



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Becoming Reconciled by Michael*

I remember when I felt that if I called myself a man, the universe would break forth in peals of laughter. I remember when I'd stumble upon a group of guys and immediately feel palpable involuntary anxiety, causing me to pull into my shell. I remember lying in bed at night, avoiding skin contact with myself because of my self-loathing. Weak. Undesirable. Unacceptable. Unhealed wounds and unchallenged lies kept me trapped in a world disconnected from masculinity.

There are many wonderful things about my family, but there were also circumstances and dynamics that scarred me. My father was a distant presence to be feared. I virtually had no relationship with him before I left for college, don't remember him touching me unless it was for punishment and believed that in his eyes I was of no consequence. I became my mother's confidant and emotionally-enmeshed surrogate in place of my father, who was not emotionally present for her either. My older brother was abusive physically and verbally, and I lived under the banner of the childhood names that he called me for years: gay, faggot, pussy and pansy. He told me that my male relatives mocked me behind my back, and I believed him. He encouraged other boys to bully me, and these experiences with males, especially those who were supposed to be closest to me, led me to believe that being male meant being cruel and indifferent—so I struggled with my identity. A girl once told me that I was a plant because I seemed asexual, and I took it as a compliment because that was better than being a jerk, which was what most guys were to me.

I accepted that guys in general wouldn't be interested in knowing me and therefore didn't pursue friendships with them. I found shelter among girls where I felt safe. I did have two male friendships growing up, but both became sexualized as we neared puberty and discovered our older brothers' pornography. We play acted what we had viewed, and I didn't realize until later that for me, closeness with other males became equated with sexual activity with them.

It wasn't until I went away to college and discovered online pornography that I began to question my sexuality. What had happened with my two male friends earlier had ended, and I chalked it up to sexual exploration. I had crushes on girls, even though I didn't feel that I could ever be man enough to please them. However, my deepening interest with online porn brought me to a surprising realization—that I was drawn more and more to homosexual acts, which seemed the only way for me to connect to the masculine. I was part of a Christian fellowship, knew Jesus and had genuine experiences of His love, but this double life led to a severe depression which forced me to face several facts: that I feared men and was disconnected by my contempt for them, yet I simultaneously needed to connect with them and didn't know how to; that this need produced unwanted SSA, which I tried to meet through pornography; and that I felt powerless to break the cycle of addiction and shame that made me loathe myself.



Michael* recently completed PF's two-year Taking Back Ground program. (*Name changed to protect privacy).

I was fortunate that my college fellowship was connected to a ministry that helped believers explore the roots of unwanted SSA. During a year of attending that program, Jesus helped me recognize the hatred I had for my father and brother, which was so toxic that I had felt something like a black hole churning in my chest for months. The moment I decided to forgive them during a prayer session, I sensed something like a knife being pulled from my chest, and out of that place a bright warm light was shining. During that season of healing, I experienced God like never before in prayer, worship and the Word. He showed me the love of a Father who embraced me when I had a deep unmet need for a Father's touch. He revealed Himself to me as the perfect older brother in Jesus who used His strength to support and defend me. I began to see His purpose for masculinity as something good, expressed as sacrificial love and service to others. God helped me start reclaiming who He created me to be as a man.



When I graduated and returned to the Portland area, I joined my parent's church, which unfortunately did not have a culture of vulnerability and accountability. I didn't feel safe to share my SSA struggle with anyone for 14 years. Part of me was happy to put it in the past, and I buried it by diving headlong into church ministry. I had experienced how healthy relating with men drastically reduced my SSA, and I built some good friendships with guys at church, but my workplace was virtually all female. As I watched more male friends get married, the less I felt that I had something to offer my peers, and the more I withdrew from them. An irrational fear also began to grow—that if my church knew about my struggle, I would be disqualified from serving. This fear caused me to return to self-medicating like I did in college, trapping me for years in the addiction cycle of gay pornography, isolation and shame.

