



the fellowship message

“Proclaiming freedom for the captives.” ISAIAH 61

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No Condemnation in Jesus Christ by Del Pullen

“Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” — Romans 8:1

When I showed up at Portland Fellowship, my life—particularly my marriage—was a mess, largely over struggles with SSA. My story was like so many others in many ways, but it was also different. Growing up, my father was physically and emotionally abusive. He was cold and hard. Today, I’m confident he would be diagnosed as bipolar with PTSD, which I believe traced back to military service during the Korean War. I cannot remember ever being comforted by my dad. One Christmas, I remember giving him a hug to thank him for a gift, and he pushed me to the floor with a stern warning not to ever do that again. Later that day, I was playing with a Tonka truck that I had gotten from a family friend, and when I didn’t respond to my dad as quickly as he thought I should have, he took his foot and smashed the truck.

Before I go on, I need to say I have long since forgiven my father. He had an extremely tragic childhood, and I believe he fathered me and my sisters the best he knew how. In fact, there are many healthy traits that I developed, either from mirroring his good actions or going 180 degrees from the hurtful ones, which enabled me to be a better husband and father.

In the end, my dad committed suicide at sixty-three years old by refusing to take medications that were essential to his living. I don’t hate him; I feel sorry for him. He missed out on a lot. I don’t think he ever knew me well, and he never had any meaningful relationship with any of his grandkids.

Based on my memories of where we lived at the time, I believe I was about eight years old when my grandfather and my dad’s half-brother, a young teenager we’ll call “Mike”, visited us from out-of-state. That was the first sexual experience of my life, and it involved little more than being held while Mike gratified himself. That was an incredible experience. I was held by a male. I was accepted. I was hooked.

On those rare occasions when we were together, I would pursue Mike. “Please hold me.” “Hold me longer.” He would always oblige. One time, though, things went further than they had before, and it left me confused. That was the last contact I had with Mike, though not by my choice.



Del and his wife, Patty, are alumni of PF’s Taking Back Ground program.

Like the majority of the people I met at Portland Fellowship, I am a believer in Jesus Christ. It took me years to forgive myself for what happened. Not only had I not stopped it, I had encouraged it. I sought out my abuser. I believed it was my fault that I was taken advantage of.

I got married to an absolutely incredible woman, Patty, and we have four awesome children, who are all happily married and living in the Portland metro area with our ten grandchildren (praise God!). I had long forgotten everything that had to do with Mike. I hadn't even thought about him for years. Then, something happened about fifteen years ago. I don't know what the trigger was. I've wasted years of professional counseling looking for an answer to that question. I became extremely depressed. Even though I was surrounded by a loving family and many good friends, I found myself alone and desperate, totally disconnected from life. My only suicide attempt failed, and I further beat myself up because I couldn't even do that right. I was too deep into depression to see things rationally. I needed to feel loved. I needed Mike, and everything would be okay.

I began a frantic internet search for Mike. Not the real Mike—images of Mike as I remembered him. I became addicted to searching online porn in utter desperation. Somehow, getting caught looking at porn was what it took for me to realize how low I had sunk. I chose to tell my kids. Based on their reactions, I'm certain that I disappointed them. However, they only showed me love. My wife and I separated for a short time, but she never gave up on me.

I began searching for someplace to get help. I found a website that had references to Portland Fellowship. Within a couple of days, my wife and I were sitting on the couch in Jason's office, and my PF journey began. After completing the two-year Taking Back Ground program, I was invited to stay an extra year, which I thought was unnecessary, but would later prove to be invaluable.

PF did not solve my SSA struggle. What they did was provide me a safe haven to share my issues without condemnation or judgement. PF provided a place for my

wife to get support from other wives that had walked in her shoes. I received acceptance without any strings—that same acceptance that I looked for in Mike. This acceptance, however, was genuine and pure.

PF gave me the tools I needed to get my life back into alignment with God's plan and not chasing some toxic fantasy. And, the encouragement from the staff and the other participants helped me find the motivation I needed to walk away from the past.

I prayed a lot before, during and after my time at PF that the Lord would simply lift the burden of SSA. Some people that I shared my struggle with told me that's not how it works; that I was being challenged so that I could be strengthened, and that it was my battle to overcome. I had tried for many years—I knew I could not do it on my own. I knew that I needed His strength.

Several months after I completed the TBG program, one day it hit me: I hadn't thought about Mike in months. I hadn't had any SSA issues. I certainly had lost interest in porn. It's a little like my testimony of salvation. I can't tell you the date I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I simply realized one day I had formed a relationship that was extremely powerful and satisfying with a force greater than anything I could comprehend. He sought me. And when I strayed, He never left my side. I will always believe He guided me to PF and a better future.

My life is not without challenges, but SSA is no longer one of them. My relationships with my wife, my children and my grandchildren are stronger than ever. For those people walking through the PF door for the first time, don't give up. Keep praying. Immerse yourself in the love and acceptance that is the cornerstone of PF. Open your ears and your minds to all of the resources offered through PF. Don't expect the path to freedom to be easy—it is anything but. However, the reward is worth every bit of it. May God bless Portland Fellowship and the incredible ministry they provide to a hurting, confused and lonely group of people who want the life that we know God has for us.



Exploring Taking Back Ground: A Six-Part Series by Phil Hobizal

Section Four—Developing a Healthy Identity

This is the fourth installment of a six-part series, where founding director Phil Hobizal shares the heart behind the lessons for each section of our TBG program. To read the previous articles in this series, visit www.portlandfellowship.com/newsletter.php.

