

# Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

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True  
Freedom  
Trust



## Be Fruitful and Multiply

**C**hildlessness is twice the level it was a generation ago. Of the women who had reached 45 in 2018, 19% were childless, compared to 9% for their mothers' generation (born in 1946). There is, therefore, perhaps a little less stigma these days in having no children.

But this is little comfort to those who cannot have children. Some married couples would have loved them, but infertility closes that door to them. For many TFT members who would have desired their own children, their call to singleness has also been a call to surrender this desire to God. For many, coming to terms with this loss can be a long and painful journey. During a person's 20s and 30s, friendships with peers can be tested as new parents "move on" to a new life stage, leaving the childless feeling left behind. Later in life,

this divide can recur as peers talk about the achievements of their grandchildren. So, can we look to the Bible for any encouragement?

### *Jesus the father?*

Genesis tells the story of God's covenant with Abraham – "Look up at the heavens and count the stars... so shall your offspring be" (Gen 15:5). This theme of God's blessing through the provision of children continues all the way through to the first chapter of the New Testament. Matthew's Gospel opens with a genealogy, showing how Abraham's line is completed with Jesus.

But then it's easy to miss the shocking reality that the biological line ends here. Miracle upon miracle had kept the line going through eighteen centuries, but then Jesus had no biological children. In a culture where singleness and

childlessness invited pity, Jesus never got married and had no kids. Instead, Jesus invites people by name to join God's family, saying "Come, follow me" (e.g. Matt 4:19). At the Resurrection, we see that Jesus' death was not the "end of the line", as Jesus rose again to live forever, and his spiritual descendants will be "a great multitude that no-one

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**"As a single and childless man himself, Jesus modelled how we can become spiritual parents"**

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could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev 7:9). In Jesus, God is doing something new. The New Testament is God's new agreement ('agreement' is another word for 'testament') with his people. Jesus' great work of parenting was to adopt into God's family anyone who trusts in him from every race, nation, class and gender (Gal 3:28-29). The New Testament introduces the hope that we can have a spiritual family, regardless of our age, fertility or marital status. When we receive Christ, we are adopted into a spiritual family at three levels:

1. Psalm 68:5 tells us that God is a "father to the fatherless". God becomes our spiritual father.

2. The next verse (Psalm 68:6) says that "God sets the lonely in families", which has particular poignancy for single people. When Jesus was called to attend to his biological family, Jesus "looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'" (Mark 3:34).

The church becomes our spiritual brothers and sisters.

3. We are called to become spiritual parents, encouraging and training fellow Christians who are younger in the faith. Matthew records that, "the people brought little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them" (Matt 19:13). As a single and childless man Himself, Jesus modelled to us how we can become spiritual parents.

*Spiritual parenthood*

The Apostle Paul addressed his fellow-worker Titus as, "my true son in our common faith" (Titus 1:4) and those in the Galatian church as, "my dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). To the Corinthian church, he writes, "in Christ Jesus, I became your father through the gospel" – (1 Cor 4:15). His letters are full of fatherly love and concern, both for whole churches and individual disciples. Barry Danylak writes, "Paul's legacy was greater than that of any physical parents, for Paul's progeny were those begotten in Christ through the limitless power of the gospel for an eternal inheritance in heaven."

There is a character called Sarah Smith in CS Lewis's classic book "The Great Divorce", whose large spiritual family is described like this:

"Every young man or boy that met her became her son - even if it was only the boy that brought the meat to her back door. Every girl that met her was her daughter."

The church needs more people like Sarah Smith, single or married, to be nurturing the lives of young disciples. A

report from *Care for the Family* cites the biggest challenge for Christian parents as, “family time was devoted to other activities, or not having enough time with the child. This was followed by needing help with knowing what to do.” Parents need help in bringing up their children, especially in encouraging spiritual growth. The report also shows that when “children receive positive multigenerational input from the wider family and church”, they are more likely to embrace their parents’ faith.

### *Conclusions*

We need to challenge the secular thinking that puts walls around the nuclear family. In some church traditions, the role of spiritual parenting is formalised in the role of godparents. But surely each of us can think of people in our church families who are less mature in the faith than us – other adults, perhaps, as well as children. If we serve in a kidswork team at church, we have been invested with the privilege to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov 22:6). To adapt the African proverb, “it takes a church to raise a child.”

When Jesus referred in the parable of the sower to true fruitfulness in His followers (“Other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop - a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” - Matt 13:8), he was not suggesting very large families! Rather, he was showing how we can be fruitful and multiply by sowing spiritual seed in one another’s lives.

### **By Stuart**

*Stuart is TFT’s Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. He wishes that he’d learned to kitesurf when he was younger, but is now satisfied with an occasional paddle followed by a nice ale.*

**This edition of Ascend looks at how a lack of biological children, resulting from a call to celibacy, can feel like a great loss. Rob, Nigel and Linda rightly lament this loss in their articles. Paul and Jamie each recognise that they would have liked to have had their own children, but go on to explain how church youth work has afforded them opportunities to speak into many young lives. Stuart describes his experience of being “adopted” by a family in his church, including the surprise of how much he could contribute to family life as a single man.**

*By contrast, some TFT members are married with children – Phil and Robert describe what it was like to talk about their same-sex attractions to their adult children. John brings an altogether different perspective – he shares his experience of fostering children as a single man.*

*One thread that runs through many of the articles is the theme of spiritual parenting – how we can all disciple younger believers. My hope is that each of us who read these articles would be encouraged and inspired to become more deeply involved in our church families.*

### **By Stuart, TFT Director**

# God Sets The Lonely In Families

*"We want to adopt you for the duration of lockdown!" my friends Paul and Sue said, at the beginning of April 2020.*

If I'd been prayerfully seeking God, then it would have been a wonderful and timely answer to my prayers. However, I wasn't finding it easy to talk to God at that point. I was just too angry. Angry that my comfortable, middle-class, western lifestyle had been disrupted by a virus! Angry that my skiing holiday had been cancelled; angry that I would have to be isolating alone (as I live alone); angry that I would not be getting any physical affection for who knew how long? So, I was moaning to God, rather than prayerfully petitioning the one who delights in providing for my needs. I was grumbling at my heavenly Father about the anticipated lack of touch, instead of expectantly asking for his generous provision of companionship. But here were friends from church, at the end of a phone line, asking if I would like to join them, several times a week, till... whenever. It has been God's gracious provision for me, even when I was too moody to ask for it.

"Come on Sunday, join us for the church service, stay all day," they suggested. "I'll bring a cake" I said, in acceptance.

## My place at the table

So, a few days later, I knocked at their door, carrying homemade Black Forest Gateau. They both warmly hugged me, knowing my need to feel loved through physical affection. We had just enough time for a coffee and a quick chat about life in lockdown, about how unprecedented everything was, before our online church service started.

We stood and sang and worshipped together. We enjoyed the contributions from many different folk as the service continued. Their ten-month-old daughter woke up from her morning nap and joined us for the end of the service. Then lunch was prepared, and it was my job to keep the baby preoccupied with toys and fun so she would stay away from the kitchen.

Paul and Sue have been married just a few years and have both become real foodies. So, meals are epic. Paul's kitchen moniker is "Never knowingly under-catered!" There is always plenty, and the quality is high too. Some people eat to live, others live to eat, and whereas I'm more at the functional end of relating to food, the way they discuss eating and their favourite meals gives me the strong impression they're towards the other end of the spectrum. That first day we had a sort of Swiss meal, (Swiss-German maybe?) melted cheese over griddled meat and veg. It was decided that we should attempt food from different nations each week. Later we sat and watched a programme about backpackers in the Americas, and they asked

"Which country should we cook from next week?"

