



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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An Unexpected Scenic Route by Eric*

Life is not what I anticipated when I was younger. I thought I could chart a course to navigate adulthood on cruise control. I had no great ambition; I was content to be a "good Christian guy", respected in his career and liked by everyone. There was an inadequate foundation under my expressway through life, however, and I wasn't prepared for the potholes that gave way under the pressure of trying to maintain an image of stability without accounting for my hidden, unrealized brokenness. "'Teacher,' the rich young ruler declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.' Jesus looked at him and loved him." —Mark 10:20-21a

I grew up in a Christian home and have been a believer all my life... at least, I "knew all the answers". As a child I built an impressive spiritual resume, making my parents proud and doing what was expected of me. By the age of twenty-one, I thought I had basically arrived after marrying a "good Christian girl". "Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord..." —Philippians 3:7-8

The problem was that I didn't know Jesus, at least not in a way where I trusted Him to fully see and love me. I knew that God loved the world and all its people, I just didn't know how to make it personal to me. I had so many doubts about myself, my manhood, and my worthiness to enter the adult world as a man. I avoided my fears and emotions in general, functioning as a spectator as life happened around me. I was underdeveloped and unaware of myself, but I excelled at the Christian game. Instead of faith, I had a checklist of religious behaviors.

My insecurities first became sexualized in high school, when masturbation and pornography constantly drained the air out of my spiritual tires. I fixated on the male form and the men in the porn I viewed, as if they could teach me about myself or speak masculinity over me. Eventually, I used gay pornography to address my questions about manhood. I felt unspeakable shame about this struggle. The same-sex attraction felt too massive to be brought into the light of the accountability I had in place. It went unchecked, eventually leading to a couple anonymous hookups when I was dating and engaged to my future wife.

She became the first person to receive a disclosure of my homosexual struggle and infidelity. I also shared my story with one or two others, but I never seriously pursued healing or answers for the urgent, unresolved questions that festered more deeply in my soul than I was willing to explore. We got married eight months later.



Eric* is graduating from Taking Back Ground this month. (*Named changed to protect privacy).

It was only a matter of time until my old patterns returned, and they came back with a vengeance. Pornography and masturbation led to numerous illicit encounters in increasingly risky situations. I was desperate and could feel myself losing my grip on the steering wheel of my life, but my only escape was the one that held me in bondage. *“When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.” —Psalm 73:21-23*

After ten years, my marriage was in ruins because of my utter lack of spiritual and emotional health, and my unwillingness to wrestle with my brokenness or to genuinely share myself with others. We were already in the express lane to divorce when I initiated a new disclosure of infidelity. The legal process moved quickly and I found myself alone, in many ways for the first time in my life. *“This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” —1 John 3:19-20*

I slowly recognized that my faith was not actually a trusting relationship with God. I began to stop playing the game of marking activities off a spiritual checklist, and instead started measuring activities by the quality of my connection to God. At first, it was brutal. I couldn't bring myself to pray, read my Bible, or go to church.

Looking back now, it seems like I was daring God to meet me outside the boundaries of the religion that I had always believed to be his realm. One pivotal moment came when I realized that the most peaceful and fulfilling times in my life were the ones in which I was connected to Jesus. That became a powerful reminder in the heat of battle, enabling me to face down temptation with the words of Peter in John 6:68: *“To whom shall [I] go? [Jesus has] the words of eternal life.”*

I embarked on a journey of intentionally shattering the crystal image of the “good guy” that I had spent my life creating. As I told my story to family and close friends, I experienced the life-changing grace of God through His people. I openly shared the worst parts of me and they loved me more, not less, and I began to feel truly known for the first time. *“Lord, you establish peace*

for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honor. They are now dead, they live no more; their spirits do not rise.” —Isaiah 26:12-14

My quest for healing has not been a smooth ride out of the pits of sin, doubt, fear and failure. It continues to be an unpredictable detour through jungles, wastelands, swamps and deserts where my soul catches glimpses of God and who He made me to be. It is wild, gut-wrenching, messy, and beautiful. I've found that Jesus is the answer for all of my questions, even the ones I didn't know I was asking about myself and Him.

In addition to my newly-meaningful relationship with God, healing has included counseling, ongoing vulnerability with trusted friends, tight boundaries that protect me when I'm online, and a restorative friendship-turned-romantic relationship with an amazing woman who recently became my wife. She has been an agent of healing, enabling me to say over and over, “I didn't know a relationship could be healthy like this.” We've been building our life together on a foundation of always being open about ourselves and seeking to follow the Lord's leading, both as individuals and as a couple. I'm learning new things about God's grace daily through my entirely fresh experience of marriage.

I contacted Portland Fellowship after my healing process was underway, as I was getting ready to propose. We wanted to enter marriage with our eyes fully open, as wise and prepared as possible. Neither of us knew what to expect from the program, but it's been a great experience. We've benefitted tremendously from connecting with others who can relate to navigating life with same-sex attraction. My major take-away from TBG Year One was a rebuilt understanding of masculinity. In Year Two, I've been pushed to show others that my journey is unfinished, my processing incomplete, my wound not fully healed, and I'm still yearning for arrival at our final destination.

