



THE PHOENIX HERALD

PHOENIX MINISTRY

October 2017

PHOENIX MINISTRY is an organization seeking to empower, educate, and serve anyone and everyone who wants to experience the love, grace, and power of Jesus Christ.

President's Corner

Hey there, reader! What a thrill and honor it is to be able to greet you in our very first newsletter ever! My name is Gilbert, and I am just as excited as the rest of our leadership team and all of our members to introduce ourselves to you! WELCOME to PHOENIX MINISTRY! We are an all-inclusive community of Christian believers, serving the LGBT communities, as well as the cisgender and heterosexual church. We do not believe in walls. We do hope to be a source of encouragement and support for you as you walk through this thing called "life." It is important that you realize that you are never alone, ever. Here at PHOENIX we are determined to help you not only understand and see that, but also *feel* that. We believe it's important.

The past 4 years have been a remarkable collection of memories! We've seen it all: the forming of new friendships, receiving answered prayers, witnessing unexplained miracles, enjoying life-changing blessings, and most importantly, experiencing new levels of intimacy with God. We've had the opportunity to meet some of the most incredible people in the world (yourself included), and the coolest part is that we are really just getting started! We encourage you to check out our website and subscribe to our YouTube channel to stay encouraged with the "outside the Church box" things we release. Most excitingly, we do hope you will come to one of our upcoming Bible studies so that we can meet you in person... and give you a big hug!

We hope this newsletter will cause you to smile and hopefully even let out a sigh of relief knowing that somebody out there cares, somebody out there loves you, and values you, and thinks you are important. Somebody does... God does... and we do too! I know at PHOENIX MINISTRY we have a lot of work to do to try and make up for the pain and hurt caused to some of you by mainstream churches. However, we are up to that challenge and we ask that you allow us to be! On behalf of our ministry, I would like to personally thank you for your support (even just reading this newsletter), and we hope you decide to get involved with our vision.

You are welcomed here. You are supported here. You are loved here! God's best to you!

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."
- Galatians 6:9 NIV

Gilbert Gonzalez Jr.



Join Us For A Study Near You

Southern California

1711 N. Van Ness Ave.

Los Angeles, CA 90068

1st & 3rd Saturday of every month at 4:00pm

Northern California

32300 Almaden Blvd.

Union City, CA 94587

2nd Friday of every month at 6:00pm

Upcoming Bible Studies

So Cal- October 21: Witches, Ghosts & Goblins (Halloween)

- *Are ghosts real? Do dead loved ones try to contact us? Are angels real? Are witches real? What does God tell us about all of these things?*

So. Cal- November 4: Psalm: The Beginning (Member Request)

- *What is the collection of books in our Bible that are referred to as "The Book of Psalm"? Where did this collection come from? Who wrote it? What was going on in these times? Are they just a random collection of short poems? Songs? Venting session?*

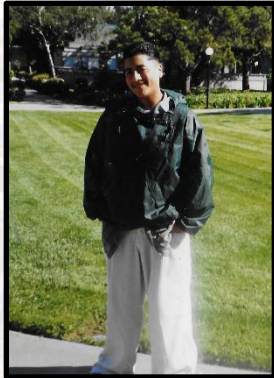
Nor Cal- November 10: The Power of Thank You

- *It's the season to be grateful. We visit this theme every year, but during this special study, we are going to go a little deeper into what Scripture says about it.*

We want to hear what you would like to study. If you have a request, please reach out to Lawrence Lee.

Welcome

ORIGIN OF PHOENIX MINISTRY



The early stages of our ministry began with our Founder and President, Gilbert Gonzalez Jr. He was culturally raised Roman Catholic, but he quickly veered into agnosticism in his adolescence with the actions self-proclaiming Christians were giving him. These actions included hate and discrimination of his gay orientation which he realized at an early age and had inherently reconciled and affirmed. Thankfully, God had other plans for Gilbert. With the help of his high school teacher, Cheryl Perez, he encountered a spiritual awakening. The attacks that Gilbert was receiving from those Christians were now fueling him to read God's Word for himself. This is how his love relationship with God began. Everything he was reading affirmed what he already felt innately. It was then that his friends had approached him to share his journey with them.

