

Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

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Responding with confidence to revisionist teaching

In this edition, we are looking at how we can best respond to those seeking to revise the clear biblical teaching on sexuality. It can discourage us when we hear of Christians departing from biblical truth. However, trying to change what Scripture teaches is nothing new: asking “Did God really say...?” (Gen 3:1) is literally the oldest trick in the book! In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged the revisionism of His day. He needed to bring correction to the legalism of the dominant Pharisees, whereas the challenges in our day come more from a liberal approach.

I hope this magazine will encourage us to have confidence in the enduring goodness and relevance of God’s Word. Let’s be so immersed in His sanctifying truth (John 17:17) that the siren voices of our age cannot unsettle us.

By Stuart, TFT Director



Affirming, inclusive and progressive

Page 10

Sarah reflects on how we can be a biblically affirming, inclusive and progressive church without compromising our beliefs.



God harnessed my SSA

Page 15

Timothy shares how God showed him the purpose of his life.



Review: Finding your best identity

Page 20

Stuart reviews Andrew Bunt’s new book which explores the question of where we find our deepest identity.

Remaining in God's love

I doubt any of us would be put off walking through a field of sheep grazing happily on the grass. A field of wolves might be a different matter. For as long as there have been sheep and wolves, there have also been false teachers in the life of the church. False teachers are described as those wearing sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ferocious wolves (Matthew 7:15). Take a moment to read through these passages to remind yourself of the presence of false teachers in the early church - 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

A biblical challenge

Now stop and take a moment also to read Jude's short letter. It's only 25 verses! Jude, correctly called Judah, was one of Jesus' brothers. While he didn't follow Jesus during his lifetime, he did become a travelling teacher and missionary in the years that followed Jesus' death. In his letter, he writes to other Jews who have decided to follow Jesus, encouraging them, in their time, to contend for or defend the faith in the face of opposition that he has heard about. It's so important, that he changes the original topic of his letter to them, to focus on this opposition.

He challenges, not so much false teaching, but what he sees as people following a way of life that has left the road that God also

intends for us to follow. His particular focus is on money and sex, so nothing new under the sun there! He takes his Jewish hearers back to examples from their history when people rebelled against God. He concludes, by using vivid analogies, that these people are shepherds who only feed themselves, clouds without rain, autumn trees without fruit, wild waves of the sea and wandering stars. Just let those images sink in for a moment.

The cause of false teaching

Having highlighted the problem, Jude now explains the strategy to contend for the faith. Firstly, remember the basic issue and cause of the problem (verses 17-19). At its heart, the false teaching is arising because people are following their own natural instincts rather than the work of the Spirit. They are seeking to find room to express their desires, and therefore develop teachings that give permission to practise those cravings. Over and over again, church history has shown that however sophisticated the false teaching may sound, at its root – as often as not – is a basic desire to endorse the indulging in a certain kind of behaviour. That does not mean that we should dismiss the intellectual arguments or assume that everyone who stands against Christian teaching is immoral or wanting to be immoral. But there is an inner

driving force that is beyond the merely intellectual. And it is to that basic issue that we must appeal and to which we must speak, and with grace and truth. A Bishop I once knew, said that we must inhabit the place of “gracious orthodoxy”. Amen to that!

Remaining faithful

Secondly, focus on building up your own faith (verses 20-21). The greatest defence is to move confidently forward. And the greatest way to counteract false teaching is to make the true teaching of the gospel so attractive and winsome through the lives of joy and peace that we live.

One of my foundational passages in the New Testament is 1 Peter 3:15-16:

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

It shows how if we live distinctively gracious lives, others will notice and ask us why we are like that. Then we have the opportunity to say why. There is no place for being contentious and ungracious in our response to people with whom we disagree. But we are instead to “keep ourselves in God’s love” as we “wait for the mercy of our

Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life.” (Jude verses 14 -19) Building ourselves up in our faith, with love and mercy, and praying in the Holy Spirit: these are the Christian characteristics that adorn the gospel of God and make it attractive.

Showing kindness

Thirdly, be merciful to those who doubt (verses 22-23). Do not be unkind or argumentative with those who are attracted to the false teaching. Do not go after them with anger and aggression. Do not dismiss their concerns out of hand. We need to show kindness, even as at the same time we disagree with the false teaching itself. This requires steady and careful listening to our friends, colleagues and family.

He is in control

Fourthly, be assured of God’s final victory (verses 24-25). Despite the great danger of false teaching, the real problem it is, and the concern that it brings, God’s victory is not in doubt. He is “able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy.” Fear the false teaching, but do not fear that it is going to win. Contend for the faith, but not with anxiety or panic. God will win. To Him be the glory.

Antony tried living in London, but now lives back in East Anglia. He enjoys sailing, sea swimming and working part time.

Book Review

“Being the Bad Guys” by Stephen McAlpine
£9.99 paperback. 144 pages, 2021 (The Good Book Company)



In many ways, the message of this book is perfectly summed up in the subtitle, “How to live for Jesus in a world that says you shouldn’t”. Yet, significantly, Stephen McAlpine has as much to say about “why” we should live for Jesus in this broken world, as “how”. The fundamental point of the book is that we, God’s people, the church, used to be the good guys. Then we became just one of the guys. Now, pretty much everyone outside ourselves views us as the bad guys. As McAlpine writes, in the world’s eyes, “... [Today] biblical ethics are not seen merely as laughable or outdated or repressed but as shameful, harmful and repressive.”