"Guatemala!" I said.

I was half-joking, but they took me seriously. I knew nothing about Guatemala, except that it was in the Americas, but I certainly knew absolutely nothing about their food. The internet provides almost all the information you could need and it has been a lot of fun researching,

preparing and consuming the results each week. Over lockdown we've done Tanzania, Fiji, Iraq, Russia, Korea, Germany, Ghana, Uzbekistan and this week it's South Africa! I've always thought there was a special power in sharing a meal; a power to deepen friendships and unite lives. And I think

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**“Children need more than just their parents - we're all enriched through these broader relationships”**

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it's all even more so when each person contributes to a bring-and-share meal. I believe that hospitality is a form of secret spiritual warfare. The shared experience of satisfying basic needs and of delighting the senses, of listening to and contributing in conversations, is very relational. It can break any sense of feeling excluded, of feeling left out. It can smash the lies behind feeling unwanted; it is a powerful thing to know you have a place at the table.

**We have all benefitted**

I genuinely don't think I would have managed very well emotionally over these months, if I weren't visiting them each week. But they say it's been a real blessing having me there (though I can't

quite see how). It seems to be a principle though: when doing good, often both parties gain something; when being generous, the giver shares some of the joy of the receiver and gains some freedom from selfishness and greed as well. Although it feels like I must be getting much more out of visiting them than they do about me coming, occasionally I get a glimpse of how the dynamic changes when I'm there.

“When you're here, we can both switch off from having to be so constantly vigilant about watching the baby.”

The thought that I could be a blessing and not just a burden to them challenges my false ideas about marriage. The idea that “because they're a couple, they're complete and self-sufficient” and the thought that “they couldn't need me, I'm just a spare wheel” are both challenged. I too easily forget that a couple don't complete each other; there's only one who completes us and fully satisfies. The well-known African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” expresses it well. Even children and a nuclear family aren't meant to be an isolated unit. Children need more than just their parents. We're all meant to live in community, and we're all enriched through these broader relationships. Spending extended time with this family, and particularly this couple, has reminded me that healthy relationships







take a lot of effort. Watching them serve each other (and me) despite how they feel having been woken by a hungry baby through the night, or far too early in the morning, is true love. Listening to them deliberately encourage and affirm one another, and at times disagree too, has reminded me that love is not something that we fall into or out of, but is a choice. A choice to put the needs of others before self a thousand times each day. I have been tempted in the past to believe that getting married would solve my same-sex attraction issues. I was, of course, deluding myself. It was totally ignoring the lives of many dear friends in heterosexual marriages, but

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**“I have been tempted to believe that getting married would solve my same-sex attraction issues”**

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still struggling with same-sex attractions. Marriage alone is not the answer to any of my problems. Marriage doesn't guarantee a lack of loneliness; it's not like only single people struggle with porn and God never intended us to get all our needs met in just one other. So, we all need to build relationships and friendships whether we're married or

single. Marriage is a different set of challenges, including a fast track way of being sanctified from my selfishness, pride and arrogance.

Family is essential for everyone. Family is the answer to my loneliness. Just as Paul and Sue's family have helped me to feel that I'm welcome and that I belong, so God's family must be where I feel at home for the rest of my life. God puts the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6) and I'm so grateful that I've been welcomed into His family. Family is not just for a moment of crisis. Family is for ongoing healthy living. So, for the future, I will be ensuring I do all I can to be at home in, and with, the body of Christ. I cannot afford any longer to be half present, to take brothers and sisters in Christ for granted. I must ensure that I'm doing all I can to welcome other members, and help them feel at home too. I resolve to give up living like an orphan.

**By Stuart**

***Stuart has lived in the heart of London for about 25 years and enjoys working for a small building company that has a vision to disciple men. He also loves capturing the beauty of the natural world with a camera.***



## Podcast

To explore the themes from the article “God sets the lonely in families” in more depth, we recorded an interview with Stuart and the couple who hosted him. Paul and Sue share their perspective of what it was like to include Stuart in their family over an extended period. To listen to this interview, subscribe to the ‘Ascend Higher Podcast’

[truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts)

## Online Teaching

During 2020, our staff and speaking teams have been growing in their ability to teach and support people through online platforms, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Though we are conscious of the limitations of the technology, particularly around communicating sensitively on matters of sexuality, we recognise the growing demand for teaching and seminars provided in this format. If you would like a TFT speaker to attend your event (online or in person), then please call us to talk through the options or fill out this webform:

[truefreedomtrust.co.uk/speaking](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/speaking)



## THE INTIMACY DEFICIT

TFT NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2020

ONLINE

# “The Intimacy Deficit” *National Conference 2020 Review*

I was a little apprehensive as I logged into Zoom for my first TFT National Conference. The window opened to lots of smiles, waves and conversation between people who clearly were friends. Community. After years of struggling silently with same-sex attraction, thinking I was the only one with that experience to continue holding a traditional biblical view, here I was seeing and interacting with others who understood that tension. That initial moment of not being alone in this struggle was one of the most impactful things from this event. That feeling only grew as I got to know people throughout the day in the breakout rooms and the women’s hangout time.

Ed Shaw gave four talks focused on intimacy with God, Self, Others and Creation. Each address followed an organised pattern: defining that area of intimacy, considering what keeps us from that area of intimacy, and how can we enjoy intimacy in that area. He incorporated a brief theological framework as well as specific and

practical examples. One of these examples concerned intimacy with God, and we spent time in Psalm 23. Pray it, stress different words, memorise and meditate on it, sing it, respond to it, paint it, summarise and rewrite it etc. I’m familiar with all these techniques, but as my time in the Word tends to be more academic, it was a good reminder to come with an attitude of intimacy. Although the talks themselves were short, when followed by a question/answer session and small breakout rooms for discussion, there was ample time to thoughtfully consider and interact with the content.

I was surprised by how little the conference seemed to actually be about same-sex attraction, rather focusing on general discipleship and growing as followers of Christ. I noticed this with the main talks, testimonies and the book review. There was enough reference and discussion about sexuality to make it helpful and applicable, but it was also refreshing to be reminded that even though sexuality issues can seem so big,



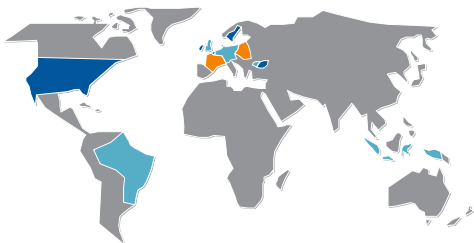
God is working in many areas of my heart.

I don't have any similar resources nearby, so I was thankful to have an option for a Zoom conference. It was well organised and still made space for interaction with others. The day ended with some casual (or somewhat competitive) games. My love of Disney artificially boosted my confidence in the music quiz section until the focus changed to UK TV show theme songs,

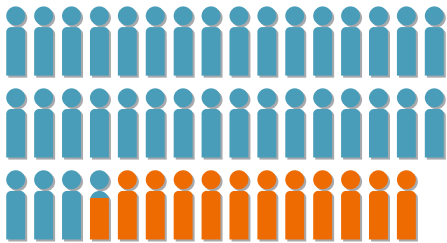
leaving those of us not from the UK slightly disadvantaged. It was still entertaining and a great way to close out a day of fellowship and encouragement.