A painful church split prompted me to leave my parent's church, and God led me to a new church where I joined a men's cohort. For two years, I experienced a sense of acceptance and belonging to a degree I had never experienced before from a larger group of men. This was transformational and markedly alleviated the trauma response that a group of men usually triggered. This new church emphasized the gospel as the story of God who is in the process of reconciling all things that have been broken, and highlighted that God wants to use all of my story, even the darkest parts that I'm not proud of, to bring glory to Him. When I joined a community group and had the chance to share my story, however, I found

that I could not. I was still trapped in fear, shame, isolation and addiction. I left that community group, and I don't know what I would've done if Jason Thompson hadn't visited my church to share his story with SSA and what God was doing at Portland Fellowship. This was a clear invitation to enter into greater freedom.

I went through the two year Taking Back Ground program at PF, which revolutionized my life. When I first walked through the doors of PF, I feared that I would encounter shockingly broken people. In reality, I encountered some of the most beautiful and courageous men and women I'd ever met. Yes, they were broken, as we all are, but they were being renewed as they laid their brokenness at Jesus' feet. PF taught me that my deepest wounds came through relationships, therefore my healing would come through relationships as well. As Jesus gave me courage to lay down my mask and share

the good, the bad and the ugly with my small group, I felt more known and loved by other men than I ever had in my whole life. I learned that if I present a mask to others, the mask will get the love, not me. I discovered that when other men in my small group disclosed their greatest sources of shame, their loveability, value and manliness were enhanced, not diminished, by their humility, vulnerability, honesty and courage. If it was true for them, it must be true for me, too!

God continues challenging me to press into areas of insecurity where fears of failure are holding me back, such as the workplace and in pursuing women. My time at PF is helping me take back ground because it has instilled in me a deeper trust in the goodness of God's character, a habit of focusing on His holiness instead of my sinfulness and a healthier response of going to Him to meet my needs for acceptance, affection, affirmation, satisfaction, security and significance. I have hope again that I can have meaningful relationships in which I can be fully known without shame. Jesus is bringing me into a more rooted peace and rest, into a satisfaction that could never be filled by the romantic and sexual connections I was seeking from men. For so long, men were a symbol of what I was not and never could be. Now, they are signpost of who I am and can be. I have lived most of my life unreconciled to men and masculinity, but God is inwardly reconciling what has been broken so that I can look outward and join Him in His reconciling work to the world around me (2 Cor. 5: 17-21).

His Presence in Praise and Protest by Jason Thompson



PF staff with friends from Help4Families & Living Stone Ministries.

It is always captivating to see the Lord make His presence known in the midst of broken people. He shows up to those who are hurting and are deeply aware of their need for a Healer, as well as those who are wounded and completely unaware they need the Great Physician. I was privileged to see The Lord show up to both these groups of people, as Patrick, KathyGrace and I attended the 2017 Restored Hope Network Conference in San Diego, CA.

In the very first hour, I met a woman who was full of joy because, for the first time in her life, she was in the presence of others who were seeking freedom from the very same struggles she's dealt with. She was not alone anymore, and could feel the love of Christ and the hope she so greatly needed.

There was another group there, however, that had no intention of seeking hope and healing, but instead offered up condemnation, shame and curses. We were warned beforehand that potentially more than 800 protesters from the gay community would be at the conference, and although only 30-40 actually showed up, the emotional intensity was disconcerting. The first day I made efforts to connect with the RHN conference attendees, but on the second day, I really felt led to go share the love of Christ with these protesters. My friends Robyn Black, KathyGrace and I went down the street with bottles of water, just to be the love of Christ to an obviously hostile and angry group.

In my short visit I began talking to two people, a young gay-identified man and a professional psychologist. Both immediately began to accuse me of abusing children and practicing unethical "conversion therapy." As I listened to them both, I immediately heard misunderstandings and wrong accusations, as well as wounds and hurts. My hope was to speak compassionately to these wounds and lies, as well as their legitimate concerns, rather than be defensive or angry. The young man, with much antagonism, shouted how his church had kicked him out when they discovered he was gay, and told me that "*all Christians can go to hell.*" This grieved me, and I immediately expressed how wrong it was for his church to treat him that way, and I asked him to forgive me on behalf of the Church. Although he did not verbalize his forgiveness, he clearly softened and listened in as the psychologist and I began to talk.

