



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Community by Kristy Granger

I looked up from the wooden table I was seated at, and around me was a body of believers I had met in the last year. I observed them loving one another and wondered if they could love me like that. God spoke to me in that moment and said, "Welcome home."

I grew up in Southern California with my mom, dad and two older sisters. My parents knew who the Lord was, but as adults, they stepped away from the Church. We girls knew who God was through private school, our grandparents and Veggie Tales.

Early exposure to sex and violation as a child made me feel like being a girl was not safe. I then became confused about my gender. In elementary school, I preferred playing like a boy when I was by myself. When calling for me across the house, my dad would sometimes not use my name of Kristy or Kris, but would call out for Christopher. In middle school, I tried to fit in with different groups of girls. I always felt like an outsider and never fully accepted by them. In high school, I struggled with my first thoughts about being gay. I actively denied it to myself. I simplified it to feeling insecure about my lack of femininity.

During my sophomore year, I started going to a youth group with a new friend and gave my life to Christ. I found a healthier connection with new friends in the youth group. It was the first time in my life that I built real friendships and felt accepted to just be myself. I didn't have to act more "feminine" to fit in. It was truly a "come-as-you-are" dynamic.

In my freshman year of college, I started having an unhealthy friendship with a girl. I idolized her and started developing same-sex attracted thoughts toward her. She was straight. She recognized our emotionally dependent relationship and decided we needed a break. When she stopped returning my calls and texts, it broke my heart.

I transferred up to Pacific University in Forest Grove, OR. I thought nothing of my SSA struggle. I was attracted to guys in college. I graduated and moved into a house with people from my church, Refuge of Christ. I had a roommate who was a girl and straight. After living with her for a year, I started to develop feelings for her. This is when I knew my struggle with SSA was real. I started to watch gay pornography. I kept my struggle hidden for two years before I confessed to my mentor at the time. I then moved to a different bedroom by myself. My church community still loved me the same as I came out to them.

I still would lie awake at night, asking God why He made me bisexual. My church helped



Kristy is in the second year of PF's Taking Back Ground program.

support me in finding my identity in Christ and not my sexuality, but something was missing. In 2017, I went to a conference called *Wineskins* in Los Angeles, where a sister congregation of ours, Church of the Servant King, had Jason Thompson, Director of Portland Fellowship, teaching about his testimony and the ministry. I found this to be the cool cup of water I needed in my desert. That winter I started Taking Back Ground's online program. I partnered with a mentor from my church. Throughout 2018, she and I went through the first section of Year One of TBG.



Kristy with her church friends.

After completing the first online section of Taking Back Ground, I decided I needed more support through people who have walked out of the homosexual lifestyle. I contacted Jason, who connected me to KathyGrace, PF's Women's Ministry Leader. After meeting with her for a few months, I started the onsite TBG program at the PF house in 2019.

Through this process, I have learned the importance of community. Before TBG, I had the body of Christ around me, but I still felt alone in my process of becoming sexually and relationally healthy.

One thing that fosters authentic community is vulnerability. I think so often I put up walls because of past abuse, neglect, and rejection, that I thought I would feel safe if I kept everyone at an arm's distance. I was always a shy kid growing up and dealt with my problems internally. During the surrender service at the PF retreat last March, I surrendered my idea of independence. I realized I needed to stop trying to "fix" this problem of sexual and relational brokenness on my own, and allow God and others in on my process to transformation. I have had the opportunity to practice vulnerability with my TBG small group and a few people in my church community each week. It takes courage on my part to share with my few close friends. The more I practice vulnerability, the easier it becomes. God opens our hearts and breathes life into us as we share our thoughts, feelings, and inner parts of ourselves with others. Vulnerability for me was the first step I took in my process of building a community.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in

you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."—Ezekiel 36:26

The next step I took to build community was to admit that this journey through relational and sexual healing is a process of transformation. I started this

program thinking I could just check these lessons off like a list and in the end, I'd be done struggling with SSA. Little did I know what God had in store for me. In a community, people come alongside one another to walk with them through thick and thin.

PF and Refuge of Christ have seen me at my best and worst with these struggles. They stick by me, love me, and challenge me in ways I never knew were possible at the beginning of this process.

"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."—Romans 12:12

Another step I've taken to build community is developing healthy accountability. I have partners through PF and my church that I have tasked to hold me accountable to healthy non-emotionally dependent relationships, healthy boundaries, keeping me from fantasy, pornography, and masturbation. It's not easy to come to them and admit where I have slipped and fallen away from who God has called me to be. I started this process thinking that accountability was just an opportunity to confess when I had fallen short. I have learned now that healthy accountability is an opportunity for people to speak into my life to see the weak spots of my walk with God, and for me to learn how to repent and try not to fall into the same patterns again.

I wouldn't say there is ever a final step for community on this side of Heaven. God is transforming us into a new creation, but it will not be made complete until we are with Him. What I can do until that time comes is to continue to be vulnerable with my small group of people who speak into my life, have patience through my process of transformation, continually ask for accountability, and rely on God to continue revealing to me the next steps I must take from brokenness into wholeness.

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

Section Two—Knowing God in Our Struggle

This is the second 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 first part of this series, visit www.portlandfellowship.com/newsletter.php.