**By Sarah**

*Sarah loves outdoor adventures like camping, kayaking, and biking. She also plays several musical instruments and directs a gospel choir as part of her full-time ministry.*



**14 countries represented**  
(Spanning 13 timezones)



**141 Attendees**  
(35 for the first time)



**20 Breakout Discussion Groups**  
(5 Connect Groups in the afternoon)





## The Eternal Uncle

“It’s so good to know somebody else who is happy not to be married and have children”, says my 86-year old spinster friend once again. And, once again, I disavow her of this erroneous assumption, though with her advanced dementia, I know I shall hear it again... and again.

I would have absolutely *loved* children and, as I am of a certain age, I now realise that I would have absolutely *loved* grandchildren. A wife may also have been nice.

It is interesting to reflect back on what expectations or hopes one may have had at certain times in our life. I clearly remember, at age 18, assuming that a decade later I would be married with a couple of children. I suppose that seemed like ‘what one did’, and yet I had not then even had a girlfriend. In hindsight, I know I felt no physical attraction to girls. I did subsequently dally (briefly) with a few girls, expecting something might develop, but I never seemed to have any joined-up thinking between that and my total lack of physical interest. Finally, sometime in my late twenties, during a wedding service, I realised that this was unlikely to happen for me.

I had always loved children, and started as a Sunday school teacher at age 16 (continuing almost without a break for the next 40 years), meanwhile adding in various clubs, children’s crusades etc.

The 20s and 30s are difficult ages for those of us in this situation, as we see our friends getting married and having families. I also found that, as I had grown up with these people and was still quite young, I immediately became a courtesy uncle to their kids. During that time, I was invited to plenty of family activities and even on a few holidays. I became the eternal ‘Uncle Paul’, and furthermore looked for any opportunity to ‘borrow’ one or two kids to take them out, or to give me an excuse for example to see a kids’ film!

### Changing churches

A much more difficult situation ensued when I changed church in my late 50s. I found it much harder to make new friends at that age, and also to meet their kids, especially as the mums and dads were so much younger than I was. I eventually made some progress and became a much older ‘Uncle Paul’, but this was not without having

to work hard at it, and meeting some disappointments. Singles can always play the victim at church and complain that they are left out and never get invited to be with families. But this is probably not intentional as their primary focus will be on their busy work and family life. I learned to get on and invite myself to their homes (even if the invite was unlikely to be reciprocated) – “just a cup of tea... any time that suits you...”. I always found that this was well-received, as families appreciate the effort and they are much less transportable than a single adult. As single people (particularly men!) we may not warm to the idea of producing a full dinner for a family, but a cuppa and biscuit will suffice – the opening up of our homes and our lives is a powerful thing.

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**“Our close connection with a family may also serve to show us that family life is not always like the perfect TV advert”**

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I really like little kids, but have also found it a delight when those I have known for a long time have kept in touch through adolescence, and into adulthood, especially if they have gone on with God and now really are ‘friends’.

I had the privilege of working in China for much of my 50s. When one young man came to faith, he became my closest friend, although I am twice his age! On holiday in Thailand, his lovely little son (age 3) woke up each morning in his parents’ bed and his first question was, “Where is Grandpa Paul?”. The quality of our ‘friendship’ owes a lot to the closeness between his Dad and me.

## How church should be

In a well-functioning church married people should have a stake in the lives of singles and singles in the lives of the married. No two parents can be all things to their children – and there can be great benefit from a trusted other who is external and objective. Our close connection with a family may also serve to show us that family life is not always like the perfect TV advert, which helps ease that sense of missing out!

Jesus counts each of us to be of equal value, whether or not we have a spouse and children. Jesus himself made the great sacrifice of being childless. But he also calls us to produce *spiritual* children in this life (Mark 10:29).

We single people need to make it a major priority to use our freedom to seek out opportunities to input the lives of others. While none of this takes away the challenges of singleness and childlessness, I see my state as one of great honour. The Apostle Paul says that marriage and singleness are both *gifts*, but remember that Paul always uses the idea of a *gift* as something to help build up the church, and not just for my own personal benefit (e.g. 1 Cor 14:12).

I still feel my lack of family acutely, but I have lived nearly 70 years of a rich and fulfilled life. Beyond everything, I have known the unfailing care of Jesus and the privilege of sharing in His sufferings, just as He said we must.

## By Paul

***Paul enjoys travel and the countryside and is an avid reader with the most eclectic of tastes. He is also just discovering the pleasure of gin and tonic.***

# No Children? The Bible Brings Hope

All who belong to Jesus share God as their Father. To be a parent is, to some extent, to mirror our God and fulfil our created design. Indeed, God created humanity to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). Of course, many do not have children, so what hope is offered for them?

When exploring this sensitive subject, I hope these three principles will be used by the Spirit to offer hope and stir the “...inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8) that is available in Christ.

## Share your sorrow with Jesus

For many, the realisation they will not have children is accompanied by acute pain and ongoing heartbreak. I’ve spoken to people who deeply desired children but were not able to have them for a variety of reasons. Sometimes our dreams don’t coincide with God’s sovereign will.

One of the most helpful pieces of pastoral advice I was given was to involve God in my struggles. Of course, when faced with emotions that seem

overwhelming, this pastoral advice can sound trite. When I reflected on my own walk with God, however, it became obvious that I wasn’t being honest with the Lord. I’ve found that difference between involving God in our struggles and hiding from Him can be revolutionary.

Logically, of course, hiding how we feel from God is self-defeating. It conjures up the ludicrous picture of humanity playing hide and seek with God (Genesis

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**“Sometimes our dreams  
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3:8). The Lord already knows how we feel, and what we need.

Why should we share our sorrow with Jesus? Well, I’ve never yet seen a time when being honest with God hasn’t proven to be beneficial. Could that be why we find such honesty in the songbook of God’s people - Psalms? To





obey the command to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4) - which carries the meaning of rejoicing in every circumstance - we can’t ignore the circumstances we are in. We must involve God in them.

When we share our unfulfilled dreams with God, He may help us to uncover the potentially sinful, or positive, desires that lay behind our plans. If God doesn’t grant our requests, we are then better placed to see how He might re-channel our desires for His good purposes. As CS Lewis noted in his book “The Problem of Pain”, pain is God’s megaphone. It can be a tool for our sanctification.

### **Be fruitful for Jesus**

The childless woman who was graciously granted children by God is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. For example, Hannah was honest, and she cried out to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:10) and He answered her prayers. God answers prayer. However, I think this recurring motif points to another wonderful truth. The barren wombs being opened were shadows of the truly miraculous child, born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), who would enter the world to inaugurate God’s Kingdom.

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**“I’ve never yet seen a time when being honest with God hasn’t proven to be beneficial”**

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Some members of TFT have entered marriage and had children. Some have not. Both are commanded to see the more glorious implications of this Scriptural trajectory.

Whereas God commanded humanity to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28), now a different kind of fruitfulness takes priority. That’s why Jesus extols the virtues of being a eunuch for the sake of God’s Kingdom (Matthew 19:12), and the apostle Paul lists singleness as a gift alongside marriage (1 Corinthians 7:7) that is to be used in gospel service (1 Corinthians 7:32–40). Tragically, our fallen world means that some married couples are not able to have children without adopting, but I think the implications as to why singleness is a gift apply in this area too.