Initially, this psychologist, red in the face, began to accuse me of damaging kids by doing "conversion therapy" and forcing them to change. As I explained that we don't do either of those things, she demanded, "*Well then tell me what you do!*" My reply was simply that we help people grow closer to God and help them find peace in who God made them to be. I shared that we do not convert people, as we have no power to do that, but we do know The One who does. I also shared that we never force people to change, as that would be unloving as well as unethical. Her anger subsided, and a genuine interest to understand emerged. I saw the Lord's compassion that draws people to repentance in that moment.

It would have been a great conversation to continue, but two angry men with bull horns began to scream expletives into my ear about the church, and I literally could not hear. The San Diego police encouraged me to step out of the mob, and I did. Thankfully, the psychologist shook my hand, passed me her card, and asked to follow-up with me. What an opportunity to continue sharing God's truth and love! God showed up with those inside the conference as well as with the angry and hurting crowd outside. One of the testimonies shared this year was from a woman who was in San Diego's gay community five years ago, but is now surrendered to Christ! Like that testimony, my prayer is that one or more of this year's protesters will be proclaiming Christ in a future Restored Hope Conference.



Police and protesters outside the Hope 2017 Conference.

july - august calendar & services

july 3 & august 7 pf board meetings

The PF Board of Directors gathers to plan and pray over the ministry. 7-9 p.m.

july 14 & august 11 the hope group

For friends and family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones. Join us for a time of prayer, support, encouragement and a great meal. 6:30 p.m.

july 19-20 pf work days

Come help us love on this old house! We are looking for volunteers to help with practical maintenance needs on the PF property. If you enjoy cleaning, painting, weeding or minor home repairs, we would love your help! Lunch will be provided. 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

august 6 church presentation

PF Board Chair KathyGrace Duncan will be sharing her testimony at Faith Evangelical Free Church in Dallas, OR. 1:30 p.m.

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Stay connected for updates, prayer requests and inspirational resources. Like and follow our page at: www.facebook.com/portlandfellowship/

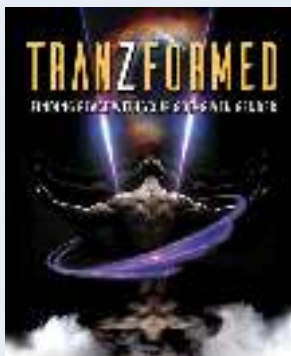
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speakers, counseling and support for youth

can be arranged through the office.

New Documentary: "TRANZFORMED"



This year's Hope 2017 Conference included the world premier of a brand-new documentary, "TRANZFORMED: Finding Peace With Your God-Given Gender." In this amazing new resource from director David Kyle Foster of Pure Passion TV, "fifteen ex-transgender

individuals join with numerous experts to dispel the confusion and bear witness to what Jesus Christ can do for those who struggle with gender dysphoria." Portland Fellowship's very own Board Chair KathyGrace Duncan shares her testimony in this video, along with Walt Heyer, Linda Seiler and many others. This is an excellent and timely resource for anyone looking for clarity, hope and encouragement concerning gender dysphoria and transgender issues. You can order your copy today at: <http://purepassion.us/web/>

TBG & URC: Accepting Applications Now

As we enjoy the summer months, we are also looking forward to our fall ministry season here at PF. If you or someone you know is interested in a deeper discipleship process in the area of same-sex attraction, please contact us! We are currently accepting applications for both our 2-year Taking Back Ground program and our 9-month Upper Room Community residential program. These are powerful programs that are changing lives! Here's what one participant, Del, had to say about TBG this past year:

"What a difference you are making in people's lives and what a blessing you are to many, many people, my wife and I among them...I learned more about God and life and love on Tuesday nights over the past two years than from any other experience in my life. God took something ugly and used it to His glory. What many women might have used for justification to leave their marriage actually brought us closer. Life is looking up! Thank you just seems horribly inadequate, but my appreciation and love for you and what you do in people's lives comes from the bottom of my heart."



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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