“Apart from me you can do nothing.”—John 15:5. In Section Two of the first year of the Taking Back Ground series, we look at “Knowing God in Our Struggle”. As believers in Christ, we understand the Gospel message, but many of us have not invited Him into the deepest parts of our struggles.

In the beginning of Portland Fellowship, we were just a drop-in group, sitting around sharing our struggles. We would discuss relevant topics and valued listening to each individual, and many of the lessons in this series come from that time. Unfortunately, at times our dialogue would digress into negative and unhelpful conversation. It became apparent that we needed to focus our attention on God first. Thus, worship time was introduced in our gatherings and has become a rich part of our time together. Intentionally focusing on God has allowed the Holy Spirit to touch places in our hearts no words could reach. Our worship times have been unlike any other I’ve experienced, bringing to light the verse, *“He who is forgiven much, rejoices much”* (Luke 7:47, paraphrased).

Redemption is God’s plan for humanity, and the hope for strugglers of same-sex attraction. At times, it feels impossible to believe we could be forgiven for some of the things we have done. However, God’s love extends beyond our limitations and is able to free us from the guilt and shame that holds us captive. There is nothing hidden from Him. Recognizing His love for us, *“In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8), we can know a newness of life brought about by the cross.

Authority figures in our lives can become an obstacle to knowing a truly loving Father God. They have a responsibility, whether they realize it or not, of showing God’s protection and provision for us. For some, our earthly parent or authority figure’s weaknesses can be transferred onto our perception of God. We all must learn that God is not distant, conditionally loving, demanding or abusive. He has known us from conception and has a future planned for us.

God’s love is such that He is unwilling to share our affections. He jealously longs for our devotion. Yet, like Israel, idols have arisen to draw us away from Him. Sexual desires, human relationships and physical beauty, to name a few, can take hold of our hearts and keep us from fully surrendering to God’s purposes for us. We are called to willingly lay down those things that threaten our lives in Christ.

Jesus is the bridge from a religious knowledge of God to a human expression of His love. He was tempted, knew rejection and was betrayed—all this while knowing full well that His life would come to a gruesome end in order for us to be free. His promises of a coming Kingdom and the deposit of His Spirit fill us with an eternal perspective that this life is temporal, and these struggles are nothing compared to the glory He will reveal in us.

Overcoming anything on our own strength requires great determination and will-power. Eventually, though, we come to the end of our abilities. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come to reside in us as we surrender to Him. He convicts, comforts and teaches us to walk in righteousness. We are empowered, not by our own strength, but by God’s indwelling presence; and as we grow in our dependence, we live a new life, born of the Spirit.

As we grow in our relationship with God, the old things that held onto us gradually lose their appeal. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. And we understand that God rewards those who diligently seek after Him. God is not leading us to be “just normal”, but to become exceptional new creatures.

Taking Back Ground: Section Two

- Redemption: God’s Message of Hope
- Imitating Christ
- The Marred Image of the Father
- Idolatry
- Developing an Intimacy with Christ
- Empowering the Will
- New Life in Christ

march - april calendar & services

march 13 & april 10

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.

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

portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

march 6-8

tbg retreat

Taking Back Ground participants gather for a powerful weekend of worship, fellowship and surrender.

march 13 & 14

kathygrace speaking

Women's Ministry Leader KathyGrace Duncan will be sharing at the 2020 InCourage Women's Conference at Rolling Hills Church.

march 17

jason speaking

Executive Director Jason Thompson will be sharing with a group of pastors from Alliance Northwest's Field Forum 2020: EMBRACE.

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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.

Women's Conference: InCourage 2020



The 2020 InCourage women's conference is almost here! Ladies, this is an incredible opportunity for you to shed your masks and deepen your courage to embrace who God says you are. In a world full of

confusing and destructive messages, it is time to talk about the issues that plague all of us: sexuality, identity, shame, abuse, insecurity, comparison, body image, loneliness and more. This one-of-a-kind, trauma-informed resource gathering will explore what it means to be loved, known, rooted and 'in-courage'. PF's own Women's Ministry Leader, KathyGrace Duncan, will be leading one of the breakout sessions.

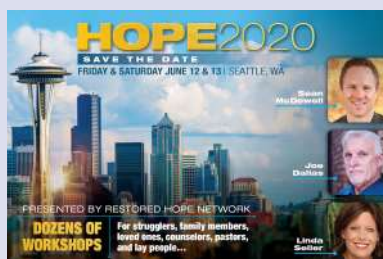
InCourage 2020 will take place March 13-14 at Rolling Hills Community Church, in Tualatin, OR. Cost is \$85. To register, visit incouragegathering.com.

RHN Hope2020 Conference

This year's Restored Hope Network annual conference, Hope 2020, will take place June 13 & 14 in Seattle, WA. Join us for powerful biblical teaching,

dozens of workshops, worship and inspiring life stories of those who have dealt with same-sex attraction and been transformed by the living God. Speakers will include Sean McDowell, Joe Dallas, Linda Seiler and more. Strugglers, family members, loved ones, counselors, pastors, and lay people... this conference is for you!

For pricing, registration and more information, please visit www.restoredhopenetwork.org/hopeconf.



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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