There is a saying that “time heals all wounds”. While I agree with the time part, healing is something that cannot be assumed to take place apart from God. Isaiah 53:5 says, “...by his wounds we are healed.” God’s timing in our restoration takes patient obedience.

With that in mind, we felt it important at PF to provide two years of material to allow the Holy Spirit time to access our hearts. Also, providing a safe place to be known and accepted paves the way for future healthy relating. Part of that safety requires guidelines for behavior. We weren’t creating an ex-gay social group. Early on, church leaders would challenge us: “You can’t bring together a bunch of people who have the same struggles. What if it only facilitates their problems?” Still, where were they going to go? The church didn’t know what to do. They mainly reinforced the sense of shame related to SSA. We believed the benefit outweighed the risks. And so we set out, stumbling and bumbling, to put in necessary guidelines to provide a safe place for those seeking God’s help. For most, this would be the first time to share, without fear, the reality of their deepest struggles and desires in a safe and accepting environment. We are so grateful to those who supported and encouraged us in those days, and still do today.

Year Two, part one, begins tackling some difficult questions, mostly about relating and relationships. In defining our goals as a ministry, one aspect is to look at what is meant by healing. It would be easier to have God just take away unwanted desires. However, God tends to use our weaknesses to bring about His purposes. He may act quickly in some areas of our lives, but His primary goal is to make us like Jesus. Diminished same sex attractions, healthy same-sex relating, desire for the opposite sex, or contentment in our circumstances all speak of change, but ultimately, true healing is a pure heart devoted to the Lord.

Gender plays a big role in the homosexual struggle. *What does it mean to be a woman or a man? How do I fit into this design God has for me?* The attraction to the same sex has its initial roots in seeking affirmation as a gendered person. Learning the core aspects of our God-given identity and being able to recognize and reject false thinking about gender will lead to a secure sense of self. Reconciling with our gender, as well as forgiving past hurts related to our gender, opens us up to a new self-discovery.

Moving into healthy relating requires self-reflection on our habits. *How do I relate to my gender? And to the opposite sex?* Learning to put healthy relational boundaries into place leads to healthy relationships. If, upon reflection, we notice patterns that produce dependent or codependent relationships, we must seek help in breaking those habits and thoughts that cause relating to be so difficult. God has made us relational, so of course He knows our needs and wants the best for us. And, He is also jealous for our affections and will not support or encourage what amounts to relational idolatry. Many of us have longed for that “one best friend” who we never had in our life. The myth of a “best friend” has left a trail of broken, emotionally dependent experiences. Fortunately, God desires for us a relationship with Him in that capacity. A look at major figures in biblical history will attest to that. We can have an intimacy with God that allows us to call ourselves “the disciple Jesus love[s]” (John 13:23).

It will take a variety of relationship to bring about personal wholeness. As we grow in understanding our obstacles to relating, we face the challenge to be open to friendships that will speak into our lives. The Church is the natural resource for meeting relational needs. We experience mothers, fathers, sister and brothers who God will use to bring healing and companionship.

Taking Back Ground: Section Four

- The Healing Process
- Masculinity
- Femininity
- Boundaries
- Same-Sex Relationships
- Emotional Dependency
- Levels of Relationship

july - august calendar & services

july 10 & august 14 hope group

For friends and family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones. Join us for a time of prayer, support and encouragement. *Please check the RSVP page to see if we're meeting online or in person.*

7:00 p.m.

To RSVP for this month's Hope Group, please go to:

portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

tuesdays in july & august emotionally healthy relationships

PF's Summer Series this year is an 8-week interactive study called Emotionally Healthy Relationships by Peter & Geri Scazzero. Come ready to learn and grow in practically loving others in emotionally healthy ways. Cost is \$20.

7-8:30 p.m.

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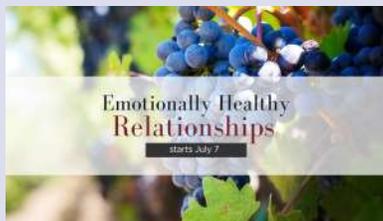
additional updates

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.

2020 Summer Series: Emotionally Healthy Relationships



will equip you with practical tools to really love people in difficult situations and mature into an adult follower of Jesus.

The *Emotionally Healthy Relationships* study was written by Peter & Geri Scazzero, authors of the best-selling books *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* and *I Quit: Stop Pretending Everything Is Fine and Change Your Life*, and this course is part of their extended *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* series.

Come join us as we dive together into topics such as Clarifying Expectations, Family Genograms, Incarnational Listening, Conflict Resolution, Integrity and more. Each week's topic has an accompanying video lesson, devotional readings and practical questions to process and practice together. If God has called you to mature in how you relate to those around you and you're still looking to grow in this area, this is a great opportunity to learn new tools and try putting them into practice in a safe and grace-filled environment.

Cost for the series is \$20, which includes the course workbook and the devotional book. You can sign up at www.portlandfellowship.com, email office@portlandfellowship.com or call us if you have any questions, 503-235-6364.

**We are continuing to follow all state/county health guidelines regarding Covid-19 and group gatherings. As such, we plan on having our Summer Series in person at PF, but we have the option of moving to Zoom if we need to. We'll keep all registered participants updated via email.*

This year, our PF Summer Series will be *Emotionally Healthy Relationships*. This is an eight-week interactive study that



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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