



the fellowship message

"Proclaiming freedom for the captives." ISAIAH 61

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Never Meant to Walk Alone by Ben Tindall

Listen to Ben's story: portlandfellowship.com/stories/audio/tindall_story.m4a

Over the past three decades, I've wrestled with my gender identity, specifically, with persistent feelings of disgust at being male and a deep desire to be female. For many of those years, I felt utterly alone, carrying a battle that shaped my inner world and the way I saw myself.

Around the age of eleven, I began to really struggle with my identity. I loved to draw, and I would imagine what I would be like to become a cartoon character that I had created. My fantasies then shifted to imagining becoming an animal, and I would draw pictures of how I imagined I could surgically become a cat. One afternoon, the TV was on a talk show and I remember sitting alone watching as a man was on the stage eager to be reunited with a long-lost neighborhood boy he used to play basketball with. However, the person that walked out onto the stage to join him was a beautiful woman.

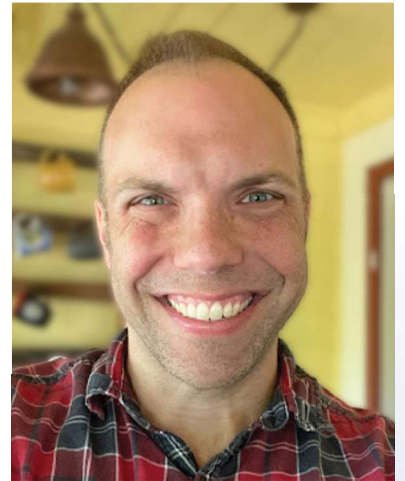
That moment shifted everything. When I was introduced to the concept of transsexuality, it was as though everything suddenly made sense. I believed I had discovered the answer to the confusion I had felt for years: "I was meant to be a girl." After that point, I began to fantasize about becoming a woman and what it would be like to live as female.

From that day forward, I was consumed with the idea of transitioning. I prayed that God would transform me into a girl. However, there was also something in me that knew I couldn't share these feelings. It wasn't something that was ever talked about, and I was scared. I just knew this wasn't something my parents or church would accept. I buried the struggle under layers of guilt, shame, and fear. I became skilled at hiding. In secret, I would dress in my mother's clothes and imagine myself as someone else. I felt very alone.

As puberty hit, my discomfort intensified. I vividly remember the night before my sixteenth birthday, I prayed desperately that God would make me wake up as a girl. I was convinced it would happen. Of course, it didn't. I was devastated, confused, and ashamed. I also began to realize that these desires wouldn't go away, but I also couldn't pursue them without devastating my family.

I remember eventually gathering the courage to tell someone about what I was thinking and feeling. I spoke to a youth minister. He had some good counsel and encouragement, but it didn't go beyond a couple conversations, and I was on my own again.

In high school, the internet became "a thing", and I found other transgender communities online and began conversing about my struggle. This group was accepting and it felt good to have community. One day, my dad discovered an email I had written to a transgender person asking



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

for advice. That discovery led to a tearful confrontation with my parents. They were heartbroken and confused, and called me into a bedroom where they confronted me. I remember them on their knees in front of me praying as though it was an exorcism. Then, the strange thing is that we never really talked about it again. What was clearly communicated (though not explicitly stated) was that if I ever pursued transition, I would never be able to see my family again. So, I buried my struggle, which only deepened my sense of isolation and belief that I was all alone in this.

College was supposed to be the opportunity to finally transition, but knowing what it would do to my family, my fear and guilt paralyzed me. Instead of acting on these desires, I explored them online, chatting with transgender communities, engaging in crossdressing, and pretending to be someone I wasn't. I was caught in a cycle of fantasy, guilt, confession, and retreat.

I tried reaching out to a counselor and pastors, but most didn't know how to respond. I was often given the "deer in the headlights" look as the pastor then awkwardly offered to pray for me. I would leave the office and we would never talk about it again. I remember as a college student, one counselor directly told me that he wasn't sure what to do, as he generally dealt with issues like homesickness. No one seemed equipped or willing to walk with me. I felt very alone and extra-special dirty. At many points, I found myself crying out, "God, why?! Why this burden? Why this struggle? Why won't you take it away?" I never got an answer.

