

# Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

Summer 2021

True  
Freedom  
Trust



## Watch out for the wolves

**S**exuality is a minefield. Christian – tread carefully!

In our culture, if you say something that others perceive to be wrong, you can provoke a verbal lashing or a social media storm, or worse. Remember the bakers who were prosecuted for not baking a cake with a pro same-sex marriage slogan? Or the man demoted for saying in a private Facebook post that allowing gay weddings in churches was ‘an equality too far’?

Perhaps you remember a heated reaction when you said something about your Christian faith or the biblical teaching on sexual morality?

Why is this happening? Why is God not stepping in to protect His people who stand up for the Gospel? Or are Christians at fault for choosing their

words badly – or even for speaking up at all?

Jesus gives us an answer. There’s a section in Matthew’s gospel where he enrolls the disciples into The King’s “School of Mission.” He prepares them for a first field trip, where they will put their heads above the parapet as they speak into their culture. He sends them off to find “the lost sheep of Israel” by repeating Jesus’ message, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 10:7)

But the lesson takes a dark turn. He warns those first disciples, and it seems all disciples, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.” (10:16a). Do you feel your adrenaline pumping as He says that? It’s not a comfortable picture, is it?

Addressing sheep heading into the danger zone, Jesus continues, “Therefore

be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (10:16b). Snakes were thought of as clever beasts. Be like them. Don’t be naïve. Be shrewd, and think very carefully about what you say and how you say it. Don’t jump down people’s throats.

A Christian recently lost his job for tweeting, “Warning – Drunks, Homosexuals, Adulterers, Liars, Fornicators, Thieves, Atheists, Idolaters – Hell awaits you – Repent!” Perhaps that wasn’t the wisest or shrewdest way of making his case?

Be shrewd. Don’t give the wolves a reason to devour you.

And don’t give them a reason to accuse you either. Be as innocent as doves. Doves are gentle. Apparently, doves mate for life, and so they are an example of purity. So live a pure life. Then if the wolves want to accuse you, they will have nothing to accuse you of – beyond being faithful to Jesus.

But who are these wolves?

Jesus describes three packs of wolves. The first pack of wolves can be the religious: “Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local [religious] councils and be flogged in the synagogues” (10:17). People can be very religious, very devout, but oppose Jesus’ message of repentance and faith. Religious people, religious leaders, can oppose biblical truth and those who stand up for it.

We see that, don’t we? You don’t have to look far to see church families that have lost their buildings and assets, or leaders who have lost their jobs, for teaching biblical sexual morality. Could that happen to you or your church in the future?

The second pack of wolves can be the state. “On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.” (10:18). Jesus anticipates Christians facing the highest authorities in the land. Read reports from *Open Doors* or *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* and see that Christians around the world suffer under governments and dictators who hate their faith.

At the moment, we face hardly any state interference in our faith. But this year, the government is looking to ban conversion therapy. Although TFT is clear that it does not practise any form of conversion therapy, concept creep could mean this legislation expands to outlaw Christians praying for one another in any way that does not fully embrace a gay identity. If that was the case, could you or your church leaders face courts in the future?

The final pack of wolves can be a Christian’s own family. “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.” (10:21). We expect family members to be loyal to each other. But Jesus’ call to repent, to turn away from sin and to crown him as king, is so repugnant to some that they would rather hate their family than submit to Jesus.

Again, *Open Doors* reports tragic stories of Christians abroad being betrayed by their families. But perhaps that happens closer to home? Even in subtle ways? How many TFT members feel family pressures to “get with the times, give up being so restrictive and settle down with a nice boyfriend or girlfriend?”

Seeing three packs of wolves can shock us. But is opposition surprising? Jesus doesn't think so. "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master." (10:24). Didn't Jesus' own family try to stop him ministering? Didn't Jesus face persecution at the hands of the religious? Didn't Jesus endure a trial at the hands of a governor and a king?

So opposition shouldn't surprise us. If Jesus faced wolves in his culture, we will in ours.

But then why would we risk speaking up? Why would we not just keep our heads down? Why risk the wolves?

If we love people – if we care that they are rejecting King Jesus and are on a path to judgement – though we may fear what might happen to us, we will still share the good news of Jesus. Jesus the King has come to us, He has served us by dying for us and He has promised eternity to us as a gracious gift.

Paul – the wolf who became one of the sheep – reminds us we have the words that can transform other wolves into sheep – "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16)

Sexuality is a minefield. Christian – tread carefully! Christian – speak up! And do so praying you will be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

**By Iain**

*Iain is a Vicar in Stoke-on-Trent and the honorary chaplain to TFT. He loves photography, holidays in the trailer tent and steak and chips with Stilton sauce!*

**This edition looks at how we can respond well to opposition. Last year, we faced pressures from journalists who misunderstood and misrepresented the TFT community. This year, there is pressure for government to outlaw any pastoral care that advocates any alternative to same-sex activity. It's easy to get defensive when we are opposed and marginalised, but that's not the way of Jesus. This Ascend has a number of articles and testimonies setting out godly ways of responding to such pressure.**

*One way that we can deflect criticism is to be really clear what we don't do, and Simon's article explains why TFT does not offer conversion therapy. Another good way to respond is to speak up about the good practice that we encourage in churches – Jonathan's story of how his church became a safe place to share is a great example of this.*

*We'll be looking at the theme of being a "stranger in this world" (1 Peter 1:1) at our Exiles conference this summer. Do please consider joining us on that day, where we'll be exploring more about why it's the normal experience of Christians to face opposition in this life.*

**By Stuart, TFT Director**



## Responding well to opposition

In November 2013 a report from the House of Bishops *Working Group on Human Sexuality* was published; it was called “The Pilling Report” after the name of the chair of the group, Sir Joseph Pilling. The group consisted of three other bishops and others. I realised in the summer of 2013 that I couldn’t sign up to its recommendations, and said I would need to submit a dissenting opinion.

Let me say at once, that though there was disagreement in the group, there was no “opposition” to my dissent. The other members of the group could not have been more understanding, even though it was the outcome none of us had wanted.

There was opposition afterwards; I haven’t kept *The Guardian* comment on my statement, but it was not flattering! In fact, as Bishop Jill Duff has said in her dealing with reactions to *The Beautiful Story* film released last November by the Church of England Evangelical Council (see website), the vast majority of

those who sent in emails were positive. My experience was that I wondered, after having received so many emails from Oak Hill Theological College students thanking me, whether the then Principal Mike Ovey had told them to write, and much later discovered that he had!

There were those who objected robustly, and I knew there were consequences in what future options for ministry might be possible for me. There were some considerable personal consequences. But the Lord sustained me, and I have never regretted submitting that statement, and believe the truth of it now as much as then.

But I was afraid. In fact, I’m not sure that I have ever been as afraid as I was in that summer before publication. It felt as if I was about to walk out over a precipice and there was no safety net. In the summer when I realised that I would have to do a statement I thought of Jesus going forward into His trial with Caiaphas. He knew pain and death were coming. He knew He would have to do this alone. He had asked His Father to spare Him if it were possible, and He knew the answer was “No”, and yet He still kept on going. I have never identified more with the Lord in His

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**“We should not be surprised or phased by opposition”**

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trial than at that point. How did you do it, I asked Him over and over?

So now, some 7 years later, as all of us go on facing being true to God's word in a culture that has no interest in hearing it, and the Church of England is asked again about her teaching on marriage, sexuality and human identity in the *Living in Faith and Love* project, what can I say about "responding well to opposition"?

Well, two things: first and foremost we follow Jesus and ask to be like Him in responding to His opposition. Hebrews 12:3 asks us to "Consider Him who

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**"There were some considerable personal consequences, but the Lord sustained me"**

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endured such hostility against Himself from sinners that you do not grow weary or lose heart"; the next verse v 4 says "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood". If the Lord had not responded to opposition with self-giving love to the shedding of His own blood, we would not be here; there would be no salvation by His cross, and no good news of the forgiveness of sins. Not being surprised or fazed by opposition is key, and being content to follow Jesus and be like Him is at the heart of this. When the moment of testing comes may we all be found in Him.

But there is one other thing to say for me, as I hope this brief description makes clear. The greatest "opposition" was from within, namely my fear. I discovered an advanced capacity to

"catastrophise", that is not only to imagine the worst, but to be paralysed by the thought that what you imagine to be the worst, actually will be the worst. In my case I did catastrophise; the reaction could have been far worse, but in actual fact was not. As opposition goes, I have been let off lightly, which speaks to my fear now. Of course, terrible things can be said and done, and in the realm of human sexuality, the public discourse is becoming much more challenging, not less. But if we will still follow Jesus Christ, if we will be content to bear His scars and identify with His wounds, He will sustain us.

I love the calm of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3, who I think give a wonderful Old Testament prefiguring of the spirit of Jesus before Pilate, as they say to Nebuchadnezzar in response to the command to bow down before the idols of the day.

