



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Freedom Really Is Possible by Ian Propst-Campbell

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) For many years, I have clung to the hope that this verse offers. Not only is a life free from sexual immorality possible, it is God's will—His deepest desire for our lives.

My life of discipleship with Jesus began at a very young age. When I was nine years old, I gave my life to Jesus at a Christian summer camp. I remember being in tears, knowing in my heart that something profound had happened inside of me. However, just as my faith in Christ began in the early years of my life, so too did my lifelong struggle with same-sex attraction.

I remember as a child struggling with confusion about my gender, sometimes even wishing I was a girl. This confusion was accompanied by a fear of other men and a fascination with the male body, the latter quickly becoming the object of many ongoing fantasies. By as early as three or four years old, touching myself became a frequent act of self-soothing. I was also a shy, timid and sensitive boy, uncomfortable with sports and traditional male activities. I preferred to spend my time around girls, who seemed safer and less intimidating, and remained aloof from the activities of other boys my age.

In middle school, I really began to realize that the sexual feelings I had were not the same as the ones many of my male peers often talked about. Even though I had some of my own crushes on girls, denying that I wrestled with same-sex attraction became increasingly difficult.

Fortunately, college turned out to be an amazing time in my life, where I discovered the close male friendships and sense of camaraderie that I had missed out on when I was younger. It seemed like guys cared less about sports after high school. Still, college also brought confusion for me. I hungered for close connection with other men, and this longing for connection became increasingly conflated with romantic attraction. Having a crush on your best friend can be very confusing! I also started dipping my toes in the black of pool of pornography, something I had been largely shielded from earlier in my life.

After I left the close-knit community I had in college, things got pretty tough. On the one hand, I really wanted to have a girlfriend and get married, just like many of my peers were starting to do. After all, I had always been attracted to women too. On the other hand, I so badly wanted a man to love me. As a result, during most of my twenties, I was simultaneously looking for counterfeit comfort in pornography and fantasies about men, while also



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

going on dates with ladies in the hopes of finding a girlfriend. It was definitely a conflicting time.

I heard about Portland Fellowship through my counselor, and I first met Jason Thompson in 2015. He encouraged me to join the Taking Back Ground program and take a break from dating, in order to spend a season working on growing in purity and wholeness. I thought, “No way!” Convinced I was fine already, and eager to pursue a relationship, I turned him down.

I had promised myself multiple times that I would never do anything with a man. However, in the fall of 2017, I gave into my desire for counterfeit masculine intimacy: I had a sexual encounter with a man I met on the internet, the very thing I had promised myself I would never do.

While this decision represented a low point in my spiritual life, God still used it for good. Realizing that I had become too comfortable with entertaining sexual ideas about other men, I recognized that some drastic changes needed to happen.

About a year after my encounter with that man, I finally decided to join Portland Fellowship’s Taking Back Ground program. I was a little uncomfortable at first, but soon I came to look forward to my evenings at PF. I appreciated the opportunity to wrestle with difficulties from my past and try to find the roots of why I felt the way I felt. I particularly enjoyed my small group, which was led by Jason during my first year, and Ron my second year. I loved the opportunity to check in about my week and also hear from the other members of the group. I developed an incredible respect from Jason, someone who was incredibly warm and compassionate, but also very quick to challenge and reprimand. I realized I needed that, and needed it consistently!

During one of our final small groups of my first section of TBG, Jason gave me a challenge, the same challenge he had given me the first time I had considered joining PF: stop trying to date ladies for a season, and focus on healing. Knowing how things had gone the last time I disregarded him, I chose to accept, and I committed to leave dating aside during that next year.

The spring retreats for both my first and second

years of TBG were the highlight of my time at Portland Fellowship. My first year, for the Surrender Service, I laid down my life of fantasy. I had been fantasizing about men since I was a little kid! A year later, in March, 2020, I renewed the same surrender, expanding it to laying down all forms of meeting relational needs in counterfeit ways.

This concept of trying to meet my needs in destructive ways showed up many times in our TBG discussions, and for me, this was the biggest takeaway: the only

way to stop meeting relational needs in counterfeit ways is to meet them in real ways. For me, I found prayer to be the number one way to do that.

When Jesus’ disciples asked why they were not able to cast a demon out of a boy, He responded, “This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting.” (Mark 9:29) God has confirmed this reality to me as well—the power of sexual addiction can only be broken through prayer and fasting. I didn’t start to gain actual traction in my recovery until I really committed to prayer. Through my time of fellowship with God and the Holy Spirit, I received the power to control my body in a holy and honorable way.

Finally, after a lifetime of struggling with deeply ingrained addictive habits, I’m discovering a new reality: freedom from pornography and even fantasy can become the new normal. God is bringing me into a place of sobriety I had not previously thought possible.

A year and a half after accepting Jason’s challenge to set dating aside (and also after waiting to complete the TBG program), I finally met a lovely young woman who is now my girlfriend. Most of my dates in prior years resulted in disappointment or frustration. But the woman I’m dating now I first got to know as a friend. By taking our time and keeping our expectations in check, we allowed our connection to develop organically. The irony is I only matured in the dating process after I laid it down at God’s feet!

