



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Coming Out in the Light of God's Love by Darin Mitchem

My birth parents were young teens in Oklahoma and weren't ready to parent. As I was born weeks after the Roe versus Wade decision of 1973, the first miracle of God in my life was that my birth mom chose life and chose to give me to an adoptive family.

The second miracle of my life was that the unwed mother's home where she gave birth placed me with adoptive parents that believed in Jesus Christ and the value of nurturing children through a stable home life. My adoptive father provided well for us, and allowed my adoptive mother to focus on that nurture and to do it well.

I believe there is a spiritual enemy of our souls, and I see this played out in the seeds of doubt and rebellion that accompanied my earliest memories. I did not accept my adoptive parents' transparency about my adoption and see their act of love and sacrifice. I was obsessed with my perceived rejection by my birth parents and interpreted any act of discipline or restraint by my adoptive parents as a lack of love. This baffled my adoptive parents, who later tearfully explained how they'd done the best they could. The enemy's first victory in this was my retaliatory rejection of my dad as I began to fantasize my ideal parentage and a father of my own imagination.

To fill my yearning for love and mentorship, I discovered performance in academics and the arts. My adoptive parents saw the importance of attending events for me and my siblings and praised me for good grades. Extended family, church, and community all seemed thrilled by my performance, so I embraced performing as the way to receive love and acceptance. When my fantasies became sexualized during puberty, performance became a way to hide my attraction to the older boys and father figures in my life.

The third miracle of my life was that God was reaching out to me, and, largely through the prayers of my adoptive family members, drew me to Himself early on in a Sunday school setting to give my heart to Him. As the spiritual weeds of pride, arrogance and same-sex attraction grew alongside this newly planted faith, I doubted God's goodness and love for me as my Heavenly Father, just as I had with my earthly dad. I rejected God and bragged to my high school friends about my desire to sin, lying about my true struggles, and began dating and messing around with girls as a part of my façade and my rebellion. While a prayerful hedge of protection and my parents' boundaries kept me from starting down many paths of destruction, as a high schooler my same-sex attractions intensified. I attempted to stifle them by performing as a pianist and a student, acting both on stage and off in ways that made me feel acceptable in my Christian community, while at odds with who I was becoming inside.



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

Again, God reached out to me and drew me unexpectedly into a relationship with Him during my junior year of high school, and it turned my world upside down. I was experiencing for the first time as an adult the Holy Spirit speaking to my sin, offering me Jesus' death and resurrection as payment, then leading me into a forgiven life where my eyes were opened, and I saw my school-mates, teachers, and community members as God designed them to be in the light of His love. I loved people the way Jesus loves people for the first time, and this led me into true Christian community, daily time in the Bible, and a joy and hope of acceptance outside of my imaginary world.

Jesus sealed my hope and my future with that decision in high school. However, I needed a fourth miracle to break the bondage of those weeds the enemy had planted, that were now so deeply entangled in my psyche. A desire to live from a pure heart walking with Jesus conflicted diametrically with the pride, lusts, and desires that I had hidden through a "nice guy" façade for so many years. I envisioned a life of ministry with a wife and children at the very same time that I contemplated entering the gay lifestyle. I cried out to God the summer before my senior year of college, begging Him to intercede, and He did.

First, God gave me the motivation and courage to confess my struggle to my parents, who were shocked and upset but started seeking out resources for me. Secondly, God increased my attraction for a spunky girl named Jessica that I'd noticed her very first year at college. As He pushed us together in multiple arts and faith-centered scenarios, our friendship turned romantic. I could see how God had given me the heart and soul of a man, not just the physical body, and that I could still realize my dream of wife and children.

The fourth miracle took shape as Jess and her family accepted my confession of same-sex struggle with Christian grace and mercy. We began our marriage with a fantastic honeymoon after a Christ-centered wedding. Still, I didn't know much, and found the struggle returned because the roots of those spiritual weeds were still alive. Jess helped me find Portland Fellowship to receive instruction on healing and restoration from unwanted same-sex attraction, and thus Jesus began my restoration in earnest.



As a young Christian, I did not see the full depth and breadth of my sin and all that needed to change. I was complacent, and dropped out of the program after Year 1, waited a few years until my struggle got even worse, then went back for Year 2. Jessica showed her great love for me by sticking with me all this time while bearing, raising, and homeschooling five children. Eventually, she broke our negative cycle through the Holy Spirit's movement in her life by yielding her challenge areas to God.

This challenged me to step up and seek Christ's true Lordship in my life. I joined a local change group based on Michael Dye's Genesis Process, and this group challenged me to fully engage with Jesus, with Jessica, and with our children. The class renewed my understanding and cooperation with Christ's change process in my life, helping me to walk into that uncomfortable place that my brain couldn't recognize because it's a new routine and way of living, with no guaranteed comforts. Time and again He has proven that there is light, joy, and peace on just the other side of the ridge if I can trust Him through the darkness of a valley.

He also showed me His promises that convinced me, in a way that I could *feel*, that I am loved and cherished by Him. One of God's incredible promises that stood out to me all these years was I Cor. 6:9-11: "*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.***"

As I became more accustomed to walking in the truth, my church encouraged me to come out into the light of God's love by sharing my testimony at one of our men's retreats. As a performer, I was (naïvely) enthusiastic, but the reality of being vulnerable about my hidden struggle made me sick to my stomach. I expected no end to awkwardness and loneliness after sharing. Yet, instead of rejecting or ridiculing me, the men loved and respected me, treating me as the man of God that I desire to be and not the man the world was telling me I had to be. Though slow and unsteady at times, I now walk among men as a friend and ally instead of hiding in the shadows.