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present to you a defence in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand O King, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you O King, that we will not serve your gods, and we will not worship the golden statue you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18).

Amen, Lord. Let us not bow down and let us put our trust in you, whatever the consequences.

**By Keith**

**Keith Sinclair was the previous Bishop of Birkenhead. From April 2021, he is now the National Director at the Church of England Evangelical Council.**



# Why we don't offer conversion therapy

Members of the press and other individuals sometimes contact True Freedom Trust with questions about our stance on so-called “conversion/reparative therapy”. What conversion therapy is has been a source of much debate. Colloquially, however, the term is perhaps most often used to describe any kind of attempt or intervention which aims to change a person's sexual orientation. This popular definition is the one I have in mind in this article.

The topic of orientation change is emotive for many people, and we should lament the damage done to individuals where they have been coerced into undergoing ‘treatment’ they did not need, or where they have encountered practices which are clearly abusive. Where the church has had a hand in this should also be a source of great sorrow. In our Basis of Belief, we are clear that TFT does not aim to change anyone's sexual attractions, nor do we practise any form of conversion/reparative therapy. Below I want to offer three principles, drawn from scripture, that inform our stance on this matter.

## **Our orientation does not exclude us**

We believe that God does not exclude anyone from entering into relationship with Him on the grounds of sexual orientation and, therefore, we do not consider it necessary to have/gain a heterosexual orientation in order to be saved. The Bible makes important distinctions between orientation, temptation, lust and action. Have you ever heard anyone say something like “homosexuality is sinful”? A few times when hearing this, I've caught

myself having raised my eyebrow in reflex. As I hoist it back down again, I gently ask the person to explain what they mean. Almost always, they're referring only to sexual practice and not to sexual orientation. Being clear on this distinction is important. Most of the biblical passages that directly address homosexuality only talk about behaviour (see Lev 18:22 & 1 Cor 6:9). While these passages are clear that same-sex sexual activity is sinful, they cannot be used to show that a same-sex orientation (i.e. the capacity to experience sexual desire/temptations for the same-sex) is also sinful.

The only passage that speaks directly to thoughts involving the same-sex is Romans 1:26-27. Here, Paul talks about men being “consumed with passion for one another”. The word frequently translated ‘passion’ in English comes from the Greek ‘pathos’. Paul uses the word again in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, where ‘pathos’ is something that all believers are urged to repent of. This broad use suggests that Paul had lust in mind, any wilful sexual fixation outside of God's purposes for sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual in nature. This too is separate from our experience of sexual orientation, which is the pattern of characteristics to which we are attracted.

Scripture would not seem to consider a homosexual orientation in itself to be a roadblock to experiencing the fullness of God's grace. This means that we can't say that changing a person's attractions is a necessary part of their Christian journey.

## **Temptation will always be there**

Having concluded that changing a person's orientation is not necessary for them to be saved, we next have to ask if seeking to do so would be helpful to them on their Christian journey. Nothing has the potential to derail a Christian quite like temptation. In our everyday lives, we face a barrage of internal impulses and external stimuli that seek to lead us into sinful behaviours. One of the wonderful truths of scripture is that Jesus faced this barrage of temptation too, such that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15).

Being tempted is not sinful, and nowhere in scripture do we read that we will be entirely free of temptation this side of eternity. We face a constant call to flee from temptation. Proverbs 5 talks about the adulterous woman, whose lips drip with honey. Apparently this means she is enticing, however we're told to stay far away from her door. In our passage from Thessalonians earlier, and in other places like Galatians 5:22-23, we're encouraged to exercise self-control as a means of resisting temptation. By God's grace, as we walk

with Him He helps to grow in our ability to do this. This is great news as it means we can strive for holiness no matter the type of temptation we face.

We will face sexual temptation whatever our orientation. God does not encourage us to trade one type for another: both can be just as deadly. In this sense, we cannot argue that one type of orientation is inherently preferable to another in our walk with God. However, that is not to say that being gay/same-sex attracted does not hold its own unique difficulties. For some, having this orientation has led to them experiencing homophobic abuse or rejection, sometimes at the hands of the church. I suspect many gay people, facing these types of reactions, have at some point in their lives thought that "being straight would be much easier". I was a teenager at a time when being gay was not something you talked about with your peers and I often had these thoughts myself.

There are others who, while being primarily same-sex attracted, have a genuine strong desire to marry somebody of the opposite sex. This could be for all sorts of reasons. Perhaps they long for a particular family dynamic, have noticed some





fluidity in their pattern of desire or have otherwise found themselves attracted to a particular person of the opposite sex. Changes in desire can occur in all manner of people, Christian or non-Christian. We would also never doubt God's power to change a person's orientation if it were in His will to do so, even if we play no active part in this ourselves. These scenarios can leave people with a lot of questions. Is marriage really right for me? What's it like being married to someone of the opposite sex when you're mainly same-sex attracted? What might sexual expression look like in those circumstances? While we don't practise conversion therapy, we believe support should be available for those with these sorts of questions and we seek to help to the best of our ability.

### **Christ offers a better sort of conversion**

As Christians, we talk about conversion a lot. Our conversion is to be a turning point, a turn away from sin (repentance) and toward Christ (faith). In doing this, we see several things happen. Paul lists some of them in 1 Corinthians 6:11, right after a prohibition about same-sex sexual behaviour. He says "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were

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**"Whatever our sexual orientation, we can enjoy the full measure of God's grace"**

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justified". Moreover, God takes us and He places us in the church as members of his family. In doing so, He sets us in a community that is to become our primary source of intimacy with others. There should be no conflation of this type of conversion with the kind offered by so-called conversion therapy. God does not promise to change our sexual orientation, but He makes it so that we can enjoy the full measure of His grace, whatever our sexuality, and He offers us the means and the relationships needed to live to live a fulfilled life in worship of Him.

**By Simon**

***Simon looks after Operations & Outreach on behalf of TFT. He can't play a game of Scrabble without telling people about the time he spelled "catalyze" using all 7 of his letters on a triple word score.***



# Is it wise to debate biblical sexuality?

*TFT:* Andrew, I know you encourage Christians to engage constructively in dialogue with those from a revisionist point of view around biblical sexuality and learn how to disagree with them in a godly way, but is this a wise path for all Christians to follow? I wonder if I might describe what makes you especially qualified for such conversations, if I may. You're a tutor in Christian ethics. You're obviously very well versed in the Bible. You seem crystal clear about what you believe. In some ways, because of the position you have, you debate this area publicly on behalf of all Christians who hold to the traditional understanding of biblical sexuality. And, by publicly debating it, you help

these issues without your personal life choices being too much at stake. In contrast, I want to explore what it's like for people who aren't in a position like yours and, in particular, should they be engaging in these debates with people who hold to a more liberal point of view?

*AG:* I think you're right to pick up on what you said. I think this is really important: different people have different callings with different gifts and roles, and you've described some things that have made me who I am and the role that I have. I think it would be very wrong to say every Christian needs to be doing this. Each of us needs to reflect prayerfully on how God is calling us, what it is safe and sensible for us to do, and the risks we have in terms of temptation or mental health. All of those sorts of questions are important, and I wouldn't want to downplay those or say everyone has got to go down a particular path.

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**“Having scripture as our touchstone keeps us from being tossed about by every wind of teaching”**

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us clearly understand what we do. You influence policy and doctrine within the wider church. You're also not same-sex attracted: you're married to a woman, Liz, and therefore you can grapple with

*TFT:* So, I'm wondering whether it's risky for those of us who experience same-sex attraction to enter these conversations, particularly where we recognise inside that we might like the revisionist viewpoint to be true. Is there



a danger, by getting deeply drawn into these conversations, that this viewpoint might seduce us into believing that same-sex partnerships are ok with God? And would you caution the same-sex attracted believer against getting too embroiled in these conversations?

*AG:* Again, I think that picks up and sharpens some of what we were talking about a moment ago, in terms of different people having different callings. Different people are in different situations, and we each need to take care of ourselves. All of that is important and, clearly, there are lots of other factors there. One of these is to discern the extent to which this is something that has a serious existential, faithfulness and discipleship impact on your life, so that you can determine how much is personally at stake. I think it's imperative that one thinks and prays that through and works out what that means for each individual.

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### **“We’ve got to work out how to respond to the liberal perspectives in our own congregations”**

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However, I also think we need to remember that regular biblical refrain of “do not fear”. We can put our trust in God and the scriptures and the Spirit. In particular, we can rely on scripture as a trustworthy and reliable guide of what God says for how we should live our lives. If we come back to scripture as a touchstone during our discussions, this is one way we can ensure we’re not just letting ourselves be tossed about by every wind of teaching (Ephesians 4:14).

