



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

May / June volume 24 number 3

Free Indeed by Terri Chapman

When I got sober from alcoholism, I didn't drink or abuse substances for almost fifteen years. After that long, my life should have shown evidence of growth, change and a good measure of peace, but it didn't. I was not at all living in serenity, or any kind of inner quietness or calm.

At times I badly wanted to drink, and was agitated and irritable. I finally decided to meet with a sponsor and go through the 12-steps of recovery. I just had not done them, even though they were highly recommended. The steps required me to take full stock of my behaviors while in my addiction—things I had done, things that were done to me and everything else that needed to be addressed, forgiven and laid to rest. It was a thorough house-cleaning. I was living in abstinence from substances, but I had not found the true freedom that comes from that deep inner work. I was essentially living a life in "white knuckle" mode: If I could just pray hard enough, go to enough meetings, plead with God to remove the desire to drink, I could do this. I just needed to hang on. To try hard enough. However, after doing the work within the 12-steps, I found that true sense of calm and peace that I was missing. I found a new desire to serve God and others, aligning my life to His will and focusing outwardly. I gave my life over to God every day, asked for His help in sobriety, and in letting go, I found freedom.



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

When I came to Portland Fellowship, I had the privilege of going through the Taking Back Ground program. I showed up for my initial meeting claiming I had a very "complicated" past that I was just sure required much explanation, so that the woman I spoke with could "really get it". I'm sure I must have looked exhausted as I got ready to launch into my story of same-sex relationships, what I felt was a perplexing sexual identity, shame and guilt about pornography and other sexual sin. I had an overall deep longing for something better. I felt such immense comfort when that wonderful woman simply stated, "We just love Jesus here." I sat back, took a deep breath and realized I was home.

During the Taking Back Ground program, I had the honor of learning alongside some amazingly courageous women who believed, as did I, that it was time to start the difficult task of digging deep, looking at our views of ourselves, our gender, our sexual identity and our often confusing and conflicting relationships. I knew that how I was thinking about myself was not how God thought of me, and that how I lived was not God's will for me. I grew up in a Christian family and a great

little church, but like many, I suffered hurts and painful experiences along the way. I had never considered myself gay, but confusion about my identity started when I was an adult. There is no easy way to describe how all of this began, and all of the details surrounding it, but I can say I was already emotionally and spiritually vulnerable, and the collision of my poor self-esteem, inner turmoil and new same-sex attraction as an adult catapulted me into years of depression, addictive behavior and suicidal thoughts and actions. I compartmentalized my behavior so that I could live a deceitful and fraudulent existence. I attended church, worked full-time in the mental health field and had friendships, however shallow, with others. I was exhausted in trying to keep everything in order so that no one knew what was really going on inside of me. People were beginning to believe I was gay, which was incredibly hurtful, yet my behavior behind closed doors was evidence that I was certainly engaging in that lifestyle. Confusion and torment were my best friends. They were indeed horrible companions, but I saw no other way of managing my life.

Once I began the Taking Back Ground program, I took on the difficult task of looking deeply into how I thought of myself, how I might have begun the journey towards identity confusion, and my profound need for God's forgiveness, strength and undeserved grace. Like many others in our group, we found true compassion, forgiveness and, ultimately, worked to align ourselves with how Jesus saw us. Portland Fellowship lends voices to these statements: "The programs of Portland Fellowship were inspired by men and women who have experienced freedom from homosexual desire and behavior through the love and mercy of Jesus Christ". "We firmly believe that sexual and relational redemption is available for all who seek it". Thank you, precious Lord Jesus.

The reason I began this testimony with my journey through alcoholism and recovery is that I believe there are parallels. I am a redeemed person and a sinner liberated from behaviors outside the will of God. I am a new person. However, much like my substance abuse recovery,



I believe there is a step further that is available to those of us who have found "recovery" from sexual and relational pasts: true transformation in Christ, and the belief that Jesus can and will do a work in us to find

an absolute change in sexual orientation. He is able to restore us to the identity in which God intended. True freedom. Something further. I found a beautiful Biblical definition of transformation online that defined it as "a change or renewal from a life that no longer conforms to the ways of the world to one that pleases God". We must continue to give Jesus our burdens, temptations, worries and fears every single day, and do so with truth and full honesty, but there is an assurance in this

that can cause us to cling to Jesus instead of the painful life of white knuckling.

Jesus said in John 10:10, "*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*" (KJV). Abundant life, I have found, is not about stuff, but about peace, having joy, having God. Abundance isn't always an easy, comfortable life, but it's a life of satisfaction and contentment in Jesus. I have thought of John 10:10 in an even more comforting way: Jesus says He came that we might have life, and not just that, but that we might have it more abundantly—a satisfaction and contentment in Jesus. All of this has given me the assurance that I can have true freedom—a life secure and promising in God's ability to care for me in serenity, peace and comfort. We live urgently, as always, but not in fear that at any moment we will return to our former lives. We rest assured that we have done the work Jesus put in front of us for redemption, love and mercy in Jesus Christ. John 8:36 says, "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" How can this promise be denied, contradicted or refuted?! If there is one thing I have tried to remember, and it is one hundred percent true, it is this: I can take Jesus at His word. Always. A quote often heard in the rooms of recovery: "Don't give up before the miracle happens." Don't settle for less than God offers. He will never fail us, now or ever.

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

Section Three—Walking Out the Process

This is the third 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.

