



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Dispersing the Darkness Within by Kris

I learned about Portland Fellowship from a friend of mine who graduated from the program several years ago. It was at a time in my life when I was seeing God do some healing in me on many fronts.

The year of 2020 was rough for me. I was living in New Jersey at the time, serving in urban ministry. Entering quarantine in the middle of a stress-filled metropolis area, with little opportunity for healthy outlets or community, led me down a dark road of engaging with same-sex pornography and getting consumed in mental sexual fantasies. I was already feeling like there was a dark cloud around me from the outside—I lived on a street with open prostitution, heroin use, and the frequent sound of gunshots and police sirens in the night; these were some of the places we ministered in. However, up until that point, I hadn't realized the dark cloud that had been gathering strength from within, until I got sucked into the internal storm.

This storm did not come out of nowhere. Growing up, I struggled with comparing myself to others. I wasn't known for being popular; I moved around a lot so was often the new kid; I was scrawny, not great at sports, and would often get made fun of. Other kids called me names that definitely hit at my insecurities. In high school, I started noticing traits in other guys that were more masculine than I was and wished I could be like them. I wanted to be more muscular, more athletic, or even just be able to grow a beard. Somewhere along the way, the thoughts became sexualized, and I eventually realized I was feeling a same-sex attraction to other men. I pushed these thoughts away about as quickly as they came—or at least I tried.

In college, I heard the testimony of a friend who came out of a homosexual lifestyle, and I confided in him my struggle. It was the first time I was open to anyone about this. I eventually shared with a couple other friends during college, finding out that I wasn't the only one facing this issue. Knowing I wasn't alone in my battle was such a relief, and those friends have been lifelines to me over the years. Yet, I still felt like I didn't know what to do with this inward storm, other than focus on my relationship with the Lord and hope it would stay at bay.

I knew that this struggle was not my identity—and that we are called by Christ to die to ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Him. (*Matthew 16:24*) Our true identity is redeemed



Kris is a second year participant of Taking Back Ground.

children of our Heavenly Father. (*Romans 8:14-17*) While I never acted out in any kind of relationship, for me the struggle with same-sex attraction has always been a mental battle, often triggered by stress or anxiety. I have had a good handful of friends who have helped keep me accountable in my thought life over the years. However, the stresses of 2020 seemed to push me over the edge, and I found myself indulging my urges through same-sex pornography. My shame ballooned like never before. In 2021, I started getting back into healthy community and healthy habits, and I decided to ditch some of my social media accounts, which were a big part of the problem. Soon thereafter, I learned about Portland Fellowship. I was drawn to PF because of the way my friend described his transformation there. I could see in him a peace and a confidence that God was working out in this area of his life.

I cannot be more grateful for this gift that the Lord has given me through the Taking Back Ground program. I'm not going to lie—the first few weeks were extremely uncomfortable. I had never shared my story with so many new faces at once. The weekly journaling questions have forced me to go deep, to be vulnerable and honest with myself and our small group in profound ways. Here, I've found a community of men and women with whom I can not only relate to in my struggles, but also walk together in actively pursuing healing and transformation.

I have opened up more about sexual and relational brokenness in this last year than I have in my whole life prior to this. During the Surrender Service at last year's Taking Back Ground retreat, I laid down the constant comparison with others, and picked up God's view of who I am. I have begun recognizing when I believe lies about myself and can call up God's truth instead. I have gained tools from PF that have helped me renew my mind and develop healthier thought patterns, while building community that has brought healing to some of my relational wounds from the past. I am thankful to say that I have not engaged in

pornography again since starting TBG—all glory to God.



Kris and his fiancée, Kailee.

Shortly after starting Taking Back Ground last year, an unexpected blessing entered my life. Kailee and I met around a campfire at a friend's house in Nashville. We served together in an outdoor youth mentoring ministry for almost a year before we started dating. Christ's love always seemed to just spill out of Kailee in every interaction she had with others. I was drawn to her beauty, her compassion, and her depth. I found myself attracted to her on all fronts, which was a rare occurrence. I had tried dating in the past, and it always seemed to end in extreme anxiety and unrest. As I took steps in the renewal of my mind and the healing of my heart, I found a lightness and joy in dating Kailee.

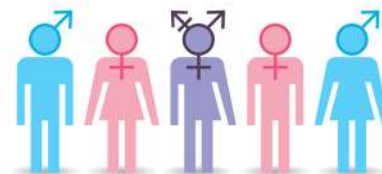
I sat down one night and shared my testimony with Kailee, including everything about Portland Fellowship. I was nervous, as you might imagine, but was met with loving confidence as she said, "Kris, I am 100% not scared." She was encouraged that I was facing this struggle head on. I felt the opposite of shame. That has been Kailee's posture all along this journey. Kailee has since shared about her own struggles with sexual addiction from her past, opening up even deeper conversation around the challenges and victories of each of our stories. Her encouragement has bolstered my confidence and reinforced God's view of me as a man.

A few months ago, on the top of a mountain, I asked Kailee to marry me. It is the most peace and joy I have ever felt about a decision in my life. I know this doesn't mean the struggles are over, but as light enters in, the storm has begun to lose its power in my life. I am currently working through year two of the Taking Back Ground program, and I am expectant of what God will continue to do. Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (*Matthew 7:12-13*) Kailee and I have both walked through storms of shame from the past, and now get to dance together in the freedom of His redemptive light.

The Transgender Struggle (Part 1 of 6): Transgender Definitions by KathyGrace Duncan

Portland Fellowship proclaims the message of hope and healing for those with unwanted same-sex attractions. This six-part series explores the realities of the transgender struggle, what God's redemption can look like, and how we can respond with biblical love.