In 2008, Gilbert casually began holding Bible study in his apartment in Union City, CA with a few of his close friends. A lot of his friends expressed their frustrations with reading the Bible because of the Shakespearean style in which it was translated. That was when Gilbert found that he had a gift for teaching. He was able to comprehend the Word, digest it, and repackage it in a way that was easy for his friends to understand. He included a nice home cooked meal with the study, so the atmosphere was very intimate and drew many of his friends, family, and neighbors. During this time, he realized that there was a community hungry for spiritual things of God whose needs were not being met. Things were going well with the study when Gilbert came to a crossroad.



Gilbert's passion at a young age was to be in entertainment, and his dream was about to be realized when his industry contacts asked him to move to Los Angeles in 2010. At this time he had already stopped searching. So, with prayer, careful consideration, and counsel from his mentors, he moved to Southern California with a few dollars, top ramen, and a prayer. Amazingly, God provided a job and housing for Gilbert within a month of moving to Los Angeles. He started attending the Dream Center at Angelus Temple eventually calling it his home church.

Gilbert's struggle with non-affirming Christians resurfaced while attempting to start a Bible study in his new home church. He was faced with adversity and different levels of rejection on multiple fronts. There were friends who questioned his Christianity, others who questioned his orientation, and still others who were friends but only in private because they were in denial about their own orientation. As things appeared to grow darker for Gilbert, a glimmer of hope appeared when he went to a NoH8 Campaign photoshoot in Orange County.

In 2012, Gilbert was pleasantly surprised to meet another Christian man who was also openly gay. They quickly became best friends sharing much of their lives with one another. The one best friend grew to many best friends. The following year his friend suggested that they start an LGBT Bible study. Because of the recent events surrounding Gilbert's spiritual journey, he agreed to co-lead the group allowing his friend to take the reigns. That group was appropriately named Rainbow Bible Study because of its focus on LGBT issues. Only a

few months later, his friend decided to step down from leadership and pursue other endeavors leaving Gilbert to lead on his own. The little but sure flicker that was inside Gilbert grew and grew, and suddenly, burst into flames.

In the summer of 2013, Gilbert started having recurring dreams about his favorite fictional characters from childhood. Most notable was X-Men's Jean Grey and her alter ego as the Phoenix. The Phoenix is a guardian with immense power, and her role was to insure that people were helped, nurtured, and protected. Gilbert saw this as a great metaphor for himself and the burgeoning ministry. In the short time he had experienced being a church leader, he had witnessed and even worked alongside several ministers that abused their roles in leadership. He observed the devastation that came to the people that were under their care and knew that it was his destiny to help them recover. Over a very short time period, confirmation of the name Phoenix came from multiple sources, and Gilbert knew that he wanted to start a non-profit organization. He knew that this could be the very way he had always wanted to help people by living a life of service. It could not just be about people like Gilbert. It had to be bigger. He had a desire for all people to come to know Christ, and becoming a bridge ministry would ultimately become what he would want the most.



It was an exciting time for the LGBT Christian movement. Exodus International, a globally renowned ex-gay reparative therapy organization had recently closed its doors after 37 years of failing to change sexual orientation. Gilbert believed that the Holy Spirit would breathe new life into the LGBT Christian movement from this darkness just as the Phoenix rises from the ashes. In preparation of the revival, he completed the paperwork for his non-profit organization, and on October 4, 2013, our ministry, PHOENIX MINISTRY, was officially born. However, he still led the group and studies on his own while praying for leadership to step forward, and in due time, God provided.