The reality is that there are liberal perspectives out there. And in our own congregations there are probably some

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### **“If you’re learning about ideas that may tempt you, don’t go about it alone”**

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people who might hold those views. We’ve got to work out how are we going to respond to that reality. The sense I get sometimes is that some of those who have significantly changed their position are people whose pattern of story is often something along these lines: the person has been in the closet (or maybe even in denial towards themselves) about their sexuality; they’ve been wrestling with it on their own, not having support, not having the sort of fellowship that TFT provides; and then they eventually go off and read something and find something that makes them feel, “Oh, I don’t need to struggle in this way on my own anymore”. When this happens, they become powerful advocates for a different, liberal revisionist perspective. This sort of story illustrates that there is also a danger of hiding away from other views. We need to recognise that the dangers are not just on one side.

One lesson we can learn from such stories – particularly if we are same-sex attracted – is not to go about it alone. Engage with friends, with support, with people who are praying for you. If you’re reading and exploring ideas that may tempt you, talk it through with people, pray it through with people. Don’t just go, “Oh no, I’ve read this book. I’ve now changed my mind!” Be honest about those doubts with people and pray them through. Say, “Lord, I really want to know what Your will is. I know that might be hard for me, but I want to know what it is, even if it is hard because doing Your will is what matters.”

Then go back to the scriptures and do it with openness, support and honesty with people who are there to help you.

Some of us are confronting revisionist arguments in quite a prominent way, but there are many ways. I remember having a conversation at the TFT National Conference years ago where, for that person, it was only at the TFT conference or in similar groups that he could talk about these things. He didn't feel he could talk to other people in his church, but he did have support, and that's really important. How you then work out how you engage with viewpoints or people that take different views is a matter for wise discernment. Take counsel with others so that you don't put yourself in a position where you're actually going to hurt and harm yourself, even if you aim to benefit yourself and others.

**TFT:** Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and experiences with us, Andrew.

### By Andrew

*This article is an edited extract from a much longer conversation about disagreeing well with those holding to a revisionist view of scripture. The full podcast interview explores some ideas from a talk given in late 2020 by Andrew:*

[www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/is-there-a-spirituality-of-good-disagreement/](http://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/is-there-a-spirituality-of-good-disagreement/)

*Stuart Parker (TFT) was in conversation with Andrew Goddard (AG) for the Ascend Higher podcast. Andrew is an Assistant Minister at a church in London and a tutor in Christian Ethics. Over the last three years, he has deeply involved himself in the Church of England's project "Living in Love and Faith", which has brought together church leaders from both traditional and revisionist perspectives.*

## Is it wise to debate biblical sexuality?

To explore the themes from the article "Is it wise for me to debate biblical sexuality?" in more depth, listen to the full interview, in the latest episode of the 'Ascend Higher Podcast'



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





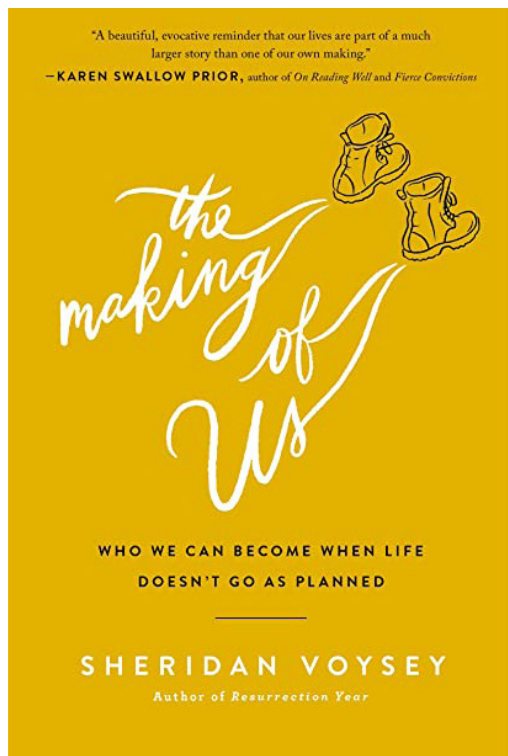
## Book Review

*The Making of Us* by Sheridan Vosey  
(W Publishing, 2019) 217 pages  
£11.99 paperback, £9.99 E book

Sheridan Vosey is an Australian author and radio presenter who, with his wife Merryn, experienced a 10-year struggle with infertility. The painful loss of remaining childless is recounted in his book “Resurrection Year”, and resulted in Merryn taking up a life-changing job offer in research at Oxford University. Sheridan therefore faced giving up a successful career in Australia to relocate to England, where he and his work weren’t really known. Following this move across the globe, he

profoundly questioned his identity and purpose. This book is part memoir, part pilgrimage, as he undertook a 115 mile walk with his friend DJ in a week, from Lindisfarne to Durham Cathedral, in the footsteps of St Cuthbert, a monk who evangelised the north of England in the 600’s. I really wanted to read this book because, for my 50th birthday, I walked 50 km of St Cuthbert’s Way in three days, ending the journey by walking the poles on the sands of Lindisfarne. It was also an unforgettable spiritual experience for me. My feet also took a while to recover!

As his journey commences, Sheridan feels directionless, like a “plastic bag I once saw floating along the freeway.” The whole account is a worshipful metaphor. The language is poetic and lyrical. The descriptions of landscapes, whether sweepingly beautiful or built up and industrial, interweave with discussions between Sheridan and DJ about their feelings, their past, and plans for the future. In Chapter 4, “Visions and Whispers”, they walk through the sand dunes on Bamburgh Beach, and DJ recounts how much his atheism was isolating until he found himself at a church altar praying for salvation. Sheridan’s rejoinder about spiritual guidance relates to how God encouraged him to join “Family Radio”, a small, undeveloped station at the time. The appeal to join this station was minimal, but this move was to set the course of his career for the next 18 years.



He advises that “Sometimes the God of wonders guides us with clear words and lights in the sky. Like a rushing wind... He sweeps us into His plans and into unexpected places” (p.54).

People feature so much in this book, and their stories matter. Whether it be ice cream shop owner Brenda in Cresswell, who has seen that the loss of mining has made her community of ninety seven people more close knit, or Paul, one of the ministers at a church in Monkwearmouth, whose wife will give birth to a child with a serious heart defect and Down’s syndrome, Sheridan concludes that there is only one real vocation, whatever our job or circumstances, “one great river from which all the streams of life flow: to love God and love others” (p.98).

Both walkers are honest about questioning faith and having no personal control over circumstances. Chapter 8, about comparison, particularly resonated with me and how we sometimes measure ourselves against the seeming success and ‘brightness’ of others. The story of Cuthbert is never far away too. As a novice, prior, hermit and bishop, he experienced adversity and suffering, which resulted in him bringing life and healing to those he met. He spread the gospel, saw thousands of Christians flourish, started modern conservation, and united a church on the verge of division. His legacy is inspirational. There is also a reflection guide with thoughts on each chapter, and Bible references to accompany the exploration. As one critic wrote, this is a book for a disciple.

I would suggest that this is not the genre of book that we usually review at TFT. It does not feature same-sex attraction, is not a study on disappointment and

how to counteract biblically feelings of frustration and anger when life goes awry, and it is not a scholarly exposition of scripture. It is a book that advocates listening to God, finding space for peace, and being truthful about holding up our pain in silence to our Saviour. In encountering nature, friendship and church history, as well as sharing anecdotes and experiences from other wayfarers, both on this journey and in the past, God gently whispers encouragement and truth as Sheridan “attends” to His voice. Through the re-assessment of messy situations and the blurring of his calling, the author learns that “beautiful things can emerge from a life not going as planned. It can be the making of us.” (p.xiv). If you have ever struggled, or currently struggle, with crossing terrain that is uneven, or have metaphorical blisters on your feet and many unanswered questions (which I would suggest is a universal experience as a Christian), then please read this book. The experience will encourage you to be like Enoch, who “walked with God” (Genesis 5:24). As the last page states, you will “Walk on” (p.188).

### **By Ruth**

***Ruth is Women’s Worker at TFT. She is trying to learn to play the ukulele, eat as much home-made cake as possible and sit round a fire pit with socially-distanced friends.***



# Updated Basis of Belief

The TFT Basis of Belief describes the common understanding that our members share about what the Bible says about sexuality and gender and its implications for us and our churches. This sits within the more general Christian beliefs set out in the Evangelical Alliance's Basis of Faith: [www.eauk.org/about-us/how-we-work/basis-of-faith](http://www.eauk.org/about-us/how-we-work/basis-of-faith).

At the start of 2021, we made some adjustments to our membership system (see the Spring 2021 edition of Ascend), which led to us inviting around 1400 long-standing members to renew their agreement to our Basis of Belief. The staff and trustees of TFT took this opportunity to update the tone and the emphases of the Basis whilst standing firm on all our key beliefs. The principles we had in mind for this update were:

1. We wanted our language to be as positive and transparent as possible. For example, instead of talking about Christians who “fear rejection and condemnation”, we now describe our positive vision that “the church should be a place of welcome and safety for all”. We also introduced the concepts of identity and community, which have always been important in our ministry but had not previously featured explicitly in the Basis.

