



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## Partnering in Prayer by George and Cathy Sesser

*This month, we are highlighting one of the lesser-known ministries here at PF, our Prayer Team. The following is an interview with George & Cathy Sesser, who have been on the Prayer Team for several years.*

**Portland Fellowship:** George & Cathy, we are so grateful for you guys and your faithful support of this ministry over the years. Could you share with us the story of how you first got involved here at PF?

**George & Cathy:** Of course! We first learned about Portland Fellowship about 7 years ago, when, as Joe Dallas says, "*Homosexuality Hit Home*." As parents, we were not prepared to help our loved one answer the questions that come with unwanted same-sex attraction. Through a friend, we heard that Sy Rogers was speaking at a conference in Portland. George was attending the funeral of a relative in the area, so he dropped me (Cathy) off at the conference. Portland Fellowship was sponsoring the event, and as Drew Berryessa explained the ministry, I knew this was the help God was sending us as an answer to our prayers.



*George and Cathy have been on the PF Prayer Team for over five years.*

**Portland Fellowship:** Tell us a little bit more about how you came to join our Prayer Team.

**George & Cathy:** After finding PF, we drove 5 hours each month to attend the Hope Group on Friday nights in order to find out all we could about the subject. We wanted to know how we could be a loving presence, not only in our family but in the life of our church as well, since we knew they were as ignorant as we were about SSA. At Hope Group, we would have dinner and connect with other families who were hurting. We also met men and women who were dedicated to following God in the midst of their SSA struggle. As they shared their stories with us and we began to understand SSA, we were burdened to pray for these brothers and sisters in Christ. Drew encouraged us to adopt an Upper Room intern to pray for, and after asking Cynthia to sign us up, our prayer link with PF began.

**PF:** That's so encouraging that you responded to Drew's challenge to pray for the URC participants. What has the experience of interceding for people struggling with SSA looked like in your life? How has it impacted your own walk with the Lord?

**G & C:** We feel it is a privilege to lift up the participants, staff and ministry at PF. The staff at PF comes as close as anyone we know to pouring out their lives as a drink offering on behalf of others in the body of Christ, as Paul says (*Phil. 2:17*). PF is a ministry that is teaching others to love God with all their heart, soul and mind, and their neighbor as themselves. The answer is the same for all of us, whatever our struggle is. For us, we needed to be disciplined in this area of spiritual growth. As we prayed for the TBG and Upper Room participants, God revealed areas in us where we needed to change our understanding of what it means to love God, ourselves and others. We realized that there could be people in the pews

next to us at church who are struggling deeply, and we wanted to be more open to loving people well and listening to their pain. God began to teach us how to be sensitive to people who have a struggle very different from our own, even when we don't understand it. We truly began to know a bigger God than we had ever known—His love is bigger than our limited perspective!

**PF:** Many Christians wonder if prayer is really effective, or if it actually changes anything. How have you seen God answer prayers or deliberately move in the lives of people here at Portland Fellowship?

**G & C:** There is something about praying for someone that endears them to you. A few years ago, we actually got to attend a PF retreat and become better acquainted with some of the people we were praying for. We saw for ourselves how God was doing a work of surrender in these young Christians. It was so powerful to witness men and women giving complete control to the Lord and asking Him to provide for them. The exciting thing is, we've seen and heard God answering those prayers! When we've prayed for God to provide for people financially, we've heard reports of them getting job interviews, and even new jobs. When we've prayed for restoration and healing for someone's family, we've seen God open the door for a redemptive conversation to begin. Many times, we don't see God responding to participants' requests in the ways that we'd expect, but it's exciting to see Him moving in His own way and time.

In addition to God answering prayers for people at PF, He also showed us the path of surrender we needed to take. We had been clinging to our own vision of what our church should look like, and we needed to surrender that to the Lord. After receiving prayer from one of the URC interns we had been praying for (how humbling!), we've since found an amazing church community where God continues to challenge and bless us tremendously. God answered *our* prayers!

