



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Laying it All Down at His Feet by Christopher Flores

I had always been a sensitive boy growing up. I was often told to stop being a cry-baby and a sissy. My older brother was very athletic, but I was super scrawny, weighing in at 125lbs when I graduated high school. I grew up Catholic, and at a very young age I felt I wanted to be a priest, but that dream was later squashed by my mom. Eventually, I left the Catholic Church and started to seek out my own faith, and enrolled in a one-year Bible Institute. It was there that I heard a man share his testimony of being delivered from homosexuality.

I related so much to his story. I hadn't lived in the lifestyle like he had, but I knew I had the thoughts and desires. I was excited that maybe I, too, could experience this freedom and deliverance he talked about. I approached the speaker afterwards in good faith—I really wanted God to take away my same-sex attraction! Sadly, that's not what happened; instead, I had my first sexual encounter with a man. Confusion increased, and lies began to take root deep in my heart.

Living with same-sex attraction (SSA) and resisting it became part of who I was; it became my identity. It wasn't a secret to anyone, and I was an open book. I convinced myself that the more I opened up about my SSA struggles, the more support I would have, thus bringing me quicker healing. I really wanted these feelings to be gone, and I believed that I was just too weak to accomplish this on my own. Looking back on those efforts, I realize that I was putting more weight on God's people instead of laying it all down at His feet.

In 2008, twenty years after I first sought counseling to address my SSA, I enrolled in Portland Fellowship's Taking Back Ground (TBG) program. That earlier season of counseling brought up a lot of pain, and I had been fearfully running away from some of the things that I learned about myself and about homosexuality. After my wife caught me in my sin, life was very difficult, but joining TBG was absolutely a breath of fresh air. PF offered me the hope I was looking for, and I truly felt like I was experiencing "church" for the first time. Here, I was freely worshiping in a room of Christian brothers and sisters with stories similar to mine, struggling week after week towards wholeness. In small group sessions, you couldn't shut me up! I had finally found a place where I could pour out my confessions with others who actually related to what I was feeling.

Having experienced the love of God, I found it easy to confess and pledge my desire to accept His path for my life. At the time, I felt I put in the effort to make those changes, but there was always a piece of me that I just couldn't let go: pornography. It was my "solution" to avoid physical activity with other men.



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

Unfortunately, pornography was also my “solution” when I found intimacy with my wife difficult. My struggle with pornography started at ten years old, when I found an explicit video at a cousin’s house. From that moment on, my homosexual desires and pornography use gradually got worse. If SSA was the fire in my life, then pornography became the fuel.

Sadly, I never brought up my struggle with pornography during my first two years at TBG, or even with my counselors over the years. It was my secret that I deemed as a necessity to “get by”, and considered it the “lesser of two evils”. I even believed the lie that “all men do it”, and so I secretly kept engaging with it. Over time, the images lost their luster, and I began desiring the in-person encounters that I was seeing on the screen. Eventually, I jumped in with both feet—in an attempt to satisfy the needs I felt pornography no longer met, I began pursuing sexual connections with other men.

My acting out abruptly came to an end after I received an ominous warning at a men’s gathering in February, 2019. The speaker said, “You cannot hide anything from God; He will bring it to light.” A week later, I was in the hospital on my death bed, under a chemically induced coma due to a severe case of the flu. When I woke up three weeks later, my wife and a friend of mine told me that they knew everything; they had found my secret emails and sexual texts with other men.

Once again, I was faced with a season of getting caught, another season of hurting those I love, and of hurting myself. The evidence of my double life came back to rear its ugly head, showing me how my actions destroyed the lives of the people I loved. I remember lying in my hospital bed, reading notes from family and friends all over, telling me they were praying for me. I was extremely grateful for what people did for my family while I was in a coma, but still my mind went back and forth between, “I almost died, thank God I’m alive!” and “How is my wife even here right now, after what I did?”

After I got out of the hospital, my wife graciously let me come home to recover. About two months later, I was asked to move out; the changes she needed to see were not there. She was right—I was starting to settle again, not doing the hard work. I was wrapped up in reconciling and getting right with God, but I wasn’t ready to work on my

marriage. Asking me to move out was the best thing that my wife could’ve done for me. It showed me just how much damage I had done, and I knew it was time to get to work. I immediately joined Portland Fellowship’s summer program, and found a professional counselor. I thought that if I at least did this much, then maybe I could go home. That wasn’t the case, however, and after living with two different families, I finally accepted the fact that I may never go home, and I asked to move into the PF house.



Upon moving into Portland Fellowship, I had to make some commitments with God and myself. I determined that this was going to be a safe place for me, safe as in free from the sins that I had so often indulged in. I was going to invite God to work on the area of my life that I never allowed anyone to address. For years, I easily admitted my struggle with SSA, but I never saw how pornography was contributing to my unwanted SSA, and magnifying it. I had to admit that just maybe I had a sexual addiction, and I wrestled for weeks accepting that fact. My addiction became very apparent when I decided that anytime I thought about pornography, I was going to stop everything and run to God. The first two months, I prayed and prayed and prayed. There was lots of crying as I took all my emotions and feelings to the throne room of God. I was frequently in my bedroom, door locked, diving in to meet with God. Over time, it got easier and easier to resist the urges. I began seeing the truths of God; I began healing! I started seeing men less sexually. If there was something I noticed in a guy that was attractive, I would immediately pray and ask God to show me a new way to respond in the truth. It was like a flood gate once I decided to give it all to Him. Lies I had held onto for years started to break down, and I began to believe in His truth—truth that I had often heard, but somehow had never penetrated my heart.

