



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Returning to My First Love by Lyla Peterson

"A prodigal pastor's daughter finds her way home after thirteen years in a gay relationship" could be a longer title for my life story. All my family and friends were terribly shocked when I left my husband for a woman. It took me a long time to learn that what I thought was love, really wasn't.

My mother led me to Jesus at age four through the Wordless Book (an evangelistic tool for children). My father was going to Bible school and seminary during most of my childhood years. We were poor, but we had a close church family. The church we grew up in was strict and legalistic, but I did love Jesus, studying the Word, and hearing His sweet whisper in my heart.

Growing up, I had a few "crushes" on female teachers. Then, there was a female Bible student who was overly affectionate with me when I was fifteen. That was very confusing. As I grew, I liked boys, but I also had a few minor same-sex crushes. Years later, when my marriage to my husband began to deteriorate, I sought out a gay relationship. I found one, and it led me to leave my marriage.

It's been hard to revisit this period of my life. My kids were small when I left my husband, and I wasn't walking with Jesus. I felt like my kids would be happier if I was happy (the cultural lie at the time). My new partner and I had a "good life" over the years we were together: good jobs, a lovely home, great friends and trips around the world. We were role models in the gay community. We joined a "gay church", which we attended for ten years. We sang gospel songs and believed Jesus was on our side. I believed that the Bible had some good ideas, but I also thought that God was "bigger" than the Bible: *God is all about "love", right?* However, I had pushed Jesus out.

At times, things would "poke up" in my mind, causing me to question my lifestyle. Yet, I would push them down and continue on. I didn't think I could leave and stick to it. Some huge "pokes" were my daughter getting seriously ill, some disillusioning experiences in the "gay church", and seeing things in my gay friends' lives and lifestyles that disturbed me. I had also developed a new fear of death, and as I saw world events unfold, I wondered about Bible prophecy.

Another "poke" was problems in my gay relationship. It had dramatic ups and downs—high highs and low lows. Over time, I felt like I was walking on eggshells with my partner, just like I had in my marriage to my husband. I felt like I was in bondage: unable to leave, but miserable staying. I began to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, and found a name for my problem: codependency. One of the Twelve Steps was to "try to make conscious contact with God as we understood Him". As I quieted my heart, I began to realize that I had made my



Lyla is an alumnus of Portland Fellowship's Taking Back Ground program.

partner a “god”. Trying to please her had taken over my life. Jesus had been pushed out.

All these “pokes” culminated in my going to New Hope Church on an Easter Sunday in the late 1980’s. I responded to the altar call and tearfully came back to Jesus. A beautiful sense of cleansing, forgiveness and joy filled my heart. I went home and moved out a few days later.

I’d love to say all went well after that, but my faith failed in the following months. I didn’t make time to be in the Word and prayer to nourish my walk with Jesus. I felt lost in a huge church, and I was afraid to tell anyone about my past. I also couldn’t find a support group. After that first year, I was missing my partner and eventually went back. We lived together for a year, but it was a terrible time. I was trying to “serve” her and Jesus at the same time. This time, when I moved out, it was for good.

Fortunately, I found Portland Fellowship and it was a huge help. PF was a safe place where I could be open and honest. They offered prayer, hope and healing, and helped us understand the roots of identity issues, such as unmet childhood needs, bullying, abuse and other life experiences. When I hear how our culture uses the term “reparative therapy” to dismiss the power of God to change lives, my heart sinks. PF made such a difference for me in finding freedom.

I learned at Portland Fellowship that sexuality and identity issues are “not a sexual problem, but a relationship problem”. As I thought about my gay relationship, I realized that what I thought of as “love” was really a neediness, a type of emotional bondage. Its dramatic ups and downs created instability, and my needs for affirmation made me captive to her every emotion. My heterosexual marriage had had problems, but I felt much calmer and “freer” in it. A Scripture that has been most important to my understanding of my gay relationship is Romans 1:25 (KJV): “..[people] worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator”. As Christians, we must keep our eyes on God, the Creator, because anything He created could become an idol.