The first two chapters look at how we got to the point that this world revolves around ‘me’. A world in which “...authenticity is defined by how true you are to yourself.” The following three chapters are about what it looks like to be the bad guy. The final three chapters include some thoughts on the goal, that we should be the best “bad guy” Christians we can. We should not compromise, shouldn’t withdraw, but live confidently, courageously and joyfully in today’s society. From a solid Bible base, Stephen McAlpine encourages us to look forward, so as to avoid a victimhood

mentality. We need to be honest about our failures and remember that God’s power is, and has always been, made perfect in weakness. We are to follow the example of Daniel by living faithfully, faultlessly and fearlessly, in order to embrace our place on the cultural margins. He writes, “Our hope is not in winning a culture war. Our hope is in the One who has defeated our true enemies - Satan, sin and death.” For me, chapter 6 (“Don’t renovate the wrong house”) is the standout chapter. Here McAlpine looks at the book of Haggai and calls the church once again to “...preference God’s people, proclaim God’s praises and promote God’s promises.” Brilliant. This book is worth every penny, won’t take forever to read and is full of wisdom, encouragement, comfort and challenge.

Leslie loves to read, watch all kinds of sport (especially football) and spend time with his grandchildren

**Being
the
Badd
Guys**

How to Live for Jesus
in a World That Says You Shouldn't

Stephen McAlpine



Solid ground to sinking sand

A number of years ago, the term “agree to disagree” came into popular parlance in relation to compromise over the biblical interpretation of same-sex practice. When encountering a difference in opinion, could we amicably “agree to disagree” with others and continue to fellowship with them? At the time, it was inconceivable that I would ever have to take a stand if faced with my minister changing stance from holding an orthodox, historical view of scripture on sexual relationships to allowing other views to have equal value. Well, that exact instance happened recently. On this first order issue, I found I could not benignly accept any degree of revisionism. I had to leave the church that I had been part of.

We belonged to a small congregation where we took part in outreach, discipleship training and prayer ministry. Before committing to the church, we met with the vicar and his wife to ensure that they would agree with the TFT Basis and its work. I knew

that I could not be part of a church where there would be no biblical teaching on this subject or where they would not support my membership of TFT. After speaking to them, we felt happy; we would find a home there and be able to share our life with others in the church.

I had never felt as accepted. I often consider myself as an “edger”, someone who finds it difficult to fit into a traditional church setting and often spends their energy observing from the outside. In my previous churches, it would usually mean making a few firm friendships and quietly using my giftings. For the first time here, I felt embraced for who I was, with freedom to offer my time and skills to the church with or without my husband at my side. There was no living up to people’s expectations or being judged for performance. I started to invest in that church and felt loved by its people. It was a place I wanted to stay into old age. During Covid, two women gave their lives to Jesus. It was thrilling.

The congregation welcomed them wholeheartedly and, after a year of attending, were confirmed and wanted to study a discipleship course. We were excited to start a course for them and others who would benefit. After one of the women revealed that she was in a same-sex relationship, she brought her partner to church and we prayed for her salvation too. It was an amazing opportunity to welcome them both. They believed and belonged. We prayed that as they read the Bible, the Holy Spirit would teach them His ways and transform their behaviour. We were under the authority of our vicar and were happy to inform him that the discipleship course was starting. He knew of the same-sex partnership and we presumed that he would meet with the couple, explain to them the scriptural prohibitions on same-sex sexual practice and, in grace and love, discuss the implications for their relationship.

The initial group meeting started really well. We knew the new women, had been to their confirmation and encouraged and prayed for them most weeks. Their gratitude for the group, feeling of acceptance by the church and love of the services was infectious. Everyone could witness God doing amazing things in their lives. Then the bombshell hit. Another group member, out of the blue, asked what the Bible said about same-sex relationships. This was related to “Living in Love and Faith”, an Anglican initiative to explore

relationships in a mutual context. My heart sank. We looked at each other knowingly and explained graciously, with trepidation, that the Bible said that any sexual relationship outside heterosexual marriage was not what God had ordained for human flourishing.

There was an excruciating silence. One of the couple then forcefully quoted that the Bible said we should love one another. There was consternation and anger from them. We knew that this wasn't the place to open hurts and prolong vulnerabilities, and so we brought the discussion to an end, believing that our vicar would endorse the biblical stance we had taken. We hoped that biblical teaching and care giving would assuage the hurt and judgement the couple felt levelled at their lifestyle.

Undermined by the Minister

A week later, we became aware that our minister was offering one-to-one time for members to discuss their thoughts on “Living in Love and Faith”. We had received an upsetting message from one woman in the same-sex relationship to say that she felt very let down and ostracised by our stance on same-sex relationships. I thought that this time with the minister would help me feel secure in my biblical stance, be supported by the leader of the church and also to be told that he was working with the women in their pain. We agreed a time to talk together after the next Sunday service.

I was nervous in the lead up to the meeting and started by asking him directly what his stance was on same-sex sexual relationships. There was no point beating about the bush! He replied by admitting that, out of everyone in the congregation, he was expecting the conversation with me to be the most difficult. He knew what I believed. Since we had joined the church, he had been on a journey. He had studied scripture, prayed and talked with his spiritual director.

The conclusion that he had come to was that the unity of the Anglican Church was his paramount concern and quoted Philippians 2:2, “...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” He wanted his church to welcome and unite people, whether they endorsed same-sex relationships or were living in one.

“He wanted his church to welcome and unite people, whether they endorsed same-sex relationships or were living in one”

I then learnt that he had told the couple, after the group debacle, that there were different interpretations of scripture, ours being only one. There would be no preaching on marriage or singleness, same-sex relationships or celibacy, no drawing attention to



these contentious subjects. There was an admittance of the huge irony of the situation; his position made my position untenable and the unity that he craved was now the cause of me leaving. I was gracious to him. I thanked him for the teaching and fellowship I had so loved. He thanked me for my kindness and said that he hadn't expected such a calm response from me to his revelation. I walked out of the church with a breaking heart.

