



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Reclaiming My Identity by Brandon Foote

"I can't trust anyone or anything." This core belief is the main issue that has caused me to act out over the years and head in the direction I did. Even before puberty, I remember having a deep feeling of mistrust toward people.

I first felt abandoned around four years old, when my dad left the house. After he left, I remember making very specific vows: "I can't trust mom to take care of me, because my step dad is abusive. I can't trust dad, because he left me. I can't trust God, because He wasn't there for me when my abuse and abandonment began." This is when I became a self-preserver. I believed, "I have to take care of myself at all costs, because the people who are supposed to take care of me failed me."

Around puberty, at the age of thirteen, I had a critical need for a male role model in my life. My dad had left, and my step-dad abused me. There was a man who didn't hurt me—in fact he was kinder and nicer than the other men in my life. However, this man became my molester. I felt like this was what real love was—it was better than the absent or abusive attention I had gotten from my other male role models. Still, I also became confused when other people found out and told me that he was sick and should be in prison for what he did to me.

While I experienced lots of pain and abuse, through my healing journey I've had to take responsibility for the choices I've made myself. I was the victim of abuse, yes, but I don't want to continue being a victim—*playing the victim doesn't heal me*. Through therapy and healing, I've forgiven every single person that wounded and hurt me. For example, when I was seventeen, I found out the name and number of a babysitter that tried to sexually assault me; he had been a teenager when I was five. I called him on the phone and forgave him for what he tried to do to me. He had previously denied what he did to me, but when I called him, he was dumbfounded. He told me he had been terribly guilt-ridden, and he took full ownership of his actions. I found out he had been in therapy himself and was seeking a relationship with the Lord. At this time, I was struggling with my identity, and I figured something had happened to this guy as well, so I had compassion on him. Instead of being trapped in victim-mode, forgiving my abusers has allowed me to experience God's peace and freedom.



Brandon is an alumnus of PF's Taking Back Ground program.

I've been a part of many different healing groups, programs and counseling over the years. Some have given me unhelpful advice; others, like my pastor and PF's director, Jason Thompson, have encouraged me with great advice: *"Be holy and grow closer to the Lord. Don't focus so much on the side effects of sin, but be intentional about removing the things that hinder you from pursuing God. Renew your mind with The Word."*

As I've grown and applied these principles, something clicked—I realized that if satan can get you to forget your identity, you won't trust God or pursue Him, and you won't experience the fullness that comes from living out of your true identity. I discovered that while I had forgiven my abusers, I was still agreeing with and living out of an orphan spirit—I was stuck in being alone and feeling sorry for myself, when in reality God was with me the whole time.

It's been said that "hurt people hurt people", and this was true in my life. I would sabotage every relationship that was going well (employer, friend, romantic, etc.). I believed that at some point they would abandon or abuse me (the orphan spirit mentality), and as a self-preserver, I had to be in control and make sure they didn't get close enough to hurt me. If they got too close, I would sabotage the relationship to keep myself safe.

In 2015, I realized I didn't trust God, and when I confessed that and chose to trust Him, things began to change. I broke free from the self-preserver mentality. In the last few years, I've decided to press into the Lord as a worship leader, as a father and as a husband, and to make deep and meaningful relationships with people in my life. This hasn't been easy—I began to notice that when people would leave my life, I felt the pain and rejection really intensely. There is a song that says, "The owner of a lonely heart is better than the owner of a broken heart", and I used to believe that. I would take care of myself by trying not to feel pain. In surrendering my self-preserver mentality, however, I'm seeing the fruit and benefit of relational intimacy. Now I'm not afraid of feeling rejected,

because I know intimacy is worth it. I'm learning that it's good to feel emotions—and it's ok to cry! I want to face my emotions head-on, especially as an example for my son, who's twelve, and my daughter, who's eleven. My kids are watching me and modeling after me, and I want them to know that a real man feels and doesn't run away from his emotions.

Today, the Lord continues to challenge me to press into intimacy with my wife. I'm learning that true intimacy isn't just sex—it's sharing your dreams, your emotions and your struggles with your spouse. In our marriage, both of us have been afraid the other person would hurt us, and so we've had our walls up. Still, we are pressing into deeper intimacy together, trusting that *"God will be faithful to finish what he started"* (Phil. 1:6).



About three years ago, I was very tempted to explore the carrot dangled in front of me by the "Gay Christian" movement—the idea that I could embrace and act on my same-sex attractions *and* have a right relationship with God. This "it's ok to give in and give up" mentality was tempting for a moment, but I realized it's not worth it—I'd have to give up my wife, my kids, my church and my relationship with God. Ironically, I'm now more terrified of me walking away from God than

Him walking away from me—a complete reversal of my old fears of being abandoned!