In my loneliness, I searched online for Christian resources on transgender identity. At that time, the internet was the Wild West, and I found next-to-nothing helpful, as most of it was fully affirming transitioning. I knew that I needed help, but I didn't know to whom or where to turn.

Eventually, I got married. I hoped that marriage might help diminish the desire to transition. It didn't. And yet, God used my marriage to do something greater: I now had someone else to fight for. I had a reason to pursue healing, not just for me, but for the woman I had committed my life to.

Around 2005, I came across a ministry called Reality Resources, led by a man named Jerry Leach. Jerry had lived as a woman for a time before God brought him into a place of

restoration. For the first time, I was talking to someone who truly understood. Jerry didn't judge me, and he didn't just tell me to pray harder. He helped me ask the harder questions, not just what I was feeling, but why: *Where did these desires come from? What pain was I trying to escape?* Jerry pointed me to truth in Christ, and I also felt heard and loved.

Through our conversations, I began to recognize the impact of childhood trauma, my need to escape difficult realities, and the lies I had believed about myself. I wasn't "a woman trapped in a man's body." I was a boy who had been deeply hurt, confused, and desperate to be someone else. Jerry was the first person who really helped me not feel alone.

Years later, I found more community through programs like Celebrate Recovery, Help4Families, and Portland Fellowship. These ministries introduced me to others who shared my struggle. I was no longer alone. I finally had a safe space to talk openly and feel understood.

Through Portland Fellowship particularly, I have been able to be a part of groups of people that are so understanding and willing to let me speak honestly and fearlessly. It has been life changing to share my story with someone else and know I'm not alone. I've now been in community with others who have been there too. That has been one of the most life-giving experiences.

Do I still struggle with my gender identity? Yes. However, I no longer carry that struggle in isolation. I've come to believe that people who wrestle with gender identity aren't dirty or perverted. They're often deeply wounded people trying to make sense of the baggage they have picked up on the journey. They desperately need truth, yes—and they also desperately need grace, friendship, and the presence of others.

I know, because I've been there. I'm a firm believer that the hardest battles are the ones we fight alone. Galatians 6:2 encourages us to, *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ."* I have seen others help to carry my burdens, and it empowers me to seek to do the same.

I'm still on the journey. However, now I walk it with others beside me. I'm not alone. And you don't have to be either.



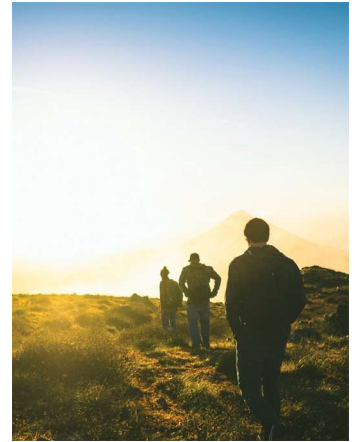
A Year of Growth (Part 6 of 6): Trusting God on the Journey by Lisa Price

*This article finishes our series of topics from Portland Fellowship's Hope Group, which ministers to family and friends of gay and trans-identified loved ones. In this article, Hope Group leader Lisa Price shares how we can actively trust God with our LGBTQ-identified loved ones. *To read previous articles in this series: www.portlandfellowship.com/articles/growth.pdf*

"Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me." —Psalm 86:17

When a Christian parent learns they have a child who identifies as gay, lesbian, or transgender, it is likely some of the toughest news they will ever hear. The revelation brings with it deep self-doubt, personal pain, and sometimes even seemingly-unshakable shame. However, this unwelcome revelation is more than just bad news or a source of confusion or shame. Anytime a Christian parent learns they have a child living in any unrepentant sin, it quickly becomes an opportunity to trust God with something they don't understand.

Like most people, Christian parents who attend a Hope Group in-person or online tend to view the whole notion of trusting God as a passive undertaking, where they do nothing and God does everything. It's not. Trusting God is more than simply sitting back, continuing to live as we have always lived, as we wait patiently for God to "transform our mess into a message". Trusting God is not a passive exercise; it is a process we actively participate in (*Proverbs 3:5-6, James 2:18-19*).



