



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## A Compass In Christ's Hands by CJ McConnell

*It seems that all throughout my life, I've struggled to keep a clear focus on the path ahead of me. Even if I had a goal in my head, I would soon fall off the path towards that goal and become lost. It would appear that I strayed from the path toward masculinity and sexual wholeness as well. My inner compass seemed broken.*

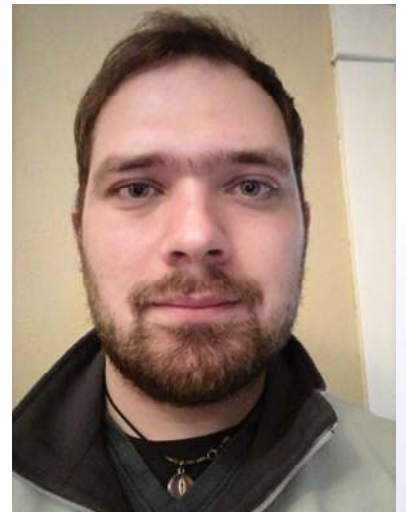
Growing up, I was always different from other boys. I had no interest in sports or competition; I enjoyed art and music and I may have played with Barbies. I didn't connect very well with other boys and felt I related much better with girls. I got teased and called names like "sissy" or "girly", and those tended to stick with me.

Around the age of ten, I made a friend that I really admired. He was masculine, confident and popular, and yet still respected me for my interests. Desiring his qualities in myself, I really wanted to be like him. I would take every opportunity to hang out with him and try to emulate him. As I grew older and puberty came about, desiring to be like him turned into desire for him. These feelings were new and strange to me, but I knew that I couldn't act upon them. It seemed my broken compass was leading me astray.

I was raised in a Christian home and grew up knowing of Jesus and His love for me. I was taught the Word and went to Sunday school every week. At the age of twelve, I dedicated my life to Christ and was baptized. With all this in my head and heart, I knew what I felt towards my friend was wrong and unacceptable. Yet, in spite of this, I would continue to struggle.

I had these unwanted feelings, but I didn't have an outlet for them, until I discovered pornography when I was about fourteen years old. I was too ashamed of my feelings to act out on them openly, so I turned to satisfying them in secret. Behind closed doors, I would spend hours looking at racy images, ready to close the browser and hide my activity if I heard someone approaching. I knew in my head and my heart that what I was doing was wrong, but I was too deep into my habit and too ashamed to seek help. I prayed to God nightly to remove the burden of these feelings from me or help me come forward to my parents. I wanted desperately to tell my parents of my struggle, but fear constantly held me back.

My SSA struggle wouldn't become known until I was eighteen. One night, while house-sitting for a couple from my church, I used their personal computer to look at pornography. Normally, I would have covered my tracks by deleting my browsing history, but I didn't that time. The husband discovered my deeds and informed my dad, who confronted me about it. I came clean to him and eventually also to my mom. They were disappointed, to be sure, but ultimately their response was one of love and deep concern.



CJ is a graduate of Taking Back Ground and is a part of the 2017-18 Upper Room Community.

With my secret revealed to my parents, some of the weight had been lifted from me. My parents started seeking out Christian ministries that dealt with homosexuality in order to help me. They first found Exodus International and its newsletter, which contained hopeful stories of lives healed of homosexual desires. Through this, we eventually came across Portland Fellowship. Living in Washington, it wasn't quite feasible at the time to participate in Taking Back Ground, but I started their online youth program, Reach Truth.



At this point, my friend had fallen for a girl who would one day be his wife. Even though I still had feelings for him, I felt no resentment towards his new love and hoped the best for them. He began to have less and less time for me, until eventually they moved out of state to begin a new life together. I felt partly relieved that the source of my temptation had moved out of reach, but my unresolved feelings also left me feeling empty.

I sought fulfillment in other relationships that came into my life, like one girl that I met in choir at community college. We had similar interests and she had a bubbly, fun personality. Along with her, I found a group of friends who appreciated my more artistic and musical interests. We spent lots of time playing card games, watching movies and generally hanging out. I eventually even shared my struggle with my friend, which she seemed to accept. However, she eventually moved away, and even though we put in an effort to stay in touch and form a relationship, things eventually fell apart and we fell out of contact.

After graduating with an Associate's Degree, my parents thought it would be a good idea for me to move down to Portland to participate in TBG. Hoping for change and wholeness, I went along with their plan, but with the idea coming more from them than from me, it felt like I had little agency in my own life. The day I moved to Portland, my cousin Stephanie died suddenly and unexpectedly. We had lived next to each other for several years. She was almost like my sister, and was one of my closest and dearest friends. Her death shocked me and left me feeling more lost than ever.

Luckily, I found an outlet for my grief as I started to participate in my small group at Portland Fellowship. It

felt good to share my struggles and feelings in a safe environment with guys who had similar experiences. Working through TBG, I delved into the aspects of my past that brought about my brokenness, unearthed the lies I believed about myself and worked towards discovering the truth that God had for me. Yet, hearing others share their struggles and comparing their stories against my own life made my troubles seem absolutely trivial. I often considered my problems as unimportant and secondary to those of others.

At the end of TBG, I felt I had made some progress towards wholeness, though I still had struggles to face. However, it wasn't financially feasible for me to advance to the Upper Room Community, so I returned home to Washington. One of the struggles I continued to face was the depression brought about from the loss of my cousin. Though I settled into a new job, church and apartment, a vague emptiness seemed to stick with me wherever I went. I did, however, find a girl with whom I connected strongly and would go on to start a growing relationship. Even though she filled a large part of the emptiness, my depression took a bad dip last June that eventually cost me my job and my apartment.