How fruitful we are for God’s Kingdom should be the priority for every follower of Jesus. Simply put, not having children does not mean that we won’t bear fruit. What’s more, Kingdom fruitfulness is not just equal to physical fruitfulness - it’s infinitely more important. One type of fruit lasts for eternity. Sadly, one may not.

Think about the message of Ecclesiastes – its existential angst certainly rings true. Everything in this world is vaporous. Death will come to all, so how can we find meaning? It is not in our legacy (Ecclesiastes 1:11), our wealth (Ecclesiastes 5:5), pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:1) or anything else (including children and future generations that may follow (Ecclesiastes 1:4)). The only answer offered is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). From our perspective, this side of the cross, the answer is obviously subsumed by the greater meaning that is offered in Jesus Christ. Our desire to be fruitful in the Kingdom, then, should trump our desire to be physically fruitful.

I do believe children are brought into God's covenant family. For the Christian parent, to teach them the ways of Jesus is their most important task. Christian parents train their children for Kingdom living. But having physical children is not the only way to be fruitful for God's Kingdom. Christians without children may have more opportunities to help nurture others in their faith, and be may be called to act as a kind of spiritual parent to others. Love is not self-seeking (1 Corinthians 13:5), but outward-looking. Both physical and spiritual fruitfulness is designed to draw love out.

### **Enjoy the family of Jesus**

When Jesus was hanging from a tree, He gave his mother into the care of His beloved disciple (John 19:26). Mary became a mother to John. John became a son to Mary. Of course, Jesus never had physical children. But He was deeply concerned that His people would live out who they are, His family on earth.

That pattern of spiritual parenting is repeated throughout the New Testament. Paul the Apostle, who like Jesus was single, learnt how to be a spiritual son. For example, towards the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too" (Romans 16:13). He learnt how to enjoy the family of God. But not only that. Paul felt a fatherly affection towards others too. In his exhortations to the Corinthians, Paul stated, "even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). He also claimed

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**"Our desire to be fruitful in the Kingdom should trump our desire to be physically fruitful"**

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Timothy as his "true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2).

As Christians we are not left without family. We are enfolded into God's family and relate to one another as spiritual brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, mothers and fathers.

So, how do we reckon with the pain of not having children?

First, remember to be honest and share our pain with God. Second, let's look to the trajectory of spiritual fruitfulness that Scripture gives. Third, we can meditate on the wonderful examples that are given of spiritual parenthood in Scripture. We should be overjoyed that we are invited to play an active role in God's family.

These principles may not minimise the pain that is felt. But, hopefully, it can edge us towards channelling that pain for the glory of God.

**By Rob**

***Rob worked on the TFT staff team for four and a half years. He is now an ordinand in the Church of England. He enjoys spending time with friends and reading in his spare time (when he's not watching a TV series).***

## Robert's Story

My marriage ended when my three children were in their late teens. Two had started at university and the youngest remained living with me until going to university. During those years, I started to explore my sexuality and began openly meeting other men on a regular basis, and quickly I was at home in the world of same-sex relationships. During this time, my ex-wife would reveal things about my behaviour that I immediately denied or covered over. Sadly, and to my shame, I lied many times about my sexuality to my children.

In 2012, the Holy Spirit began convicting me of my need to repent of sin. I was

thoroughly convinced of God's saving work, and experienced the assurance of salvation in my life. However, my heart was still breaking, not about salvation but about the skeletons that were in my closet and the lies that I had told my children. The destructive forces of shame and guilt are heavy burdens for anyone to carry alone.

Through the leading of God's Holy Spirit, I felt it necessary to talk to my children about the pain, anguish and impact of my lifestyle choices which had affected them in lots of different ways.

There is no rule to say that this is what you must do as a sinning parent but, for myself,

## How Do I Tell My Children? Stories from Robert and Phil

### Phil's Story

Every person's circumstances are different, and there are no easy answers to this question: how do I tell my children that I wrestle with same-sex attractions? I hope to write a two-part answer: firstly, some general principles and, secondly, to share how I told my children (which is more of what not to do, than what to do).

#### *Two principles*

The first principle is to fully understand why you are telling your children, and what you expect to achieve by doing so. Are you addressing a need in yourself, or a need in them to know? My first attempt at telling my

eldest son did not go well because my son told me outright that he didn't need to know, and I felt hurt by that.

I can't answer these questions for you because there can be many varied reasons for approaching the subject with your children. Perhaps one of the most significant is their age. My children were all adults when I told them. However, one reason to share in the present climate might be to better educate younger children about issues of sexuality and to counter what they may hear in school, playground or even church.

It might also be necessary to share because something about your behaviour has come to light that is causing family dynamics to force the issue. In my case, perhaps the main reason I felt I should share was that

it was necessary in order to deepen and restore relationships. My daughter sums it up perfectly, and she writes, "I felt relieved when I heard the honest truth about the issues faced by dad, but I wasn't shocked. It's difficult to articulate, but I think I already knew some of his struggle based on my own intuition and observation. But, through his courage to say the difficult things he had experienced, he opened up the lines of communication and took the burden of worry from me. I will always admire his bravery."

My daughter's twin brother found it much harder to deal with what had been happening in my life. This was partially due to the interference and influence of others,

and the unhelpful stories they were sharing. Restoring the bond between father and son has taken patience and much prayer, but we have rebuilt a loving relationship with trust and openness.

My youngest son, who spent a great deal of time living with me, writes, "The not knowing, the second-guessing, severely hindered our relationship. However, Dad's courage to share his story has honestly brought about healing and restoration between us. Our relationship is very healthy; in fact, we now share a much deeper relationship - one that exhibits the message of the gospel. Dad's sharing has enabled us both to appreciate the gospel better,

my working with TFT was becoming more public at the time, TFT friends were visiting our house and I felt I owed some explanation to my children before they found out some other way.

If I were to give one piece of advice it would be this: unless there is a really good reason, wait to share until they are adults, and preferably after they are married (or at least openly sexually active). Even though I told my children in a less than ideal way, I felt they had a sufficient understanding of life to be able to respond positively.

That leads on to the second principle: what do you tell them, and in what context do you say it? Firstly, how does what you share fit with their impressions of you as a father? Secondly, how does it fit in with your relationship with God? It may well be helpful to have a prepared testimony of how

you have worked through your own issues with God. There is an obvious risk that your relationship with your children could change drastically as a result of telling them, either for better or worse. That's perhaps the most significant challenge in saying anything.

### *Three approaches*

So how did I do it?

With my eldest son, I took the Direct Approach. I sat him down one day I can't remember exactly what I said, but I probably said I wanted to explain why I was working with TFT. I mentioned some homosexual experiences before I married, and he stopped me abruptly and said it was all in the past, and he didn't want to know. At the time, he had finished university and was unmarried. I had the feeling that the conversation had made him feel uncomfortable, and that maybe he felt I was fishing to find out about his sex life. I was



and Dad is no longer weighed down with a heavy burden of guilt. He has truly come to experience that Jesus' yoke is easy to bear."

Talking to your children, in an age-appropriate way, may be the most difficult thing you will ever do as a parent, but it could be the beginning of healing and restored relationships as well as a renewed commitment to pray for your loved ones who need God's grace every day.

What for me has proved a very positive activity, for others may be more difficult, and I would caution anyone setting out to

do it to consider the reason for it. I wanted to exemplify God's grace and to glorify God. Whilst it was the right decision for me, I would encourage any parent to proceed with caution, seek Godly advice and exercise biblical wisdom.

