the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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My Savior Softened My Heart by Terri Chapman

I wanted to provide an update because Portland Fellowship really did change my life.

What I need to tell you is that I don't say this in a trite or dismissive way. Taking Back Ground is intense, and some of the topics I write about here are not Sunday dinner topics with the family. In order to recover, we had to learn to talk about things as they were and not how we wanted them to be. We used terms that might make some folks extremely uncomfortable. My goal is not to offend or upset anyone with my testimony, but I did far too much work at TBG to start making covert and secretive references to the truth now. For PF participants and graduates, nitty-gritty dialogue becomes the norm, necessary to recover and to become the people God wants us to be. Sometimes getting there just isn't smooth, classy or pretty.

Terri first joined the Taking Back Ground program in 2010.

I was introduced to homosexual behavior as a young adult, and not by choice. It completely freaked me out, but then again, I continued to participate and perpetuated the behavior, for which I am deeply ashamed. With much gratitude and gratefulness I can say that the Lord has forgiven me in those instances and I am clean: *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18 KJV)*. Thank you, Lord Jesus! Thank you so very much.

I used to think my problems and sins were far worse than other people, especially other Christian women. I would attend an event or retreat for women at my church and I would feel so out of place. I never felt I was a "real woman", certainly not one like them. I didn't do all the "oohs" and "ahhs" and quiet contemplation, share cooking advice and recipes, or bake. Frankly, I read my novel during quiet time because truthfully, I felt masculine. I felt hard and emotionally dead inside. This was not necessarily in the way I looked physically, but in the way I felt. I didn't have a husband, didn't have a boyfriend and felt very much out of place. I had great confusion and was likely trying to reconcile my feelings of same-sex attraction with the other women at these events who seemed to be doing fairly well. I was never deluded enough to believe others "had it all together", but I did believe that they were doing far better than I. If only I had known the truth! Perception becomes our reality, though it's often very incorrect. These were amazing yet imperfect women, and they treated me wonderfully. My perception was just badly skewed.

At Portland Fellowship, I was able to listen and understand the roots of same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior. I think what happened when I looked at my thoughts and feelings was that I changed, and I changed a lot. When I first came to talk to someone about the program, I explained just how "complicated" my life had been, especially my story about being occasionally attracted to people of my own gender. Looking back now, it was laughable, because I'm sure everyone who goes to Portland Fellowship believes their story to be "complicated" and perhaps so different no one will really get it. *"How could they understand? I'm so unique."* Pretty humorous now, because I learned that we all struggle with similar needs, desires, wounds and temptations. *"Maybe I'm not so complicated after all..."*

One of the joys of Taking Back Ground is that we call thoughts and behaviors exactly what they are. I heard words said out loud that I had only thought in secrecy: *homosexual lifestyle, masturbation, pornography,* and so on. But, I also heard words that went right along with these that seemed much like oxymorons—it felt like there was no way to couple them together. How were we supposed to entwine these behaviors and concepts with words like *redemption, forgiveness, healing, restoration* and *identity change*? Only through the blood of Jesus! I have to tell you though, if anyone ever told you that life was going to be easy (especially in the Christian life), they straight up lied. We all have our "detours" off the highway. That's reality. That's the result of sin. That's the truth. But there is a way out. Never be fooled into believing you are so stuck, so sick or so damaged that you are beyond the grasp of God's healing power, amazing grace and unending mercy.

What I had to do was really take a look at what identity was all about. A wise individual told me that when we talk about "who" we are, nothing should precede the word "Christian." Simply put, my name is Terri and first and foremost, I am a Christian, a believer in Christ, sealed and sold-out. A sure-fire Jesus Freak. After that, it was dissecting issues one-by-one.

One of the most pertinent lessons I participated in at Portland Fellowship was about fathers. It was not only informative but transformational over time. My father (or mother or step-mother) are not, and never have been, at fault for the attraction I experienced toward women. However, the *conditions* were perfect for my confusion and behavior. That was a difficult trek—seeking the balance between finding out how certain behaviors and events from people I loved might or might not have contributed to the identity that confused me so badly, and taking responsibility for my own later behaviors and choices .

Another one of my identity issues when I arrived at PF was my complicated stance towards men. Did I find them attractive? *At times*. Did I trust them? *No*. Did I believe most of them were pedophiles and perverts, bent on destroying young girls and boys lives through abuse? *Many times*. Was that part of my experience? *Yes*. Were they safe? *Rarely*. Did I believe men would ever be interested in me? *Never*. Oh, how satan can entrap us in our own minds! Listen closely here: perception is reality at a young age. What I found was that my perception was skewed.

