- **Lesson 5: Forgiveness and Relinquishment**--Learn about biblical forgiveness and what it looks like to truly relinquish your plans, your control and your dreams to the Lord.
- **Lesson 6: Boundaries**--This lesson teaches you what healthy boundaries are in relationship with your loved one. Learn what boundaries are, what God says about them, and how to establish and protect healthy boundaries.
- **Lesson 7: Biblical Sexuality**--Dive into a deeper discussion on what the Bible says about God's design and intent for sexuality, what He says about homosexuality, and what we can learn about pro-gay theology.
- **Lesson 8: True Identity**--It's not easy finding our true identity in Christ—not what the world says, but what the Lord says. Join the conversation about how people form an identity and what God says about who we truly are.
- **Lesson 9: Faith, Hope and Love**--A practical discussion on what Faith, Hope and Love really are, and how we can apply them to our relationships with our loved ones.



If you or someone you know could benefit from Hope Group Online, you can sign up at this web address: www.portlandfellowship.com/hope. We ask for a minimum donation to cover the costs of the website and program development/maintenance. Once you sign up, you will have access to all of the videos and accompanying PDF handouts (which you can print for personal or group use). Hope Group Online is also a great resource for church groups ministering to people in their communities who are dealing with the pain and discouragement of their loved one's struggle. We are also currently developing a leadership training curriculum for people desiring to use Hope Group Online in their group or church--stay tuned! Thank you to our faithful supporters who have partnered with us in this initiative. Many families will be blessed by your prayers and generosity.

march - april 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.
7-9 pm.

march 13 & april 10 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.

march 27 & april 24 home groups

Friends & family of SSA-strugglers connect, share and pray together in host homes. Groups are in Tigard, Oregon City and Gaston.

march 16 & 18 Portland Bible College

Jason will be teaching in their counseling classes.

march 17-18 Project PATCH

Patrick will be speaking to students and staff at an alternative highschool in Idaho.

april 9 Concordia University

Jason will be sharing about PF in a Human Sexuality class.

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.

A Personal Note to You Our Reader:

This morning as I stood in line at the post office, waiting to mail a set of our Taking Back Ground books to another ministry, I began to pray over each book and the hands that they might fall into. I find myself doing that often at Portland Fellowship, whether it is a donation we receive, a personal email/note or an order for our resources. Many times when someone donates to our ministry they will leave a prayer request. I can't tell you how much this means to us here at Portland Fellowship. We appreciate these tangible tokens that remind us how much you mean to our ministry, and spur us on to pray for you and your loved ones.



I don't know about you, but it's easy to be dismayed when we look at the current events and affections of our culture. Indeed, it can be a really discouraging time if we stop to survey all the waywardness of our generation. However, we try not to do that here.

As a ministry that offers hope we

can't afford to lose hope ourselves, and in this God is faithful. He helps us and directs us to pray for you instead of being downcast because of the culture. He reminds us to be thankful, and we do have so much to be grateful for. Each donation, note and order is affirmation of His love and hope to our ministry.

We love hearing from you! Connecting with like-minded believers, praying and sharing with one another is one of the most encouraging things we can do right now. It will keep both your heart and our heart fortified and focused on what God is calling us to do.

Encouragement--we all need it, especially in our walk of faith! Scripture tells us to keep urging each other on, saying, *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The New Testament is filled with the certainty that Christ will return soon: *"The Lord is at hand"* (Phil. 4:5). *"The coming of the Lord is at hand"* (James 5:8). *"Behold, I am coming quickly"* (Rev. 22:12). As we "see the Day approaching," let's keep cheering each other on in the faith. Keep going! You're almost there! The finish line is in sight.

We are so incredibly grateful for you. As you read this, we pray that you can sense from the Lord how much we affectionately esteem you in our hearts. God bless you.

--Cynthia

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PORTLAND
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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

Cynthia Beaudry
Ministry Administrator

Patrick Silvus
Program Coordinator

Heidi Perry
Amy Thompson
Support for Wives

Kathy Grace Duncan
Board Chair

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

e-mail: pf@portlandfellowship.com
portlandfellowship.com