In 2013, Michael Arbuckle became a devoted member and was given the title of Advisor after the birth of PHOENIX MINISTRY. He was involved in several ministries previously, and he has profound wisdom and is very compassionate. Most importantly, he was a devoted Christian. By early 2014, our ministry was one of the fastest-growing LGBTQ+ affirming Bible Studies in Los Angeles County. The studies were groundbreaking and prompted people to think outside the box. They were richly encouraging while character challenging, and the social events were family-friendly and felt like an extension of what was happening in the studies. The Bible

studies became a community much like the first original study in Northern California. Furthermore, the group felt like a family because they were a family. With this formation, at the beginning of 2015, Michael's loyalty, experience, and commitment to the vision of our ministry prompted Gilbert to promote him to Treasurer of our board. On occasion, he has even led studies because of his extensive knowledge of the Bible and gift for teaching. Today, Michael is a solid asset to the ministry, serving as Associate Minister, Treasurer, and host of various social events.



In September of 2014, Lawrence Lee visited PHOENIX MINISTRY for the very first time. As Michael joined the leadership team, he joined Gilbert in prayer that God would provide a third person to complete the newly forming board. It was during this time, that Lawrence coincidentally showed his strengths. He was structured, loyal, and levelheaded. Our style and approach also really jived with him. During this time, he had a spiritual awakening and experienced personal revival. He began to radically seek ways to serve God, which caught Michael and Gilbert's attention. Because it paralleled their journey in praying for a third member, they approached Lawrence to join the board in 2015. After careful prayer and consideration, he enthusiastically accepted.

With three board members, the paperwork for 501(c)3 approval was completed in 2016, and they went to work on guiding our organization to expand to the next level. We grew, and new members arrived after hearing about our unique style of service. Not only did we produce groundbreaking music videos and short films, we also created an approachable and spiritually solid space for individuals seeking a relationship with God that did not feel comfortable in a conventional church setting. We became well known for our reverence and presentation of Scripture in an easy to understand life-applicable way, all while being completely affirming and celebratory of all orientations and gender identities.

By June of that year, we grew enough to expand to another location. We went full circle and re-launched the Bible study that started it all in Union City. Former members from the San Francisco/Bay Area were ecstatic to hear "Bible study is back!" They arrived at our first study, and the enthusiasm was infectious. Members from our Los Angeles group even made the trip to be part of the celebration. The dual Bible studies proved to be great ways to strengthen our community statewide. With the revival of our Northern California group, we desperately needed a new leader, and earlier this year, the remarkable Izek Campion was tapped. He proved himself faithful, genuine, driven, and passionate about God's word and the vision of our ministry. Today, he is a sensational asset, and he currently leads and facilitates the Northern California division of the ministry.



Matthew Lonn was one of the original members of the Southern California group in 2013. He has been a devoted attendee of Bible study and trusted friend of countless members for years. He also has a gift for service and is a man of profound honesty and deep integrity. He shares in our vision and is always there to encourage and uplift his peers. Matthew was recently promoted to serve as the Event Coordinator for our Southern California division, and he is also the Editor-in-Chief of the PHOENIX HERALD. Today, Matthew still brings out the best in us and our cheerful members.

Over the past several years, we have seen each other through the genuine struggles of life. Thankfully, we have each other for encouragement and prayer. Despite what we have achieved thus far, we are embarking on our biggest journey yet, and that's where you come in. We are gearing up to expand to even more locations and equip even more people's lives with community, life-applicable bible teaching, and a unique spiritual experience that allows and encourages all people into more intimacy with God. So, get involved today, and be part of this exciting story that is being written this very moment!



MEET THE PHOENIX LEADERS



The first word that comes out of my mouth regarding the journey of PHOENIX MINISTRY is “Wow!” It has been such an amazing ride. I found PHOENIX MINISTRY at the coattails of reconciling my faith with who I am. By then, I was mostly convinced that God loved me with no stipulations and even more poignantly that He made me this way. So at that point, I wanted to focus more on growing my relationship with God who loves me so much and created me with that love. From the Bible studies and game nights to conferences and Christmas parties, PHOENIX MINISTRY has been a wonderful safe space in fostering my spiritual growth as well as providing the community I so desperately needed. After joining the leadership in 2015, my role shifted from a standard member to a more active servant. I am truly thankful to God for giving me the opportunity! Growth comes from reading the Word, learning about God, and learning about your neighbors. But, the big growth spurts

come through service when you apply what you learn and walk out what God has told you to do in obedience, patience, and humility, which include putting Him first and serving your neighbors. A lot of this, I learned and now try to apply in PHOENIX, and that is what Christianity is all about. My goal for the ministry is to become a space where there is so much love within it that it bursts into the world and reaches everyone that needs it. God gave me big dreams for PHOENIX MINISTRY, and I am most excited to be on that journey with Him as He unfolds His plans for us in His perfect time. — **Lawrence Lee (Secretary)**