*By Robert*

hurt, and it really put me off saying anything to my other children.

A few years later, after he married in 2007, things were a little different. I did a TV appearance for TFT in 2008, which his wife watched. She texted me afterwards and said I did great. Two years later, my son came with me to Belfast for a speaking weekend for TFT. All's well that ends well!

Next was my daughter, when I took the Coward's Approach. Again, she was married by now. It was 2008, and I appeared for TFT on Revelation TV. As it was transmitted when my wife and I were on holiday in Greece, and I did not have satellite TV, I asked my daughter to record it.

We got a text in Greece saying, "Really great that you are free now!" The power of testimony.

Finally, with my younger son – the non-Christian – I took the Accidental Approach.

This was much more recently – probably 2015, as I think he was also married by then. He was in my office, saw one of my books and said, "What would you have done if I'd been gay?" My reply: "Oh son, I've never thought you were gay. It's not you with the issue. It's me!" That broke the ice, and a conversation ensued.

So, three completely different approaches. I'm not sure I'd recommend any of them. Nevertheless, we all survived, and so did our relationships. What I can suggest is to think carefully about the 'why' and the 'what', and pray for the opportunities that God can give to you.

*By Phil*

*Phil is still battling to master Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, 4½ years after buying his organ – maybe another 4½ years will do it! Phil's cancer is well in remission, thanks to Donald Trump's favourite medication: Dexamethasone.*



## Fostering As A Single Person

*What led you to consider fostering?*

I have worked with young people for over 25 years in various settings. One of my work colleagues commented, “you’d make a good dad”, and another encouraged me to consider fostering. I had always wanted kids of my own, but circumstances hadn’t, to that point, brought about the opportunity! I didn’t even think I was eligible to foster. However, I saw a leaflet regarding fostering in our reception at work, so I took it home and went on to the website to find out more. I was surprised to discover that there were no restrictions discouraging people who were single, had a religious faith or same-sex attraction from applying. They welcomed initial enquiries from pretty much anybody! I then went along to one of their information evenings to speak with social workers and other carers.

I’ve got no nieces and nephews, so my experience with young children is very limited. My only experience with young people has been in a work capacity rather than in a family context, so it made more sense for me to foster older children as I was more used to dealing with them.

*Is there a certain type of person who flourishes as a foster carer?*

I would like to say someone who is patient, but that’s not necessarily a quality I have in abundance! I’m not sure really, as every foster carer I’ve met is different. What is important is that the relevant social workers match the right children or young people up with you. Many of the boys I’ve worked with have either had a diagnosis or been under assessment for ADHD and, as I’m single, they’ve not had to compete with anyone else. So, I’ve been able to give them my full attention.

*What are some of the joys and some of the challenges?*

I love going to theme parks and taking trips out to different places, and it is great to have someone to take! It’s also been nice to expand their cultural awareness and introduce them to new experiences. Having had some extremely active boys on placement has forced me to do more exercise, which isn’t a bad thing! One of the boys loved attending a church youth club. He became a Christian and got baptised last



year, which was very emotional! The issues have been the usual teenage boy stuff! I'm a very tidy, organised person and hate mess! I also insist on good personal hygiene. I want my life to run smoothly like clockwork, and I dislike being late. As you can imagine, this has brought about the occasional challenge. So, I've incentivised good behaviours by working out the price for activities the child wants. The key is to set the expected rules, guidelines and boundaries from the very start, and I make it quite clear – they're not negotiable! Lots of friends mocked me for producing a 7-page list of rules, but actually, it has worked well. I phrased the rules positively, and so the child knows where he stands. We go through the list on day 2 of their arrival. I'm very clear that I'm in charge and there is no room for negotiation on these rules. Once these ground rules are in place, I can then be quite relaxed.

*What support do you have in the emotional/practical ups and downs as a foster carer?*

Foster carers are allocated a personal social worker who then provides regular telephone support and occasional home visits – mine has been excellent. I also have extended family and friends who have also helped out in times of need. Your support network has to be approved by the authority, which might mean they need to be checked/interviewed. There is a whole programme of training courses to attend, some compulsory, others

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**“I was surprised to discover that they welcomed enquiries from pretty much anybody”**

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optional, but all very helpful. There are local fostering support groups where you can meet with other carers for a coffee and chat. This also operates via Facebook and WhatsApp. There are organisations on the internet who offer support like [www.fostertalk.org](http://www.fostertalk.org) or the Christian charity [www.homeforgood.org.uk](http://www.homeforgood.org.uk). There will be an allocated 'Looked After Child' co-ordinator in the child's school to liaise with, as well as an allocated 'Looked After Child' nurse. There are occasional care planning meetings to attend. However, due to the stressful nature of the work, there can be a high turnover of staff in social care, and so support from the child's allocated social worker hasn't always been as consistent and effective as one would have desired! Interestingly, I have met quite a few other foster carers within church circles, since I was approved, and it can be good to tap into their experience, advice and guidance.

*What would you say to someone considering fostering because they're a bit lonely?*

This is probably not the best motivation for going into fostering. I was lonely for a few years before considering fostering because I had wanted/expected/hoped for more than I had in life. One day I felt God say, “If you end up doing your current job for the rest of your life, would you be happy with that?” And I realised that I could be happy with what I had. I became content with my job, with my home, and with singleness. God gave me an inner peace with what I did have when I realised I had been trying to fulfil others' expectations. When I made the conscious decision to choose to be content with what I had, I felt a greater sense of inner peace.

In many ways, my life living alone felt perfect and, strangely, people seemed

actually to envy my lifestyle! It was when it seemed almost too comfortable that I felt the urge that it may be needed shaking up a bit. Some thought I might not cope with the drastic changes, but I think I've surprised them, and most definitely myself.

*Most fostering is done by couples. What's it like fostering as a single person?*

I am not aware of any other single foster carers who have chosen to pursue fostering unless they have decided to take on guardianship of a child of an extended family member. Obviously, the local authority would prefer more couples to foster, and they are clear from the outset that it is much more difficult for single foster carers, for many reasons. There are lots of meetings and appointments to attend. If you foster through the local authority, rather than a private agency, there is a very significant difference in terms of financial support. Personally, I didn't want money to be my primary motivation and so have stayed with the local authority up to now. They would prefer you not to have other employment, due to the responsibilities. However, if you do need to work, then it may be important to find a role that fits in perfectly with the school day and child's school holidays. Your employer will also need to be sympathetic to allow you to attend appointments and occasional training courses. This should be explored prior to starting the assessment process. Therefore, a job in a school is probably the perfect option, or alternatively set up a small part-time business from home. There are a number of benefits you may be able to tap into or access, and you will receive an allowance for each child you are able to take. Generally, this increases as the child gets older, or if the child

has a diagnosed disability. Most carers (apparently) want babies and young

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**"I want my life to run smoothly like clockwork - fostering has brought about the occasional challenge!"**

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children, and there is a shortage of carers who wish to take teenagers, so there may be financial incentives in this.

The way I look at it now is like this: there are many single-parent families out there who are struggling to support their families and make ends meet – this experience has undoubtedly helped me become more empathic towards them. I don't know how they cope with more than one child!