2. Whilst TFT's emphasis remains on sexuality, we wanted to make some reference to gender. Rather than using the medical term “gender dysphoria”, which we are not qualified to diagnose, we use the more general terms “experience of gender” and “gender incongruence”.

3. We needed to sharpen what we said about change: we now explicitly state that we don't practise conversion therapy, and that growing as a Christian does not require a change in sexual orientation. Where possible, we also avoid words like “brokenness”, “wholeness”, or “wounds” since these are often associated with counselling and ex-gay ministries. We emphasise that same-sex attractions are unchosen (hence, we cannot simply decide not to have them!) and stress that lifelong temptations are an everyday experience for all Christians.

4. We have sought to include more Bible references to show that we root our beliefs in a plain reading of scripture that would align with Bible-believing Christianity.

Although we have reduced our number of points from seven to six, the word count has increased from 310 to 435. We needed to use a few more words to ensure clarity and graciousness!

We have updated the online versions of the Basis:

- [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/basis](http://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/basis) (this has Bible verse links you can hover over)
- [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/beliefs](http://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/beliefs) (with suitable icons added)

Whilst trying to update the Basis, we've tried not to lose the connection with the previous version, which you can still refer to here: [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/old-basis](http://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/old-basis)

The following page contains the new Basis of Belief.

**By Stuart**



### 1. Scripture

We believe that all scripture is given by God (2 Tim 3:16), is authoritative, and that God calls us to belief and obedience in every area of our lives.

### 2. Design

We believe that the Bible teaches that God designed two distinct sexes, men and women (Gen 1:27). We hold that God intends sex to be enjoyed within the marriage of a man and a woman (Gen 2:24), and that all sexual activity outside of this context is what Jesus called “sexual immorality” (Matt 15:19 & 19:4-6).

### 3. Identity

We believe that God, in His grace, welcomes anyone into a relationship with Him, whatever their sexual orientation or experience of gender (1 Cor 6:11). We affirm that being made in God’s image gives every person inherent value and dignity, and that the church should be a place of welcome and safety for all. Within the need for a Christian’s primary identity to be found in their relationship with Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), we respect a breadth of opinion in the language used to describe sexuality and gender.

### 4. Hope

We believe that, as a consequence of the Fall (Gen 3), all people fail to conform to the whole of God’s moral law. We believe that part of the Bible’s good news for every Christian is that

God works with us in the lifelong task of freeing us from sinful behaviours and making us more like Christ in all areas of our lives (Rom 6:1-14). We believe it is possible to work towards these goals regardless of the ongoing temptations we all face (Heb 4:15). As such, we do not aim to change anyone’s same-sex attractions or their gender incongruence, which we recognise are not chosen. We also do not practise any form of so-called ‘conversion’ or ‘reparative’ therapy.

### 5. Relationships

We believe that both marriage and singleness are gifts from God (1 Cor 7:7), and that a meaningful and fulfilled life is possible without any form of sexual relationship. We seek to encourage the important role of the church in fostering healthy intimacy and meaningful community (Eph 2:13-22).

### 6. Attitude

We accept that some people hold to alternative viewpoints on same-sex practice. Although we don’t consider this to be an area where Christians can simply agree to disagree (compare 1 Cor 6:9-10 with Romans 14:1-6), we lament the damage done to both the church and LGBT people when Christians have not exercised grace. We respect the freedom of everyone to choose how they live their lives before God, and we seek to encourage the church to respond with truth and grace (Ephesians 4:15).

# How my church became a safe place to share

I was once part of a small group (around ten people at the time) from a large church (several hundred people) in Cambridge that held to the orthodox view on biblical sexuality. We formed this group of various people within the church who experienced same-sex temptations. The leader of the group was Brian, who did not personally struggle with same-sex feelings, but he had a gift for overseeing our gatherings.

Brian eventually moved on to become pastor of a church in Liverpool and subsequently I (along with a few others) also moved to Liverpool and joined the same church. It was smaller than the Cambridge church, with fewer than a hundred in attendance.

Brian, I and another member of our church met as a small support group several times a year, over the next few years. We dubbed our group "Thessalonians", as we were doing well in the faith, but we needed some encouragement to keep going! A man from elsewhere joined in for a while, which made us think about widening the group to other local churches. After a while, he left, and we eventually found that "Thessalonians" was no longer required. Let me explain how this came to be.

## How the church grew

Several things at our church happened over the following years that helped me grow in my confidence, so I was able to share more openly in the church about my personal struggles.

Firstly, Brian preached clearly, week by week, the simple life-changing truth that salvation comes by grace and not by our own merits or respectability. For each person in the church, we learnt individually what it means no longer to be dead in our sins but to be alive in Christ (Romans 5:17). To be a Christian is not to be proud and perfect, but is to receive much forgiveness. For me, this meant "I am saved by Jesus regardless of my ongoing same-sex desires". Good teaching challenged our thinking about a hierarchy of sins – we are all in the same boat!

Another result of this faithful and consistent teaching was that I grew in self-confidence that my fellow Christians in the church would not look down on my struggles if they knew about them. This growing confidence in their grace eventually grew into a desire to share outside our small support group. Both of us felt able to share in our usual small groups, and with close friends within the church, and our special "Thessalonians" group was no longer required. The wider church was so soaked in the gospel that we felt safe to share more widely.

A pivotal moment was when the local Bishop came to visit. Many of us had concerns about his affirming position on biblical sexuality, and Brian arranged for concerned members of the church to meet with him, and for those of us involved in the "Thessalonians" group to share our stories. The group of invitees (10-15 people) had a get-together before meeting with the Bishop, and there we shared our testimonies. Although it was nerve-racking, I was so pleased to have shared with that group, as it meant I



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**“Consistent teaching that salvation comes by grace grew my confidence that my fellow Christians in the church would not look down on my struggles”**

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could then be more open when disclosing prayer points. It also meant that I could more tangibly experience their love and acceptance, knowing that they knew the whole truth. It was significant for me not to keep secrets from people whom God had ordained to be my family.

The other result of our sharing was that we felt that we had both blessed the church and glorified God by speaking about our struggles and victories over sin. It bolstered the confidence of our hearers to understand the personal impact of believing the orthodox position. Although I did not pretend that my same-sex temptations were an easy struggle, they could now see that God's grace amid these temptations meant that He was sustaining me through them – it wasn't a cruel and

unrealistic imposition on me to live a chaste life, as they had perhaps feared. I learnt from this that it is not good for Christians to hide, downplay or avoid mention of their sin (“confess your sins to each other” – James 5:16).

Another formative moment for us as a church was hearing a lady sharing a testimony of her recent Christian life. Since the birth of her daughter, she had faced severe post-natal depression. It was key for us that the sharing was still fresh, and this challenged thoughts that we need to be “sorted” once we become Christians. She did not present a “done and dusted” struggle from the past, as this was still raw and unresolved for her. However, she was still willing to share it with us in all the messiness. We understood that the gospel speaks into our ongoing struggles through the Christian life and that our church family is to support one another and “encourage one another daily... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness” (Hebrews 3:13). Her testimony also helped the church move to a culture where people could be more honest with each other and work through what it means to be a Christian in difficult circumstances.

One more significant shift for the church was when five or six church members studied for the UK Biblical Counselling course ([www.biblicalcounselling.org.uk](http://www.biblicalcounselling.org.uk)). They ended up sharing what they had learnt with around twenty other people. Without the material being preached from the front, this had a broad impact on the wider church as the way they talked with people in the church deepened. The training helped people to connect their actual struggles and hardships with the gospel message, and to explore how the gospel speaks into those hard and real situations. In conversations after church meetings, it helped us to delve deeper into one another's lives, using simple but

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**“We had blessed the church and glorified God by speaking about our struggles and victories over sin”**

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meaningful questions. Rather than just responding to one another with platitudes (“I’ll pray about it” can be one of these), we involved one another in our lives through meaningful sharing, and with questions that were searching without being intrusive. We also talked more openly about Sunday sermons and applying them practically to our lives.

**My fellow church-goers’ theology matters!**

When Brian took on the role of pastor at the church, the congregation was a mixture. Some had an orthodox view, and some had an affirming view on biblical sexuality. My church in Cambridge had been more uniform in its theology, and this new combination felt unsafe to me. I knew I could face the temptation to compromise my theology on this matter, and that I would have sought a same-sex relationship if the Bible did not prohibit

them. So, it was incredibly unhelpful for a believer within my fellowship to undermine what the Bible clearly tells about sexuality. I knew that a part of me would like to ignore the biblical teaching and just follow my feelings, so I needed my brothers and sisters to encourage me on the narrow way (Matthew 7:13-14).