**PF:** How has being on the Prayer Team impacted your relationship with your loved one?

**G & C:** Being on the prayer team has been so beneficial in knowing how to pray more specifically for our loved one. Sometimes we take the requests from PF participants and pray the same thing over our loved one, as well as others we know. Praying for men and women struggling with unwanted SSA has also really helped us empathize more with our loved one. As we've learned more about this struggle and heard stories of the pain people have been through, we've learned how to be more sensitive. We didn't realize before how

certain comments or jokes could be really hurtful to someone struggling with SSA, and it's definitely helped us be more respectful of our loved one and their feelings. Gaining a better understanding of SSA has also lessened our fear of it. As we've studied and learned more about this issue, it's helped us to have more peace about our loved one's journey,

instead of being afraid of relating with them or worrying about their future. Ultimately, praying for others has taught us that all of this is in God's hands.

While the SSA struggle presents some unique requests, many of the petitions we lift up on the Prayer Team are common to all of us: better relationships, healthy community, struggles against temptation, depression, etc. As Paul says, *"No temptation has seized you except as is common to man..."* (1 Cor. 10:13). The enemy seeks to make

us feel like we are worse off or different than others in our struggle, but Paul suggests that we all need help for our common temptations. We are all struggling against our flesh in one way or another. We all need a way out, and God is faithful! So yes, being on this team has definitely helped us learn more about SSA, ourselves and our loved one.

**PF:** How would you encourage someone who is contemplating joining the PF Prayer Team?

**G & C:** We love the passage where God says, *"If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land"* (2 Chr. 7:14). What a wonderful promise! God wants all of us to humble ourselves, pray, seek and turn. And Paul certainly admonishes us to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ everywhere. The Prayer Team is one way we can do that. We recognize that we are in a spiritual battle in our country, and God has called us like Gideon and the soldiers in the Battle with the Midianites to take our assigned place. We feel that praying for Portland Fellowship is our assignment, as we stand with many others awaiting the victory from the Lord (as Gideon experienced). If you feel called to support PF and stay connected, this is a great way to do that. Don't be afraid to answer God's invitation to communicate with Him and intercede for His people. It's an experience you won't regret!

With thanks and prayers,  
George and Cathy Sesser

*If you have been connected with Portland Fellowship for one year or more and would like to join the Prayer Team, you can sign up through the PF website, or call or email the PF office.*



## Life From Death by Patrick Silvis

With the arrival of spring and the changing of seasons, we also celebrate the new life Christ offers us through His resurrection from the grave and His victory over sin and death. Many of us spent the recent Easter holiday remembering what could be considered the core of our Christian faith, the fact that God miraculously brings life from death. As I was reading in John recently, I was struck by a story which precedes the resurrection of Jesus that also points us to this idea of God having a purpose in our suffering, of bringing life from death: the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Most of us know the basic story. Lazarus had two sisters, Mary and Martha, who informed Jesus that Lazarus was sick. Lazarus ends up dying, and when Jesus visits his tomb, He is moved by the people grieving for Lazarus. Jesus prays to God the Father and calls for Lazarus to come out. Lazarus emerges from his tomb, very much alive, to the shock and awe of everyone gathered there, and his resurrection causes many people to believe in Jesus. Though I've read this story many times before, upon further inspection, I was moved by some deeper truths that give us hope as we struggle towards sexual and relational wholeness here at Portland Fellowship.

First, the story of Lazarus' resurrection reminds us that God is sovereign over our suffering. We see with Lazarus, Jesus knew exactly what was going on. He heard about Lazarus' illness before Lazarus died (v. 3), and then He even informed His disciples that Lazarus had died, before any of them could've known (v. 14). Furthermore, Jesus was trusting in God's divine timing over the situation. When He heard of Lazarus falling ill, He didn't leave right away, but waited two days (v. 6). When He finally goes to Lazarus' tomb, Martha reaffirms her trust in Jesus' power, but she also points out that if Jesus had come earlier, her brother wouldn't have died (v. 32). How easy it is to sound like Martha! On the journey of surrendering our sexuality to The Lord, there are many times when it's tempting to question God's timing or His control over our circumstances. We blame Him for not meeting our relational or emotional needs fast enough, or we question Him not rescuing us from pain as soon as we'd like. Yet, when we read the story of Lazarus, it's obvious that God, in His sovereignty, was in control of Lazarus' life, illness, death, and ultimately his resurrection. Many of us here at PF have had to ask ourselves the hard question, *"Will I trust that God is sovereign over my pain and struggles, even if He doesn't deliver me from them when I expect Him to?"* As Martha and Lazarus show us, ultimately God's timing is best, and we can trust Him even when our circumstances seem bleak.