It is God’s will that we be sanctified and that we turn from sexual immorality. If it’s God’s will, that means that it can happen. He is proving to me that freedom is available, that sober-mindedness is available to me, and that learning to control my body in a holy and honorable way is 100% possible in Jesus’ Name.



Beyond the Walls of PF: Interview with a Pastor by PF Staff

This year, we are offering a series of interviews with Christians who are responding to SSA and transgenderism from a redemptive perspective. We hope you are challenged and encouraged by what the Lord is doing in the lives of those who stand alongside Portland Fellowship. This month, we talk with Pastor/Elder CJ Coffee from The Well Community Church.

CJ, how have you, as a pastor, seen sexual issues come up in your church?

Mainly we've walked with people struggling with pornography, but we've also come alongside people dealing with all kinds of brokenness, like marital infidelity, addictions, etc.

What steps have you guys taken to minister to the sexually broken?

At The Well, we methodically preach through books of the Bible, so we allow Scripture to take us to the topics of sexual sin and brokenness. We've also periodically taken time in our Sunday gatherings to address a specific topic or issue that has come up. Over the years, we've had various small groups geared toward sexual purity, which have been initiated and led by members of our congregation. Finally, we've been blessed to partner with PF and other similar ministries. Having you guys come speak occasionally has really helped us grow in our understanding in this area. I think all of this has helped us as a church to normalize discussions about sexuality.

How have you approached the topics of homosexuality, pornography and gender in your preaching?

When the text has taken us to those topics, it's been awesome! A few years back, we were in 1 Thessalonians 4 and came to verse 3: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality..." We ended up taking two weeks to process that as a church: one week for the men, and one for the women. In my preaching, even if the text we're in doesn't specifically address sexuality, I may touch on some application points for sexual issues, and I always try to reference the transformational perspective and the hope of the Gospel.

That's a great point, directing people to transformation. With all the differing beliefs out there on sexuality, how do you discern which resources to learn from?

Well, I've had to do a lot of research and reading. [Laughs] I've also been encouraged by testimonies and articles from PF. I think for me and the rest our Eldership team, we tend to turn to people we know and trust. A lot of times this might be other local pastors we know. I look to see if people I'm asking

for advice are theologically careful, grace-awakened and culturally competent in this area. I try to stay away from the scare tactics and voices that use the "us-versus-them" language. I want to be pastoral and hear people out, and I seek advice from people who will try to do the same.



Pastor CJ Coffee

What advice could you offer to other pastors who feel paralyzed to address these complex issues?

Preach the Scriptures! [Laughs] It really does work best to let God bring up sensitive topics through His Word, in His time. I will say, when you do hit these topics, slow down, and stay faithful to the text. And know that you will make people angry, even if you're loving, pastoral, and gentle. The truth can hurt, so prepare for that reality. And, it's exciting and a joy to be able to point people to the hope of Gospel transformation! 1 Cor. 6:11 says, "such **were** some of you", and that's huge! The truth is, there's nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9). God redeemed sexual sinners in the early church, and He's still doing it today.

As a pastor, where do you see Christians struggling to minister to those experiencing LGBTQ desires?

I think some adopt a reductionistic "Don't Do It" attitude toward LGBTQ issues, which misses out on a comprehensive, Gospel-driven focus on discipleship. I've also seen others vilify those they disagree with. The fallout I see is believers losing their authority and credibility to speak hope into the lives of people they disagree with. I believe that if we lead with the Gospel, we will have more authority to speak into people's lives.

What do you see the Church doing well in this area?

I've seen many churches living out what one of our elders, Justin, calls "100% truth and 100% grace"—fully loving the sexually broken while *also* preaching the full Gospel of repentance and redemption. I've heard many testimonies of God's healing and restoration, and that encourages me to keep pointing to stories of transformation.

Any words of encouragement for pastors and church leaders who might be reading this?

I would encourage us all to communicate God's purpose and design for sexuality with love, kindness and compassion.

january - february calendar & services

january 8 & february 12

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

january 16

annual planning meeting

PF Board and Staff gather to pray, plan and prepare for the new year.

tuesdays in january & february 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.

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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.

Praise Report: Matching Grant Matched!

Thank you so much to all who donated to our Matching Grant campaign this past fall. We had an anonymous donor through the National Christian Foundation who was willing to match donations up



National Christian
FOUNDATION

to \$20,000. Thanks to the Lord's amazing favor and your

extremely generous gifts, we were able to meet our goal of \$20,000!

We are so incredibly humbled, grateful and in awe of how God continues to use people like you to support His work here at PF. Please join us in prayer as we seek the Lord's will to be good stewards of your gifts and invest in the Kingdom wisely. Thank you for continuing to make possible the work of supporting those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions, as well as friends and family of gay/trans-identified loved ones.

Giving Statements for 2020

Your gifts and offerings to God's work here at Portland Fellowship are tax-deductible. This month, we are sending out annual giving statements for contributions made in 2020. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your giving to PF last year, please email or call us here in the office.



TBG Overview—Full Series Available Now

Last year in The Fellowship Message, PF founding director Phil Hobizal shared the heart behind each of the six sections of our Taking Back Ground discipleship program. We have since compiled all of his articles into one packet, which you can view and download here: www.portlandfellowship.com/taking_back_ground.php



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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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