



PORTLAND
fellowship

Dear Friends,

update april 2022

In March, Portland Fellowship held its annual retreat for Taking Back Ground participants and leaders at Camp Tadmor. What a joy to be back again after Covid!

I'll be the first to admit I am not a retreat guy. The thought of sharing a cabin, activities and meals with other people is not for me. Adding in the expectation to have an encounter with God made me bristle even more—it felt like contriving a spiritual response. That's possibly why two times through the Taking Back Ground program as a participant, I never once attended the retreat. I managed to “drop-in” for one as an alumnus, but the first chance I had, I got in my car and headed home; I didn't even stay for the whole thing. So, in a way, this was my first TBG Retreat. I admit I still had some hesitation, but now as a leader, I knew it would be in bad taste to promote it and then find some excuse not to attend. I prayed about it, and decided that all of my worries and doubts were insignificant. I merely needed to be obedient, show up and let God blow my mind with His goodness. And He did!



From setting up on Friday to packing up on Sunday, this was a totally different experience for me. As participants arrived late Friday afternoon, I experienced my first face-to-face meeting with people I had only seen on my computer screen in Zoom meetings. The energy people brought as they came let me know this weekend was going to be special. The Holy Spirit's presence was already covering this place, these people, and, dare I say, me. I knew God was going to do a mighty work in the hearts of the participants. What I didn't anticipate was how much He was going to do in me.

The TBG Retreat is all about worship, reflection, surrender and blessing. It is a time to allow the Holy Spirit to speak into our lives and draw us to himself. It is also a time to rub shoulders with each other and get to know one another in a deeper, more meaningful way than we are able to during our limited time on Tuesday evenings (whether in person or through Zoom).

So what were the highlights? Leader Roy introduced our Saturday morning sessions by telling us that most retreats come with a keynote speaker to challenge us. Then, he informed us that our keynote speaker this year was Jesus Christ Himself, by way of His own words in Matthew 5-7, The Sermon on the Mount. As I read through the Scripture passage once, and then again, I found myself letting Jesus' words come alive in my heart in new and profound ways. The experience led me to new revelations about who I am in Christ. I began to see the impact in others as well, as we shared what had been revealed to us individually in small groups. I saw myself and others digging deeper into Scripture and into themselves with a hunger and thirst for righteousness (*Matt. 5:6*).

“He has sent me to bind
up the brokenhearted, to
proclaim liberty to captives,
and freedom to prisoners.”

ISAIAH 61 : 1

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The pinnacle of the TBG retreat is the Surrender Service on Saturday night. Here, participants are invited to surrender something to the Lord that has hindered them in becoming the person God wants them to become. It is an emotional time, and yet, it is very real, as individuals become so vulnerable and share deeply-rooted strongholds they want to leave at the Cross. I was challenged by Jason's reminder that once we surrender something to God, it is no longer ours. If we pick it up again, we must relinquish it, because it isn't ours anymore.



One by one, people stood up and shared what they wanted to surrender and why they were surrendering it. It could be an object, an idea or an attitude. I saw God softening hearts of people to lay aside negative things in favor of going deeper into their relationship with their Heavenly Father. I was awestruck and humbled, and I was reminded that we are all broken due to painful experiences. Yet, by surrendering whatever it was that needed to be left at the Cross, people invited Jesus to heal and to provide hope.

Last fall, I was invited to be a TBG leader, and I didn't know what to expect. I seriously doubted I could have much of an impact on the participants in my groups. However, something quite unexpected happened to me during the retreat. I realized how much I had grown to love these people whom God entrusted to me, but I was trying to lead based on my own experiences and strengths. I tried too hard to be the best leader I could, and it was somehow on them if they didn't respond. I realized God is at work in these people's lives despite me and my efforts. He brings about the change, not me. My task is simply to love my participants as God has loved me (*1 John 4:19*), point them to Jesus and allow Him to change their hearts. I love this quote from Jon Bloom: "If we love God best, we will love others well." "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" —*Deuteronomy 6:5*. And that is how the Holy Spirit transformed my heart during the 2022 TBG retreat.

In Christ,
Russ Sweet
TBG Leader

RHN HOPE 2022 Conference

This year's Restored Hope Network annual conference, HOPE 2022, will take place on June 9-11 at Ridgecrest Conference Center, NC. This special in-person conference will feature powerful biblical teaching, workshops, and inspiring life stories of those who have dealt with SSA and transgenderism and been transformed by the living God. Learn from some tender-hearted experts in helping others and supporting families. Speakers will include Dr. Julie Hamilton, Tamika Sanders, Jeff Simunds and Dr. Paul Hruz.

For pricing, registration and more information, please visit www.restored-hopenetwork.org/hopeconf

Portland Fellowship is a nonprofit, 501(c)3 nondenominational organization. We are exclusively supported through private donations, support services and offerings. Thank you for your gifts.

events calendar

april 8
In-Person Hope Group
For friends and family of gay or trans-identified loved ones. 6:30 pm.
www.portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

april 7 & 21
Zoom Hope Group Program
www.portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php

tuesdays in april
Taking Back Ground
PF's discipleship program for unwanted SSA. 7-9:30 pm.

Speakers and personal support
can be arranged through the office.

Check website for additional updates
at www.portlandfellowship.com