What is the real meaning of transgenderism? If you've ever tried to find an answer, you may have found two different terms: Gender Dysphoria (GD) and Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD). Both terms fall under the "transgender" umbrella, but are they the same thing? Clearly in the name, "rapid onset", sounds like it comes on quicker (like out of the blue) than gender dysphoria. Does it though? Maybe ROGD is a social contagion contributing to what is really gender confusion. Let's look at the definitions.



Gender dysphoria (GD) is defined on Dictionary.com as "a psychological condition marked by significant emotional distress (i.e. anxiety, depression, mental suffering) and impairment in life functioning, caused by a lack of congruence between gender identity and sex assigned at birth". It does not define at what age the GD starts, which is usually in childhood.

Just as a side note—sex is not assigned at birth; it is assigned at conception. It is confirmed at birth how you were created. In Psalm 139:13-14, David says of the Lord, "For **You** formed my inward parts; **You** covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise **You**, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are **Your** works, and that my soul knows very well." (Emphasis mine) My conclusion? I was intentionally knit together on purpose for a purpose, which included my sex. It was not something that was "assigned". End of story.

There are a couple of definitions I found for rapid onset gender dysphoria (ROGD). One of them is from Brown University's Lisa Littman, MD, MPH, who defined ROGD as "a type of adolescent-onset or late-onset gender dysphoria where the development of gender dysphoria is observed to begin suddenly during or after puberty in an adolescent or young adult who would not have met criteria for gender dysphoria in childhood." (PLOS One, 2018) The second definition I found for ROGD said, "Specifically, rapid onset gender dysphoria is hypothesized as a phenomenon in youth with gender dysphoria emerging at or after puberty, socially influenced through peer contagion, and with contributing factors including poor mental health, neurodevelopmental disabilities, parent-child conflict, and maladaptive coping." (The Journal of Pediatrics, April 2022)

In comparing the two definitions for ROGD, both seem to agree it starts at puberty. In the first definition, Littman says the young adult "would not have met the criteria for gender dysphoria." The criteria being referred to is gender dysphoria might start in childhood, possibly as early as three years old, and will continue through adolescence into adulthood. I also noticed that, unlike the second definition, Littman's definition doesn't mention the other contributing factors, such as: outside influences, mental health issues, the possibility of conflicts in the home, or the use of coping mechanisms. Also, what stuck out to me in the second definition was the word "hypothesized". The root word is "hypothesis", and it means "a supposition or proposed explanation made on the basis of limited evidence as in a starting point for further investigation". (Google.com) Things that make you go, "Hmmm."

As I look at both definitions for ROGD again, they speak to me of gender confusion. Still, I think the second definition defines well what is really going on: a mental health crisis in our teenagers. The new transgender ideology is a real cry for help.

Going back to the definition of gender dysphoria (GD), it seems straightforward in my mind: from childhood, one struggles with their gender, wanting to be the other sex. There aren't social influences or contagion (this would've been prior to what is now being taught in schools). There isn't peer pressure. There is just this continual, inside struggle of the incongruence of what is felt and what is seen. This was my story—being a child struggling with gender dysphoria, I was trying to make friends, figure out life, and be "normal", when everything inside was telling me I was not.

I am baffled by the things I see, hear, and read about today. My heart breaks for today's youth because they are not offered real hope—hope that Jesus can love and transform them, by meeting them where they're at, even in their gender confusion. I am hoping these definitions help, even just a little. Definitions may not relieve the pain of dealing with the transgender struggle, but hopefully they can begin to help us understand it better. No matter if it is you or a loved one who is wrestling with GD or ROGD, I want to encourage you, as it says in Isaiah 59:1, that "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear."

In part two of this six-part series, we will address some of the specific social influences that are contributing to the rise in ROGD in today's youth, and look at how God's truth is piercing through that darkness.

january - february calendar & services

tuesdays in january & february
taking back ground
PF's intensive discipleship program for men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction. Group for wives and fiancées also.
*For both Zoom and in-house.
7-9:30 p.m. PST.

january 7
annual planning meeting
PF Board and Staff gather to pray, plan and prepare for the new year.

january 10
jason & patrick speaking
Jason and Patrick will be sharing about Portland Fellowship at N.E.T., a monthly networking breakfast for local ministry leaders and pastors.

january 13, february 10
hope group in-person
Support & encouragement for friends & family of LGBTQ loved ones.
6:30 p.m.
portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php

thursdays in february
hope group zoom
15-week Zoom course for friends and family of LGBTQ loved ones.
6-8 p.m. PST.
portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php

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additional updates

www.portlandfellowship.com

speakers, counseling and support for youth

can be set up through the office.

Hope Group Zoom Course

As we continue to see the rise of people embracing LGBTQ desires and identity, we see a corresponding rise in loved ones seeking out how to respond biblically. Here are some of the questions we frequently hear (that you may have asked yourself):

- *Should I call my son by his new name and pronouns?*
- *Should I go to my daughter's gay wedding?*
- *What do I do if my son and his partner want to visit for the holidays?*



To encourage personal connection, encouragement and support for family and friends of LGBTQ loved ones, we are offering a 15-week Hope Group Zoom Course in 2023. This Zoom course will address topics such as:

- *Disclosure & Grief*
- *Roots of Sexual Brokenness*
- *Family Dynamics*
- *Biblical Sexuality and God's Transforming Power*
- *Restoring Relationships*
- *Boundaries*
- *Effective Communication*
- *Responding with Grace & Truth*

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

The Hope Group Zoom course will run weekly on Thursday evenings, 6-8pm PST, from February through May. The course fee is \$50, but scholarships are available. Space is limited, so sign up today! To register, please go to: www.portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php



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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