I recently hit my one year anniversary with the NorCal PHOENIX MINISTRY! It has been an amazing year being part of the ministry and facilitating Bible Study. These are a few of my favorite things...

Let’s be real... many Bible studies I have been a part of in the past have been boring and had a sense of detachment to them. What I love about PHOENIX is our studies are creative, interactive, and relatable. We learn about God in engaging ways and where we can apply what we learn to our personal lives. I also love how people are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences so that we are able to learn from each other.

PHOENIX MINISTRY wants to value all of who God has made you to be. As a transman of color, I have felt embraced and supported. My needs around feeling safe were sought out and respected. Because PHOENIX has created and fostered a safe and inclusive environment, I can learn about and connect with God in this space without any fear of being rejected or judged for who I am.

This year, I look forward to the widening of our tent and continuing to be a witness of God’s radically inclusive love. I also look forward to deepening my relationships with the wonderful friends I have made through PHOENIX MINISTRY. — **Izek Campion (NorCal Bible Facilitator)**



When we originally launched this Bible study 4 years ago, I was at a very unique point in my life. I had just recently come out as gay to my immediate family and some of my closest friends; however, I didn’t have a group of people in Los Angeles I could connect and fellowship with. The first year of PHOENIX coincided with my first year of being out and proud. Naturally a year of firsts can be very overwhelming and at many times scary. PHOENIX has provided me with not only an opportunity to discover God’s Word on a more intimate level, but I have met a group of people that have truly become family.

It is so amazing to see how God works through the lives of those who yearn to serve Him and help spread His truth. There has certainly been a lot of heartache, fear, judgment and damage that has been done to the lives of LGBTQIA believers and I couldn’t be happier to have a ministry that works daily to be the light that will stand out, be different, and heal the wounds that have been created. Knowing how much this ministry has affected my life, I was incredibly honored to come on board the leadership team to provide the same experience to other believers as well. Reformation is inevitable, and it’s exciting to see how PHOENIX MINISTRY is already a big part of it. I can’t wait to see how God will grow this ministry in the years to come. — **Matthew Lonn (SoCal Event Coordinator)**



TREASURER'S CHEST

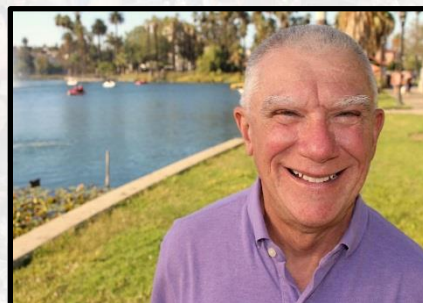
WITH MICHAEL ARBUCKLE

We here at PHOENIX MINISTRY want to extend the opportunity for blessing and partnership to all our members. In order to facilitate that we will now have a donation box at the Bible studies and events for you to donate as the Lord directs you. You are also able to give online through our website at www.phoenixministry.org/donate. Currently, we are running four campaigns for giving. One is the general fund for all the needs of the ministry. Additionally, we have a separate fund for the t-shirts we are selling, and you can buy them online for \$15 each. We are now beginning collection of specific giving to the 2018 Mini-Con if you desire to help defray costs for that event. Each year we host a Thanksgiving dinner, and now you can also give direct to that fund. All giving is confidential.

