



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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His Precious Daughter by Melissa Elsasser

I was born and raised in the rainy Northwest by my mom and dad. In my early years, things were really good. My parents had a good marriage, we were really involved in church and we had a tight-knit family. Being the only child, I was especially close with my mom; she was my best friend and my hero. She ran her own dog grooming business out of our house, took care of me and got all the household tasks done every day. I looked to her for assurance for everything. My dad, on the other hand, was a different story. While he was a great provider and a good man, I always felt emotionally distant from him. He worked a lot, so any free time he had would be spent watching TV, taking a nap or working on things around the house. Any time he would spend with me felt really awkward, so I began to think that something wasn't quite right with me, that I was annoying and a burden to him. So the closeness with my mom only grew stronger as my dad and I grew farther apart.

Growing up in the church I knew that God existed, but my relationship with Him was always at a distance. I saw Him the way that I saw my dad: I felt that I was a burden to Him and that He wasn't pleased with me at all. Whenever I did anything wrong, I would feel so guilty and ashamed, and I would try to earn my forgiveness by doing good things. I did really well in school, I was the "good kid" who never wanted to be the cause of trouble and I was a people-pleaser. If I could get praise for my accomplishments, I could feel like I was worthy and valuable.

Unbeknownst to me, my parents' marriage was declining. My mom was getting tired of being the leader in our household. She started abusing pain pills to help her get through the day. Then, after my grandpa (her father) had a stroke, she decided to move him into our house so that she could be his caretaker. This was the final straw that broke her. When the pills weren't enough anymore, she started turning to meth. I remember seeing her the night of her first overdose—this was not the mom I knew anymore. I watched helplessly as she writhed on the floor, and fought the paramedics as they took her away in the ambulance. My assurance, and my lifeline, were gone.

The summer before I began middle school, my parents divorced and my mom left. She would come home every once in a while, but I would never know when to expect her. Some nights I would stay up until three o'clock in the morning on the couch, waiting for her. Other times, I would have to drag her (passed out) from the bathtub and put her to bed. I worried about her constantly, to the point of becoming ill. Our roles had reversed: I was now the mother, and she was the daughter.

The anxiety and depression that weighed on me was too much to bear, and I didn't know what to do. My dad didn't feel like a safe option, and I didn't want to burden him along with everything else that was going on, so I turned to pornography to numb my pain. It worked in the beginning, but slowly shame and guilt crept in and crushed me. I felt like I was letting God down because I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't stop. It became a ritual every day that I couldn't live without. Yet every time I went back to it, I



Mel is a member of the Upper Room Community.

would leave feeling even more empty and ashamed. My dad caught me twice, but never tried to help me stop; he didn't even get angry. His lack of reaction only affirmed in me that I didn't matter.

Along with the pornography, I was also struggling with same sex attraction. I was always too afraid to act on it, because I knew God thought it was wrong. But that didn't stop me from having an avid fantasy life. I was involved in online roleplaying groups, read erotic stories and even began writing myself into my own stories. I could escape whenever I wanted in my own mind, be with women or men, and feel valued and loved. My view of love was so broken and twisted that I began believing that the only way I would ever feel loved would be in a sexual context. I assumed my chance at really being loved had been thrown out the window.

My mom was in and out of different rehab programs throughout my high school years, but even while she was struggling we remained best friends. We had become so codependent on each other. If I wasn't happy, she wasn't. If she was angry, I tried everything to fix it. We kept looking to each other to fill our needs, and would end up disappointed and emotionally exhausted.

Things began to feel "normal" as I went through my first years of college. My mom had about 4 years being clean and sober, and I was living with her fulltime. Then my world fell apart. Within a year, I lost my grandpa to lung cancer and my dad was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He was doing better after getting treatment, and we thought we were in the clear. But his health started declining again, and he was eventually diagnosed with lung cancer. He passed away a few months later, in April of 2012. Two months later a family friend drowned in our hometown.

