



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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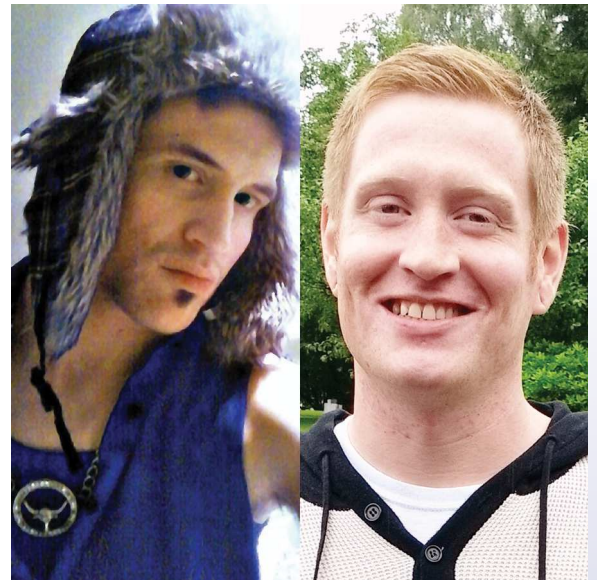
Darkness to Light by David Schnoor

I was born in Portland, Oregon, on June 25, 1982. My parents met at church, and when I was a baby, they dedicated my life to Jesus. My parents divorced when I was very young, and my mom raised my sister and me as a single mom. Our dad would pick us up every other weekend, and we went to church, which I loved. However, my faith in Jesus would eventually slip away.

I experienced sexual abuse at a young age by a babysitter's friend, and again as a young teen by a neighbor. At thirteen, I started using drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with life. I also found myself struggling with same-sex attraction. I remember praying that God would make me "straight", but nothing changed. The problem was that I feared man and not God. I was concerned more with what people would think if they found out about my struggle than with what a Holy God says about it. Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe." So instead of deliverance, I was ensnared by the hands of Satan. Through adolescence, the attraction to my peers got stronger, to the point of acting out on my desires. By the time I was nineteen, I had completely stopped believing in Jesus, and felt I couldn't live a lie anymore, so I came out as gay. I quickly found acceptance in Portland's gay community, and discovered what I thought I had always been looking for. My sexuality became my identity.

At twenty-two, I moved to San Diego and was amazed at how vibrant the gay community was. Shallowness, materialism, status, drunkenness and carnality were the norm. I started working at a couple of gay bars, and my life of drinking and drugs escalated. The more entrenched I became in the gay culture, the more I was deceived that what I was doing and how I was living was right. I remember being at gay pride events and seeing Christians condemning us with Scripture and hell fire. I didn't see the love of Christ, so all they did was make me angry; there were times when I would mock street preachers and even get hostile toward them.

Crystal meth ran rampant in the San Diego gay community, along with promiscuity, and it wasn't long before I was addicted to both. At this point, Satan had a grip on every area of my life. I eventually became such a mess that I could no longer hold a job, so I resorted to selling my body to support my drug habit. I would hotel hop and couch surf, staying at different places, without a permanent residence. This went on for several years, and by 2012, the lifestyle caught up with me, and I became HIV positive. I remember lying in bed just balling my eyes out, feeling my life was totally over and fearing the unknown of death and eternity. To make matters worse, after hearing



David living in brokenness (left) and after finding freedom in Christ (right).

my diagnosis, the “guy friend” who I was staying with kicked me out. Immediately I was out on the streets, truly understanding what it meant to be homeless.

I told myself I would never shoot anything up, but once I gave in, I was hooked! Shooting meth and being homeless meant I lived in survival mode. I started dumpster diving and collecting cans for money. I was miserable and had no idea how to break out of the prison I was in. As Proverbs 4:19 says, *“The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.”*

One day in 2015, as I was out collecting cans, I had a moment of clarity. It hit me all at once that I was a junky, sick, lost, hopeless and homeless. For the first time in my life, I cried out to God: “If you’re real, I can’t just hope—I need to know. And if you’re real, save me from this life!” That prayer came from the deepest part of my heart, but I definitely didn’t expect to hear back from God. That day, I was wearing a hat that a friend had given to me, a hat I had been wearing every day for a few months. God had kept me from seeing what the hat actually said, but immediately after crying out to Him, I took off my hat and read for the first time the word “SAVED” written on it. And upside down, I saw that my hat said “JESUS” on it. The timing of reading my hat after that prayer was crazy!



A couple days later, I was hanging outside a store with nowhere to go, and a young man opened up his home to me. At his place, he told me that earlier that day God had told him to go outside, and that when he first saw me at the store, he saw Jesus with me. I was in shock—I didn’t see Jesus, but I believed this man’s sincerity. When he started praying for me, I felt the love, peace and power of God flow through me like a tsunami, stronger and more real than anything I had ever felt. Jesus made it undeniably clear that He was real, that He heard my prayer, and that He had a better plan for my life. For the first time in many years, some light entered my heart, and it started softening. In John 8:12, Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of eternal life.”*

In May of 2016 I moved back to Oregon. I entered a year-long discipleship program called Freedom House. I got a solid foundation of Truth, and it’s where I

learned to live a surrendered life. Watching porn, acting out, drinking, gambling and doing drugs all came to a halt. The Holy Spirit began to empower me to think differently, helping me to cast down immoral thoughts that are not in agreement with God’s will.