Lessons from leaving

I have not been back, but my husband continued to lead the discipleship course until its end. We wanted to act with integrity and not abandon our responsibilities to others. After much prayer I wrote to my minister, explaining my concern for his soul. He was accountable to God for leading his congregation in truth and that accepting same-sex partnerships was an issue of salvation (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). He was giving freedom to the couple to sin by not



teaching the gospel in its entirety, leading them to destruction. I know he was upset at what I had written. Jesus embodied truth and grace. I felt I had to balance both as I left the church.

In leaving, I did not want to bow my head in shame, embarrassment or pretence, so I wrote letters to my friends at church with an explanation for my decision. I felt it right to

say that scripture was consistent and orthodox on this issue, and that to quote unity as a foundation for embracing alternative views of the Word of God was misrepresenting what Jesus stood for. Some agreed with me, some didn't, but all said that I had made the right decision, given what I believed. I wanted to leave well and strived to act with wisdom and kindness.

“...the pain of experiencing ‘shifting sand’ is that one can lose faith in leaders”

I miss the church so much. I know we are missed too. We have remained friends with a few couples, but I want to acknowledge that leaving had implications and we took it very seriously. Investing in a church means that when one leaves prematurely, the roots that one has put down are quickly wrenched up. It took me months to want to commit again to another

church, because the pain of experiencing “shifting sand” is that one can lose faith in leaders and feel a huge division in friendships. I have learnt to hold church lighter. I now attend a church where, by meeting the minister, I made absolutely sure that he would teach the truth about same-sex attraction. Trusting God resolutely, knowing He is the never changing, great “I Am”, has steadied my walk and guided my way.

This won't be everyone's story. Some may remain to influence the minister and be a stalwart biblical presence in their church. For me, staying was untenable. I could not agree to disagree. My explanation of same-sex relationships to a discipleship group was undermined by my minister, under the premise that unity was to be preserved. Unity is very important. “Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (Romans 14:19) and “Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) underscore the necessity of unity, but not at the expense of biblical truth. Jesus says in Romans 16:17, “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.” I had to adhere to that warning above all else.

Chloe lives in the north of England and loves walking autumnal country paths. She is learning how to paint using a gel pad and make her own pasta.



How to be a biblically affirming church

As I pondered the brief for this article, a wry smile came over my face as I reflected on the title. Simply by removing one word, this article would be widely celebrated in today's woke culture.

I wondered how celebrated it would actually be when the reader saw the addition of that all-important word, 'biblically'. Living in a post Christian society we are challenged to declare our support of, and uphold the personal rights of, everyone and anyone to do life their way. Saying that you're an affirming, inclusive and progressive church heralds your endorsement of society's values. Could this create a stumbling block, a potentially crushing blow to those who hold to traditional biblical teaching? You, like me, may feel that through the omission of that one important word, the emphasis is significantly different; in fact, the vision becomes diametrically opposed.

The sense of inclusion swings from 'come as you are, stay as you are,' to 'come as you are and find a spacious place to be transformed by the Holy Spirit'. And that for me

is the essence of a biblically affirming, inclusive and progressive church. One which excludes no one, and where all who attend have time and space to be transformed by God's love.

In considering how we can be churches who fit this picture of being biblically rooted in our outlook, we will consider each of these attributes in light of what Jesus desired for his church and how his life demonstrates that well. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5:25-27 that Jesus loved the Church and sought to make her holy. The love of Jesus is so apparent in the way he interacted with people who were to become His church, and not in a way that we might expect. Jesus was a lot more woke than your average Christian today. By saying Jesus was woke, I am saying that he was alert to injustice and discrimination in his society, something that we, as Christians, could aspire towards today.

One of His many virtues was His love of the outcast. Jesus loved and affirmed people who society had shunned. The leper, tax collector, prostitute, the unclean woman and

the demon possessed were all shown compassion and love by Jesus when he met them. His love affirmed them in a society where they were ostracised.

Let's consider how Jesus demonstrates his commitment to being affirming, inclusive and progressive and model our commitment on His lived experiences.

“Jesus’ love affirmed them in a society where they were ostracised”

To be an affirming church

A short trawl of dictionary entries helps us to define affirmation as something that is stated publicly or emphatically; it declares one's support for something, or describes providing emotional support or encouragement to another.

One such example of affirmation was the woman with the issue of blood. This woman stepped out in faith, reached out and touched His cloak (Mark 5:21–43). Whilst she was immediately healed, what happened next was what makes this encounter all the more applicable to our lives. Jesus called her out from the place she had withdrawn in shame, He called her into the sight of others because He wanted to affirm her. He understood that her condition would be widely known of, that she was looked

upon as someone cursed of God, so He seized the opportunity to ensure that her new status as “daughter” was known. She was no longer to be mocked or shunned.

She was accepted and affirmed publicly, so that there could be no doubt of her status. Jesus clearly demonstrated that this woman was no longer to be judged as unclean.

Being an affirming church speaks to me of this act of compassion. Regardless of who walks through the door of our church, we know that through Jesus they can find healing and righteousness. Rather than hiding in the shadows, feeling judged or unworthy, affirming churches should be places where people can, if they choose, mix in with the crowd. The woman with the issue of blood was both unclean and inferior as a woman in a patriarchal society. By being in the crowd, she had already put herself in a place where she was likely to be torn down. Yet Jesus did not condemn. Had the crowd noticed her, I am sure there would have been many who would have tried to prevent her from touching the hem of Jesus' cloak. Let us never be guilty of preventing someone from reaching out to Jesus.