One of the most helpful resources for my struggles was a little booklet by Lori Rentzel called *Emotional Dependency*. There have been a couple times I’ve felt myself drifting into emotional dependency over the years,

but thankfully I haven’t struggled with sexual thoughts or temptations. The alarm bells would go off when I found myself needing to “be there” for someone, or needing to feel needed. The noise of a relationship addiction can drown Jesus out, and I’ve learned to be honest with myself, calm down with the Word and prayer, and quiet myself to hear His voice during these times.

Often He would nudge me to establish boundaries. Sometimes it was painful to distance myself from a friend, but I knew God loved them more than I ever could. *Who am I to play God in their life?* I knew that over time, I would be relieved and happy to have escaped a relationship addiction, and it would also be in their best interest. Jesus really does fulfill His promise to “set [us] free and [we] will be free indeed”. (*John 8:36*) Jesus has been healing my identity through the years, teaching me who I am in Christ, and that I am a beloved child of God. He has done a “new thing” in me. (*Isaiah 43*)



During COVID-19, I wrote my memoirs for my family, including six grandchildren. I shared this part of my life because I want them to know the freedom Jesus can bring. He instructs us to let the next generation know about His faithfulness. (*Psalms 89:1*) God has shown me His love through His care,

provision and protection through many wonderful adventures, friends and prayer partners during these years of following Him. Mission trips to Africa, Cambodia and Honduras provided opportunities to share stories of God’s love and faithfulness to me. Jesus truly gives us the “abundant life” He promised! (*John 10:10*)

When I was at PF, I longed to know if one could leave the gay lifestyle and not look back. Today, I can answer with a resounding “yes” and testify that it’s so worth it! I only regret those thirteen lost years and the pain it brought to my family. Thankfully, they have been so gracious to forgive me, and I praise God for the joy and blessing they are to me. During these last three or four years, in spite of the challenges of aging, COVID and health issues, I have had more time to be in prayer and in the Word. I feel like His whisper is getting louder in my heart. As the title of one of my favorite songs says, “*Jesus is the sweetest name I know*”.

Beyond the Walls of PF: Interview with a Prayer Partner by PF Staff

In 2021, we are offering a series of interviews with Christians who are responding to SSA and transgenderism from a redemptive perspective. This month, we talk with Angela, who is a member of the prayer teams for TBG and Hope Group.

Angela, what led you to join the PF Prayer Teams?

I first found Portland Fellowship through a friend who told me about Drew Berryessa, who used to work at PF. My son is in the LGBTQ lifestyle, and I was looking for other parents or a ministry in this area to connect with. After I attended Hope Group a few times, I wasn't able to continue coming in person, but I still wanted to partner with Portland Fellowship in some way because of who you minister to. I'm so grateful for this organization—I don't know any other ministry like it!

I joined the Taking Back Ground and Hope Group prayer teams because I'm an intercessor—I love praying, and I've always wanted to be a part of a ministry that serves people with LGBTQ struggles. I look at the weekly requests as God delivering us and restoring us, like God cleaning out the gangrene of our hearts. I would love to be on the frontlines serving in this area physically someday.

What has been one of the most challenging parts about praying for participants at PF?

I think the hardest part for me has been growing the discipline to stop and pray intentionally for PF, especially through all the changes happening in my life. I'm not really an email-person, so I've had to learn how to prioritize checking my email to see the PF prayer requests. Thankfully, as I've talked with God about PF, He's reminded me that even short, simple prayers are still using my time to support the ministry, even if I don't always open the emails or read every specific request.

How have you seen the Lord answering your prayers, both in your own life and in the participants' lives?

In regards to my son, I have as close a relationship with him as I can. When my son was growing up, I didn't know how to respond to his struggle, and I think he could sense that. As I've sought God's will on how to relate to my son, He told me, "It's not too late for you to learn how to love your son." I am grateful that the Lord has entrusted me with the responsibility of loving my son and being his mother.