In the end, several people who held to an affirming viewpoint on sexuality decided to make themselves at home in another church that agreed with their interpretation. Although this was a tough time for the church, I felt safer and more supported once I knew that my spiritual siblings stood with me in holding to the biblical position in this vulnerable area of my life. Although it is not a daily temptation, I have a perennial struggle in wondering whether I might be better off embracing a same-sex relationship. I entertain the thought sometimes that I might be ‘happier in the moment’ in a same-sex relationship, although I know it is not God’s design for my life. It can be quite hard to believe that it is better to follow Jesus than my personal desires. But, even though the Bible’s teaching on sexuality is so counter-cultural, it is good teaching, and I trust that God wants to bless me through it.

It is also often tough to have a constructive conversation with fellow Christians about biblical sexuality. Many who hold to an affirming perspective have come to their viewpoint because of

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**“We involved one another in our lives through meaningful sharing, and by applying Sunday sermons practically to our lives”**

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close friends/family who have same-sex feelings. So, it can lead to highly charged and hurtful conversations, which are rarely, if ever, productive.

Recently, it has felt like the pendulum has swung back the other way as regards talking about my same-sex attraction. This was partly because of my semi-conscious fears about several Middle Eastern asylum seekers who have joined the church. My small group rapidly grew from around six people who knew me well, to then include three additional people from cultures which can be quite harsh in their view of homosexuality. It was not a conscious choice to assume that these people would treat me unkindly, but I noticed after a while that I had stopped sharing in my small group about my personal same-sex struggles. It is important for me to remember that we all have our own prejudices, but that the work of the Spirit in all Christians is effective in making us more Christ-like. Knowing that our church regularly and clearly teaches the gospel of grace (and having already seen the effect it has had on my church family) gives me the confidence to think I could be more open about my temptations with these newer members of our Christian family.

### Seven years of growth

My church and I have both progressed along this path of honesty and openness over my seven years here. Our church still talks little about same-sex attractions, but clear, gracious biblical teaching has allowed us to catch this threefold vision:

1. God is good
2. The Church is God's family
3. God calls us to follow Him amid our difficulties

So, consistent biblical teaching about God's love and forgiveness has gradually encouraged us to take the Bible seriously in every area of life, and apply it to our struggles.

### By Jonathan

*Jonathan still cannot quite believe that God keeps on forgiving him after all this time. Outside of his work as a software developer (at least when he is not lazing on the sofa watching Netflix), he can usually be found attempting some random new hobby - so far this year that's included gardening, lino-cut printing, sewing his own clothes and learning Klingon.*



## Book Review

*“Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say”* by Preston Sprinkle

(David C Cook, 2021) 285 pages

£14.99 paperback, £8.96 E book, £14.08 Audio book

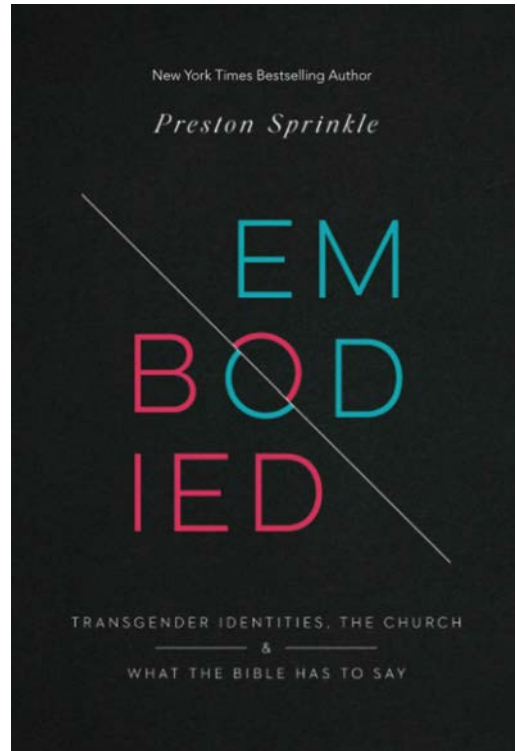
Preston Sprinkle has a rare capacity as an author. On the one hand, he is emotionally warm, personable, people-orientated, empathic and real. On the other, he is scientifically rigorous, clear and theologically coherent. The result is a book that, despite my high expectations and medical background, did not disappoint me in any way. Its pages flow with humanity, understanding and both biblical and scientific truth.

One of the most engaging aspects of the book is hearing of the number of friendships Sprinkle has made with those who identify as trans. He speaks about what he has learnt, including challenges given to him. So, he covers many basics, such as the difference between “sex” and “gender”; but he also speaks passionately about Lesli (or was that Leslie?), who was ushered out of the Church because of their sexuality.

He also does not shy away from the scandal (in my view) of children being sent on a pathway to transition gender, with the most minimal of assessments, and scant attention being paid to the emotional reasons underlying their agony. Or, did you know that SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery) is relatively common in Iran, as it is seen as more acceptable than homosexuality?

After much careful thought, Sprinkle does conclude that a Christian should never transition genders. He argues that

we are God’s creation, and part of the Creator’s intent was to make us male and female – think Noah and the ark. He tactfully reminds us that Jesus had a penis and suggests heaven is likely to be populated with those who show sex differences. After all, God made the body, and the body is good. He argues (rightly in my view) that making up 10,000 genders is effectively an empty token when God has already laid out His plan.



Alongside this, he consistently points out that unless we offer love and community, then we can give all the advice we want, but fail to show Jesus. He says, repeatedly, that we must come alongside others and listen to them; not doing so will not win others.

There are several more problematic areas he deals with, and again his humanity and rigour come through. Regarding intersex, he points out that this is an incredibly rare condition, despite what you might have heard. Just because an exceedingly small number of people have a mixture of male and female parts to them, it does not mean that this creates a new blanket rule for everybody to do as they wish. He also debunks the notion that transsexuals have the brain of the opposite sex. Yet, his humanity shines through, repeatedly saying that we are talking about people rather than someone with an intersex condition.

One chapter that stood out for me was his treatment of transgender and suicidality. Sprinkle defines self-harm and suicide before looking at the relationship between trans feelings and mental illness. He reveals that rates of mental illness in transsexuals are much higher than the general population, and this alone counts for at least a large part of the increased rates of suicide. This is very much in contrast to the “gender-affirming” narrative that if someone has thoughts of being in the wrong gender and does not transition quickly, this will only lead to suicide.

For me, this was a refreshing reminder of much of what I had read before, both from theological and scientific perspectives. It was good to hear it being pointed out that the Bible prohibits cross-dressing, but also to hear it

affirmed that it does not demand that men and women behave in gender-stereotyped ways: Deborah led Israel; King David wrote poetry and danced. Although I had read of “cisgender”, I must have switched off from wondering what it meant: not trans.

This is an ideal book both for Christians to read to learn more about transsexuality, and to give to those who identify as trans, irrespective of what they think about God. One struggle it helped me with is in using pronouns which I know are not truthful – for instance, calling a trans man “he”. Sprinkle, as well as discussing Paul’s approach to cultural appropriation, suggests that we practise “pronoun hospitality”.

One of the joys of “Embodied” is that I did not need to read it physically, but instead laid back, thinking about transsexuality, and listened to it on *Audible*. This was thanks to the audio version being released first. Sprinkle is an engaging listen, and it meant that I could think more about what I was hearing, or even take the dog for a walk at the same time. Of course, the option to go back and re-read is not as simple. Indeed, I come to the subject with a lot of pre-existing knowledge and therefore I am not convinced by how easy a read it will be for others. I suspect that many TFT members will have some background understanding which they will bring to this subject.

**By Gary**

***Gary who is a doctor who lives in Central London with his ever-patient wife and two children. He has been in TFT since before some of you readers were born. He is enjoying having a lockdown puppy.***



# Responding in faith to a hostile world

**I**n our post-Christian Western culture, Bible-believing Christians are facing increasing hostility to important aspects of our faith. In this article I'm not covering the extreme persecution faced by believers in places like North Korea, Pakistan or Libya. However, looking at the courage of Christians in those countries can be a good way of getting the opposition that we sometimes face into perspective.

Christianity clashes with the surrounding culture in different ways according to time and place. Sexuality, gender and the right to life are areas where Christian values jar most at the moment, with the values of the secular West. If we articulate the historically 'Christian' understanding of biblical teaching on these matters we might today find ourselves sneered at, marginalised, denied privileges or characterised as immoral.

In the face of hostility, it's easy to get stuck in one defensive posture, reacting to everyone outside our tribe in the same rigid way. In this article I'll be reviewing four possible responses we can have to hostility: compromise, silence, withdrawal and confrontation. Looking at each of them in turn, I'll be identifying when they can be valuable,

but also showing the harm that comes by taking the response too far.

## A brief theology of hostility

Firstly, the 'world' has always rejected genuine Christian faith. The apostle John writes: "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." (1 John 3:1). So, it's entirely normal for a Christian to stand out and to attract criticism. The Parable of the Sower suggests that trouble or persecution will come to each believer in just "a short time" (Matt 13:20-21). Hostility will clear out nominalism in the church, which is probably good because nominal Christianity creates false assurance (Matt 7:21).