I am thrilled to report that at the writing of this testimony, I have found freedom for one entire year from those sins that held me back (and made my SSA struggle harder to fight). I can honestly say that I have never desired Godly intimacy like I do now. My past behavior reveals I was like a selfish little boy. Now, I am prayerfully seeking to obediently walk away from acting like a boy, and walk into being the man God is calling me to be.

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

Section Six—Growing in Christian Maturity

This is the final 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 the Taking Back Ground series is entitled “Growing in Christian Maturity”. If we are being honest, we must admit that those struggling with SSA deal with a level of immaturity. This would mainly be recognized as it relates to gender: there is a need to grow up. Paul also identifies this need within the early church, regarding their faith. He encourages them (and us) to “*forget what lies behind and press on toward the goal to win the prize*” (Phil. 3:14), taking back our identities as God’s sons and daughters.

I remember a story I used to share in our groups years ago concerning holidays with my family. It was the habit of my large clan to divide up, with women in the kitchen and men in the living room watching the “game”. Being uncomfortable with sports, I, of course, found refuge in the kitchen. And yet, an odd thing happened to me, when God was working in my life as a new believer: I found myself in the hallway. *Would I continue to hide out in the kitchen, or take the risk of joining the guys in the living room?* I needed to move forward, and, by God’s grace, lay aside old habits that kept me from growing.

How we identify ourselves will affect the outcome of our progress. We are first and foremost followers of Christ; then, we are women or men. To carry any other label, such as “gay Christian”, or just “gay”, would take away from our true identity. Our thoughts and behavior are different from who we are. We must be willing to let go of false labels in order to move beyond being a “struggler” to being an “overcomer”. “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” (Phil. 4:13) We will never know true acceptance within the Body of Christ until we are willing to be known. That’s not to say that everyone needs to know your struggle, but God never intended us to walk out the process of His sanctification alone.

PF has never promoted marriage as a “solution” to same-sex attraction, and we never will. In fact, a good percentage of people we’ve worked with over the years have mistakenly gone down that road in hopes of a “fix”. Still, we must be realistic in facing the truth of the need for relational and sexual fulfillment. Marriage *can* be a good thing, entered into honestly and with the right motives. St. Paul, however, also states it is better to be single like him; you are free to serve God whole-heartedly, as opposed to living to please your spouse. Being married is not a sign of healing, nor is singleness a sign of weakness. We must be willing to go where God leads, keeping in mind that His will is to “*give [us] the desires of [our] heart*” (Psalm 37:4).

The enemy of progress is procrastination. Often fear can keep us stagnant, supplying us with myriad excuses as to why now is not the right time, or that we’ll get serious once our circumstances change. God says, “*Today is the day of salvation*” (2 Cor. 6:2) and calls us to respond *now* to His voice. We must learn to recognize when we are being distracted from picking up our cross and following Him. Ambivalence is the lukewarm state produced by a double mind. Once we know the truth, we must walk in it. This is where you and I experience the grace of God to overcome.

As we grow in our true identity, pitfalls and failure are bound to happen. In this, our most vulnerable state, the relationships we have made become the life raft to get us through challenges that will come. The ability to confess and repent, in the context of love, reminds us of our humanity and need for Jesus. We do well to put into place daily disciplines to prepare us for this battle and strengthen us for the journey. Each one of us is a child God fashioned in His image for a purpose. The sexually broken have a tremendous insight into the forgiveness and love of God to bring to the Church.

Taking Back Ground: Section Six

- The Healing Plateau
- Disclosure
- Marriage or Singleness
- Ambivalence & Procrastination
- Dealing With Failure
- A Call to Servanthood
- Safeguarding Our Souls

november - december calendar & services

november 13 & december 11

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 november

taking back ground

PF's intensive discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction. Group for wives and fiancées also. 7-9:30 p.m.

november 26 & 27

office closed

We will be closed Thursday & Friday for the Thanksgiving holiday. We'll be back in the office on Monday November 30th.

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.

Celebrating Over Twenty Faithful Years



This month, we are celebrating Ron & Heidi Perry's faithful service to the ministry of Portland Fellowship for over twenty years. After serving as TBG & Wives Group leaders, as well as Hope Group Facilitators, Ron and Heidi will be moving out of the Portland area. While we are sad to see them go, we are so grateful for their friendship, encouragement, and loyal partnership in God's transforming work here at PF over the years. We love you, Ron & Heidi! May the Lord guide your steps and bless this next chapter of your lives.

Portland Fellowship Matching Grant 2020

There's still time! An anonymous donor has come forward to offer PF a matching challenge grant up to \$20,000. This means that when you donate a special gift in any amount to Portland Fellowship, your contribution doubles. For example, if you give \$100 toward this grant, your gift effectively becomes \$200. Your \$1000 gift becomes \$2000. This opportunity will continue now through the end of December 2020. You are welcome to give a one-time gift, or monthly until December 31st. If you or someone you know has never donated to PF before, this is a great first-time giving opportunity!



There are two ways to respond: the first is to mail the matching grant response card back with a check, and the second is to donate online by signing in to your profile at www.portlandfellowship.com. You are welcome to call the office and we can assist you with that process. We are truly grateful for this anonymous donor and for each of you as you consider your partnership with us. Thank you for continuing to help us support those struggling with same-sex attractions, support family and friends with loved ones who have embraced a homosexual identity, and offer online resources world-wide.



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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