



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

May / June volume 22 number 3

## I am a Child of God by Surina Nash

*"It's okay. You're a child of the devil." These words were followed by "I'm a Christian." This was my first introduction to Christianity.*

The young man who spoke these words over me was not an enemy or a stranger; he was my friend, Greg. We rode the bus and walked to school together. We were finishing our senior year. One day, Greg handed me a folded-up paper and asked me to read it when I got home. It was (what I now know as) his testimony. In it, he shared details of his sexual experiences with his male best friend and the shame they both felt afterwards. The letter finished with something about a god.

When I met with Greg the next day, he asked my thoughts about his letter. I thanked him for trusting me enough to share it, and he then asked if it spoke anything to me. Bewildered, I answered "no." He proceeded to stare at me as if waiting for me to say something more, and when I didn't, he smugly determined that I was indeed "a child of the devil". This young man, who had never spoken an unkind word to me, had just associated me with the creator of evil.

Not understanding what he was trying to communicate, or what his motives were, I countered his accusation with a question: "What are you?" Having been primarily raised by a Catholic mother and an atheist father, I understood that some form of religion was at play. Greg shared that he attended a church that followed the teachings of Jesus Christ; he was a "Christian". I told him that I was aware of who the devil was, but I had never met a Christian before, and after that day, I never wanted to associate with one again. I then ordered him to stay away from me, and he did. I never saw him at graduation.

Several years later, when I met Jesus and accepted Him as my Savior, I came to understand that Greg (with his limited understanding of Christianity) had been trying to "save me". When I didn't give him the answer he was expecting, he concluded that I must have been of the devil. What Greg didn't know was that his accusation wasn't just hurtful, but seemingly confirmed all that I had been taught about myself. What he saw as a shameful act, I saw as an unchangeable part of my DNA. As much as I wanted to have nonsexual platonic relationships with females, I didn't know how. So, to be called a "child of the devil" was nothing new.

Growing up, I was always told that I was worthless, and I believed it. As a baby, I was abandoned and found at a farmer's market. I was adopted by a couple that eventually divorced, and during a parental visitation to my mother, I was stolen from my father and never returned to the only home



Surina is a graduate of PF's Taking Back Ground program.

I knew. At seven years old, I was given a new name, father, brother, language and culture—everything that I first learned about my life and my identity was eliminated. The process to assimilate me was very swift and harsh. At fourteen, I left home. At sixteen, I was on my own. Thankfully, at twenty-one, I met a man who put his Bible into my hands and introduced me to Jesus Christ.

When Jesus met me, I was a wreck. To the outside world I was doing very well for myself, but on the inside, my heart always ached. No matter how much good I accomplished, at the end of the day I was a suicidal mess. I was very angry at God for the life I had received—a life riddled with extreme abuse. Abuse that I was made to believe I deserved. I couldn't understand the purpose of me being alive, and I always felt alone, even in crowds. Existing was excruciating, and I often prayed for death.

It took seven years for me to finally ingest the Gospel of Jesus enough to allow Him to begin piecing together my tattered life. The beginning process was extremely painful, and I cried many angry tears. As I continued to press forward in my journey, I grew stronger. Eventually, I had to learn the process of surrender and obedience, and with each painful step of faith I took, God faithfully met me. One of those steps was to finally marry the man who introduced me to Him. That step of faith blessed my life and our two children. We were a family.

In October of 2011, Jesus brought me to a place in our relationship where He wanted to begin excavating the area of my life that dealt with my same-sex attraction (SSA) because it was ruining my marriage, and it was the area He was calling me to work in. The following day, I contacted my pastor for counsel, and he asked me why I believed that I was being called to that ministry. I told him that the only possible reason was because my birth mother was a lesbian. I was lying by omission—to avoid judgement, I downplayed my own SSA struggle as a side effect of having a lesbian mother. I didn't tell him that I had already tried to find help for myself, but was unsuccessful. My pastor wasn't able to direct me to any tangible resources, but advised me to pray for direction. Within

a few months, our family was led to attend my husband's old church. We didn't understand why, but we obeyed.

After two years at our new church, I had completely forgotten that Jesus wanted to clean out the SSA part of my life, and it took me being agitated with my new pastor to be reminded of my calling. In May of 2014, I had to finally confess my SSA struggle and own it as my own sin, not hinged on my mother or any of my five parents' choices. My past could no longer be used as an excuse to sin, especially as a professing follower of Jesus Christ. This time when I contacted my pastors for help, I was pointed towards Portland Fellowship (PF), which literally saved my life and my marriage. I was no longer walking alone in my struggle, and I was finally able to understand the deep, unconditional love of Jesus for me.



Before I signed up for the Taking Back Ground (TBG) discipleship course at PF, I told my pastor that I was going to complete TBG, and then return to our church to

make sure other SSA strugglers within our community never walked alone or were sent to random groups that didn't meet our specific needs. I wanted SSA strugglers to know that Jesus came for them too—that He wants to walk with them, teach them who they are in Him and show them that they do fit into His kingdom and into His Body of believers.

After completing my two years of TBG, my pastors eventually gave me the opportunity to start ministering to our church SSA community. The beauty of this journey was that God had set everything up, including all my resources. My only job was to be available for His kids by listening to them, sharing my story (if needed) and then pointing them towards tangible resources like PF.

It is my heart that SSA strugglers never have to walk alone within the Church Body or be made to feel like they don't fit into God's Kingdom. SSA strugglers are an asset to Him, and, like me, He has a great purpose for our lives, because we are His children.