God continues to call me to trust Him more and more, and to believe in who He says I am. I am worth God's love because Jesus died for me and calls me worthy. Why would God abandon me if I was worth dying for? I don't understand it, but I choose to trust him. My identity isn't in what I can do, how thin I am, if I'm losing hair or not, who I love or who I'm with—first and foremost, I am His son, whom He loves, and I'm learning to live out of that. When you know who you are in Christ, you know there are certain things you do and some that you don't, and there's a peace that comes with that. I'm so grateful that God continues transforming our family and helping me love my wife and kids as God loves me.

Program Update: Upper Room Community 2018 - 2019

Meet Jesse, our most recent addition to this year's Upper Room Community! Please be praying for his intensive discipleship year and for the rest of the community members as they continue their process here at PF.



Jesse Merkel

I recently moved back to Portland from Las Vegas, Nevada. Several years ago, I went through the two years of Taking Back Ground and a year of Living Waters. I was raised in a Christian family and accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. In high school, I began to feel the Lord call me to full-time youth ministry, so I went to study Bible/Theology and Youth Ministry in college.

From a very early age, I had developed unwanted same-sex attractions. Over time, I embraced an attitude of denial—if I didn't think about this ugly reality of life, it wasn't there. When I came to Portland Fellowship a few years back, however, I was finally ready to admit that I needed help, but I didn't quite grasp the goal of the transformational process. My goals for this year are to let God transform my heart, to embrace authentic community and accountability, and to continue living in purity. Now, I know that the only true, real change comes from God changing my heart. It is one thing to know this, but it's another thing to truly believe and trust that change can happen, and to allow God to change me. I am excited and hopeful as I press deeper into the Lord and the transformation I know He has for me.

New Resource: **CHANGED Book** by Patrick Silvis

We are excited to share with you an encouraging new resource, *CHANGED: #ONCEGAY STORIES*. Published by Equipped to Love (a ministry in Redding, CA), this book is a collection of stories from almost forty different men and women who have left homosexuality and experienced God's radical transformation. Portland Fellowship's Women's Ministry Leader, KathyGrace Duncan, has her testimony published in the book, as does Drew Berryessa (former PF Assistant Director, now Director of A Living Letter Ministries).

Written as a response to California Assembly Bill 2943 (which proposes outlawing the advertisement and sale of resources for people struggling against unwanted homosexuality and/or gender confusion), *CHANGED* was published



to be given directly to California Senators and leaders. A team of its contributors personally delivered copies to each senator on June 11th. Then, on the morning of June 12th, the team gathered together on the California Capitol steps for two and a half hours to share their stories publicly.

To learn more, please visit <https://www.oncegay.com/changed-book>. There, you can order your copy of *CHANGED: #ONCEGAY STORIES*. You can also order the T-shirt, share your own testimony, watch the Facebook Live video feed from the California Capitol on June 12th, and connect with the #ONCEGAY movement on social media.

september - october calendar & services

tuesdays in september leadership training

Volunteer leaders for PF's Taking Back Ground program gather to learn and grow together in preparation for the upcoming TBG program year.
7-8:30 p.m.

tuesdays in october taking back ground

PF's intensive discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction. Group for wives and fiancées also.
7-9:30 p.m.

thursdays in september/october upper room community

Participants in PF's live-in discipleship and intentional community program meet for teaching discussion, prayer and encouragement.
12:30-3:30 p.m.

september 14 & october 12 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.

follow us on facebook!

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

additional updates

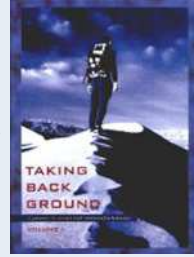
www.portlandfellowship.com
Please take advantage of your online profile. If you don't have a username, please email or call.

speakers, counseling and support for youth

can be set up through the office.

Fall Program Applications

We are currently accepting applications for both our Taking Back Ground and Upper Room Community discipleship programs. Taking Back Ground is for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction, and also includes a group for wives/fiancées. The Upper Room is a 9-month live-in program for strugglers seeking deeper community and spiritual growth. To apply, please contact the office or check out www.portlandfellowship.com.



Project Update: Side Lot Patio

We are making progress on the side lot patio project here at the Portland Fellowship house! We have been busy excavating dirt, jackhammering the old asphalt and constructing the retaining walls that will enclose the patio area. Next up will be finishing the side staircase off the main porch, making all the cuts for the wall stone caps, laying the stone pavers and building several fences to close off the area from the general public.



Please continue praying for the Lord's hand on this project! We are hoping and praying it will be a beautiful space that we can use to bless many people in the future.



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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