



# the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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## This Is Not Who You Are by Stuart Marks

*My journey has taught me that what I once thought was the biggest problem in my life—same-sex attraction—was merely a symptom of deeper lies that have been intertwined into so many areas of my life.*

We often hear how God has a perfect plan for our lives, but in the middle, it doesn't always seem so perfect. When I think back, I recognise that I was a sensitive kid, a bit of a worrier, but full of laughter and fairly happy-go-lucky. I don't remember exactly when the same-sex attractions started to appear, but when they did I had no idea how to fight them myself, or even how to ask for help. I didn't want the attractions and knew that I didn't want to act on them, so I did what seemed sensible: I attempted to shut them away.

I grew up in a Christian home, raised in church from an early age. I knew a lot about God, but I didn't truly know God. I did have a sort of prayer life, and when I prayed about the SSA, there was a voice from within me that said, "This is not who you are." Thankfully, the attractions seemed to wax and wane depending on what I was going through at the time. They felt separate from me, but still attached in some way. Over time, I got used to carrying this secret and did my best to ignore it.

In my late teens, I came to a crossroads. God was pursuing me and had been for some time. I knew I needed to give my life to Him, but having left home for university, a new set of worldly vices was up for grabs. Unfortunately, I opened doors that let a lot of darkness into my life. As the drinking and partying increased, so did the hidden attractions. Eventually, I came to a point where I willingly walked into a den of lions. I let the enemy in, and once he was in, it was very difficult to get him to leave. In my second year at university, I remember lying in bed and hearing a very distant voice from within me whisper, "This is not who you are." I cried myself to sleep that night, not believing that voice for one second. I remember thinking, "Why me? Why this?" I hit an all-time low, and to be brutally honest, I would've been happy not waking up the following morning.

Over the next few months I wrestled with God, knowing that I needed to surrender to Him, but also believing that I was too much of a mess and that He had made a mistake with me. Eventually, I gave my life to God one Sunday evening in church. I was done running and knew that I needed Jesus. God could've changed and healed all my brokenness in an instant, including the SSA, but He didn't. Instead, He took me on a journey, one that I'm still on. In the first few years of my walk with God, I got myself fixed up pretty well on the surface. I finished my degree, got a job and



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

started volunteering at church. I always had a desire to date girls, but I was so engulfed in lies and unwanted SSA that I never got very far. I felt too broken in this area. I didn't know where the brokenness came from, but I believed that it was just something I would have to carry.

A few years ago, I read a book called *Love-ology* by John Mark Comer, where I learned about Portland Fellowship and the Taking Back Ground programme, a discovery that has changed my life forever. After a quick Google search, I dismissed the idea of signing up for TBG. I would have to follow the online programme, as I live in Northern Ireland; a mentor was also required. I felt there was no way I could speak to someone about my SSA, never mind ask them to mentor me. That night, I stubbornly told God that if He wanted me to sign up for TBG, then He needed to give me the name of someone I could speak to. He did. I fought internally for weeks, telling myself that I couldn't and wouldn't talk about my issues, but eventually I gave in. Asking for help was my first step towards real freedom.

I joined TBG Online with a genuine desire to deepen my relationship with Christ, to hear what He had to say about me and to try and understand my attractions. Along that journey, which also included prayer ministry, counsel and accountability, I experienced God like never before. I learned from the Holy Spirit that this was a war against my identity, against my masculine heart. The first big attack against me was fairly obvious: between the ages of ten and twelve, I was bullied at both school and church by a group of boys, including my former best friend. This experience taught me that I was different, that being different was bad and that I wasn't "boy" enough—lies that I carried into adulthood.

