



PORTLAND  
fellowship

Dear Friends and Fellowship Partners,

update june 2026

Milestones are an important part of life, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations. We celebrated graduations from Taking Back Ground at the end of May. I've had two such graduations. I missed my first in 2003 because I was on a business trip to Washington, D.C. My second was in 2020, and we were all quarantined due to COVID-19, so it was held over Zoom. From those two milestones, I learned a beautiful lesson: The healing work of God doesn't end after a program is completed. My first time through TBG didn't really "take", because I was just relieved to have the program behind me. However, in 2018, I found myself back at Portland Fellowship to try it again, hopefully with a different outcome.

We refer to Taking Back Ground as analogous to the Israelites escaping the captivity of Egypt and heading toward the promised land. We are, in effect, escaping the bounds of our brokenness and tendencies toward sin, and moving toward a place of rest in the power of God's redemptive and restorative nature. Yet, before Israel could reach the promised land, they had some lessons to learn along the way to fully understand the freedom they would experience.

It is estimated that to travel from Egypt to the Jordan River on foot should have taken a few weeks. But, for Israel, it took forty years. They didn't even take the most direct route. If you map their actual journey, it is more of a meandering through the wilderness with little access to food and water than an efficient travel path. There are two possible reasons why the journey took so long. The first is that God needed to eradicate Egypt from their hearts. Israel had spent a little over 400 years in Egypt, both in prosperity and later in slavery. And in both of those situations, they had food to eat and water to drink. Throughout their journey, they often looked back and even wished to return to Egypt so they could eat better food.

Perhaps the second and most important reason for all of this wandering is that the Israelites needed to learn to trust God. God had long before chosen these people to be set apart from other people groups. He called them into a covenant relationship with Himself. He knew the struggles that lay ahead, even when they would venture into the promised land. They needed to trust Him then, and they needed to trust Him now. Looking back on the curriculum of Taking Back Ground, it is all about us learning to trust God in our healing and our redemption, and not us doing the work alone. There were probably times during the two-year program that it felt a little like wandering in the wilderness, but God was faithful in those moments, even if we were not.



*Russ is a leader for  
PF's Taking Back  
Ground discipleship  
program.*

*"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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Eventually, the day had arrived when it was time for the Israelites to enter the promised land. The wandering was behind them, and now it was time to step into a new chapter in faith and hope for the days ahead. Unfortunately, while the Israelites found success in conquering the promised land, it was not without problems. From Joshua to Jesus, Israel made and broke covenants with God. They were victorious at times and defeated at others. They worshipped Yahweh and worshipped other gods. Eventually, the Israelites ended up in captivity again and under foreign occupation as well. That can be our story after Taking Back Ground, if we let it.

If there is a central point to Taking Back Ground, it is this: We desire to become who God wants us to become. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”. In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul instructs us to, “...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on a new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” This is our post-graduation work. It is a daily thing. TBG may have given us the tools to do this, but the daily examination of our hearts, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal our still-present blind spots, is essential for continued growth, healing, and transformation.

My favorite verse is in Numbers 6:24: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift His countenance upon you and give you peace.” I pray this for our graduates and all who continue to seek His holiness beyond Taking Back Ground. Thank you for supporting the Lord’s work here at Portland Fellowship, and for praying for our participants through Taking Back Ground and beyond.

In Christ,

Russ Sweet  
TBG Leader

### **June 12-13: RHN Hope Conference**



The  
RHN  
HOPE  
2026  
Con-

ference will take place in Colorado Springs June 12-13. Come hear biblical teaching & testimonies of transformation from former LGBTQ-identified individuals. For pastors, counselors, parents, and lay believers.

[www.restoredhopenetwork.org](http://www.restoredhopenetwork.org)

### **June 19: Hope Group Dinner**



Join us  
Friday June  
19th at  
6:30pm for  
our June  
in-person

Hope Group dinner. This is an encouraging evening of testimony, fellowship and prayer for friends & family of gay and trans-identified loved ones. Come learn how to walk with your loved one in both grace and truth.

[portlandfellowship.com/events.php](http://portlandfellowship.com/events.php)

### **July & August: Summer Series—“The Journey”**



This summer, PF will be offering the video program “The Journey” on Tuesday nights in July & August, from 6–7:30pm (PST) on Zoom. This eight-week study is for those seeking freedom from unwanted SSA & gender confusion. “The Journey” is also a great introduction to Portland Fellowship for those considering joining Taking Back Ground in the fall. A Zoom intake is required for people new to PF.

[www.portlandfellowship.com/events.php](http://www.portlandfellowship.com/events.php)