Praise God for His ability to renew our minds and hearts! Through the work I did in the TBG lessons and group activities at Portland Fellowship, I found that I greatly generalized men, and even women. When I would see something on the news, or hear a story about childhood sexual abuse, I would think or even say, *"See?! There you go. There's another one!"; "Just like a man…"; "Just like I said, men are not trustworthy at all, ever."* What I did learn was that it was *that* story at *that* time to *that* person. It was not *all* men, *all* the time, to *all* people. I began to look around at PF staff and participants and found that most men were trustworthy, honorable, loved their children safely and were not out to get them or harm me. What a stark change in me! I was able to catch myself when I began to generalize. As a matter of fact, I'm now able to recognize when I'm headed for trouble if I begin to generalize again. I also found that I knew many trustworthy, honorable and safe men. They were all around me, but I had not done the work necessary to find out that not all men are what I perceived they were.

Another enormous battle fought and won was my belief that I did not fit in with women—I just perceived myself as an outsider. I never really was, except in my own mind. Once I began to look at my walls and defenses, I could see that my 30-foot wall of defensiveness (protection) surrounding me on all sides was keeping me entrapped and angry. Once I saw that I could open up my life, take some risks, trust other women and even some men, I found that I softened. I could feel it inside. Now when I attend a women's retreat, I act just as ridiculous as the rest of the group. I even shared my testimony at a women's event at my church. I used to wear my sins as some sort of sick Badge of Honor. I was "worse" than other Christians and because of that, I thought I was, in a way, "better" than them—I went through *this* and they only went through *that*. The truth is, a sin is a sin is a sin. My sins might look different than the sins of others, or we might share the same ones: gossiping, over-eating, infidelity, anger, bitterness, lying, covetousness, etc. Sins have different consequences, but that does not make any of them better or worse than the others.

The reality of having softened inside makes me feel more feminine than I could have ever thought. If people were distant, it was probably because I drove them away with my angry demeanor, wicked sarcasm and bitterness. Learning that I was changed, particularly in my identity, I found I had been duped for many years. Sometimes I feel I've wasted my best years, but then I find that to be a lie as well. Through the blood of Jesus I have found I am free of my same-sex attraction and the lies that go along with having dealt with that. Redemption and change is possible. Just look and see. I am changed. I am free! *"Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."*

Program Update: *Upper Room Community 2015-2016*

Meet the new participants for the 2015-16 Upper Room Community! Please be praying for their intensive discipleship year.

Liz Lowe

I'm originally from California and moved here with my family to Portland when I was a few years old. After my parents pulled us out of the conservative church I grew up in, I later began to attend on my own and had some profound moments hearing from God. He brought me through multiple colleges and universities, as well as many cross cultural excursions and ministry experiences. At the same time, I was still struggling with lots of insecurity as a woman and temptations that I didn't know how to identify or surrender to Christ. I later became involved with women. However, by His grace and through a strong community of friends, it became clear that in order to follow God I would have to walk away from a woman I loved deeply. Depression followed this good decision. A couple of years ago, in a moment of crisis, a friend initiated my contact with Portland Fellowship. I started counseling and went to Summer Series as well as Living Waters. I had developed deep, trusting relationships prior to my involvement with PF, but I was even more encouraged to find a place to struggle together with others who are walking the same difficult road. Going into the Upper Room Community this year, I'm excited to deepen my relationship with Christ and with others. I don't know exactly what all He has in store for me, but I want to continue growing in my identity in Christ and as a woman of God.

Joe Carson

I'm from the lesser-known Vancouver (Washington, not Canada). I grew up in the church and believed God was real and that He had standards for His people, standards I could never uphold. I was attracted to men, and there was no room for that desire in His sight. I desperately wanted to serve the Lord, but my desires brought me so much shame that I made sure nobody knew about them. I hated my feelings and hated myself because of them. A couple at my church learned of my struggle and introduced me to Portland Fellowship. Since then, I've completed two years of Taking Back Ground and two years of the Upper Room Community. I find that my self-hatred has greatly diminished, and I now have a greater understanding of my struggle, and also of God and His relationship with me. In this third year of the URC, I'm excited to see even more weeds rooted out of my life for the Lord's glory, and allow room for more good seeds and growth. I want to be more firmly planted in who the Lord is and who He created me to be.