*What advice would you give to a TFT member considering applying to become a foster carer?*

Pray (a lot!). The assessment process can be long, so check with your particular local authority for estimated timescale. Ours was 6-12 months, and at any point it could come to an end if you do not successfully move to the next stage of the process. They may tell you that the assessment process is challenging. That is an understatement! Expect to be grilled about your early childhood/family experiences, past relationships, employment history, religious beliefs, political beliefs, views on homosexuality, charity involvement and practically everything else. Even your pets have to be assessed for suitability! You may need to have the communication skills of a politician to answer some of the more sensitive questions tactfully. Social service departments and employees





have some policies and viewpoints that could be considered to be very liberal compared to those from a more traditional conservative Judeo-Christian background. They have to be careful not to approve foster carers who they perceive to hold views that are extremist or fundamentalist (to them), but may seem perfectly reasonable to you. It may take much prayer, wisdom, discernment and careful thought when giving your responses. You will also need to have a few positive character references. To be honest, it's a miracle in itself to get through it, and the emotional response when they finally told me I was approved was a mixture of shock, joy and a huge relief.

I prayed about it with friends and family. I was most worried about talking to my parents about it, but they were, actually, really supportive. I knew, as a single man, that I was going to be vulnerable to false allegations from a child and, because I've worked with children professionally, I had more to lose as any allegation would mean I could impact my job. But some agencies can support the foster carer through false allegations. If a child has previously made an allegation against previous carers, then I would politely decline to take that particular child on a placement.

If you are successful and you receive a phone call about a potential placement child, do not feel you have to rush into saying 'yes'. You may think that a social worker is pulling on your heart-strings and putting pressure on you to decide quickly, but take your time to make the right decision, for both you and the child. Find out as much information as you can, and ask as many questions as you need to, especially "Has this child ever made an allegation against a previous carer?". Perhaps ask for a couple of days to go away and think (and

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**"I had a mixture of shock, joy and a huge relief when they finally told me I was approved!"**

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pray) about it, before taking the next step. The authority may put pressure on you to take a child, but it's essential to be discerning and to be willing to say 'no'. It's important to make a decision with your head, using common sense, as well as your heart. I would go away and pray about it before responding. I've said 'no' to about 7-10 placements and 'yes' to about four. The matching process is critical – each child will respond better to certain environments than others.



Having people to talk to about the process is very important. I had two friends, who were both church ministers, who met up with me regularly and gave me the space to talk things through. I needed that encouragement to get through the incredibly intrusive process.

*How would you respond to personal questions from the children, such as “Why are you single”?*

I’d say that up to now circumstances haven’t worked out that way for me to have a family, life doesn’t always turn out the way you expect or wish it to. I wouldn’t go into all my personal details with the child.

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**“The matching process is critical – each child will respond better to certain environments than others”**

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*Fostering sounds like quite a challenge. Can you still see yourself doing it in 10/20/30 years’ time?*

There’s no typical foster child. The reasons they come into the care system can be very different: sometimes it’s because the child has the issues and the parents can’t cope; other times, it’s the parents who have the issues, and the child isn’t safe, or they can’t cope. Some of the children are really lovely, and just need to be removed from a difficult home situation.

Because I’m self-employed, I have the space to rest if I need it. God has given me all that I need for this role. Some children will be more demanding than others, so again it comes down to having the right parent for a particular child.

**By Jack**

*Jack always wanted to be a professional ice-hockey player as a teenager. But, now that’s he’s more advanced in years, he would like to own a string of afternoon tea shops!*

## Sponsor A Pastoral Conversation

Every week we have enquiries from people needing pastoral support around their sexuality. Our trained staff and volunteers are able to listen, to signpost them to helpful resources and to set out ways to get more involved in the TFT community. If you value the support and community provided by TFT, perhaps you could consider sponsoring our pastoral care. A monthly donation of £20 would fund the support provided to one new contact each month.

[truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate)





## A Thousand Generations

**T**he other day I was musing on my spiritual heritage and thanking God for all the people He used to bring my parents to faith in Him. On Dad's side it stretches back generations. On Mum's side it includes a teacher, who took her RE class to a Billy Graham Crusade, where Mum responded, and was linked in with some wonderful people in her local church who discipled her brilliantly.

Now, it continues down the line, through my brother and me to his children and hopefully, in time, to their children, and their children...

But what about me? Does the line stop with me, simply because I never had children? It could, if I let it. I could receive all the wonderful blessings of this heritage, and of the faith, and let them fill my cup and stay there. That would be tragic, indeed. But it needn't be.

Mum wasn't the beginning of my Christian heritage. On her side it stretches back through the teacher who was bold enough to organise a trip to hear an evangelist, and then further, to whoever introduced that teacher to Christ, and then whoever introduced

them, and so on, and so on. All the way back to Abraham (Galatians 3).

The Bible teaches that we (all believers everywhere) are members of one family. We are brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, all because of our faith in Christ. We didn't just receive an individualistic salvation, but were adopted into a new family, and given the name of that family. The blood relationships we have are still real, but they are secondary to the covenant relationship we have in Christ.

I may not have physical children, either by blood or by legal adoption, but I am richly blessed with spiritual children: the people I witnessed to at school (at least one of whom is still going on in the faith); the people who have come to faith through missionaries I support; the people in my sphere of influence who maybe didn't come to faith through my witness, but have been helped to stay on the path and to grow into the next phase of spiritual maturity.

When I listen to the UK Blessing, I am not excluded from that wonderful section about God's favour being upon me and my family, and my children and their children...for a thousand



generations. I don't have to put on a brave face, and try to be happy for those to whom it applies. No, I can sing it with joy, receiving it as God's faithful promise to me.

*"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;  
break forth into singing and cry aloud,  
you who have not been in labour!  
For the children of the desolate one will be more  
than the children of her who is married," says  
the Lord.*

*"Enlarge the place of your tent,  
and let the curtains of your habitations be  
stretched out;  
do not hold back; lengthen your cords  
and strengthen your stakes.  
For you will spread abroad to the right and  
to the left,  
and your offspring will possess the nations  
and will people the desolate cities."  
(Isaiah 54:1-3)*

God's favour is not only upon those who are already favoured in the world's eyes, or who conform to different culture's expectations, or who have already received the desires of our hearts. His eye is on the widow, the orphan and the outsider. He sets the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6). His blessings are abundant, and his promises are good. He is for me. He is for you.

**By Jennie**

**Jennie Pollock works as a freelance writer and editor in Central London. She has an MA in Philosophy and loves to think, read and write about the assumptions underpinning our cultural values.**

*This post first appeared on [ThinkTheology.co.uk](http://ThinkTheology.co.uk)*

## Video Testimonies

**An encouraging feature of our 2020 online conferences has been featuring short video recordings of our members sharing something of what God has been doing in their lives. We are always in need of more people to share about their experiences - this can be over video, podcast (audio) or via a traditional written testimony. Please do get in touch with one of the staff team to explore how you might tell your story.**

**"Encourage one another and build each other up" - 1 Thessalonians 5:11**



# Everyone Can Be A Parent!

Children are a blessing given to us by God. This year I wrote in a Father's Day card to my Dad: "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Psalm 127:4-5). This verse, along with many other parts of scripture, supports the overarching message that we are to treasure our children.

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**"We are called to love the family we have in Christ - the church"**

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I have the privilege to work as a Youth and Children's Minister for a small church. I influence many young lives (and families!) through my work. It's a joy when I see children, teenagers and whole families get the gospel and live out a personal faith in the Lord Jesus.