Hostility might sound like bad news. However, John Stott introduced his well-known commentary on the Sermon on the Mount by describing the Christian value-system as "totally at variance with those in the non-Christian world." Opposition is recognition of the radical counter-culturalism of Christianity. Although nominal belief is swept away in the face of opposition, genuine faith is deepened, as believers are forced to articulate their faith, count its cost, and lean increasingly on God.

## Being reactive

In the face of a hostile world, it's easy to be reactive. We might want to hide, or we might want to stand up and fight. Often, such a reaction comes out of fear of confrontation; fear of marginalisation; fear of losing our rights; fear of being silenced. These fears, of course, can be well-founded. But the problem is that they are focused on ourselves (our comfort; our belonging; our rights; our churches) as well as the seemingly overwhelming forces of opposition (their financial support; their permission to indoctrinate our children; their apparent desire to undermine our churches). However, Jesus did not send his disciples into the world with an attitude of fear, instead, he told them, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be

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**"Genuine faith is deepened in the face of opposition, as believers are forced to articulate their faith, count its cost, and lean increasingly on God"**

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afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28).

Instead of allowing our knee-jerk reactions, let us pause and choose, prayerfully, the right response for each person in a particular situation. That will enable us to respond more openly and lovingly.

### 1. Responding with compromise

One response to opposition can be to compromise our beliefs. Now, sometimes, compromising secondary matters can build bridges. Paul wrote of

becoming "all things to all people" (1 Cor 9:22), speaking of how he adapted his style to suit his audience without ever misrepresenting the truth of the gospel. Similarly, we might graciously use terminology that jars with our preferences in order to build rapport with those holding different viewpoints.

But when we allow our hearts to be seduced by our culture, or intimidated by a seemingly unstoppable cultural tide, then we are in danger of compromising key truths and losing our distinctive saltiness (Matt 5:13). We might defend our approach as other-centred when we empathise, say, with gay and trans people who have faced judgement and exclusion. But, important as it is to listen to people and to stand up against bullying, Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love God with heart, soul and mind (Matt 22:37). And Jesus makes it clear that loving Him cannot be separated from obedience: "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

Some in the church have buckled under the pressure to compromise the historically Christian understanding on sexuality. But in a revealing piece of research amongst American LGBT people, Andrew Marin found that 51% of LGBT people left the church after they turned 18. Of those people who left only 3% left primarily because of the church's traditional theology of marriage. This reason was dwarfed by reasons of feeling unsafe, feeling unwelcome, feeling unheard or even being asked to leave the church because of their same-sex feelings. The evidence shows that we don't need to compromise our theology – instead, we need to overhaul radically the welcome that our churches give to LGBT people.



Here are three remedies to a posture of compromise:

- 1. Meditate regularly upon God's Word and allow it to permeate your mind and heart (Psalm 1:1-2)*
- 2. Expect the gospel to be divisive (1 Cor 1:23)*
- 3. Don't be ashamed of God's truth, because it brings eternal salvation (Rom 1:16)*

## **2. Responding with silence**

A second possible response to hostility is to go silent. This arguably avoids the theological compromise of the previous approach, because we get to hold on to our beliefs (albeit privately). It involves no longer publicly articulating certain beliefs, for fear of upsetting others or inviting opposition. Now, being silent in conversation sometimes to allow others

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**“It's easy to get stuck in one defensive posture, reacting to everyone outside our tribe in the same rigid way”**

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to talk is a long-neglected virtue – plenty of Christians are often too quick to push their viewpoints, whereas more listening would often be better (James 1:19), as well as building credibility and respect with others. Silence can also be a wise approach when it comes to divisive secondary issues that breed division and distract from the gospel (Titus 3:9). When it comes to counter-cultural matters, while we don't have to hide them, it's often wise to wait and introduce them at the appropriate moment when conversing with non-Christians. There's rarely much sense in

leading evangelistically on issues where there's such a huge gulf between the Christian and secular mindsets.

Bearing in mind those points of wisdom, an unhelpful posture of silence can come from a heart of fear. This can sometimes be dressed up in spiritual language, such as “not wanting to create a barrier to the gospel”, but we are disingenuous if we hide the cost of discipleship. Indeed, if we are highlighting how following Jesus might be costly to others, they might very reasonably respond with a question like “Well, how is following Jesus costly to you then?” Are we ready for that question? Jesus is clear that every “disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24).

Here are three remedies to a posture of silence:

- 1. Be clear on what you believe and prepare carefully how you might articulate unpopular teachings to someone gently and respectfully (1 Peter 3:15).*

- 2. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you with choosing the right words (Matt 10:19-20).*

- 3. Accept that the gospel will offend some. Many deserted Jesus when he brought them a hard teaching – His response was not to swallow his words, but rather to emphasise the importance of sharing the truth: “The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life.” (John 6:63b)*

## **3. Responding by withdrawal**

A third possible response to hostility is to withdraw from the world. Again, we get to retain our beliefs, but we then withdraw from contact with those with whom we disagree. This might involve living in a separate community, or it

## **“It’s completely normal for a Christian to stand out and to attract criticism”**

might be choosing to spend all your time with Christians, or just keeping relationships with Christians (and non-Christians) at a superficial level. Now, temporary withdrawal from the world may be, at times, essential – Jesus withdrew from people often to connect with God (Luke 5:16) – but this should be a regular rhythm of withdrawal and re-engagement rather than a permanent cutting off of contact. We do need to guard our hearts (Prov. 4:23) to restrict ungodly influences on our lives, and most of us need to get more serious about daily devotions, Sunday observance and fasting from worldly influences (e.g. social media).

Having recognised the value of regular withdrawal to seek God, adopting a posture of withdrawal from the world can be a sign of hard-heartedness to the lost. Our Great Commission is to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 27:19-20).

Here are three remedies to a posture of withdrawal:

- 1. Meditate on the lostness of non-Christians (e.g. Matt 25:46).*
- 2. Remember that Jesus has sent us into the world (John 17:18).*
- 3. If we worry about ‘contamination’ from the world the solution is to press more deeply into God, rather than withdrawing from the world (John 17:15-21).*

## **4. Responding with confrontation**

The final response to hostility in these situations that we will explore is confrontation. We know that Jesus confronted the Pharisees and money-changers when he needed to. Sometimes we will need to be strong and assertive when we stand up for other people’s rights and when we seek to influence our nation’s laws.

But when our posture towards the world becomes a permanent one of confrontation, surely we have wrongly identified the enemy. Paul clarifies that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” (Eph 6:12) but we are to take a stand “against the devil’s schemes” (v11). We are to win over the world rather than fight it. A confrontational manner might also come from a hard heart, or an “us and them” mentality. Will the world see us as always battling for the rights of Christians, or will we wield radical meekness (e.g. Matt 5:38-42) in order to display the character of Jesus to an aggressive world?

Here are three remedies to a posture of confrontation:

- 1. Clothe yourself with humility, which is the antidote to self-righteousness (1 Peter 5:5).*
- 2. Hand over your anxieties about the world to God. Receive His peace. Respond to others with gentleness (Phil 4:5-7).*
- 3. Let go of any thinking that Christians are the victims (Rom 8:37), relax into the knowledge of God’s sovereignty over all authorities (8:31), and respond with compassion for the other person’s eternal destiny.*

### **A versatile response to hostility**

When we can relax into God's sovereign power, we can let go of our defensiveness and fear of others. If we can allow our natural fear of man to be displaced by a supernatural fear of God, then we will become increasingly free to respond to hostility without focusing on ourselves, or the other person. Let us instead focus on God, who is far stronger than any earthly force. This correct posture towards God allows us to respond lovingly, and with much greater versatility. Paul wrote, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor 9:22)

But Jesus was the ultimate model of versatility, always choosing a response that would best love the other person:

- Jesus compromised nothing in God's law (Matt 5:18), but he compromised man-made taboos to reach the Samaritan woman (John 4:9)

- Jesus was silent in his own defence (Matt 27:12), but he was vocal in

declaring the truth even when it cost him his life (Matt 26:63-64)

- Jesus often withdrew to commune with his Father (Luke 5:16), but he involved himself even with those considered untouchable (Luke 5:12-13)

- Jesus risked relationships by confronting even his friends (John 21:15), but he prayed peace over his enemies even as they brutally killed him (Luke 23:34)

Be aware of how you can easily react to the world's hostility with a knee-jerk reaction. Instead, "as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (Col 3:12)

**By Stuart**

***Stuart is TFT's Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. He has the ability to forget entire storylines, which means he can enjoy his favourite films again and again and again.***

## **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\*\*](http://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate)



# Finding Acceptance

**“F**or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). As a young child, I sang this well-known scripture verse along with a cassette tape of Bible songs. My mom interrupted me, saying, “You shouldn’t sing that! It’s too negative.” That moment encapsulates how my family, and even my church, felt about sin. It was something we didn’t talk about, or even think about, and certainly not something we ever did.