Melissa Elasser

I am a native of Portland, Oregon, and I've lived here all my life. I grew up in a Christian home with loving parents, but our home was also a mess of drugs, abandonment and secret struggles of my own. I knew same-sex attraction was not what God wanted for my life, but I felt I couldn't reveal my secret to anyone, especially the church. After high school, I began a B.A. in Digital Film and Video, but I ended up pursuing a career as an art teacher after my father passed away in 2012 from lung cancer. This was the catalyst that pushed me to visit Portland Fellowship, which I had heard about from a ministry fair at my church. I graduated the Taking Back Program in 2014, and after a year of coming to the Solid Ground alumni group, I'm excited to embark on the journey of the Upper Room Community! I want to intimately and passionately grow closer to God, while learning to live in intentional community so that I can be an encouragement to others in this struggle.

Rigel Hernaez

I am originally from the Philippines and moved to Canada about five years ago. My grandparents and my mother were great Christian influences as I grew up in the church, but as I entered high school, my parents separated and my world shattered. As a young Christian, I just wanted to know Jesus more and serve Him. I was having fun working and serving in church and school ministries, but I was numbing all the pain inside and my brokenness was never addressed. I was living a double life—a good boy in public that everybody liked, but in private, a person that secretly struggled with pornography and with same-sex attraction. I thought I could get myself together on my own, but I failed over and over again. Last year I attended Living Waters, and it helped me understand more about who God my Father really is and who I am in Him. After LW, I felt that I needed to continue the work that He started in my heart, which led me to Portland Fellowship. I have wrestled with the Lord regarding this big move, but wrestling with the Lord is always in vain—we know He always wins! I'm still scared and I'm not sure how everything will work out this year, but I'm super confident in the Lord that He is faithful to provide all that I need and that He will fulfill the purpose He has for my life.

september - october
calendar & services

tuesday nights in september
leadership training
This is a 4-week training course for anyone seeking to lead groups or programs here at Portland Fellowship (TBG, Wives Group, Hope Group, etc).
7-9 pm.

tuesday nights in october
taking back ground
A powerful discipleship program that equips those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions to walk in freedom. To sign up, call the office or go online.
7-9 pm.

september 11 & october 9
the hope group
Join us for a time of prayer, encouragement, support and a great meal.
6:30 p.m.

september 25 & october 30
home groups
Friends & family of SSA-strugglers connect, share and pray together in host homes. Groups are currently in Tigard and Oregon City.

thursdays in september & october
upper room community
PF's intensive discipleship proram. Participants meet weekly for devotions, teaching, discipleship training, group processing and prayer.

additional updates
www.portlandfellowship.com
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.

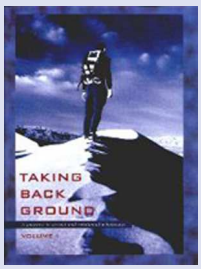
Portland Fellowship Matching Grant

We are pleased to announce some exciting news this month! An anonymous donor through the National Christian Foundation has come forward to offer a matching challenge grant up to $50,000. This means that when you donate a special gift in any amount to Portland Fellowship, your contribution *doubles*. For example, if you give $100 toward this grant, you gift effectively becomes $200. Your $1000 gift becomes $2000. This opportunity will continue now through the end of November 2015. You are welcome to give a one-time gift or monthly until November 30th. This is a great time to invite your church body or friends to partner with us in this amazing work!

There are two ways to respond: the first is to mail the matching grant response card back with a check, and the second is to donate online by signing in to your profile at www.portlandfellowship.com. You are welcome to call the office and we can assist you with that process.

We are truly grateful for this anonymous donor and for each of you as you consider your partnership with us. Thank you for continuing to make it possible to offer support for those struggling with same-sex attractions, to offer hope to family and friends with loved ones who have embraced a homosexual identity and to offer online resources that are accessible world-wide.

Taking Back Ground + Wives Group



Our TBG program launches this fall on Tuesday, October 6th! Taking Back Ground is a powerful discipleship program that equips those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions to walk in freedom by providing powerful worship, in-depth group discussions and small group accountability. If you are struggling with sexual and relational issues, please consider joining us for the Taking Back Ground program, Tuesday evenings, 7-9:30pm at the PF House. If you are not in Portland, please consider TBG online.

We are also launching a new section of our Wives Group on Tuesday nights for wives, girlfriends and fiancees of SSA strugglers. Come join us for encouragement, support and prayer.

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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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