The first step in trusting God with our pain begins when we choose to work through our grief in a constructive way so that we are healthy enough to love others well and be useful to the Kingdom. Trusting God means we make the time to pray for the transformation we long to see in our loved ones. Trusting God also means we allow Him to work on those we love without nagging or stooping to manipulation to get them to do what we think they should do. Trusting God means we actively choose to accept the reality that we cannot change anyone but ourselves. Trusting God with our situation means we never stop working with God to become the very best version of ourselves we can be (*Romans 12:1-2*).

Trusting God means that we never stop doing the things God puts in front of us to do. It means that even in the midst of our greatest pain and most profound confusion, we look for ways to serve others and grow in grace. It means we view all of our relationships as a stewardship and continue to joyfully love and serve our families. It means we make church and serving the Body of Christ a priority. Trusting God means we choose to keep on living for the glory of God and the good of others, even when we feel like giving up completely.

Perhaps, the most difficult aspect of trusting God is making the choice to accept the fact that our identity in Christ is our *true* identity, no matter what our struggles are in this life. We are not the false identity of shame and self-doubt. We are more than the sum-total of our parenting mistakes. Our identity is not found in our grief or loss. We must never allow our child's brokenness and sin to become our identity, because we are more than just the parents of a lesbian, gay or transgender-identified child.

God still has plans for us. God still wants to use us. God still loves us. God is able to do all He wants to do in us and through us when we choose to live out our identity in Christ, rather than an identity of brokenness, shame, and loss.

Portland Fellowship's Hope Group is available in-person and online October through May. It is designed to be a safe, compassionate place where parents of gay, lesbian, and transgender-identified children can grieve the losses that come with learning they have a child who struggles with sexual brokenness. It is also a place parents can go to find friendship, practical help, and support as they discover all that God has for them in this journey of trusting God in a whole new way.

**To learn more about the Hope Group and the Hope Group Online video series: https://www.portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php*

November - December Calendar & Services

tuesdays in november

Taking Back Ground

Discipleship program for Christians struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction and gender confusion.
6-8:30 p.m. PST

tuesdays in november

Hope Group

Discipleship series for friends & family of gay or trans-identifying loved ones.
*For both Zoom and in-house.
6-8:30 p.m. PST

tuesday december 2

Worship & Prayer Night

PF is hosting a worship and prayer night at the PF house! This is open to participants, alumni, supporters, prayer team members, and friends.
7-8:30 p.m.

*To RSVP: portlandfellowship.com/rsvp.php?rsvpid=30

friday december 12

In-Person Hope Group

For friends & family of gay & trans-identified loved ones. Dinner, testimony, sharing, and prayer.
6:30 p.m.

portlandfellowship.com/friends_family.php

nov. 27 & 28, dec. 23- jan. 2

PF Offices Closed

Follow us!

Get updates and inspirational resources on social media.

*Facebook & Instagram:

@portlandfellowship

*Twitter: @PTLDFellowship

Additional updates:

www.portlandfellowship.com

Speakers, counseling and support for youth

can be set up through the office.

With Much Gratitude

As we enter this month of Thanksgiving, we want to give glory and praise to God for His amazing provision in this season. And, we want to thank YOU specifically! Thank you to each of you who



responded to our recent newsletter, where we shared that, to maintain our monthly budget and to continue growing, we were seeking additional monthly

Fellowship Partners to come alongside us.

We are incredibly humbled and grateful to see how God has led his people to respond to this ask. With our request, we have had:

- Four new Fellowship Partners pledge their monthly support
- Three current Fellowship Partners increase their monthly giving
- A couple special donors give large one-time gifts

We know that not everyone can support PF or increase their giving; financial support is one need, but please know your prayers and encouragement are deeply appreciated. One of our monthly partners even took the time to mail us a sweet note that said, "I'm not able to increase my monthly giving—if I could, I would. I will be praying for larger donors for Portland Fellowship!" And as you see from the response, those prayers are being answered.

As we reflect on your incredible generosity and the Lord's provision for this ministry, we echo the sentiments of the Apostle Paul:

"[We] rejoiced greatly in the Lord that...you renewed your concern for [us]...it was good of you to share in [our] troubles...the gifts you sent...are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And [our] God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:10a, 14, 18b-20)



PORTLAND
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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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