To be an inclusive church

By definition inclusion is the opposite of exclusion; being inclusive means that we have a desire that no one should be left out. More recently it has been associated with ensuring that people have equal access to

opportunities and resources, particularly those who are marginalised in some way or who belong to a minority group. Controversies raging around inclusion are the hot topic of most western societies. The discourse on sexuality provokes heated discussion and the church is not exempt. In looking at the life of Jesus would you say he was inclusive, or perhaps you'd reflect that he was simply against exclusion? Being inclusive and being against exclusion are different and we need to consider this. For example, Jesus may not have been inclusive (in the modern sense of the word) of LGBTQ, but He wouldn't have excluded them. We have enough Scripture available to us to illustrate that, whatever the answer, Jesus was certainly effective in ensuring that no one was left out, and that surely should be our goal as the church.

Whilst Jesus was inclusive, this was not at the expense of his teaching. He did not embrace sin as something good, as is happening in many churches today. Rather, He tackled it directly by addressing the state of the heart. Simply consider the story of the woman caught in adultery. The words of Jesus from John 8 are familiar to us:

“Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?” “No, Lord,” she said. And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

Those words ring out, “Go and sin no more”. In other words, address

your heart and see where you need to change. Jesus showed her love, but gently called out her actions as something that needed to be addressed. She was not shunned or worse stoned, but there was a challenge.. Jesus did not shy away from the reality that her behaviour could not be condoned. He lovingly, yet clearly, corrected her by that one simple statement - “Go and sin no more.”

“Creating an environment which fosters change is the work of the Holy Spirit”

1 Corinthians 5 reminds us that our judgment should not fall on those outside the church, and that includes all who come to our churches seeking answers and relationship with God. Inclusion means loving people where they are at. It means not excluding them because of the result of a judgmental word, an unfriendly environment or worse still a pointed reference to their lifestyle. I know one lady, who as a seeker, went to a number of churches with her wife. Most of the churches demonstrated an outward form of welcome, yet after 3 or 4 weeks in each church the pastor preached pointedly on homosexuality.

Understandably this caused pain and rejection; they felt judged and unwelcome. Effectively they were excluded from those churches because of the treatment they

received, despite the veneer of welcome. The pastor's mistake was to prioritise challenging sin over welcome, and seemingly to enforce change rather than build relationship. Creating an environment which fosters change is the work of the Holy Spirit. Being inclusive requires us to switch the question around: "In what ways are we excluding people?"

To be a progressive church

In the context of church, progressive often refers to becoming advocates of social reform and is synonymous with advancement. Hence being a progressive church is associated with moving forwards, perhaps stepping out of archaic teaching or thinking and approaching long held, traditional beliefs in a different way.

Let's consider whether, as those who hold fast to the Bible being the inerrant word of God, we can safely call ourselves progressive? Progressive church is a relatively new term; it paints a picture of a church that has stepped away from the antiquated practices of the past, a church that focuses more on social justice than sound doctrine. Perhaps it suggests a church that has moved with the times, that recognises how life has changed significantly since the Bible was written and one that has a revisionist view of Scripture.

For those of us who hold to the traditional interpretation of

Scripture on sexuality, progressive church is not where you are likely to find us on a Sunday morning!

Yet in seeking to be a church that is truly progressive, would it not be more realistic to talk about a progressing church, a church that is constantly evolving and growing? Jesus told Peter that he would build His church (Matthew 16:18). This was never meant to be a one-off event. The church is being built by Jesus to an ever-increasing degree of glory; the church is being perfected for the bridegroom. The reality is that, yes things in the world have changed significantly since Jesus walked the earth, but God does not change. His ways and teachings remain the same. (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8).

And in recognising the progression of the church, we appreciate how progressive Jesus was in His day. There are so many examples in the Bible of how progressive Jesus was for His time.

Here's just four things that stand out to me:

1. Jesus encouraged wealth distribution: he told a rich man to give all he had to the poor (Mark 10:21)
2. Jesus spent time with prostitutes, despite the potential for gossip or slander (Luke 7:38)
3. Jesus treated women as equals. Think about how Mary sat at his feet listening as He taught (Luke 10:39)
4. Jesus didn't endorse behaviour

that traditional religious leaders tolerated, as shown when He overturned the tables in the temple courts (Luke 19:45)

Jesus was radical, and we too can be radical churches. It's not hard to love radically, regardless of a person's sex, gender, identity or orientation; we can love. Let's be churches that think and talk about the difficult questions. Questions such as, "How can we welcome members of the LGBTQ community?" "How can we support, love and affirm them as important members of our community?"

The only answer to becoming the church Jesus calls us to be is to look to Him as our example. Yes He drew attention to sin, but He didn't pursue sin. He was content to speak truth and allow the person to

choose their response. He affirmed people through His love and grace. He never excluded anyone from His ministry and, as a progressive, He never once called evil good or good evil.

Jesus is the ultimate example of compassion and truth. Let us aspire to follow His example as we open our churches to a society more in need of Jesus than ever before.

Sarah is a ministry leader from Derbyshire. She claims to have the world's most handsome dog and enjoys walking in the Peaks. Her current passion is researching where to get the best brunch. It's a tough job, but someone's got to do it!

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God harnessed my same-sex attraction

‘As a 75-year-old, I’ve learnt that it is unwise to make assumptions about how one’s life is going to pan out. Now looking back, I can say that as youthful libido wains, and by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, one’s same-sex attraction can sublimate into something useful. For me this has been an introduction to the practice of ‘father care’, free of sexual content, but fuelled by spare emotional capital.