All of the loss and grief was the catalyst that pushed me towards Portland Fellowship to start dealing with all of my issues. I knew God wanted me to know Him more, and with the loss of my dad I desperately needed to know Him as my Father. I began Taking Back Ground that fall, and I started really learning about who God was and how He saw me. Slowly the image of a distant, uncaring God began to fade away and was replaced with the face of a loving, gracious Father. My identity as a burden and annoyance was changed into one of joy and delight. Instead of running away in shame, I could run to Him with abandon!

I also began to understand how codependent I was with my mom, and how it had become an unhealthy relationship. I tried moving out on my own for a little while, but ended up

moving back in to help her get back on her feet after she overdosed a second time. I watched as she started taking her recovery seriously and sought out counseling. I felt like for the first time since that horrible night of her first overdose, I was getting my mom back. Slowly our roles started reversing and we were learning how to be mother and daughter again. But there was one step that still needed to take place for real healing to come.

Earlier this year, we got a foreclosure notice, which meant we needed to decide if we would continue to live together or if we would part ways. I had always wanted to apply for the Upper Room program at PF, but never felt I was financially or emotionally capable. Yet I felt God pushing me to step out in faith. Part of me wanted to take the easy way out and just live with my mom, but I knew

that for her sake and mine it wasn't an option. So, I applied to the Upper Room in April, and got accepted. I was so excited! But then came the worrying: *Would God provide for me? Did it even matter to Him?* All sorts of crazy questions went through my mind. And for the next four months I got to watch God work. Through support from churches, a moving sale and learning to save wisely, God provided!

The last several months have gone by fast, but there has been so much growth in my relationship with the Lord. I'm starting to trust Him as my Father, I'm seeing myself as His precious daughter and since being apart from my mom our relationship has never been better. It was so hard the first few weeks. There were a lot of tears and phone calls every day. Now, instead of relying on each other, we're relying on God. I look forward to the days when we get to spend time with each other, and then go back to our own lives. It has been a blessing to see my mom in her own healing process, as she is constantly gaining victory in her recovery and her growth as a woman of God.

I know for a lot of women, it's really hard to admit to many of these struggles. Something that held me back from healing was the belief that *"women don't struggle with these things."* But we do. And the minute I began to be real with God was when I began to see the reality of who He is. If even one person can relate to part of this testimony, I know sharing my story will be worth it. And, if you would, please pray for my mom and I as we continue to shut down lies with God's truth and embrace our God-given roles as mother and daughter.

If you would like to financially come alongside Mel or another URC participant, you can donate online or call the PF offices.



One of Mel's Upper Room paintings.

What's the Big Deal About Sexual Sin? by Joe Dallas

"It is a mark of great people to treat trifles as trifles, and important matters as important." -Doris Lessing

If it doesn't matter to God, it needn't matter to us. There are, after all, countless issues for Christians to be concerned about. So in an age marred by terrorism, poverty, violence, and corruption at every level, it would be easy to assume that sexual morality is, by its nature, a secondary matter. And even if we do see sexual sin as something worth fighting, the ones most commonly practiced, such as consensual sex apart from marriage, the use of porn, visiting strip clubs, or homosexuality, might seem tame next to others.



Compare lust to abortion – the taking of an innocent life – or to teen pregnancy, with its tragic repercussions. Or to the wounds inflicted by molestation. Or to the glaring evil of forced prostitution. Next to these, private erotic pleasures, practiced by adults, can seem mild. Wrong, perhaps, but not worth action or outrage. So if certain acts are practiced in your own life or someone else's, why worry about them? In fact, many churches and pastors are beginning to consider sexual purity an issue "not worth fighting about." So a few points about created intent are worth considering, before we get too casual about this:

1. We are created beings (Genesis 2:7; Revelation 4:11). If we weren't created, and therefore answered to no Creator, we might judge the rightness or wrongness of our behavior by its rightness or wrongness in our own eyes. But if we, as created beings, will finally answer to our Maker, then it matters less what seems right and natural to us, and more what is deemed right and natural to Him. Christian apologist and radio host Gregory Kousser states it plainly: *"But if God is there (which is what the Christian says), it doesn't matter what is preferred. It only matters what is true."* (Transcript from 1994 broadcast on Stand to Reason, titled "Preference or Truth?")