The Transformational Journey (Part 4 of 6): Redeeming the Wounds by Jason Thompson

Portland Fellowship proclaims the message of hope and healing for those with unwanted same-sex attractions. This six-part series presents an overview of why and how we make this powerful God-centered transformational journey. For parts one through three, please visit: www.portlandfellowship.com/transformation.pdf

I met Ron Perry in 1998, when he came to Portland Fellowship after confessing to his wife, Heidi, that he has been sexually acting out with men. His behavior profoundly damaged his marriage, compromised his integrity, and impaired his fellowship with God.

Many wives, facing a similar situation, would conclude that their husband must be gay, with no hope of saving the marriage. But Heidi didn't believe that lie. Instead, she believed in a God who redeems, heals, and restores. And as she partnered with Ron in the transformational journey, God did a profound work in their relationship, which ultimately resulted in a stronger marriage. Ron and Heidi went on to serve on our leadership team for over a decade until their retirement landed them in Arizona. They remain dear friends of mine, and remain one of my favorite stories of God's redemption.

I shared in part two of this six-part series that many who struggle with life-dominating sin have deep wounds and unmet needs that require the healing work of God. When we identify the roots and allow God to heal the wounds, we experience change from the inside out. This intentional discipleship process is not measurable in months or years, but in sanctifying moments. And although it can be a challenging journey, if our focus is on the Lord, it will be filled with deep joy as He replaces the old with the new:

- * Our once-damaged identity (who we *thought* we were) is now found by embracing who God says we are.
- * The lack of affirmation we hungered for finds fulfillment as we receive blessings through His Spirit and His church.
- * The pain of unresolved loss becomes mended by resting in the Lord's comfort and peace.
- * A life riddled with chaos and disruption becomes renewed by finding order and stability in Christ.
- * And for those who were once bitter from the devastating effects of abuse and neglect, experience a newfound heart of forgiveness and reconciliation.

As God's redeeming work begins, we become no longer conformed by the world or our wounds, but we become transformed by the renewing of our minds. (*Romans 12:2*) Where there was once uncertainty about God and others, we now find assurance - His blessed assurance revealed in the unmatched work of the Holy Spirit, promising us what is to come. (*2 Cor. 1:22*) Where we were once insecure in our relationship with God and others and pursued dysfunctional connections in the attempt to feel secure, we now rest securely in the strong tower of Christ. (*Prov. 18:12*)

And then, because we are no longer lead by uncertainty or insecurity, the defenses that we once used to protect us are transformed into a heart of humility; and the hostility that kept us detached from God and others is now transformed into love, which allows us to live out the two greatest commandments: "To love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." (*Luke 10:27*)

When we love as Christ loved, we will see it expressed outwardly. All those sinful behavioral choices become God-pleasing, such as blessing and serving others and praising and obeying God. And we will also experience that love inwardly by enjoying the fruits of the Spirit, such as joy, peace, gentleness, and self-control. (*Gal 5:22-23*)

Those participating in our Taking Back Ground program usually come because of the troubling symptoms they face. But the symptoms are not what is focused on, rather we seek God's intended purpose and invite the Spirit of God to heal and restore. Then, we are able to walk in the freedom Christ offers.

Living out the gift of freedom is not a quick easy process, but it is true and rewarding. We will examine this in Part Five of this series.



**july - august
calendar & services**

**tuesdays in july & august
summer series**

This year, PF's summer discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction will be "The Journey: From Captivity to Freedom." Join us on Zoom on Tuesday evenings for video teachings, group discussion, and small group sharing/prayer. 7-8:30 p.m.

**july 7 & 21
hope group zoom**

Zoom program for friends and family of LGBTQ loved ones. 6-8 p.m. PST.
portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php

**july 8, august 12
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

**august 6
kathygrace speaking**

PF's Women & Transgender Ministry Leader, KathyGrace, will be sharing with Dallas Theological Seminary on Zoom.

follow us!

Get updates and inspirational resources on social media.

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***Twitter:** @PTLDFellowship

additional updates
www.portlandfellowship.com

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

Summer Series 2022: The Journey

This summer, we invite you to join us for "The Journey: From Captivity to Freedom". This eight-week discipleship series will walk through your own process of leaving Egypt and moving toward the Promised Land.

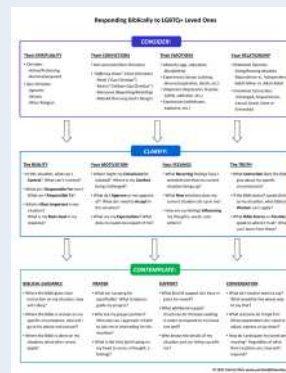


The program will feature short video lessons, questions for group processing, and time

for personal sharing and prayer. We will be offering "The Journey" via Zoom, and meetings will take place on Tuesday evenings in July and August from 7-8:30pm (PST). To register, please sign into your account at www.portlandfellowship.com, click on "Join a Program", and select "2022 Summer Series: The Journey". There is no cost to join, but a simple intake form is required.

Helpful Resource: "Responding Biblically to LGBTQ+ Loved Ones"

One of our newest available resources is called "Responding Biblically to LGBTQ+ Loved Ones". This packet walks through practical questions and topics to Consider, Clarify and Contemplate as you construct a biblical response to your LGBTQ+ loved ones.



You can view and download the packet here:
www.hopecgrouponline.com/resources/responding.pdf



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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