



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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A Mother's Hopeful Heart by Martha

I struggle to find the best way to tell you about the ever-present hole abiding in my heart. I live knowing the joy of salvation and eternal life, because of the sacrifice of Jesus. If we were to meet, you'd probably say, "There goes a happy woman, a person who makes friends easily, and rarely meets a stranger."

These qualities are very much a part of me; I am blessed beyond compare and have little to complain about. I praise the Lord daily, because He walks beside me, teaching me to walk in truth and grace. Yet, I live with an unquenchable ache.

A few decades ago, I met a wonderful man. We married, began our family, and were blessed with two children. Early on, our oldest son showed preferences for hot pink, dress-up, playing with girls and art. I pondered his sexuality, but my husband gently suggested I need not be fearful. Still, from time to time, I wondered. When our children were young, my husband, their father, suddenly passed away. WOW! That was so shocking for each of us. Each night, we tried to heal, talking, crying, reading the Psalms and praying. We were surrounded by friends and family, and everyone walked so well with us. Eventually, God put the pieces of our hearts and lives back together, and we began to move forward. We re-entered life, beginning to know joy and laughter again.

I thought I walked well with the kids, but years later my son told me that he would lay in bed at night, behind his closed door, crying as he began to wake up to his unwanted homosexual feelings.

My son was always active in school and seemed to thrive there. He worked very hard, received good grades, and played the violin. He had a date for every dance and a girlfriend at sixteen. He soon went away to college and met a lovely young woman. They dated on and off for several years, eventually talking of marriage when they were about twenty-four years old. They seemed content to be together, and they were each walking with the Lord. I do need to say, though, there were times I didn't see him full of the desire I thought was natural for a man in love.

When my son was twenty-five, I opened my email one day to find a very private letter from him. My son was pouring his heart out to me. He had fallen in a deep dark hole, and he didn't know how to get out. He was running from God, from himself and from me. I was instructed not to call—he said he would lie to me like he always had. After a few days of emailing back and forth, pleading for him to share his pain, I received another message. This time, he told me of a man with whom he was sharing his life.



Martha is a member of PF's Hope Group friends & family program.

It was after midnight, and honestly, I can't remember if I called him or just went to bed, but I do remember a sleepless night. I wailed and cried out to God. The pain was worse than when my husband passed away. The next day my son and I spoke on the phone, and he begged me to get on a plane and come help him. I did, going twice within about three weeks. The second time I saw him, he was in such deep pain and desperation, I wasn't sure if I'd ever see him again. I found excellent counselors for him, and he seemed to get better, but then began to slide back.

As for me, I was numb, stunned, and felt very much as if someone had their hands around my neck, yanking me and my entire root system out of the ground. I was left floundering, struggling to learn to function again. I had gone to seminary the year before all this, where I met a celibate lesbian woman. Little did I know then that a year later I would spend hours on the phone with her as she gently helped me grapple with understanding same-sex attraction. I am so thankful for her friendship, and for other dear Christian friends who walked and prayed with me.



About this time, I decided to move to Portland—I was looking forward to a new beginning. Within a month, my son followed me west, and lived with me until he found his own place. Eventually, he and his old college girlfriend began to discuss dating again. He was elated and shared his happiness with me. She had known about his struggles with SSA and believed God would guide them through these issues. He traveled to see her and discuss their future, but after that trip, I never heard her name again.

A year later, I came home to find him working in my kitchen. He seemed distressed. I inquired as to the reason for his emotions. He had just learned his old girlfriend was engaged to be married. We sat on the couch and cried. I asked if this new man loved her, and he told me he had no idea, but knew that anyone would be able to love her better than he could. That day my son gave up on himself, and he turned his back on God. Before the day was over, he met the man he is married to today.

Within less than a year, I watched the son I thought I knew transform into a stranger before my eyes. He was running a business in my home, and he slunk into the house every morning and left at night without so much as

a “hello” or “goodbye”. Before I knew it, he was living with this man he'd only known for a few weeks. He stopped going to church, and dropped the Bible study he once helped lead, allowing everyone to accept or reject his new path. He didn't care what anyone thought.

I was angry, hurt, and honestly, my heart began to turn cold toward him. We had arguments that were far from grace-filled on my part. One day, I went to the dry-cleaners and learned from the owner that my son might be married. My heart burst. Who was this person I had known since birth?! Within a short-time I confronted him, learning he wasn't yet married, but would be in about six weeks. He off-handedly invited me to the wedding, and I sharply refused the invite.

Times were tough for the first year. Seeking to understand God's teachings, I wrestled with God (like Jacob) to hear His truth (*Gen 32:22-32*). I needed to walk true to the Lord's leading. Eventually, I began hearing God's lessons of grace. One book that meant a great deal to me was *Messy Grace* by Caleb Kaltenbach. About midway through this journey, God led me to Portland Fellowship. Here, I found great solace, both from the staff and from the other attendees. I often felt God was far from me, yet just when I needed His presence most, He showed up with encouragement to move me through the pain and sorrow.

Nearly four years have passed since their marriage. I still refer to them as partners, as I do not believe God has ordained this union. Still, I have learned to love this young man as a son. He is kind, tender-hearted, and generous. I pray God will touch the heart of both these men with His love for them, and though it's painful, I fully recognize these prayers cry out for the dissolution of their partnership.