Two scriptures I have enjoyed on the subject of giving:

"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." - Luke 6:38

"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8



We here at PHOENIX MINISTRY encourage you to financially support the endeavors and events that we do in support of our communities. Donations will be used towards snacks and food for our Bible studies and game nights, travel expenses between ministerial campuses, administrative costs and other materials needed for the Bible studies. We also rent facilities for our services and are looking to be financially ready as our ministry expands. Please feel free to contact me at treasurer@phoenixministry.org if you have any questions as regarding giving or finances of the ministry.

One of the things that makes us truly unique at PHOENIX MINISTRY, is the work we put into our video productions. Every year, we create fun and exciting material to not only keep you encouraged in the things of God, but also entertained. We also like giving you the opportunity to get to know us in the process.

Log onto www.youtube.com/phoenixministry and subscribe to our channel. We have sermons, devotionals, music videos, interview clips from our members, and so much more! Log on today, subscribe, and join us for the ride!



TESTIMONIALS



Luis Martinez-Iller
Modesto, CA

When I first began to attend Bible study with my friends, I thought of it as a casual way to explore my questions about the Bible. It was a nice way to connect with my friends on a different level.

Over the years, as the Bible study has grown, my connection to the Bible and appreciation for the impact of PHOENIX MINISTRY has also grown. At times, I have gone to the Bible studies because I needed to be filled up spiritually, and I knew that an evening of PHOENIX MINISTRY with the people I care about would be like a cool drink of water for my soul. We have laughed and cried together. We've seen each other through the greatest of blessings and heaviest of burdens.

I love how much I've learned from attending Bible study, and I appreciate how I am challenged to grow in my faith. My kids ask about Bible study and can't wait until they're old enough to fully participate, though they join in on their own level from time to time.

As I look to the future of PHOENIX MINISTRY, I can imagine many more years of Bible study, new and exciting things for the ministry, and the continuation of this strong family tradition that has already started.

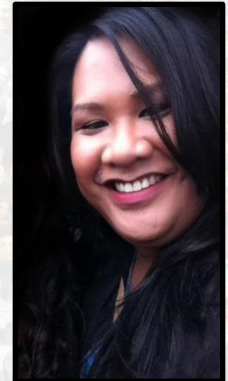
Theresa Eugenio
Union City, CA

Hello! I'm Theresa Amber Eugenio, proud member of PHOENIX MINISTRY.

I was part of this dynamic ministry back before it was even conceptualized as a ministry in 2008. Back then, it was a simple Bible study that Gilbert Gonzalez Jr held at his apartment. Friends would come over and bring food and their other friends. The group grew larger and larger as more and more people started hearing about these Bible studies.

Today, of course, it's a full blown ministry based in Los Angeles which branched back up to Northern California allowing me to be part of such an exciting group of people who have the same passion for God that I do.

I love what the ministry stands for, that we're a safe haven for the broken and the desperate, the burdened and the hungry. It's rewarding to know that I'm part of a ministry where I can help reach out to those needing acceptance, because I was there too.



Nathan Hull
Torrance, CA

Hello! I'm Nathan. I'm 22 years old and I'm from Torrance, CA. I was referred to PHOENIX MINISTRY by a friend on Facebook.

My experience has been very nice at PHOENIX MINISTRY, getting the opportunity to hang out with generous, fun-loving people that share similar beliefs. I have enjoyed every single Bible study that I have ever attended. The fun events that we often engage in have been a great experience to meet new friends and create close relationships with people that live close to me. The atmosphere of these events have even helped me get closer to God.

The type of studies I enjoy most deal with articulating and understanding homosexuality and even love itself in all its forms, especially in the context of being LGBT and Christian. The studies are very interesting and informative, and therefore, I am always learning new things. I very much enjoy the fellowship time we have following every study.

We usually go out to dinner (always having fun conversation), and then end the evening with game night at a members home. It is always such a blast.

Having a safe and fun medium to interact with your peers and with God is what makes this a great Bible study group and organization, in general. I love every aspect of PHOENIX MINISTRY.

MONTHLY DEVOTIONAL

Happy October! It's the Halloween season. That means it's time for spooky movie nights with friends, an abundance of our favorite sweet treats, and the delight we get from seeing children dress up as their favorite superheroes and cartoon characters. It's a cheerful time.