God has sent other people to speak into my son's life, and I believe God is going to use him in a special way someday to reach the LGBTQ community. For example,

a random person who is a believer came to my sister and brother-in-law and asked them if they knew someone with my son's name. It turned out God told this person to tell my family to pray with them for my son. And I've seen God changing my son's heart—he's getting sick of that life, and beginning to desire a better way.



I've also been able to connect with some friends who also have a son in the LGBTQ lifestyle. They've been more old-school in their response to this issue, but more and more I see people starting to want to learn how to respond better, and I'm thankful I get to be a part of that.

One of the people we've been praying for in the Taking Back Ground emails reminds me of my son. A few weeks ago, my heart jumped when I was reading this participant's name, because it gave me hope that one day my son might be on a prayer list like this, in a program like TBG.

What encouragement or advice could you give other readers who may be considering joining the Taking Back Ground or Hope Group Prayer Team?

I would say that if you feel you don't have the time to read each prayer request, you're not obligated to do so! You can pray a simple prayer, like this one:

Father, I'm so glad You know every single person on the PF prayer list. You know their needs, desires, and what has been requested, and You want to and are able to fulfill them! You are good and Your mercy is forever. Hallelujah! So Father, I'm here to agree with these requests. I agree that Your Kingdom come, Your will be done in these people's lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

This is an amazing way to support the ministry of PF, especially if your life circumstances prevent you from partnering financially or serving in person.

**If you would like to sign up for one of the PF prayer teams, sign into your account at www.portlandfellowship.com, click "Join A Program", and then select either "Prayer Team for TBG" or "Prayer Team for Hope Group".*

july - august calendar & services

tuesdays in july & august
summer series: sy rogers
Beginning July 6th, we are offering Sy Rogers' video teaching series, *Lessons Learned*. Discussion & prayer follow the video teachings. *This group will be held over Zoom. * 7-8:30 p.m.

july 16, august 20 hope group

Prayer, support and encouragement for friends and family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones.
6:30 p.m.

*NOTE: The Hope Group will be meeting on the third Friday of the month in July & August (not the second Friday).

To RSVP for Hope Group, go to:
portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

august 29 pf staff speaking

KathyGrace and Patrick will be sharing about PF at The Well Community Church.
10:00 a.m.

follow us!

Get updates and inspirational resources on social media.

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*Twitter: [@PTLDFellowship](https://twitter.com/PTLDFellowship)

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.

PF Summer Series 2021: Sy Rogers



This year, our Summer Series is open to the general public (not just individuals struggling with SSA). We will be working through international speaker Sy Rogers' video teaching series, *Lessons Learned*.

Sharing from his personal experience of God's redemption in the areas of same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria, Sy explores several topics that are crucial for anyone seeking sexual and relational wholeness, such as: *The Power of Relationships, Realistic Expectations, Forgiveness, Renewing The Mind, What Works and Relapse Prevention*.

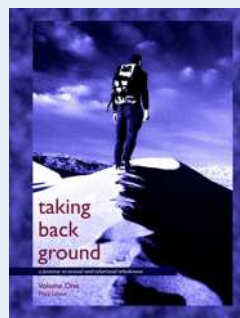
Please join us for video teachings, discussion and prayer on Tuesday nights from 7-8:30pm on Zoom. Meetings begin on July 6th and run weekly until August 24th. To register, sign into your account on the PF website, click "Join A Program" and select "2021 Summer Series—Zoom". If you are new to PF, please call the office at 503-235-6364 or email office@portland-fellowship.com to schedule an intake.

Fall 2021 Program Applications

We are currently accepting applications for our Taking Back Ground and Upper Room Community discipleship programs.

TBG is for men and women struggling with unwanted SSA, and also includes a wives group. The URC is a 9-month live-in program for strugglers seeking deeper community and growth.

To apply, please check out www.portlandfellowship.com.



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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