I ended up having to move back in with my parents, which was a huge blow to my sense of maturity and growth. Over the summer, I struggled to find another job, but I had a hopeless outlook that hampered a lot of my effort. Eventually, I ended up at a job I once held back in Portland. Shortly after that, my parents suggested I return to Portland Fellowship to join the Upper Room Community. My dad had just gotten a raise at work that covered the cost of the program almost perfectly. It seemed that God was detaching me from my life in Washington for a smooth transition back to Portland Fellowship.

Now, being in the Upper Room Community, surrounded by people who know and have shared my struggle, my compass is leading me back on track. I'm making progress in coming to spiritual wholeness, overcoming my depression and filling my days with purpose and meaning. There's also still hope for a relationship and a future with the girl back home. I'm still not quite sure where my compass will lead me, but I know that it's Christ who's holding it and guiding me each step along the way.

## Reach Truth: Revising a Valuable Resource by Jason Thompson

Last month, I shared some of our top objectives for Portland Fellowship this year. Strangely, the second objective was completely omitted from the update. I'm not sure how that happened, but thankfully, we have this month to share not only that objective, but also the significant progress already made on the project.

The second objective we planned for this year was to renovate our online program for youth, Reach Truth. Reachtruth.com was our first online program, developed over fifteen years ago. It was cutting edge at the time, but today the site not only needs material refreshing, it also needs programming revamping to become youth and mobile friendly. Our desired outcome is that youth who are questioning their sexuality would find instruction, encouragement and hope in Christ through a site that communicates God's intended purpose for their lives.



I cannot adequately express how crucial it is to have a resource like this. Doing a quick search on the internet, one can find thousands of support options for LGBTQ-identified youth from every corner of our society, including pro-gay support from schools, counselors, communities, government and churches. For youth who are proud to be identified by their sexuality, the support is both abundant and readily available. But for those who experience a genuine conflict between their faith and their sexual desires, the resources are extremely limited.

Much like CJ shared in his testimony, “*A Compass in Christ’s Hands*”, I, too, at a young age, was desperate for Biblical and redemptive answers to my unwanted and deeply distressing desires, but never found anything specifically designed for youth. For this reason, I became passionate

about creating Reach Truth as a redemptive message to counter the prevailing worldly messages. Over the years, hundreds of people have utilized this site. Here is some of the feedback we’ve received along the way:

*“Hey, I just wanted to say this program is really awesome! I looked for something like this for months while I was in the middle of my darkest struggles and never once came across Reach Truth. I think it would be great if you got your name out there a little more so more people could find this resource and make use of it! God is doing a great work through you guys!” – Kyle*

*“This online study was extremely helpful. The topics that were covered, the questions, videos, and feedback were put together totally with the direction of God. I realized many times through the studies that things that I thought were ‘normal’ in my life, really turned out to be a struggle that I needed to deal with. There were many times at the beginning that I really didn’t want to go to the next study, but the ‘Commitment’ topic kept me going. I am glad I stuck this through; there were days that I didn’t think I could. My mentor helped me keep going as well. So thank you again, I am going to keep going with choosing my next study on ‘Taking Back Ground’.” – Amy*

*“I just thought I would send a note of gratitude so far for the changes and support that this program has brought to my life and really think you all have blessed me an incredible amount in the past months. I was ready to walk away from God and the church forever when I found it and am so plugged into friends and family and God through being honest and walking life with others for the first time!! Thank you!!” – Tim*

I am especially grateful for you, our supporters; the Juan Young Trust, for awarding a resource development grant for Reach Truth; and for Les Fenison at [www.deltatechnicalservices.com](http://www.deltatechnicalservices.com), for his many hours of programming and personal attention to this project. Because of all this support, Reach Truth is made completely free of charge to all youth who desire to go through it. Please check out [www.reachtruth.com](http://www.reachtruth.com) and share it with your church, family and community. By doing so, you can dramatically change the life of someone for the Kingdom of God.



## march - april calendar & services

march 3

### fasting and prayer

Join our Hope Group participants in fasting and praying for their loved ones to embrace the truth and love of Christ.

march 9 & april 13

### 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.

march 9-11

### tbg retreat

Taking Back Ground participants gather for a powerful weekend of worship, fellowship and surrender.

april 27-28

### church tbg training

Jason and KathyGrace will be training pastors and leaders in Golden Hills Community Church in Brentwood, CA, on how to run the Taking Back Ground program. They will also help leaders learn how to effectively communicate a redemptive message of hope and transformation.

### follow us on facebook!

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

### 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 set up through the office.

## Partner With Us In Prayer

This spring, please join our Hope Group participants as they intercede for their loved ones. You can join us in praying:

- For the Lord to minister to and sustain Hope Group participants as they fast and pray for their family and friends on Saturday March 3rd.
- For the scales to fall from our loved ones' eyes, and that their hearts would be open to the truth of God's Word about their sin and brokenness.

You can also intercede for PF Staff, leaders, the Upper Room Community and Taking Back Ground participants as they experience the TBG Retreat, March 9-11. Please pray:

- For God to encourage and prepare the TBG participants for whatever He wants to do in them during the TBG Retreat.
- For PF Staff and leaders to stay in step with the Holy Spirit and listen to His voice as they fellowship and encourage participants.
- For Jesus to break down and destroy the idols, false identities and strongholds that participants have been holding onto.

Finally, please be in prayer for Jason and KathyGrace as they train pastors and leaders in Brentwood, CA. You can pray:

- For wisdom and the right words for Jason and KathyGrace to encourage and educate the pastors and leaders, who are hungry to grow in the truth.
- For the hearts and minds of the pastors and leaders of Golden Hills Community Church, that they would be open and receptive to grow in how they communicate the redemptive message of Christ to those struggling with sexual brokenness.



**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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