Many churches, as we know, are still against the celebration of Halloween in any way. At PHOENIX MINISTRY, we completely respect that. The truth is, there actually are some dark roots to this holiday. This is where we as believers in Christ can utilize our authority. The Bible tells us to be in the world but not of the world. Therefore, we should approach things with a proper motive and engage situations in the context of our relationship with God. This allows us to participate in many things during Halloween as well as any season of life that doesn't necessarily represent our faith.

We reserve a different perspective from the rest of the world, and that's ok. We don't have to compromise our dedication to Christ to attend a costume party or go trick-or-treating. We can have a really great time while guarding our hearts, just as we do every single day. Surround yourself with good friends that you feel are spiritually compatible with you, and discuss what you feel safe doing as well as what you don't. If either of you don't feel God's peace about something, as a loving gesture, respect that decision and don't try to convince each other otherwise. There are plenty of other things to do. As a matter of fact, the alternative event you chose could end with both of you having an even greater time and ending up closer friends.

Sometimes, we hear stories of individuals that experiment with Ouija Boards or perform some kind of ritual in a house that is known to be "haunted" in order to contact the dead. It's hard to blame them because we are all designed with a curiosity and fascination with the supernatural. The truth is, however, that events like these open doors to spiritual places, and according to Scripture, they can be dangerous because they are not of God. But, let's talk about what is actually going on when supernatural things start to happen.

Can a dead person actually reach out or reach back to us? Fear not, for the answer is "No." Even though an individual may have been "contacted," anyone who claims to make contact with a dead human that lived on Earth surely has not.

"As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so one who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more." - Job 7:9-10

The dead do not stick around to haunt houses or even walk around the Earth after they pass. They do not creepily watch over us, either. This is important to remember to stay encouraged and unafraid when you are trying to go to sleep at night after watching a scary movie. Hollywood is known for making movie plots to portray the contrary though, insisting that dead people come back to take care of unfinished business. This is also not true:

"When his spirit leaves [departs] him, he [his body alone] returns to the earth [to the dust]; In that very day his thoughts and [all his] plans perish". - Psalm 146:4

So, what happens when individuals experience paranormal activity or an Ouija Board starts to move, and a supposed family member sends a message? Who are spiritual mediums speaking to when relaying a message from someone who claims to be a late family member or friend?

“And no wonder, since Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. So it is no great surprise if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness, but their end will correspond with their deeds.” - 2 Corinthians 11:14-15

Angels and demons are two different words that refer to the same exact creature in every way. The only difference is that some serve Jesus, and some do not. When an angel makes itself known to you, it is your responsibility and right to ask it whom it serves. If you make yourself known as a follower of Christ, it must revere you. It is not allowed to harm you or deceive you into believing it is a deceased loved one.

When Jesus walked the Earth and was training His disciples, He sent 70 of them out to heal sick people and preach the good news of salvation. On their journey, they were even confronted with demons, and they did well. They were comforted and even excited when they saw how the demons responded to them being followers of Jesus Christ.

“The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” He [Jesus] said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like [a flash of] lightning. Listen carefully: I have given you authority [that you now possess] to tread on serpents and scorpions, and [the ability to exercise authority] over all the power of the enemy (Satan); and nothing will [in any way] harm you. Nevertheless do not rejoice at this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.” - Luke 10:17-20

It is important to have a personal relationship with God through Christ so that you are armed should any of these events take place (Acts 19:13-17). The name of Jesus is stronger than anything in the spiritual world that can harm you. If you find yourself in a situation where some unknown phenomenon is occurring and believe that there is some kind of demonic activity going on, don't be afraid to use your mouth. Say out loud, “I belong to Christ and anything not of Him must leave now, in Jesus name!”

If you are experiencing any of these situations, and you need some assistance, please log on to our website and send us an e-mail. We are here to support and encourage you.

Please be safe this Halloween season, and be careful what you choose to engage in and entertain. Don't be afraid to assert your boundaries and your comfort levels. We want you to have a really good time. We love you.