Allow me to tell you my story:

I became a teenager in 1960, where I had been attending a boys’ boarding prep school since I was 9 years old. There would be a certain amount of larking around of a sexual nature at the school, particularly in the dorms, but nothing serious. I would sometimes fantasize over certain boys I found attractive. In 1961 I graduated to an all-male private boarding school. Although there were boys who were ‘out’ about their

homosexuality and acted accordingly, I, being reserved and slightly prudish, kept myself more or less within bounds. Nevertheless, there would be mild ribbing from those who discerned my proclivity.

The problem became more difficult when I left boarding school in 1965 (two years before the decriminalisation of homosexuality between consenting adults). I had, by then, realised that I was exclusively homosexual and that it was not just a phase I was going through. Homosexuals were open game on media comedy channels, where they were mercilessly stereotyped. In social banter they were marginalised, vilified and the subject of ridicule. On such occasions, I became very self-conscious and would go noticeably red when the subject came up.

The thought of carrying this lifelong stigma led to some suicidal thoughts. This, combined with the

fact that my father was dying from a terminal illness and that I was not enjoying the law studies that he had hoped would result in me joining his law firm, brought me to a crisis point at the age of 21. The future looked bleak and I did not have the resources within me to manage the mess. At this point, I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus. I had been brought up in a church-going family and was educated at Christian-based schools. Yet somehow, the full significance of the Cross and Jesus' sacrifice for me personally had eluded me. Was it because the message of the Cross was not emphasised in the Church of England? Anyway, my faith had not penetrated my whole heart.

Though I did not reject Christianity, it was surely not recognisable in my life, which had become compartmentalised. This meant that, after leaving fulltime education and being more exposed to secular culture, I started to believe that there was no God and even stopped attending our village church, thinking it hypocritical to do so.

Thus, from this low point, I started searching for the meaning of life. This led me to make visits to the local hills (since I love nature) to find the answer. I grew up on an idyllic 200-acre farm with a stream running through it, wild woodlands and wild flower meadows that supported many varieties of butterflies. My father's garden was home to so many bird species, the

likes of which I don't get to see these days. This instilled within me a sense of awe and wonder at creation, which was to be my pathway to finding God. On returning from one of these sorties to the hills, I arrived back home, found a quiet corner of the gardens, laid back on the grass and looked up into the sky. I was amazed to see the clouds like I had never seen them before or since. They were decked high in layers creating voluminous spaces in between, like I was seeing temple spaces up there. I had a firm sense that God was in this way revealing to me the existence of a spiritual reality that I had not hitherto embraced.

That day in the quiet of my bedroom, I got on my knees to talk to God. I told Him that my life was in a mess and that I could not cope with it any longer, on my own. I told Him that I wished to give my life 100% to Him from now on and would accept whatever He wanted me to do. I got up with the sure identity that I was now a Christian and I needed to meet up with others. My new technicolour life had started! I reconnected with the local church and willingly accepted the mentorship of an evangelical couple there. They co-opted me to help out with the Sunday School teaching and I joined them for times of prayer and Bible study. Changes were made in my studies, because I searched my heart as to what I really wanted to do for a career in this life. I had always loved horticulture, each year

winning the annual prize for the best kept garden at primary school. 'Nature conservation' summed up where my heart was. This led me to give up law and enrol on a landscape architectural course, that led me into a career as a Landscape Advisor/Manager.

My homosexuality was clearly still there. Fortunately, because of my sensibilities, I had never seriously indulged it and now understood that it was definitely a 'no-go' area. I tried dating girls and was quite involved with a lovely American who loved me deeply. However, after a while, I realised that I was not able to match her love and had to break it off. The hurt that this caused her impacted me greatly, so I decided not to get myself in a similar situation again. I made it clear that future female relationships were sisterly.

After training I secured a job as a Landscape Manager to a design and build firm. There I would regularly get attracted to landscape students that were under my management. This was potentially embarrassing, but I was able to keep it under control, and it tended to turn into a mentorship role for me, that was beneficial to them. Thus began a lifetime role of befriending and encouraging younger men in their life walk.

For the next three decades I was not 'out' to friends and relatives, but only to known gays that I came across through the church. This meant that I was not benefitting

from the prayers of my church or the wisdom and experience of other same-sex attracted celibates.

Then in 2003 I attended a talk given by Martin Hallett at a Christian Conference and afterwards spoke to TFT delegates who had a stall there. I signed up as a member and started attending meetings. It has proved wonderful being able to talk freely with others in the same situation. It is as if it brings oxygen to the issues, preventing things festering and going rotten. It is great being open with each other, knowing that there is no judgement, because we have a shared experience. We can learn from each other strategies for dealing with temptations and bad habits.

“We can learn from each other strategies for dealing with temptations and bad habits”

At the time of joining TFT I was made redundant from a post that I held at the Peabody Trust, overseeing the quality control of their landscapes. I had been with them for 10 years. Almost immediately, they realised they still had a use for my services.

Thus, for four more years, I worked for them as a part time consultant. Since I knew I would now have spare capacity for other things, I went on a church trip to Kenya with 14 others to explore the

possibility of cross-cultural work with the Kenyan church. Kirstie, a fellow team member, and I loved the work they were doing with the disadvantaged children. We went back each year for the next four years. This led to us organising activities for eight teenagers who, because of poverty, were not getting secondary education. They were, however, being given woodwork training at the diocesan rehabilitation centre for street boys. We got to know them over two annual trips; then their course came to an end. That was when the senior boy took me to one side and asked if I could find funding to get four of them into secondary education to give them a better future.