The final section of Year One in the Taking Back Ground series is “Walking Out the Process”. We’ve taken time to lay out an overview of the same sex struggle, a biblical view of sexuality, God’s love for us and His call for intimate relationship with Him. Now, it’s

time to put feet to what we’ve learned. In the Old Testament, it was common to set up a memorial to commemorate a significant moment in God’s interaction with man. So, it seemed fitting for us to come up with a way to give participants an opportunity to do the same. It began with a weekend retreat and something we call the Surrender Service. You were instructed to ask the Holy Spirit to show you something that symbolized your struggle, and be willing to publically lay it down before the Lord. The response was nothing less than amazing. Jewelry, pictures and personal mementos, to name a few, were laid at the foot of the Cross. And later, people reported new-found freedom as they obediently responded to God. That was thirty years ago, and the results, in response to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, are the same today.

We recognize that the homosexual struggle is more of a relational issue than sexual, but there is also a spiritual dimension that cannot be ignored. We are in a spiritual battle for our lives. Satan can exercise authority over us through wounds and thought patterns, as well as through our sinful behaviors. Confronting the lies of the enemy with the truth of God’s Word enables us to resist the devil’s schemes (*Matthew 4:1-11*). We are liberated through the work of the Cross to no longer be held captive to destructive thoughts and actions. We can stand victorious in the truth that we are sons and daughters of the King.

Wounds left unhealed can define us. Rejection is a common struggle—perceived or actual events can take on a power to direct our actions. Hurtful words, bullying and mocking lay a foundation for defensive responses. Here, the emergence of a false self takes up the shield to ward off further pain. God comes to us, behind the veil of our own making, to call us to a new life in Him. In His love and forgiveness, we find the strength to live out our true self, one made for His purposes. Because we are forgiven, we find the grace to forgive those who have wounded us. It is an act of faith to be able to free an abuser for the pain they have caused. Letting go of past hurts leads to the opportunity for reconciliation. It is God’s desire for us to be at peace with all men and women (and in many cases, boundaries will need to be established—that’s covered in Year Two).

Temptation is something everyone faces. God does not tempt (*James 1:13*), but He allows temptation to shape us. Jesus was tempted, but did not sin. He is able, then, to help us in our struggle against sin (*Hebrews 4:15*). The wounded heart learns to soothe its pain through various forms of medication. Jesus’ love gives us the strength to say “yes” to the good and “no” to the false. Our victory over old life patterns frees us to walk in the truth of who we are—we are more than conquerors in Christ (*Romans 8:37*).

Like a child who is learning to walk, we stumble forward in our attempts to live a different life than we have known. With encouragement, we get up and keep going. Yet for many of us, the hardest thing will be the willingness to trust those around us in the process. Confessing our weakness and sharing our needs honestly with others leads to a healthy life. God did not intend for us to walk alone in our journey, and He provides relationships to come alongside and bolster us in our pursuit of good things. Ephesians 5:21 says to, “submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for the Lord.” Same-sex attraction is a relational issue requiring relational solutions, and we praise God that He provides healthy relationships for our healing!

Taking Back Ground: Section Three

- The Battle for Our Souls
- The Root of Rejection
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation
- Temptation
- Walking in Victory
- Accountability

may - june calendar & services

may 8 & june 5

online hope group

For friends and family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones. Join us ONLINE for a time of prayer, support, and encouragement. 7:00 p.m.

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

portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

tuesdays in may

online taking back ground

Taking Back Ground participants will be connecting with their small groups via Zoom for the remainder of the spring section.

june 12 & 13

HOPE 2.0 conference

Restored Hope Network's annual conference will be held online this year. For cost info & registration: www.restoredhopenetwork.org

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.

Mourning Sy Rogers by Jason Thompson

Sy Rogers, one of the most powerful international communicators on sexual and relational wholeness who touched an untold number of lives, lost his battle with cancer and entered into Heaven on April 19, 2020.

Although Sy was known on the world stage, he was also known to us personally at Portland Fellowship. I'll never forget the times Sy flew from Orlando, FL, to share at our annual Taking Back Ground retreat in a small Oregon beach town. Two years in a row, Sy would leave an audience of thousands to come and speak to a small group of fifty. When he talked with us, he did so with passion, humor, and love that was deeply personal, making us all the richer because of it.



On a personal note, I was deeply honored to know Sy and considered him a genuine friend. Sy Rogers will always hold a special place in my heart. I'm grateful for the many occasions he invested in my life, whether it be around the dinner table or late night talks around a fire. God used Sy to deepen my transformational process, and for that, I'm forever grateful.

Sy, I love you and will miss you. I look forward to seeing you once again in eternity.

RHN Conference: HOPE 2.0



This year's Restored Hope Network annual conference is going online! HOPE 2.0 will be held on June 12 & 13

and includes live keynote addresses, individual life stories, workshop presentations, and a time of Q & A with speakers (Sean McDowell, Joe Dallas, Linda Seiler and more).

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



PORTLAND
fellowship

The Fellowship Message is a monthly publication of Portland Fellowship, a ministry proclaiming freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ.

MINISTRY TEAM

Jason Thompson
Executive Director

Patrick Silvis
Program Coordinator

KathyGrace Duncan
Women's Ministry Leader

Roy Graves
Multimedia Coordinator

The Fellowship Message is sent free upon request. (An annual donation of \$15 is appreciated to cover printing and postage costs.) No part of this newsletter may be reproduced or reprinted without permission.

post office box 14841
portland, oregon 97293
telephone 503.235.6364
fax 503.235.3896

e-mail: pf@portlandfellowship.com
portlandfellowship.com

Portland Fellowship is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) nondenominational organization. We are exclusively supported through private donations, support services and offerings.