However, I do realise that, as a same-sex attracted person, it is likely I will never have the experience of parenting my own biological children. I'm not sure if you've ever thought about having children but, as I get older, it is something that has been more on

my mind. It can be difficult when I see married friends announce on social media they are expecting a child. Friendship circles are formed without me because I have no children of my own. Now, I do not envy parents as they discipline children during tantrums, but it can be sad knowing I won't ever put them to bed regularly, tell them how much I love them every day or see them grow up before my eyes.

As Christians, we always need to get God into the mix. What does God tell us, in scripture, on this subject? How does his 'God's eye-view' speak into my situation for the better? That's what I wish to share with you as I tackle this, sometimes very personal, subject.

## **The Bible on parenting**

In the second chapter of Genesis, we read about the first family ever created in Adam and Eve. God made us to be relational beings, and children will come from this perfect loving relationship. But due to Adam and Eve's rejection of God's rule, family life can never be perfect. We see how broken, and messy, families can be. Jacob deceives his father and steals his brother Esau's firstborn





blessing. Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. Some of this we can trace from bad parenting, such as Jacob favouring Joseph, over all his other sons. But at different times even our biblical heroes have broken families. For example, one of King David's sons raped his sister, and another led a rebellion.

God speaks into childlessness too. There are couples who could not conceive due to infertility. Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Michal and Elizabeth could not have children. For some, God 'opened their wombs', but on other occasions, He did not. What about them? How does God give them hope?

For those longing for children, we are given God's answer of good news in the Lord Jesus. These women were all involved in bringing about the promised King, who would save people from sin and death. Additionally, Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's plans, not with his own biological family, but as a single man. He had no wife or children of His own. He achieved God's mission at the cross to make the best family possible – the church. The church is not people born

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**“I commit to praying  
for parents and their  
children regularly”**

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of flesh and blood, but born of God (John 1:13). The church is a spiritual family.

When Jesus was told (in Mark 3:35) that his mother and brothers were outside looking for Him, he said: “Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother”. In a culture where the family was so important, Jesus radically chose to be with His spiritual

family. Children are to be part of that family, too; Jesus blessed them when families came to see him, contrary to what his disciples presumed (Luke 18:15-17).

Church life, just like family life, is messy as well. There are people that get on our nerves, but they are your family in Christ. So, having your own biological family is good; however, we are biblically called to love the family we have in Christ, in the church. We are to encourage and teach each other as a family (Titus 2:1-15). Arguably, this is something the church needs to do better.

### **How I do spiritual parenting**

Even though I don't have my own children, let me tell you how I seek to impact the lives of children and young people positively. I have a goddaughter named Cara. When she was only three months old, I took care of her whilst her parents took a break and prepared a meal provided by their church family. Over time I bought them some of the essentials they needed, and went with the mum to the hospital. I gave her a cow toy and bought literature for her parents to read to her as she grew up. I made a Spotify playlist of children's Christian songs which her mum could learn to sing to Cara. My prayer is that Cara will never know a day when she isn't loved by God.

In my local church family, I regularly go around to different families' houses for dinner, and I've had families round to my house for lunch after a Sunday service. I watch films with them, enjoy their company and chat about everyday life. I ask their children to show me their favourite toys. I share advice with parents (if they want it), provide Bible materials for family Bible time (if they



do it) and get involved when they need help. I cheer them on when they're tired. When it's bedtime, I've read bedtime and Bible stories with the kids. When parents have had conversations with their children about God, and I'm around, I sometimes interject with my own thoughts. I've been there for families when life is hard, or there's been a tragedy in their household. And, importantly, I commit to praying for parents and their children regularly.

For teenagers, I regularly have opportunities at youth group to speak gospel truth into their lives. One young person lives next door to me in a non-Christian household, so I encourage him as much as I can. Another young person is from a very broken background, and comes from a splintered family due to multiple divorces. She lives with her aunt due to her mother's often violent alcoholism, and has lived through numerous court cases. Her parents have forgotten her birthday many times. But we care for her; she has regularly attended Sunday services over the past few years because she knows she has a better spiritual family in the church. She has been a joy to teach and encourage through her tough life.

There have been challenges and rewards. I am not one of their parents, who can speak biblical truth into their teen's life daily. But when these

teenagers are not from Christian homes, as is the case for many of the young people currently in my youth group, I can seek to teach them how to follow Jesus as their King. And I act as their spiritual role model. We can also laugh and banter together!

You may be in my sort of situation and worry or are saddened at the prospect of having no children of your own. Let me encourage you that the church is your spiritual family. You can teach, inspire and encourage the children, young people and families you regularly see on Sunday and during the week. I urge you to pair up with a family and serve them. I agree it will be different from the unique responsibility given to a biological parent, but you are in a unique God-given position to positively influence so many children. We just need to be willing and ask God, in His grace, to show us how we can serve. How can you serve those in your church family?

**By Jamie**

***Jamie enjoys singing, socialising, Netflix, board games and anything sci-fi related. Nicknamed 'Captain Keen', he lives in Winklebury, west of Basingstoke, and enjoys visiting friends and family, especially his goddaughter Cara.***



# Book Review

*Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* by Christopher Yuan  
(Multnomah, 2018) 251 pages  
£10.99 paperback, £9.99 Ebook

**T**his book's awkward title gives little hint of the interesting and uplifting material within the pages. The reason for coining the phrase "Holy Sexuality" is to move away from terms such as homosexual and heterosexual, in order to make the point that every Christian is called to self-denial and holiness in this area, while the word "Gospel" points to the concept that we all have fallen natures to deal with, and suffer from the effect of original sin. No-one should feel that the gospel hasn't "worked" for them, or that they are in any way less sanctified because they still deal with sexual temptations.

## Rooted in his own story

This is Christopher Yuan's second book. His first book ("Out of a Far Country") was a memoir of his own personal journey, whereas here he helps his readers to deal with the challenge of their own sexuality, as well as issues such as anxiety about long-term singleness. In fact, a major topic of the book is marriage and singleness, which he repeatedly returns to look at from different angles, making the book very relevant to anyone who is single but who would like to be married.

However, snippets of his own, very personal, story are retold: He attended the US Marines boot camp, and then dental school, came out to his parents as gay, was rejected by his non-Christian mother, and was eventually found to be HIV positive while in prison

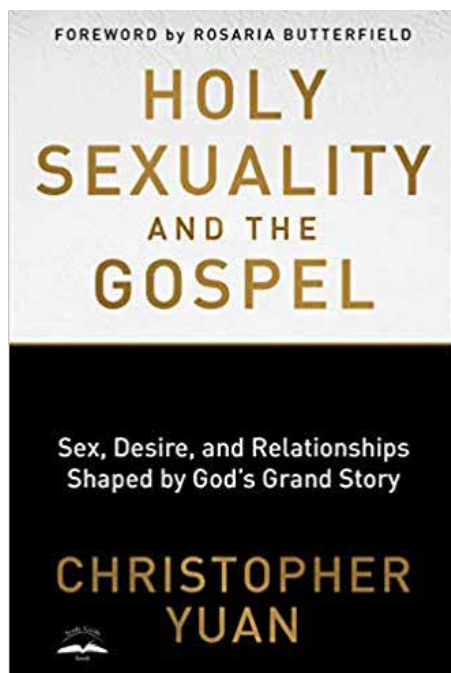
for drug dealing. By that time, his mother and father had both come to faith. After their conversion, they switched to pouring out love and acceptance on their lost son, in contrast to the expectation that Christians are judgmental. When a gay friend of his was alone in hospital, the only ones who came were his parents: "their compassion took me by surprise." At a low point in jail, before being sentenced, he saw scribbled on the metal bunk above him, "If you're bored, read Jeremiah 29:11." He is now a professor at Moody Bible Institute, where he is approached every semester by students who confide that they struggle with same-sex attraction.