This unexpected scenic route through life is entirely different from anything I ever would've chosen for myself, but I'm profoundly grateful for God's presence with me at every turn, and for His incredible redemptive work that still calls me to travel with Him farther down the road.



Changed by KathyGrace Duncan

Last year, California bill AB2943 would have brought death and destruction by trying to outlaw counseling for those seeking change for their unwanted same-sex attractions (SSA). The proposed bill would have come against hope and the possibility of ever being different, ever being healed. However, that same bill also gave birth—it gave birth to a movement. Ken Williams and Elizabeth Woning from Bethel Church in Redding, CA, became the founders of this movement when they formed a group of men and women who stood up and proclaimed, “Oh, but you *can* change!” This group grew into a movement called Changed and began to publicly share their stories of hope, change and redemption through Jesus. When they published a book entitled *Changed*, my testimony was included, alongside many others from the Changed movement.



KathyGrace (center) & others from Changed.

Recently, Bethel Church was inspired to film some of these testimonies from the *Changed* book and present them on Bethel TV, and I was invited to have them record my testimony. I must say, I was overwhelmed, honored and excited by this invitation to go to Bethel, not just because of having my testimony filmed, but also because of the opportunity to meet other people who have incredible testimonies of transformation.

At the end of March, various members of the Changed movement and I flew to Redding and gathered at Bethel Church for three days. The first night was getting to know each other and sharing a meal together. Then, the leaders prayed for all of us that were there for the filming. It was a very rich time of prayer, and the Lord, in His faithfulness, spoke to my heart.

The next day, Sunday, those of us with Changed were manning a book table before and after the services. I decided not to sit at the table, but rather mingle with the crowd, and find out what questions they had. I approached a woman and asked her if she had any questions, or if there was anything I could help with. She said her niece was transitioning into a man and had questions about that. So, I grabbed a *Changed* book and shared my story with her. Tears filled her eyes and she said to me, “I asked the Lord to meet someone to has walked out of that lifestyle.” Whoa! To prove even further it was a God appointment: she was from out of town and just “happened” to be visiting, and I was from out of town and just “happened” to be there, too. There were many other incredible encounters like that one. It was such an amazing time!

During the church service, Ken and Elizabeth were given the opportunity to share about Changed—who we are and why we were there. They had us stand up, and then the clapping started. The applause grew louder and louder, and when I turned around, I saw everyone standing up! It was so powerful having the church encourage and affirm us like that.

The final day was filming and prayer. We each had a time slot, and while we waited for our filming, we were blessed to have the intercessors pray over us. Then, at lunch, the kids from the school at Bethel also prayed over us. Going into that weekend, I had asked the Lord three questions (which I did not share with anyone), and during that time of prayer from the intercessors and the kids, each one of my questions were answered!

The recorded Changed testimonies will be released sometime in June by Bethel TV. For me, this time at Bethel wasn’t just about being filmed; it was also about connecting with others in the Changed movement and hearing what the Lord has done for them. I am excited to see how He is going to use our testimonies! My heart’s cry has always been to bring hope and show the possibility of redemption and restoration through Jesus, and I’m prayerfully walking forward believing that, “...perhaps you were made...for just such a time as this?”—Esther 4:14b (NLT).

*To read KathyGrace’s testimony and others from the *Changed* book, visit www.changedmovement.com/stories.

may - june calendar & services

may 3

pf staff speaking

PF staff will be sharing at Calvary Chapel Southeast.
7-9 p.m.

may 10 & june 14

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 may

taking back ground

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

thursdays in may

upper room community

Teaching, discussion, processing and prayer.

may 21

graduation celebration

Celebrating our Upper Room Community and Year Two Taking Back Ground participants who are graduating this month.

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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.

Restored Hope Network Conference: HOPE 2019

This year's Restored Hope Network conference, HOPE 2019, will take place on June 21-22 in Minneapolis, MN. Keynote speakers include June Hunt, Alex McFarland, Juli Slattery and Phil Courson. There will also be breakout sessions, worship and fellowship. For more information and registration, visit www.restoredhopenetwork.org.



Partner with us in Prayer

This month, please join us in praying:

- For the Lord's hand to be on Jason and his family as his son Trevor has brain and spine surgery on May 14th. Ask the Lord to guide the doctor's hands during surgery, for full and complete healing for Trevor, and for a fast recovery with no complications.



- For Jesus to reveal His next steps for Jesse, our Upper Room Community graduate this year. Pray for grace to continue growing in the healing process, and for protection, hope and boldness for Jesse to follow Jesus wherever He leads.

- For God to encourage, bless and challenge the Year Two Taking Back Ground participants who are graduating this month. Ask God to reveal to these brave men and women all He's done in them this year, and pray for inspiration, hope and joy as they move into the next chapter of their journey with Him.



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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