2. Our Creator has specific intentions for our existence and behavior, which are spelled out in scripture. This is seen most noticeably in the Mosaic Law, the Psalms and Proverbs, the Prophetic Books, the Gospels and the Epistles, all of which are brimming with instructions, prohibitions and warnings, testifying to a God who is not passive or unconcerned about His creation. We were fashioned with specific purposes in mind, purposes we'll refer to as Created Intent.

3. These intentions are extended to our relationships in general and to our sexual relationships in particular. It should be noted that not only did our Maker create us as human beings, but as sexual beings as well. He authored our gender distinctives and our capacity for erotic response, then looked on all He created (human sexuality included) and said, "That's good!" (Genesis 1:26-30). Far from being prudish or anti-sexual, then, God is the author and original celebrator of sex. Understanding this is important when approaching the next point.

4. Sexual behaviors falling short of created intent are regarded by the Creator as being serious.

Serious enough, in fact, to warrant public rebuke (Matthew 14:3-4) and church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-5), and are considered detrimental in ways that are unique and severe (1 Corinthians 6:18).

God finds sexual sin so abhorrent precisely because He views healthy sex as being so exquisite and meaningful. So John the Baptist risked and lost his life for taking a stand against King Herod's immorality; the first recorded case of church discipline occurred after the Corinthian church was rebuked for allowing open immorality to be practiced in the congregation; and Paul described sexual sin as having a particularly heinous impact on the person practicing it (see scriptures listed in Point 4 above). While we regard all sin as serious, sexual sin carries a severity in both its nature and its consequences.

If we are created with and for specific intentions, and if sin falls short of those intentions, and if sexual sin falls short in ways that especially offend our Creator and wreak havoc in our lives, then it clearly matters. It matters to God. It matters to the church. It matters to the culture. And God grant that it always matters to us.

Joe Dallas is an author, conference speaker, and ordained pastoral counselor. He's the Program Director of Genesis Biblical Counseling in Tustin, CA, which is a counseling ministry for men dealing with sexual addiction and other sexual/relational problems.

january - february calendar & services

tuesday nights in jan. & feb.

taking back ground

A powerful discipleship program that equips those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions to walk in freedom.

7-9 pm.

thursday afternoons

upper room community

PF's intensive live-in discipleship program. Participants meet weekly for teaching, discipleship training and prayer.

january 15 & february 12

the hope group

Join us for a time of prayer, encouragement, support and a great meal.

6:30 p.m.

january 16

annual planning meeting

PF staff and board members will meet to review the previous year and prepare for where the Lord is leading in 2016.

january 29 & february 26

home groups

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

february 2

western seminary

Jason will be speaking at a conference held in Portland, OR.

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.

Praise Reports:

Portland Fellowship Matching Grant

Thank you so much to all who donated to our Matching Grant campaign this past fall. We had an anonymous donor through the National Christian Foundation who was willing to match donations up



to \$50,000. Thanks to the Lord's incredible favor and your extremely generous gifts, we were able to meet our goal of \$50,000! We are so incredibly humbled, grateful and in awe of how God continues to use people like you to support His work here at PF. Please join us in prayer as we seek the Lord's will to be good stewards of your gifts and invest in the Kingdom wisely (storing up our treasures in heaven, not on earth). Thank you for continuing to make possible the work of supporting those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions, as well as friends and family of gay-identified loved ones.

Updated Online Resources

Entering 2016, we are excited to announce that all of our online resources are now mobile-friendly! This means that you can now use your smartphone to access the PF website, your online profile, Taking Back Ground Online and Hope Group Online.

We are still in the process of launching a Spanish resource page and creating an online video teaching series on transgender issues. We need wisdom, guidance and protection as we follow the Lord's leading in this area. Thank you for your prayers and support that allow us to reach countless people through our online resources!



Prayer Requests:

- Please pray for the winter section of our Taking Back Ground program, that all of the participants continue partnering with God in this work. Some of the topics we will be working through are: *The Marred Image of the Father*, *Idolatry* and *Developing Intimacy with Christ*.
- Pray for the members of our Hope Group program. Though in different stages, all of them need hope to relate well to their loved ones and see God move in their lives.



PORTLAND
fellowship

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 Silvius
Program Coordinator

Heidi Perry
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

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