The second big assault on my identity was less obvious: a misinterpretation of my earthly father's love. He's a fairly typical, Northern Irish country father who shows his love through providing and acts of service. As a sensitive kid, I responded to words of affirmation and physical touch, which I received regularly from my mum but not so much from my dad. This wasn't my dad's fault, as we all give and receive love differently, but as a sensitive boy, I interpreted the lack of words and touch as rejection. The devil tricked me into agreeing with his lies: *If my dad*

*and my peers don't love me, then there is something wrong with me. I am not enough.*

Through TBG Online, I learned the power of forgiveness. I forgave my father and forgave the bullies. Still, my journey has been much more complex than simply forgiving and seeking forgiveness. It continues to be a fight for my masculine heart, battling to hear what God says about me over what my life experiences say. What really helped me in letting go of SSA was learning that the attractions are a symptom. Each time I was tempted, I asked God to show me what was really going on, to help me access His strength and to heal the lie that was making my sexual desire malfunction. Initially, it felt like an impossible task, but gradually it got easier and I got quicker at breaking the lies. Sometimes I even physically wrote the lies down and burned the paper.



Eventually, I grew stronger and more confident as a man, believing that "...he who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion..." (Phil. 1:6). In my early thirties, I remember thinking to myself, "I am genuinely happy with where I am in life and being single". God has a funny sense of humour, though, and

not long after this I started to notice a girl at church. When I saw her, I genuinely couldn't see anything else; she was beautiful. After bumping into her a few times "by chance", I learned that her personality matched her outer beauty. I ran to God and spent a lot of time praying with Him, and also during prayer ministry. There was no way I could pursue someone unless I felt I had God's permission. To cut a long story short, I now have the absolute privilege of calling that woman my wife. This by no means signifies that I have it all together or that I am "complete". In these early years of marriage, sometimes I feel like I'm a bigger mess than I ever was, but I have an amazing wife who "has committed to loving this man unto the man God wanted him to become". Marriage is only one part of my pilgrimage towards wholeness. God has a different path and plan for us all. For me, it's a journey towards restoring my masculine heart. My encouragement for everyone, same-sex attracted or not, is to seek God's will for your life with all your heart, and allow Him to take you on a journey to become who He created you to be.

## Beyond the Walls of PF: Leaving Lesbianism Behind 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. This month, we talk with Carly Hope, who recently published her first book, GETTING OUT.*

### **Carly, you share in your book how you embraced a lesbian relationship, but you were also a Christian. What was going on in your heart and mind then?**

I felt tricked. Previously, I had not had any feelings of same-sex attraction. I was praying for a close female friendship in college, but when I got this best friend, everything changed. At first, she seemed like a gift from God, but then our friendship became emotionally dependent, romantic and sexual. I was shocked and horrified, and pleaded for years for God to take away the sexual part of our relationship. When He didn't, I became confused, hurt, tired and angry. I began to feel abandoned by God and fully embraced by her. I decided my girlfriend's love was better and more trustworthy than God's.

### **How did the Lord bring you to the point of repentance? What did it look like to surrender and obey Him?**

I know that the Lord offered me thousands of opportunities to repent throughout those eleven years. I "repented" hundreds of times, but I also chose to do things my way just as often. My moment of Holy Spirit empowerment came as my fiancée left me for another woman, and my world was burning to the ground. God showed me that repentance is not just feeling sorry, shame, or guilt—it's a change of mind, heart and direction. True repentance is always a work of God, with the power to obey coming only from His Spirit.

Repentance felt like death, like I was killing all that I knew and loved and trusted. I didn't know if the love of Christ would be better than a girlfriend. In repentance, God demanded not that I love sin less in order to love Him more, but that I allow my love for Christ to change my will. This started on the inside and moved outward. My heart softened toward God, His people and His way. My mind began to agree with His Word. My soul was comforted by His presence. Eventually, the fruit of this inward change was outward obedience and turning from sin.