That was in 2009, which marked the beginning of an educational funding programme, in partnership with the local Diocese, which now has 26 students on its books. It identifies needy students graduating from primary school and takes them on until they graduate from their technical college or university. The funding comes largely from my own resources and I visit the programme each year. We support about four female undergraduates, but all the secondary students are boys, many of whom lack fathers.

We encourage a family atmosphere in the group and hold mentorship days each holiday when they can share their experiences and receive encouragement from the older members. They all like to call me

‘Dad’ and some will contact me on WhatsApp during the school holidays when they have access to a smartphone. The undergraduates can contact me anytime and will seek my advice on some issues. Thus, in spite of not having natural children of my own, I find myself with an ever-increasing family of dependants!

How glad I am that I didn’t take my own life as a 21-year-old. Same-sex attraction bore a large part in bringing me to my knees, which connected me to God’s purpose for my life. As a youth from a privileged background, I was an insufferable snob and, without Christ, would probably have progressed into a life of self-gratification.

I encourage younger same-sex attracted Christians to hang in there. With Christ’s transforming power, things are definitely going to get better as your life produces something beautiful for Jesus. After all, He is in the business of sorting out our mess and giving us life to the full.

Timothy is a lifelong lover of the plant kingdom and is glad of the opportunity to visit equatorial Africa during our dormant season. With its 12-month growing season, Kenya is always green. His small back garden in London imitates an African jungle.

Perseverance in Denmark

KNUSS is a small Danish ministry with the same beliefs and values as TFT, where the staff team had the joy of joining TFT at the Steadfast Conference in London in June 2022. We are part of the Danish branch of the Evangelical Alliance and are challenged by secular values and pressures on the Church to conform to current trends on sexuality. The core of our work revolves around two gatherings twice a year, where we try to create fellowship and support for Christians who want to remain faithful to biblical teaching on the family and sexuality. We also try to include the family and friends of those with issues. We sense a stronger openness to discussing sexual issues among Christians now than in the past. Our last gathering in April was blessed with new participants expressing gratitude for the help and insights gained through our ministry.

We are a quite a new network, which was only founded two years ago. Before that, we belonged to another ministry called Basis, which was closed in 2019 because the organisational framework of this ministry was no longer suitable for our vision. Thanks to a big private donation of money, it has been possible to employ Peter Nissen as a part time staff worker. He organises

the network and spends quite a lot of time speaking in churches and to Christian youth groups about Christian life and sexuality. Our biggest goal at the moment is to become well known as a resource for churches and Christians struggling with their sexuality and how to reach out and include people with LGBT+ issues.

Currently, our serious challenge is the fact that Christians and their congregations are becoming liberal on the issue of sexuality. For us, with same-sex attractions, it is always tempting to choose an easier option than the hard struggles we face before God and with ourselves to remain steadfast in our life with Him. Another challenge is a constant suspicion from the public that we offer and practise conversion therapy. We are very thankful for our relationship with TFT. Our members use the resources and friendships offered there. We hope to continue participating in TFT events in the future. Fortunately, Britain is not far away, and it is easy for most of us to understand and network in the English language. We are looking forward to keeping in touch with you in our shared work for the kingdom of Christ.

Peter Nissen, *Ministry Manager,*
KNUS



Book Review

“Finding your best identity: a short Christian introduction to identity, sexuality and gender” by Andrew Bunt

£8.99 paperback. 112 pages, Nov 2022 (IVP)

There is much debate between Christians about whether it's right for a Christian with same-sex attractions to use a term like “gay”, “lesbian” or “trans”. Some argue that these words have become all-encompassing identity-forming words and so those who are “in Christ” are denying their God-given identity by labelling themselves in this way. Others argue that these terms are more meaningful in our culture than clumsy alternatives like same-sex attracted, and that they can be used in a merely descriptive way that is compatible with holding on to a primary identity received from God. These kinds of conversations show that we need clarity on what we mean by identity. This book by Andrew Bunt, while steering clear of controversies surrounding terminology, helps the reader particularly to explore the question, “How do I find who I am?”

He starts with a helpful definition of identity as being our “controlling self-understanding”. The idea of our primary identity being a self-understanding that exerts control over us distinguishes it from lesser descriptions of ourselves (eg ethnicity, occupation or nationality).

He then goes on to explain and critique the two prevailing

approaches to identity formation in Western culture - “others decide” and “I decide”. He sees “others decide” exemplified in the life of celebrities, where the number of views or the tide of public opinion can elevate or decimate the reputation of those in the public arena. Whilst ordinary people might not experience quite the highs and lows of this, if we (perhaps unthinkingly) place our value in the hands of those around us, we are surrendering our security into their hands. This leaves us under pressure to keep performing well and with that nagging insecurity that others might change their evaluation of us at any time. Applying this particularly to LGBTQ+ people, Andrew shows that this approach to identity-formation can feed shame in those who don't “fit the mould”.

In the alternative popular approach to identity formation, “I decide”, we are encouraged to look within to find out who we really are. Andrew cites the Disney film “Frozen” as a perfect example of this approach, with Elsa singing “Let it go” as she expresses her inner self, having kept it hidden for so long. Despite the appeal of this approach, Andrew describes how both the lack of clarity and changing nature of our thoughts and feelings can make this

source of identity confusing and hard to find clarity from what are often conflicting voices within.

