



the fellowship message

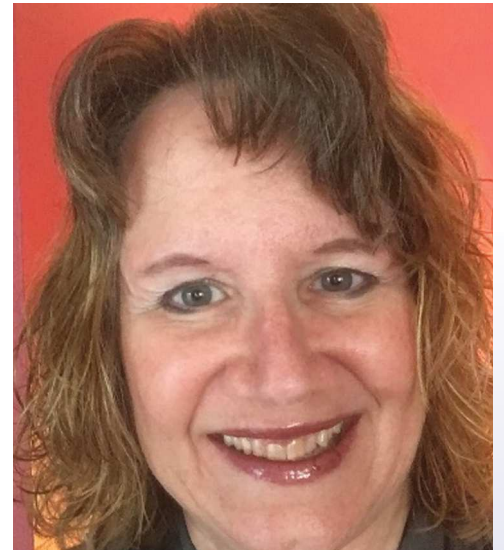
"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

September / October volume 25 number 5

My Journey to Confidence in God by Rachel Smith

In the spring of 2019, it took a courageous sibling to show me that I was emotionally dependent on a close girlfriend. That unhealthy dependency is what brought me to Portland Fellowship. After meeting with PF's Women's Ministry Leader, KathyGrace, I knew that God had me here for His plan and purpose.

My dependency on my friend stemmed from circumstances in which a young girl, me, got lost in her family, and hence, her identity. My older sister was hyper-verbal, and since we were so close in age, I ended up playing "follow-the-leader". I thought that whatever she did, I could do as well. I thought I had the same personality as her and so I never really discovered who I was. My younger brother (the only boy) was doted on by my father, and then, bring in the baby sister who got all the attention. I had always felt like the black sheep of the family, like I didn't really fit in with my siblings. I remember not feeling as intellectually competent, and perceived that I didn't receive the same level of attention from my parents as my other siblings did. I don't know that I experienced a very close connection with either of my parents. They were excellent providers, but my poor self-esteem hampered any efforts to draw close emotionally to them.



Not knowing who I was led to rebellion as a young adult. I had been wrestling with envy and jealousy towards my baby sister, and I didn't know how to deal with such intense feelings. I didn't know how to talk to my parents about what I was feeling, and I didn't even know how to process within myself these deep, raw emotions. Eventually, since I didn't feel like I belonged in my family, I figured it was time for me to leave my parents' house, and I ran straight into the arms of an older girlfriend in my church who gave me the attention I was so desperately seeking. I didn't realize how hungry I had been for affirmation and attention until she made the first move toward me. Looking back, she offered me the acceptance and identity I hadn't experienced in my family. Even though I knew it was wrong, it was meeting a need I had.

I grew up in the Midwest and regularly attended church, so I knew that homosexuality was a sin. However, it took several years, and a mission trip, for the Lord to convict me that I was living in sin and bring me to my knees in repentance. On this mission trip, I was sitting around a campfire with some other people, and we were writing down the things that were holding us back from freedom. I remember having this moment where I realized the relationship I was in was wrong, and that I couldn't continue in that if I wanted to grow in my relationship with Christ. That trip

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

was also the first time I was confronted with being a people-pleaser. I was completely shocked—me, a people-pleaser?! I had never been challenged with that hard truth, and it was one more thing that caused me to really take a look at my life, and examine who I was, what I was doing.

When I got home from the mission trip, my girlfriend picked me up from the airport, and I was excited to tell her all about being overseas and what God had done on our trip. Eventually though, I had to be honest and tell her that I couldn't continue in our relationship, because it was wrong. And so, I left that relationship, took a nail, and hammered that door shut!

It wasn't until years later, after getting married, having kids, getting divorced, and taking care of my elderly parents, that I found myself in need of Portland Fellowship. I needed some extra financial support while I cared for my parents, and one of my good friends offered to help me out with some bills. We had initially connected very well back in 2016—it was like we were two peas in a pod! But, over time, I didn't realize how much I was beginning to depend on her. It was hard, but it took my older sister confronting me for me to realize and take responsibility for my emotional dependency. After that, I stopped spending so much time with that friend, and when I shared my struggles with my pastor and his wife and told them of my past homosexual relationship, they recommended Portland Fellowship to me.

PF has been so good for me to really focus on Jesus and grow in the truth that I can't look to other people to meet my needs—I must look to Him. Over these past two years in PF's Taking Back Ground discipleship program, God has led me to surrender people-pleasing and shallow relationships. I have identified some areas of struggle within me that correlate to these surrenders.

The first area of struggle is envy. I dealt with jealousy toward my baby sister growing up. Not knowing and appreciating who I was as a beautiful daughter of God, paved the way to that struggle. Not knowing how to combat that sin led to envy of her charm, looks, wit and knowledge. However, through this process, I've found

only being thankful for how the Lord gifted my sister, but thanking God for how He has wired me differently, with unique intelligence, charm, wit and looks. This is a process that God is working out in me. To truly love and accept who God made me to be brings about true joy, confidence, and contentment. Psalm 139:14a says *"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."*

This leads right into my next struggle of self-centeredness. Steeped in this sin, kept me from reaching out to develop closer and deeper connections with family and friends. In the TBG book chapter on self-centeredness, it says, "In our search for meaning and security, somehow we have arrived at this notion that no one else will be there for us. As a result, our time and energy go into examining ourselves." Through my journey, I've found that the tool and remedy for self-centeredness is servanthood. "In serving we find fulfillment not only in our lives, but we find we have enhanced the lives of others in the process." (TBG Year 2, Third Edition, p. 205) Mark 9:35—"Anyone who wants to be first, must be the very last, and the servant of all."