### **As someone who's walked out of deception, can you offer some hope or advice to parents who are praying for their LGBTQ-identified children?**

Yes. My parents didn't know anything until I told them how God was rescuing me from my unwanted SSA. Yet, even in their ignorance, their prayers had been effective. So, for parents who don't know what is happening or how to pray, pray and groan with open hands to our God who holds all the facts. Pray that

the Lord would rescue and redeem your son or daughter from whatever chains are enslaving them. Pray that God will soften their hearts to the love of Jesus in a way that only He knows. And if you know more about your child's situation, pray specifically to our God who is specific. Pray that God will interrupt your child's days and nights, remove certain people from their lives, and show them opportunities for repentance. Be detailed with your petitions and desires for your children. Then open your hands.

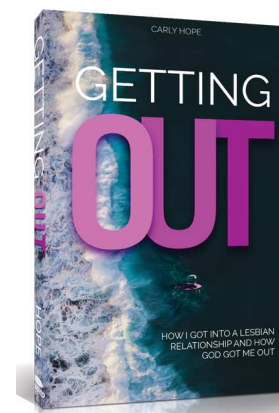
Lastly, remember that your child's first and greatest need is a saving relationship with Jesus Christ—not ending a sinful relationship. In Christ, they will have all they need for transformation and victory, and as parents, you do too!

### **In your book, you say that discipleship is "...Not for me to create something new, but for God to restore His image to how it was in the beginning" (p. 261). How can we encourage people who are working through painful things as God works His restoration in them?**

I initially worked hard at different methods for my own healing, but my efforts did not create the lasting change I hoped for. So, I went back and chose to believe what is most true about me: that I am made in His image. Because of my confession of faith, I am His, and He is mine.

For me, I knew I needed to find someone trained to deal with the trauma and loss of my fiancée, the same-sex struggle, and my faith in a healthy, holy, and structured way. My encouragement would be to seek out and interview Christian counselors who hold to the biblical view of sexuality, gender, marriage, and holiness. Encourage commitment to the counseling process—although it was hard and expensive, it was something I needed to invest in. I also knew I needed a local church where I could hear the Word of Truth and grow in my faith. I joined a small group Bible study, and found a few godly women who I could trust and share my battles with. I would encourage anyone on this discipleship journey to do the same.

To order Carly's book, *GETTING OUT*, visit [www.gettinghope.com](http://www.gettinghope.com).



## may - june calendar & services

may 14 & june 11

### hope group

Prayer, support and encouragement for friends and family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones.  
7:00 p.m.

To RSVP for Hope Group, go to:  
[portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php](http://portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php)

may 19-20

### jason speaking

Jason Thompson will be leading a leadership training for Path of Life in Spokane, WA.

may 22

### kathygrace speaking

KathyGrace Duncan will be teaching at Columbia River Bible Church.

tuesdays in may

### taking back ground

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

june 25

### kathygrace speaking

KathyGrace Duncan will be sharing with Western Seminary's Women's Center for Ministry.

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### additional updates

[www.portlandfellowship.com](http://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.

## Upper Room Community 2021-2022

We are currently accepting applications for our 2021-2022 Upper Room Community discipleship program. The URC is an amazing nine-month live-in discipleship opportunity for Christians in their 20's and 30's who have already gone through a measure of the redemptive process, and are now seeking deeper growth, maturity and community with other people on the transformational journey.



If you or someone you know is interested in learning more and/or applying, please visit [www.portlandfellowship.com/upper\\_room.php](http://www.portlandfellowship.com/upper_room.php). You can also email [patrick@portlandfellowship.com](mailto:patrick@portlandfellowship.com) or call us at 503-235-6364.

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## RHN Conference: HOPE2021 ONLINE

The Restored Hope Network annual HOPE conference is quickly approaching! HOPE 2021 will be held online June 11 & 12, and will feature keynote speakers Andy Comiskey, Dr. Nancy Heche and Alex



McFarland. The conference will feature powerful biblical teaching, inspiring life stories and more.

For more information and registration, go to [www.RestoredHopeNetwork.org/HopeConf](http://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.

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