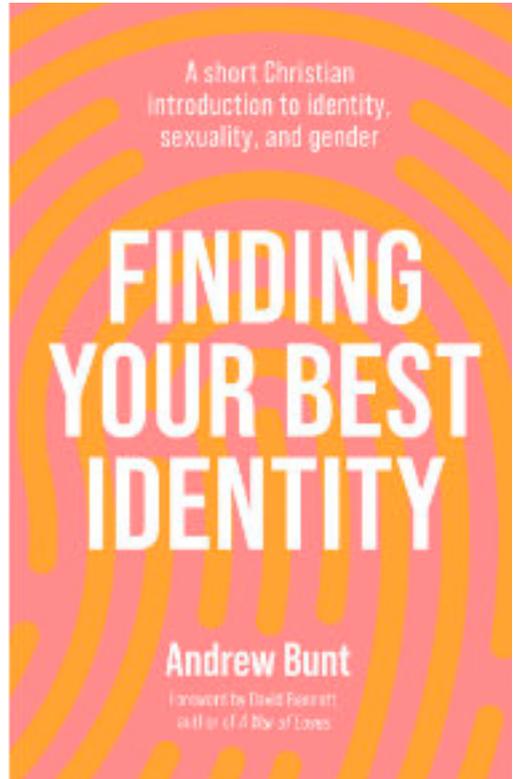
After revealing the flaws in both “others decide” and “I decide”, Andrew then argues persuasively that a God-given identity allows us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by receiving who we are from the One who knows us better than anyone else, including ourselves. An identity received from our creator gives every person inherent value. We can relax in the security of knowing that our identity is fixed - it doesn't depend on our performance, on our thoughts or feelings, or on what others think about us.

He then goes on to apply the “God decides” approach specifically to those of us who struggle with their sexuality or gender. He shows how an identity received from God gives us freedom from others' judgements, freedom from our own insecurities and freedom from shame, as we realise that we are defined by the Father's love rather than our unusual desires.

Andrew Bunt has written a book on identity that is concise, clear and practical. Whilst he applies his arguments particularly to matters of sexuality and gender, the principles in the book would be of great value to every person made in the image of God. There are study questions at the end of each chapter, which would help with reflection and unpacking of the material. These could be used to help meditate upon

the material, either personally before God, in a one-to-one setting, or in a small group setting. There is much profound truth covered in a mere 112 pages. Our challenge as we study it will be to apply it carefully to our lives in a way that reveals where we have misplaced our identity and how we receive it fully from the One who created our inmost beings (Psalm 139:13).

Stuart is TFT's Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. He can cook a reasonable curry but the highlight of his cooking repertoire is a cheese toastie.





Responding to “sticky” arguments

Some revisionist theologians’ arguments have sticking power because they resonate with our cultural norms. Put another way, they are persuasive because they draw on modern Western values and assumptions. This brief article considers four “sticky” arguments and how to respond well from a biblical perspective.

1. “The Bible has very few mentions of homosexuality”

Why it has traction today:

- If we see the Bible as just a set of “do nots”, then few mentions of same-sex sexual behaviour will make us think that God has little interest in it.
- Because the Bible doesn’t use the language of orientation, it’s easy to misread the Bible as being homophobic and hence worth ignoring.

Helpful responses:

- Every mention of homosexual acts in the Bible is clearly negative, whereas the one place for sexual activity is the marriage of one man and one woman.
- Ephesians 5 shows that sex within marriage between a man and a woman points towards the union between Christ and His church. This is a positive vision we can all get excited about, rather than focusing on mere prohibition.

2. “The Bible doesn’t prohibit stable, faithful same-sex relationships”

Why it has traction today:

- Modern unfamiliarity with classical culture and with assessing historical documents means that many will accept this argument at face value without properly evaluating the evidence.
- Our modern media is constantly promoting same-sex relationships as being fundamentally good.

Helpful responses:

- The Apostle Paul was well travelled throughout the ancient world, and was very aware of Greek and Roman influences on the early church.
- Greek writings of the time show plenty of awareness of permanent, faithful same-sex relationships.
- Paul intentionally constructed a new Greek word “*arsenokoitai*” to describe the broadest form of sexual activity between two men.

3. “It’s not fair for God to prohibit same-sex unions”

Why it has traction today:

- Even in the modern church, there are assumptions that surely a good God would want us to be happy now and avoid suffering.
- A person with a close friend or

relative wanting a same-sex relationship understandably doesn't want that person to "miss out".

Helpful responses:

- "It's not fair" starts with me deciding what is and is not fair. In contrast, the Bible starts with God defining fairness, even when we don't fully understand it.
- We need to recognise that we live in a broken world and that God wants to mature us through our submission to Him, even in ways that our world deems unfair.

4. "The biblical view is causing harm to LGBT people"

Why it has traction today:

- Widely circulated anecdotes give the impression that the church's approach to same-sex relationships is damaging LGBT people's mental health.
- The modern emphasis on "safe spaces" means that our society sees the exposure of people to unwelcome viewpoints as being

hateful.

Helpful responses:

- We need to be more precise about what we mean by "causing harm" and not rely on hearsay or sloppy research.
- Good quality recent research has shown that the mental health of Christians who are considering their sexuality depends more on how well the person integrates their sexual feelings into their religious framework than with the theological teaching of the church.
- We can do better in our churches to make them places that feel more welcoming, that challenge prejudice and that promote singleness.

This article is a summary of a longer conversation between Stuart Parker and Peter Ould on how to respond to "sticky" revisionist arguments.

"Sticky" arguments

Stuart and Peter explore some of the popular arguments against the orthodox biblical position on sexuality. They look at why these arguments seem to have so much resonance today and how we can best reply to them.

To listen to the full conversation, you can subscribe to "Ascend Higher" on the major podcasting platforms. Alternatively, listen directly from the TFT website using the link below:

truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts





THE BEAUTIFUL STORY

Review of God's Beautiful Story videos

God's *Beautiful Story* is a suite of free online resources to help evangelical church leaders engage with the Bible and enable their congregations to have good conversations about human sexuality and the implications of changes in understanding or practice in their church grouping.