## Troubling California Bill by Jason Thompson

Redemptive ministries like Portland Fellowship have continuously been a target for those who do not know the Lord or believe God's word regarding faith, identity and sexuality. Since the late seventies, the animosity toward ministries who help believers find their true identity in Christ has only intensified. When Exodus International shut down, there was not only enthusiastic applause throughout social media and the gay community, there was also an emboldened effort to continue the process of ending any and all support for those wanting freedom from unwanted same-sex attractions. And the truth is, these opponents of redemptive ministries will not be satisfied until all efforts to uphold God's truth about human sexuality are eliminated.

In the past few years, several states have already outlawed what is called "Reparative Therapy" for minors (New Jersey, California, and Oregon are among a few). And although those laws do not directly affect Portland Fellowship, as we do not practice Reparative/Conversion Therapy, we discerned this would be a slippery slope in the effort to shut down redemptive ministries.

Sure enough, the reality of that slippery slope is upon us. At the time of this writing, legislators in the California senate are close to passing a bill (AB2943) that would make it illegal for anyone to charge money in exchange for offering assistance in overcoming unwanted same-sex desires and/or gender confusion. This applies to not only minors, but anyone of any age. Moreover, this does not just include professional therapists, but also any organization, individual or church that even appears to help someone seek to change their behavior, or promote freedom from gender and sexual confusion.

What does this mean on a practical level? If a married man with three children and a wife he loves seeks support to deal with his unwanted same-sex desires (through either professional counseling or a church ministry), he would not be able to find that help legally. In essence, the state of California is forcing people to remain broken and confused, rather than respecting their freedom to follow their personal convictions, uncover the roots of their confusion and experience genuine hope and freedom found in Jesus.

Dr. Michael Brown writes in an article, *"This (bill) would apply to a 14-year-old girl who was raped by her uncle at the age of 8 and now feels repulsion towards men and attraction towards women. If her parents stood with her and she wanted to meet with a trained counselor to help to get to the root of her attractions, in some states, that would be illegal. No professional counselor or therapist or psychologist would be allowed to help her."*

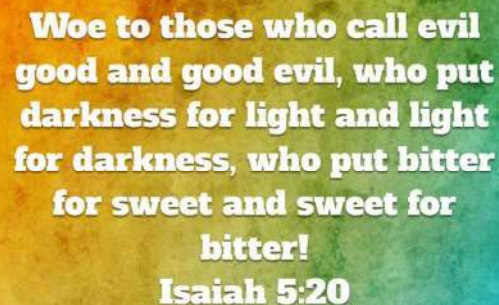
*Yet in these same states, if an 8-year-old girl believed she was really a boy and wanted to receive professional help to affirm a male identity, that would be perfectly legal. A counselor could tell her parents to encourage her to dress and identify as a boy. That counselor could also recommend that, at age 10, she start taking hormone blockers, then prepare to "transition" fully to male at age 16, then have sex-change surgery at 18, with hormones prescribed for life.*

*That would be perfectly legal. But for that same 8-year-old girl to say, "I want to be at home in the body God gave me. I don't want hormones and surgery. Can anyone help me?" The answer would be, "No. Such help is illegal."*

If this bill passes, California will only be the beginning. These are troubling times. This continues to be evidence of the end times as Isaiah 5:20 forewarns us, *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."*

Please be in prayer for God's will to be done. Also, pray for endurance and wisdom for everyone assisting those who struggle and those who are seeking help. Thank you for standing with us!

For more information on this bill visit: [www.californiafamily.org](http://www.californiafamily.org) and search **2943**



**Woe to those who call evil  
good and good evil, who put  
darkness for light and light  
for darkness, who put bitter  
for sweet and sweet for  
bitter!  
Isaiah 5:20**

## may - june calendar & services

### may 11 & june 8 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 22 tbg graduation

Second-year Taking Back Ground participants will complete their discipleship program and celebrate with leaders, friends and family.

### may 24 upper room celebration

PF leaders and mentors celebrate 2017-18 URC graduates Noel, Samuel and CJ.

### june 15-16 rhn hope2018 conference

Restored Hope Network's Hope2018 conference will take place on June 15-16 in Washington, D.C. Keynote speakers include Debora Barr, Julie Stern Roys and Dr. Michael Brown. There will also be multiple breakout sessions, worship and fellowship. For more info and registration: [www.restoredhopenetwork.org](http://www.restoredhopenetwork.org).

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### speakers, counseling and support for youth

can be set up through the office.

## Celebrating the Upper Room Community

Nine months ago, three brave souls entered the intensive discipleship and intentional community that the Upper Room offers. Noel, Samuel and CJ all came in with different levels of experience and understanding of their struggles, but all had a hunger for the Lord and a desire to learn more.

Many people have asked, "Just what exactly do they do in the Upper Room Community?" This year, Noel, Samuel and CJ lived in intentional community at the PF house. This included sharing common areas of the house, working together to keep the ministry areas clean and ready for group use, and taking intentional time to get to know one another through group activities and outings. These three participants also dove into intensive discipleship each week with Jason and Patrick, where they shared their life stories with each other, processed the wounds and deficits they experienced and studied how those contributed to their struggles. They also learned how



God wants to heal and redeem their specific woundings and mature them in their identity in Christ. Finally, they discussed practical (and sometimes difficult) topics like same-sex/opposite-sex relating, emotional health and relapse prevention. Additionally, each participant worked one-on-one with a mentor each week throughout the program year.

Though it can be intense at times, we are thankful for the Lord's work in Noel, Samuel and CJ in the URC, and we pray His blessings on their lives in the months and years to come! As we look forward, we're currently accepting applications for the 2018-19 URC program. For anyone interested in applying, go to: [www.portlandfellowship.com/upper\\_room.php](http://www.portlandfellowship.com/upper_room.php)



**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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