I have lived too long with my focus on what is broken in me and allowing others rejection of me to shape who I am. I can't continue seeking my value and worth from other people (which never worked anyway!). Now, I know I'm a daughter of the King. I am accepted as His, the beloved. God is the only One who can speak to my value, and He is all I need. I'm inspired to remember this through lyrics from Steve Camp's song, "He's All You Need":

*When you give in to that familiar sin / He is all you need.
Guilt has you paralyzed; it slowly eats you alive /
He is all you need.
He'll be faithful to you though your heart is untrue
and your love's grown cold.
His forgiveness is real, it will comfort and heal /
your sin weary soul.
God loves you so, He'll never let you go /
He is all you need.
Through all your years, the joy, the tears /
He is all you need.*



Rachel with TBG Leaders KathyGrace & Janelle.

Beyond the Walls of PF: Interview with the Director's Wife by Patrick Silvis

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're talking with Amy Thompson, wife of Portland Fellowship Executive Director, Jason Thompson.

Amy, you've been married to Jason throughout most of his time at PF. What were your initial thoughts about his involvement here?

I first learned of Portland Fellowship when Jason shared at a Multnomah chapel. I remember thinking that it sounded like an amazing but challenging ministry, and soon after I got to know Jason. I had several friends at school and church that knew him and his ministry, and them vouching for his character and ministry was really important to me. Later on, during our first date, I felt the Lord tell me, "This is who I have for you," though I didn't share that with Jason at the time! [Laughs] Even before we got married, I knew that God would have me support Jason in any way I could in his work at PF.



What has it looked like for you guys to raise your two sons, knowing what their dad does at PF?

We've lived our lives being pretty much an open book. At the same time, we've set some boundaries about how we share with school staff, friends and parents. For example, I only share basic facts about Jason's ministry; if people are genuinely interested and ask more, I'll share more. We felt that our boys didn't choose to be in this controversial ministry; therefore, we protected them. However, the boys have never shied away from sharing with others what their dad does. As young as third grade, they confidently shared about the ministry, even at school.

Though you're not officially on staff here at the ministry, how have you seen God working through you & Jason's involvement at PF over the years?

I've seen the Lord guide and love Jason into leadership. Jason has submitted his heart, mind, and spirit to Jesus Christ, and the Lord has blessed him. I've seen God put a hedge of protection and provision around PF—for example, even though many churches have backed away from this mission, the financial provision for the ministry continues. I've also seen God renew Jason's love, passion and direction for the ministry year after year. A great example of this is Jason creating and improving PF's online programs (TBG, Reach Truth, Hope Group Online, etc.).

What kinds of challenges or difficulties have you faced as the wife of someone ministering in a controversial and often-misunderstood field?

One year, when Jason was interviewed in the paper, several of our son Cody's school friends' parents backed away from me, resulting in fewer opportunities for him to play with his friends. Nothing was explicitly said, but it was obvious that they disapproved. I know that some think PF is harmful, and that misunderstanding has caused us to lose relationships.

To my surprise, churches have discouraged me the most. Doctrinal changes, acceptance of gay marriage, and people openly identifying as gay with no consequences makes it feel like PF is no longer supported by the Church. There have even been times in women's Bible studies when I've shared about PF, and quickly realized that it wasn't a safe place for me to share. It's hard, because some people think I'm judging or condemning their children who identify as gay, which of course isn't my heart at all.

Financially, the discipline of living in obedience to God's calling is real—we're acutely aware that we're supported through other people's donations, so we want to be good stewards and not mismanage our money. Sometimes that means saying "no" to expenses that seem normal for other people, and as a result we've often been accused of being "cheap". [Laughs]

Thankfully, I don't question our choice to continue serving at PF. It's so clear that we've been called to this ministry, and we continue to experience the reality that "...his yoke is easy, and his burden is light." (Matt. 11:30)

What advice or encouragement could you offer to other wives or families who are pursuing God's design for marriage and sexuality?

For those who are called to marriage, remember that pursuing God's design for marriage and godly sexuality brings great blessings. Keep in mind that our strength and joy are in His dwelling place (*1 Chron. 16:27*). We are to rest in Him and how He designed us to be.

september - october calendar & services

september 10, october 8
hope group

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

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

september 15-18, 25
kathygrace speaking

KathyGrace will be sharing with two different groups in Florida.

tuesdays in october
taking back ground

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

october 8-9, 14
kathygrace speaking

KathyGrace will be sharing at The Ambassador's Forum and with pastors from Pure Life Alliance.

october 19
jason speaking

Jason will be sharing with a support group in Melbourne, Australia.

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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.

Taking Back Ground 2021-2022



We are currently accepting applications for our 2021-22 Taking Back Ground discipleship program. TBG is for men and women struggling with unwanted SSA, and we also offer a group for wives.

Here at Portland Fellowship, we continue to see God changing people's lives as they surrender their minds and hearts to Him, and as such, we confidently continue proclaiming freedom, healing and wholeness in Jesus Christ for those who follow and obey Him.

Taking Back Ground is an amazing opportunity to dive deeper into Scripture, process our wounds and relational deficits, and learn how to grow closer to Jesus with other believers. We are offering both in-person and Zoom group options. To learn more or to register, visit www.portlandfellowship.com or call us here in the office, 503-235-6364.

Financial Partnership Opportunity

Recently, we discovered a leak in one of the PF house bathrooms, and fixing the leak quickly escalated into replacing old lead pipes, rotted sub-flooring, and gutting/remodeling the shower.

The final cost of labor and materials will be close to \$7,000. As you can imagine, this is a large unplanned expense. Would you prayerfully consider giving a special donation towards these unexpected costs? If you feel so led, you can mail in a check and mark it for "Bathroom Repair".

We would be so grateful!



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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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.

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