## Challenging received Wisdom

The early part of the book was much less interesting for me than the rest, as he lays his groundwork a little too thoroughly. He explores concepts which are already accepted, such as mankind being in the image of God, and original sin. It is only after these roughly 30 pages that the reader starts to be surprised by some unusual takes on some familiar Bible passages - insights that are convincingly argued with evidence from the Bible itself. To be fair, he does later draw on the book's early foundations. For example, he takes the idea of original sin to reassure parents who might be weighed down by ideas, blindly accepted by Christians, that the primary root of homosexuality is an absentee father or dominant mother. He also points out, "my older brother and I had very similar

upbringings, yet he never struggled with same-sex attractions.” For those who ask questions such as “If I still struggle against same-sex sexual desires, am I a gay Christian?” he challenges the view that sexual desires reveal who we are at our deepest core or define our identity.

The book examines claims made both by prominent theologians such as James Brownson, and by gay activists such as Matthew Vines, that sexual differentiation is not essential to marriage. He takes the assertions they make about certain Bible passages and searches out what those passages actually say. Some of the issues he examines take him beyond what can be found in the Bible. For example, he looks at the evidence for the claim, asserted by author Jen Hatmaker, that traditional values in society can be blamed for the higher rate of suicide among youth identifying as gay.



## Practical advice

Later in the book, he adds helpful, practical action points for those trying to share Christ with gay loved ones. He writes, “Some of you may be thinking of a particular close friend right now – someone you believe may have same-sex attractions. Can you bring it up? How should you ask? Don’t!”. There is plenty of pastoral advice for those who ask questions such as, “How do I love my adult children who identify as gay, and are giving me ultimatums about an upcoming wedding?” or, “As you listen to your gay friends’ stories about their partners, how might you respond?” He writes, “Parents, you must realize that your children don’t doubt your position on homosexuality; they are uncertain whether you fully love them... having a child’s partner in the home does not communicate approval.” Another piece of advice is this: “Be a friend, not an expert ... You can simply acknowledge your friend’s experience, saying “I see that this person means a lot to you.” And again, “Don’t use the words lifestyle or choice. When I lived as a gay man, it was not my choice, it was simply who I was.”

The tone of the book is warm and encouraging. It should help those who feel singleness is hard, those who feel somehow less successful as Christians because of their same-sex attraction, and those who wonder how to love gay friends or family members.

## By John

*John made a start with Jesus as a student, experienced a few years of unsatisfying legalistic Christianity but now enjoys resting in God’s love. He loves nature, historical biographies and talking with friends.*

# Childless Is Not Less

**W**e first met in July 1982. At that time Nigel was working as a curate at a church in St Helens, Lancashire, and Linda had recently returned from five years working abroad with Operation Mobilisation. Nigel had been asked to lead a seminar at a day conference at St Mary's church in Wirral, organised by Martin Hallett who was then the Director of TFT. Linda was already a member of that church. The title of Nigel's seminar was, "Sexuality and the Single Life." Linda attended the seminar, we met, and a year later we were married, when we were both in our mid-thirties. We were not given any marriage preparation, and we hardly discussed having a family! Perhaps we just assumed it would happen! Our parents were dead, and no one raised the issue with us. After five years of marriage, we began to wonder why we had not conceived, and discovered that we should have started investigations much earlier. We were fast-tracked to a fertility clinic and were offered just two IVF treatments due to our ages. In those days, the success rate was at best 10%. We were warned that it would be a stressful and emotionally demanding procedure, and as we prayed about the treatment, we felt that God did not intend us to go down this route.

## Adopting or fostering?

Not long afterwards, we came across a representative of the orphanage where Nigel had been born, and it sparked a thought of exploring adoption. We could have a child from the same

agency that Nigel had come from. Wow! We waited and waited and heard nothing for a year. By then, it felt that God was not leading us to have an adopted child. We had contact with some friends who had adopted three children. They had gone through a tough time with them, culminating in their son dying from a drug overdose. They told us that if they had their lives again, they would have chosen to remain childless. So, we approached the local Social Services in response to an advert

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**"We can choose to dwell on the negatives or to rejoice in what we can do"**

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for foster carers, But the social workers went on strike, and it was over a year before we were invited to a preliminary meeting. By then Nigel had applied for and been offered a new job in an AIDS hospice in Hackney, East London. The accommodation which went with the job was a one-bedroomed flat, and we concluded that God was calling us to remain as we were. People told us how they knew of friends who had conceived after many years of marriage, and so we lived on in hope until Linda had an emergency hysterectomy. Our hope for a family ended brutally and abruptly.

## God directs our paths

Some people are childless by choice, but for those who would like to be parents, whether married or single, it is a bereavement. We grieve for the child we never had. We watch parents interacting with their children and see what we are missing. We listen to our

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**"We grieve for the child we never had"**

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## **“We have been able to take on jobs which would have been difficult with children”**

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friends talk about their children and now, at our age, their grandchildren, and we feel we have nothing to say. But being childless does not have to be less. We had the following words from Proverbs read at our wedding, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths” (Prov 3:5-6). We have been able to take on jobs and move to locations here and abroad which would have been far more difficult if we had had to attend to children’s education. When we moved to the hospice, Linda, who had trained as an early-years teacher, got a job at a school opposite. Having worked overseas, Linda enjoyed teaching in such a multi-cultural school. When Nigel was appointed as vicar of the International Congregation in Beirut, Linda found a job at an orphanage school run by a Western charity, which followed the English curriculum. Amazingly, the school was ten minutes’ walk from our home.

Now we are both retired, and into our seventies, we wonder who will clear up our home when we die! So, we are freeing ourselves of unnecessary possessions, and finding ways to serve God and others while we are able. As with every situation in life, we can dwell on the negatives and feel sorry for ourselves, or be grateful for the positives and rejoice in what we can do. And, above all, we believe that we live under God’s loving providence. Jesus said to his disciples, “No one who has left home or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).

**By Nigel & Linda**

***Nigel is a petrol head and would love to drive an MX-5. A FIAT Panda has been a substitute. Linda loved being an early-years teacher and in her retirement trained in counselling. She is a bit obsessive about waste and recycling and delights in the garden wildlife (but not the occasional rat!). They are walking the Welsh Coastal Path and have reached Aberdovey, having begun at the Dee in Wirral.***



# Sponsor Our “Back To Church” Campaign

With our income down in the last financial year, we were unable to recruit for a Head of Speaking & Teaching after Rob’s departure at the end of August 2020. Although we have been able to take on a limited number of speaking engagements subsequently (online and in-person), our capacity is much depleted. We really want to invest more in our team of volunteer speakers around the country. The proposed new role of Speaking Team Manager will allow us to support and develop our speakers as we restart our speaking work, both online and in-person.

To fund this role for two years we need to raise £30,000. Now that we are a few months into this campaign, we have received funds or pledges of £19,000 over 2 years. Thank you so much if you have already contributed in this way. If you see the importance of TFT speaking with grace and truth in UK churches, please join with us in funding this role.

*Please visit [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate)*