I don't understand why God allowed this difficulty into my life, but I do know He uses this thorn in my heart to teach me more about the heart of Jesus. People ask me if I have accepted this union, and I tell them, “NO, I haven't accepted it, but I have grown accustomed to it.” God has increased the size of my heart to love these young men, even as I carry a hole in my heart surrounding the brokenness I walk with each day. I live being confident of this, “...that he who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (*Philippians 1:6*)

The Transformational Journey: Pursuing God's Original Intent by Jason Thompson

Portland Fellowship proclaims the message of hope and healing for those with unwanted same-sex attractions. This is the first article in a six-part series that presents an overview of why and how we make this God-centered transformational journey.

My daughter, Abbie, died at three months old from severe heart complications in 2001. She was our firstborn, and as I'm sure you can imagine, we were devastated by her death. My wife and I learned of Abbie's condition twenty weeks into the pregnancy, which gave us several months to prepare for the challenging time that would follow. We were presented with medical options, met other parents who walked through the process, and had time to pray for a miracle. We did everything we knew to do, and God met us through our prayers by providing access to world-renowned doctors, bringing incredible support from family and friends, and giving us hope. Yet, in the end, Abbie died.



Years before this traumatic season, I had another desperate need for God to intervene with a miracle. At thirteen years old, I found myself intimately desiring my male peers. From that first awakening, God's Spirit convicted me and pressed upon my heart to reject the inclination to entertain those desires. In the years that followed, I prayed, sought answers, and hoped for a miracle. And in the end, God answered my prayers by leading me to Portland Fellowship, which provided a path to genuine wholeness, healing, and even newfound desires.

One prayer was answered the way I hoped for, and one was not.

I recently heard a prominent Christian speaker on sexuality, who is critical of ministries like Portland Fellowship, say that although God can grow someone's arm back, He typically doesn't. Likewise, this popular speaker says, although God can take away homosexual desires, He typically doesn't, and promoting that message would give false hope.

There are two issues I find with this critique. The first is equating physical afflictions with relational needs. Indeed, I also don't see God restoring limbs (although He certainly can). Yet, I do see God healing the brokenhearted, setting captives free, and sanctifying the believer. Homosexuality is not an unchangeable condition; instead, it is a relational issue with real relational solutions.

The second issue with the critic is his reluctance to embrace and promote God's original intent for our lives. Here is the vital point: even if we do not experience a change of desire this side of Heaven, shouldn't we still always move toward God's original intent? If we believe God did not intend for a man to desire another sexually, would we not pursue every spiritual and practical path the Lord lays before us to move toward freedom and wholeness?

The critic may say, "But, I know many people whose same-sex desires have not changed." And I would reply, "Sure, and my daughter died. But not for one second do I regret all the planning for her survival, or the countless prayers and hope I had in Jesus to perform a miracle. I would do it all over again, even knowing the outcome. Likewise, if my desires for other men had never changed, I would still, until my dying breath, seek God's original intent for my life in whatever way He showed me, whether that be through His Word (*1 Cor. 6:11*), His Spirit (*Titus 3:4-7*), His Church (*1 Thess. 5:11*), or even through the natural order of things (*Romans 8:28*)."

God has revealed that He can (and does) renew hearts, restore shattered masculinity and femininity, rebuild identity, and even replace distorted desires with new ones. Yet, even if we don't experience the fullness of these things, we still run with perseverance the race marked out for us (*Heb. 12:1*). Let us not find complacency in our broken humanity, but instead seek all that God has for us. And in this process, let us remember not to focus on a desired outcome (like healing), but on Jesus (the Healer). For it is in Him that we find true joy, peace, and contentment, regardless of the trials and struggles we face. It is in Him that we find our Living Hope.

In part two of this six-part series, we will address how wounds and unmet needs have contributed to the derailing of God's intention for our lives. As we identify the enemy's scheme to confuse and wound us, we come into a more accurate understanding of our brokenness. Then, we can invite the Lord into those areas and begin to find freedom.

january - february calendar & services

tuesdays in january & february
taking back ground
PF's discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction.
7-9:30 p.m.

january 6, 20; february 3, 17
hope group zoom
This is a brand-new Zoom program for friends and family of gay/trans-identified loved ones.
6-8 p.m. PST.
portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php

january 8
kathygrace speaking
Felida Bible Church-Vancouver,WA.

january 14, february 11
hope group in-person
Prayer, support and encouragement for friends and family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones.
6:30 p.m.
portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

february 6
kathygrace speaking
KathyGrace will be sharing with a parents group from St. Louis, MO.

february 18-19
kathygrace speaking
Dallas Theological Seminary-TX.

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additional updates
www.portlandfellowship.com

speakers, counseling and support for youth
can be set up through the office.

The Newly-Revised Hope Group Online



In 2014, we launched an online video teaching series for friends and family of gay-identified loved ones. Now, eight years later, we are overjoyed to announce the launch of our newly-revised Hope Group Online program.

This is an incredibly dynamic and encouraging series that features testimonies from parents, teachings from PF staff and leaders, and includes printable PDF worksheets for individual or group processing.

While we recognize this program is not a substitute for in-person gatherings or one-on-one support, we pray this series will encourage and bring hope to families who are seeking wisdom and guidance in relating to their gay-identified loved one with both grace and truth. HGO is designed so that you can work through the lessons on your own, or you can use them in a group setting.

Hope Group Online addresses topics such as *Disclosure, Grief, Roots of Sexual Brokenness, Family Dynamics, Biblical Sexuality and Transformation, Restoring Relationships, Boundaries, Effective Communication, and Responding with Grace and Truth*. Featured testimonies are from parents who share what God is doing in and through them as they relate to their children.

To register for Hope Group Online, please visit www.hopecgrouponline.com.

**NOTE: If you've gone through HGO in the past, please consider signing into your account again to work through the newly updated materials.*



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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