Another truth that this story reminds us of is that there's purpose in our suffering. God can bring good out of evil and life out of death. Jesus was very clear on why He waited to visit Lazarus until after he had died: *"This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it"* (v. 4). Jesus also states that part of the purpose behind Lazarus' suffering was for people to believe in Him (v. 15, 26, 40-42). And, as we see later, Lazarus' resurrection was such a powerful witness for Christ that the Jewish authorities actually began plotting to kill him as well as Jesus (John 12:9-11). How many people would never have heard the Gospel if Jesus hadn't raised Lazarus from the dead? Furthermore, would Jesus have been able to complete this miracle if Lazarus hadn't died? We must then ask ourselves, *"Am I willing to die to whatever Jesus is calling me to die to, that He may be glorified?"* Joe, one of our TBG leaders, was sharing with me recently some of his various trials, and how it would be easier if he knew what the purpose was in struggling through those specific circumstances. Isn't that true for most of us?! When we know that there is a purpose to laying down our idols, surrendering our sinful habits or walking away from false identities, it somehow makes the pain, or the "death" of those losses, a little bit more bearable. We must be willing to consider that God wants to use us to further His Kingdom in great ways, but that He may be waiting for us to die to ourselves first.

Finally, the beautiful part of Lazarus' resurrection is that it points us to Jesus' resurrection, where He defeated sin and death once and for all. This gives us hope! Many times when we surrender something to the Lord, we feel the sting and pain of the loss. For people struggling to find love, acceptance and security, it can feel like the end of the world to give up ways of meeting those needs, even if the methods are sinful. The pain is still very real. Yet, through Jesus' resurrection, we have hope that the pain of those losses won't last forever. Even better, Jesus doesn't leave us in the grave like Lazarus; He doesn't leave us to wallow in our pain or emptiness. He brings new life! We can trust that in His sovereign time, our pain will bear fruit for His purposes, and He will bring new life into areas of our hearts and minds that we thought could never flourish again. As Martha trusted that Jesus had the power to save her brother's life, and believed He could resurrect him (John 11:21-27), let us come before the Lord with trusting hearts and ask Him to complete His purposes in our pain and bring life to the dead parts of our hearts.





## may - june calendar & services

may 1 & june 5

### pf board meetings

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

may 6

### upper room filming

PF staff and volunteers will be filming new promotional video material for the Upper Room Community program.

may 12 & june 9

### 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.

may 30

### tbq & urc graduation

Our Upper Room Community will end their 9-month discipleship intensive, and our Taking Back Ground Year 2 participants will celebrate the completion of their 2-year discipleship program,

june 16-17

### restored hope conference

RHN's 2017 conference will be held in San Diego, California. Speakers include Joe Dallas, Janet Mefford, Ron Citlau and more.

Register at:

[www.restoredhopenetwork.org](http://www.restoredhopenetwork.org)

### additional updates

[www.portlandfellowship.com](http://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.

## Celebrating God's Presence by Jason Thompson

One of the greatest pleasures we experience is enjoying the presence of



God. As my pastor shares from time to time, "God is always present with us, but we are not always present with Him." It's a great reminder that we need to remove ourselves from the distractions and tasks we bury ourselves with and make intentional time with our Lord. Jesus set the example by leaving the multitudes to go to a private place to spend time with His Father, and that is precisely what we need to do as well.

Our Upper Room Community participants have a personal retreat built into their program experience. Each participant goes to a private retreat hut in a secluded location, packing minimal food, a Bible and a heart to hear from the Lord. Each person has their own unique summary of their personal retreat time, but the commonality with them all is that the Lord is honored and participants are blessed.

Each participant of the Taking Back Ground program has their opportunity to get away as well, though not on a personal retreat. This happens in the context of both personal times with the Lord and community with one another. This year, we went to Camp Tadmor, a beautiful camp with over 200 acres of forested timberland, located in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. Every year, the weekend includes time in God's word, worship, corporate prayer, group activities and an evening of powerful surrender. We conclude the retreat with a morning of encouragement, blessing and communion.

We return from the weekend refreshed and free as we leave behind lies believed, fears of never having meaningful relationships, doubt in God's goodness and character, vile images that have kept some in bondage, grumblings of the healing process and contempt for the Lord. Instead, we return with hope and joy that God has met with us, ministered to us and reminded us of His goodness, His mercies and His grace. We are so grateful for your prayer support for these retreats!



**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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