I was a sheltered home-schooled kid growing up in Kentucky (USA), who just thought gay was an ordinary word in a Christmas song. I had no way to understand or describe the strange way I was starting to see girls. This silence and ignorance became its own, internal, form of opposition. I never understood the other girls ogling over a picture of Jonathan Taylor Thomas

or Leonardo DiCaprio, the top-level tween heartthrobs of my day. I always felt strange or different, but it wasn’t until years later that I realised how I was seeing girls was what others would describe as physical or sexual attraction. And I certainly didn’t know that anyone else also experienced those feelings towards someone of the same sex.

As I got a little older, topics of sexuality and orientation would make their way into hushed conversations in my family or at church. The prevailing message was that you were either homosexual and unbiblical, or heterosexual and biblical. I took this as fact and, being a good little Pharisee; I turned my nose up at even the idea that someone could be attracted to another person of the same sex. Somehow, I still didn’t connect my desires and lust for women with what other people described as sexual attraction.

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**“Sin was something we didn’t talk about or even think about, and certainly not something we ever did!”**

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**“When did you choose to be heterosexual?”**

This connection finally clicked in around 2012 when I was in my mid-20s. I was absent-mindedly listening to the radio when I heard the question, “When did you choose to be heterosexual?”



The speaker paused for a moment and then continued, explaining that this question seems ridiculous to heterosexuals because they didn't choose to be that way. She used this to show that homosexuality is also natural, not a choice someone makes. The

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**“I feel the conservative church only recognises the sin of homosexuality, and the liberal church can't understand why I won't just give in”**

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problem was, in that brief moment of pause, without knowing her purpose or where the question was leading, I had an answer. I immediately knew the exact date and time I had chosen to be heterosexual.

This thought and realisation startled me, and my mind flooded with memories. I had got together with a guy simply out of curiosity, trying to figure out what the others girls saw in boys. I had sat captivated during a youth group trip as I watched another female slip into pyjamas and my mind ran down a sexual rabbit hole. In a conversation with a friend about the TV show *Friends*, I couldn't answer which guy I liked the most, but I knew without question which of the girls I found most attractive. For the first time in my life I admitted to myself, “I'm attracted to women, and this is really all I've ever known.”

### **Feeling alone**

But what was I to do with this realisation? Did this admission automatically put me in the category of the “unbiblical” that I had been

taught surrounded homosexuality? By this point, God had brought me out of religious legalism into a growing life of faith, but I still believed that the Bible did not leave room for homosexual acts. I thought I was the only person in the world who experienced same-sex attraction yet desired to uphold that biblical view. I reasoned that, as long as I'm single, purity would look similar no matter which gender was the object of my affection. Therefore, I mostly ignored or hid the attractions that lingered.

This was often a lonely place to be, but I trusted that God's word on this subject was for my good, even when everything in my body was pushing towards something else. As I became increasingly resolved to uphold this biblical truth, the church and denomination I grew up in were swinging in the opposite direction. I had friends I had served with in ministry who came out as gay. I heard them talk about the freedom they had found, and how they could finally be whom God had created them to be in a loving and committed relationship. To them, you could have Jesus and live out of your natural desires. They had no idea that I, too, had wrestled with questions of sexuality and identity in Christ, yet with different conclusions.

### **Looking for safe community**

The churches and ministries I have been part of as an adult have upheld a traditional biblical view of sexuality. I have been blessed by powerful preaching of the Word, small groups and ministries that God used to help me grow, and wonderful friendships and families that included me as one of their own. These relationships and love have been so marvellous and important to me, but I have yet to share my experience with same-sex attraction





openly. When the topic comes up, there seems to be so much hatred. “LGBT are all whores; they need to get of here.” “Why would anyone want to be gay? It’s so disgusting!” “Don’t talk to me about LGBT until after you read your Bible.” These are just a handful of things that I have heard said or had been posted online by friends who are followers of Christ. It always feels like a punch in the gut. Like, even though I’m clinging to Christ and doing everything I can to stay pure, that I’m not good enough, that I don’t matter. I see the church dehumanising those with same-sex attraction, and only seeing issues or political agendas, not actual people.

I feel like I have no place in the conservative church conversation because they only recognises the sin of homosexuality, and I have no place in the liberal church conversation because they can’t understand why I won’t just give in. Many believers seem to have never even considered that someone

could experience same-sex attraction while still upholding traditional biblical purity. This seems to be changing and, as I’ve shared with some close friends, they have met me with a desire to learn more and walk with me, as I seek to honour Christ while still experiencing same sex attraction. Finding TFT has been so encouraging because I now have community and fellowship with others who understand that tension and stand with me, pointing me to Christ without negating the reality of orientation.

I think the wider body of Christ needs to enter this conversation. A conversation where we recognise the value and personhood even of people who wrestle with same-sex attraction, a conversation in which we acknowledge the possibility of experiencing same-sex attraction without necessarily giving in to the temptation. A conversation that encourages everyone (married or single of any sexual orientation) to pursue sexual purity no matter the sacrifice, because Christ is better.

**By Sarah**

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**“I trusted that God’s word on this subject was for my good, even when everything in my body was pushing towards something else”**

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



# Honey from the Rock Review

The 'Honey from the Rock' online conference has been a real highlight for me during this season.

The atmosphere was joyful and authentic, with 100 doorbell rings welcoming in the newcomers setting the tone. Relaxed discussions gave way to well-structured capsules of singing and solid teaching.

Steven's adaptation of the song "His eye is on the sparrow" took us into the morning session, in which Nat shared wonderful truths. While Nat waits for that place in heaven, which Jesus is specially preparing for her, she knows and lives the costly obedience to which Christ has called her. He didn't hide the cost and did not do a great marketing job, but He and all He offers us are so worth it! Nat shared parts of her own story, testifying to her growth in loving others as well. The "Turn your eyes upon Jesus" song helped these thoughts to settle in our souls.

Moving testimonies punctuated these times: stories of courageous Christ-followers living out the reality of His life in their same-sex relationships.

Donald shared, in the afternoon session, on Psalm 81 and Deuteronomy 31,

where we can find these most unusual references to honey in the rock: treasure found in unexpected places!

The break-out groups were one of my highlights: being electronically whisked into a room with five total strangers who rapidly become dear fellow Christ-followers. Tears, laughs, intimate sharing of stories and a desire to honour Christ and His calling all contribute to making this a time to treasure.

The takeaway I've had of this moving day was experiencing the sense of community True Freedom Trust can allow. Being able to know that so many others are out there are following Jesus through their struggles, the examples of courageous people pursuing Christ in costly obedience. I especially appreciated the diversity of the activities. The teaching, sharing stories, singing, and question times, all punctuated with meaningful break-out groups giving the day a complete, profound, and inspiring character. Thank you to the speakers, storytellers and organisers. I have received nourishment and joy for the next stretch Jesus calls me to!

**By Liliane**



**Honey from the Rock**  
*How God offers us hope and joy in the  
hard place of same-sex temptation*



## Timothy: Guardian of the gospel

Come with me back to 17 AD, to the city of Lystra in what is now Turkey, to a young man brought up by his Jewish mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (both of whom had converted to Christianity), and having a Greek (i.e. non-Jewish) father. This combination of Judaism and paganism made Timothy a perfect student for Paul, who recognised in Timothy an uncompromising faithfulness to the word of God.

### Guard the truth

Indeed, if I were to pick a single most prominent habit exhibited by Timothy, it would be his refusal to be swayed by the religious fraudsters of his time, instead saturating himself and his listeners in God's unadorned and unadulterated Word. Whilst many at the time came under mental health hardship, and lost their way because of listening to those who proclaimed untruths, Timothy instructed God's people out of a life of scriptural obsession and zero compromises. For us today, the temptation to agree with, or subconsciously follow, teachings of our

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**“There was nothing lukewarm about Timothy – he was completely soaked in the teachings of Jesus”**

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world (be it church or secular culture) that are not grounded in scripture, and are often stronger than our human hearts can bear. But there is One who is in us, who has all power to stand up to these ‘false truths’ and to hold firm to the one truth, no matter what the cost.

How can we remain obedient to the gospel and, even more, guard it against the many assaults we know will come? Timothy is told to do this not by his own ability but with our ‘helper’ (John 14), the Holy Spirit: “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:14).

Timothy is alerted to the “terrible” times that are to come for the church

(2 Timothy 3:1-9). He is warned of church people and leaders who, in the future, will adopt a godly form without crediting power to the Almighty; who will 'equip' their church with convincing but unbiblical teachings. Does this sound familiar? Those whose hearts will be blackened with violence, hedonistic desires, self-centred worship and, perhaps the most "terrible", the inability to forgive others. 'Take the log out of your own eye' comes to mind.

### **Hold on to your faith**

How did Timothy keep his conscience clear and fight for the truth (1 Timothy 1:18-19), amidst this fraud-wrought church, and in the knowledge of worse yet to come?