Still, I had no idea a place like Portland Fellowship existed. It was my last week in the FH program that I prayed for a divine appointment on our way to a church service. During the meet and greet time, a guy came over to me and started talking about his past struggles with SSA, and how he went through PF and found healing. This guy had no idea about my past struggles, but there is no doubt that God sent him to me! After graduating Freedom House, I called Jason at PF, went in for an interview and started Taking Back Ground that fall.

My first night at TBG, I walked through the doors with so much uncertainty and anxiety that I thought about walking right back out. Instead, I walked in and went straight back to the bathroom, locked the door and prayed. I came back out with God’s peace and realized how incredibly gracious our Lord is. I Peter 2:9 says, *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”* It’s been very encouraging to meet fellow brothers and sisters with stories of redemption where God is making beauty out of ashes, and to know that I am not alone in this struggle. Having a safe place to open up, especially in small group, and share things that I wouldn’t be comfortable sharing elsewhere has been so powerful and impactful. I’m not where I want to be, but praise God, I’m not where I was! There are still some moments when I feel attracted to guys, but I don’t entertain thoughts that I used to, and it’s my hope and prayer that someday that attraction will be non-existent. I know that, *“He who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion...”* (Philippians 1:6).

Now, I am blessed to be on staff at Freedom House, serving and helping newcomers find their identity in Christ. I am also so grateful for PF, for my group leaders, for the friends that I have made here, for the Holy Spirit at work here and for all who keep this ministry afloat with your prayers and financial support. Thank you for making this possible. God bless you!

TBG Summer Series: from Captivity to Freedom by PF Staff

The Israelites' Exodus out of Egypt is a powerful story of how God moves in the lives of His people. When we reflect upon this story, we make amazing parallels regarding our journey out of the enslavement of sin with the hope of finding peace and freedom.

Pharaoh held the Israelites captive and forced them into hard work. Even though they were people belonging to God, their lives were not their own. In response, God sent Moses to be their deliverer. He led them out of bondage, through the wilderness and into a Promised Land.

We too are people who belong to God, yet for many, we are held captive by Satan. In response, God sent His son, Jesus, to be our great Deliverer. He set us free from the rule of Satan (Egypt) and leads us on a journey that requires trusting and obeying Him (Wilderness). As we do this, we experience a spiritually and relationally matured life and genuine freedom found in Him (Promised Land).



“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.” – Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18

To begin this amazing journey toward freedom, we must both recognize our sin and our desperate need for a Savior and Redeemer. *“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.” – Deuteronomy 5:15.*

This process is important for all those who participate in the Taking Back Ground program and embark on the journey to freedom from sexual and relational bondage. Throughout the program year (October through May), we follow a series of lessons that help us walk in freedom. Although we usually take a break from the program in the summer months, this year we are inviting new and first-year participants of the program to come together to remember that God is still delivering His people, and to grow in trusting and obeying Him.

We will proclaim our stories of God leading us out of captivity. We will share areas of current struggle and need. We will declare God's faithfulness in the wilderness journey as He did with the Israelites, and we will encourage and pray for one another to persevere in the faith. Finally, we will watch God transform and heal lives.

Everyone is in a unique place on this journey. Some may be deeply entrenched and enslaved in sin, while others are learning to live a life free from bondage, working on trusting God in the wilderness. No matter where we are on this journey, the Lord wants to meet us, rescue us and redeem us.

If you are new to Portland Fellowship, or are currently attending our Taking Back Ground program, we invite you to join us on Tuesday evenings from 7-8:30 p.m., starting July 9 and running through the end of August. Sign up online, email or call the PF office to register.

july - august calendar & services

july 12 & august 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.

tuesdays in july & august TBG Summer Series

Support group for new and returning Taking Back Ground participants. Format will be more relaxed and open for conversation, discussion and prayer. 7-8:30 p.m.

july 12 patrick speaking

Patrick will be sharing his testimony in an online interview with Stephen Black of First Stone Ministries in Oklahoma City, OK.

july or august staff planning retreat

PF staff will be spending some intentional time praying and planning for the upcoming program year.

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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.

Upper Room Community 2019-20



We are currently accepting applications for the 2019-20 Upper Room Community discipleship program. The Upper Room is a 9-month live-in program for Christians in their 20's or 30's, who are wrestling with unwanted same-sex attraction and are seeking deeper community and spiritual growth. The URC begins in September and runs through May, and includes teaching, one-on-one mentoring, group processing, accountability and community living.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about the URC, please visit www.portlandfellowship.com/upper_room.php. For application instructions, please email or call the office.

Partner With Us In Prayer

This month, please join us in praying:

- For God to pour out His rest, encouragement and renewal on our Taking Back Ground leaders and participants.
- For Jesus to show up in a mighty way during the Summer Support Group in July and August.
- For the Holy Spirit to continue calling and bringing in the right participants for this year's Taking Back Ground and Upper Room Community programs.
- For the Lord to comfort and encourage our Hope Group participants as they seek to relate to their gay and trans-identified loved ones in both truth and grace.



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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