Firstly, as we have seen, there was absolutely nothing lukewarm about Timothy. He was completely soaked in the teachings of Jesus and protected himself from the surrounding falsities, trying to sway his character. One of the classic downfalls of renowned and respected church leaders today is that they protect their ministry with a biblically secure fence, but when it comes to their personal life, there are compromises. As we know, these can start small and, over time, erupt into life-destroying habits. Timothy lived out the truth in both work and life (1 Tim 6:11). He knew it was not only his life on the line but the spiritual health of the Ephesus churches where God's power was moving.

Secondly, he did not believe in his own power but in the power given to him from above (2 Tim 1:6). One might call Timothy an introvert. His character was not one that was likely to step confidently forward into an open opportunity (2 Tim 1:7), and yet with Paul's encouragement and God's sacred

anointing, he did more than one could possibly have expected of him. It's easy to categorise ourselves as an introvert; however, God repeatedly calls these kinds of people into prominent and bold positions, not for their own credit, but as His ambassador. What might He be calling you to stand up for, publicly, today?

Thirdly, Timothy made some rather bold and counter-cultural decisions as an influential young figure. He chose not to drink wine despite his ill-health (1 Timothy 5:23), and he chose to lead by servanthood, not for power (Philippians 2:20-21). It was this counter-cultural character that set Timothy apart, and kept him on the straight and narrow in a time of great challenge.

### **Expect opposition**

In the same way that Timothy was alerted to future "terrible" events in the church by Paul, so too were the disciples alerted by Jesus himself that weeds would be planted among the wheat and yeast in the flour (Matthew 13); and that the church would be seeped with falsities - both the teachers and the taught. We see the results of this today, with so much anger and bitterness towards God and the church, often to the point of rejection altogether.

Yet Timothy was granted authority to confront these false teachers who had infiltrated the church and who even challenged his role as a leader, many of them being older and assuming more responsibility than him. "You may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer" (1 Timothy 1:3). In the same way, the creator of the universe grants us the authority to not only resist the human desire to conform and to follow the curve, but to confront those who misguide and mislead





believers by painting an easy-to-follow 'Christian' way of living which does not lead us to the cross, and ultimately ends in failure and loss of self-worth. We have no choice but to be rooted in scripture if we are to make it through these times, knowing genuine joy and peace in the most unlikely of circumstances, and to bring many others with us to our Saviour King.

### **Endure for a purpose**

"Now, in fact, all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

How can we be convinced that living our lives in a way that goes against the norms and expectation of our culture, and even at times our church leaders, to the extent that we may suffer daily grief and hurt, will make a difference to our world and to the new age to come? We see in the early church that countless people turned and looked to Jesus for their salvation as a direct result of Paul and Timothy's persecutions (e.g. 2 Tim 2:10), and that the churches grew stronger in their faith. This, in itself, is an incentive beyond any earthly treasures.

Because of his faithfulness to the truth Timothy, like his mentor Paul, and his ultimate model Jesus, is laid bare to mockery, criticism, loneliness, imprisonment and poverty. His life was an aggressive wake-up call to us today, never to give up in our persecuted life for Jesus. Like Paul, he did not falter, and he kept fighting (Heb 13:23) to win more souls for eternity with Christ. It is highly plausible that Timothy would have met a similar end to his earthly and heavenly examples. Paul urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus, stand up for the truth and "fight the good fight" (1 Tim 6:12), but the Bible does not record the rest of Timothy's life, or death. Extra-biblical records indicate that Timothy's preaching of the true gospel during ungodly celebrations (one writing suggests during the veneration of the pagan goddess, Diana), inspired an anger-fuelled mob to stone to death

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**"People turned and looked to Jesus for their salvation as a result of Paul and Timothy's persecutions"**

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God's courageous, and possibly rather elderly by this point, faithful servant. "Yet, not my will but yours be done" we hear our Saviour's words through his tear-stricken face as he pleads with his Father, and then obediently and selflessly gives up his body in retribution for all the mistakes you and I have made. Jesus knew this to be the only way for us to receive a full pardon, and a full life. Both on this earth and in the eternal and renewed world.

### Conclusion

We, like Paul, Timothy and ultimately Jesus, can stand firm in the face of cultural and religious adversity by reading, digesting, battling with, praying over, and crucially teaching the unadorned Word of God.

"I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. ... But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." - 2 Timothy 4:1-5

### By Keziah

*Keziah is a linguist turned theologian and teacher, who always has 5 books on the go and often 5 coffees! She is a champion for planet-saving schemes, encouraging youngsters in sport, and paleo-inspired eating, but is a sucker for scotch pancakes!*

## Invite A TFT Speaker

True Freedom Trust has a team of speakers who can attend churches, bible colleges and conferences across the UK to share the hope the gospel has for those who are same-sex attracted. Each speaker has personal experience reconciling their sexuality and their faith, giving them the ability to share from their own testimony alongside biblical teaching.

As life returns to normal we are looking forward to being with you in person once again, though we can also join you online where preferred. We currently have good capacity right the way through 2021.

If you would like to discuss how TFT can support your church/conference/event, get in touch with us at [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/speaking](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/speaking) or call us on **0151 653 0773**



# Looking back at Lockdown



**L**ockdowns, shutdowns, shielding, stay-at-home, rule of one, rule of six... Who would have believed in them or their devastating consequences until they unwound throughout 2020 and 2021?

In line with many organisations, TFT took advantage of the much improving online technology. We used Zoom for our June 2020 London conference “Never Alone”, our October 2020 National Conference “The Intimacy Deficit”, and our so-called regional conference “Honey from the Rock” in February 2021. We also started a new online Barnabas Group and a Book Club for women.

Most of our wonderful Voluntary Workers who run Barnabas Groups in about twenty locations kept them going by Zoom. Many took in more members or met more frequently, while a few lacked the technology or facility but kept connection by phone or email.

*“We met online more often than usual, which helped keep our spirits up.” - Ian*

*“This year would have been so much harder as a single person without this regular contact.” - Miriam*

Most groups found they spent more time praying for and supporting each other. Overall, more members took an active part than in normal times.

*“We became more creative... fun quiz, book reviews and musical performance.” - John*

Although Zoom meetings gave much opportunity for connection, we were very aware that many of our members who live alone were struggling with loneliness and temptations. During lockdowns, we ran several short-term Barnabas Groups.

“I have been encouraged, supported and found new insights and a refreshing of my faith, helping me to cope with my same-sex attractions.” (Nicholas)  
We also ran prayer meetings, and one-off events such as a Christmas service, our Winter Warmer Party and an Easter service.

*“The Winter Warmer was great fun, and I enjoyed playing games and sharing laughter with other members.” - Ian*

A great advantage was being able to draw in many members who could never meet in person – from across the UK as well as ten European countries, the Americas and South East Asia.

*“I think it’s wonderful being part of TFT. Praying with members was powerful.”  
- Antonio, Brazil*

Reconvening Barnabas Groups in person will involve challenges in sorting out membership and suitable venues. Some Barnabas Groups started during this time will keep going long term. We fully expect that many events and group meetings will in future be a mix of online and in-person, which will enable us to provide broader services for more people.

**By Paul**

## Speaking Team Manager Appointment

We have now raised the full £30,000 amount that we need to fund the Speaking Team Manager position for two years. Thanks so much to all of you who gave to our 'Back to Church' campaign.

Following interviews in March for the new position of Speaking Team Manager, we are pleased to announce that Simon Byrne has been appointed to this role. As he is an existing full-time member of the staff team, he needs to pass on the Team Administrator responsibilities to someone else in order to free up two days/week for the speaking manager position.

Simon writes: *"I'm thankful for the generosity of TFT's members and partnership churches whose gifts have enabled this role to begin at a time coinciding with the easing of lockdown restrictions. I'm looking forward to working with our speaking team and getting TFT 'Back to Church' so it can share the good news the gospel has for those who are same-sex attracted once again."*

Alison Thomas has kindly returned to the staff team for a few months to release Simon from the Team Administrator work until July, but we need to recruit a permanent member of staff for this role, and summary details are included below.



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## We're Recruiting Again

Following Simon's appointment, we are recruiting for a new **part-time Team Administrator**. This would be for two days per week, with flexibility over days worked. The appointment would be for an initial period of two years, although we hope to be able to extend the position subject to funding.

### The Position

The purpose of this role is to provide administrative support for the TFT staff team and Trustees, to assist in the effective stewardship of the charity's finances through accurate record keeping and financial planning and to respond to basic enquiries from our members and partnership churches. Familiarity with QuickBooks software and bookkeeping experience would be an advantage. There is existing office space in Wirral for this work, although most of the work could be done at any location with internet access.

### The Person

There is an occupational requirement for the person to be a Christian, and the person should be fully in support of TFT's Basis of Belief.

### More Information

To download a full job application pack, please visit this page on our website: [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/jobs](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/jobs)

Do please have a look through the job outline and think about whether you know of any suitably qualified Christian(s) who might be interested in applying.