Created by the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC), the materials follow on from *The Beautiful Story*, a film CEEC released at the launch of *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF), the Church of England's current dialogue on marriage, sexuality and gender. However, congregations, leaders and groups of elders in **any** denomination grappling with a revisionist view of Scripture on these core issues could use the materials.

The website (www.ceec.info/gods-beautiful-story.html) hosts six films to be watched in order. Each one lasts about five minutes and comes with two A4 sides of notes (apart from the penultimate one which has none and is fifteen minutes long). Each set of notes summarises the video's main points, suggests how church leaders might use the film and proposes discussion questions, points for prayer and reflection.

Further reading and other external resources are listed.

The materials aren't intended to argue for the traditional view. An orthodox position is, on the whole, assumed. Therefore, if your church is not clear on this, some sermons or small group Bible studies, based on two books by Ed Shaw listed in the notes to the introductory film, would probably be required before embarking on *God's Beautiful Story*.

The films are professionally produced. We hear the experiences of opposite-sex and same-sex attracted church leaders and members. The latter compellingly state how destructive it is for same-sex attracted Christians when any church departs from orthodox biblical teaching. The interviewees show integrity, vulnerability and honesty about the pain involved when working through these issues, which is refreshing given the confrontational approach we often see.

But it is the pointers for church leaders, on how churches might navigate a Bible-based way forward with those with whom they disagree, which make this material stand out.

The first three films have the most appeal to Christians from any church background.

Film 1 persuades us why and how God's people should speak about marriage and sexuality in society's open but confused debate.

Film 2 invites church leaders to start conversations by listening well, teaching humbly, being patient and getting help from others. It also reassures by reminding them to anticipate the new creation and that these discussions are an opportunity for all Christians to appreciate the gospel and their eternal marriage to Jesus more fully.

Film 3 exposes the differences between traditional and revisionist views and how churches can't be indifferent about them, given how deeply sexuality is linked to foundational beliefs about humanity and identity. It also highlights how indifference threatens the church's united witness.

Film 4 examines how the blessing of same-sex couples might seem a workable compromise, but will satisfy neither side of the debate. Here, the content becomes more focused on immediate questions facing the Church of England, but informs all churches dealing with proposed compromises on biblical marriage.

Film 5 allows us to learn from mistakes made by branches of the global Anglican church that have

rejected the Bible's teaching. We hear from those who are hurting after traditionalists and revisionists adopted theological compromise. While Christians from any denomination get to see how messy the situation is, they receive encouragement that reconciliation is possible (as happened in Pittsburgh, in the USA).

Film 6 is timetabled to appear later in 2022, and will explore how differentiation might look.

Finally, although the films are quick to watch, and the notes are easy to read, anyone leading discussions will have to be clued up on the wider arguments. The notes expect leaders to design sessions with their congregations in mind. This will require significant prayer, thought, planning and reading.

Whether or not you lead a church, why not watch the videos and (if appropriate and you're comfortable doing so) raise the possibility of using this resource?

I pray many Christians would engage with this free material and be better equipped to live and make wise decisions in line with God's blueprint for life.

Mark has been a member of TFT for about 15 years and enjoys leading Bible studies at the London church he attends. He's already making plans to be in Liverpool next May for the Eurovision Song Contest.



Why people change their theology

When Christians revise their understanding of the Bible's teaching on homosexuality, it is often not driven by a stringent re-evaluation of the historical biblical texts. It would appear that there is a variety of stimuli that cause the relaxation of the orthodox viewpoints.

The Bible speaks of a time to come when those who confess to belong to Jesus will desire to hear something new (2 Tim 4:3). They will search for teachers who will deliver what they want to hear, whether man-made doctrines or myths, rather than what God's Word declares. There can be many reasons one reaches for a revisionist position. I consider four of them in this article.

1. Fire and Brimstone

I grew up in a church where sex was barely mentioned. When it was, there was only reference to what was forbidden in the Bible and never about sex in heterosexual marriage being the greatest gift God has given to humanity. To step outside those clearly established boundaries was

to bring fire and brimstone upon oneself; prolific quoting of verses that spoke about being cast into hell was commonplace. Such teaching for me, and for many others, simply created an environment where there was no place for dialogue about healthy sexuality or discussion on how to adequately develop an approach to sexuality that was not culturally driven, but biblically appropriate. It is easy to "...vilify sins that we are least likely to commit", says Dr Preston Sprinkle.

By the age of eleven, becoming aware of my attraction to men, there was no-one who I could identify with, or even share my feelings with. Fear that God was going to condemn me to hell, because of the thoughts I had about men, gripped me and paralysed me for the first forty years of my life. I never spoke about my homosexual struggles within my church. I subsequently stepped out of Christian ministry because of the bullying of church elders. I had never experienced the true love of God in my life. Confused about my feelings for men, I believed the

church of Jesus Christ was my enemy. My views about homosexuality were no longer under the control of what the Bible taught.

“A more liberal viewpoint helped me justify my own homosexuality”

Despite spending seven years studying reformed theology at University, I quickly adopted a critical spirit towards those who taught a biblical sexual ethic. I believed that those guilty of homosexual sin were being condemned by many within the church whilst, ironically, the church was tolerating heterosexual sin, gossiping, lying and numerous other biblical prohibitions. Listening to others from a more liberal viewpoint helped me to justify my own homosexuality and characterise it, not as a sin, but because of the way I was born. This enabled me to silence the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality and see it as out of touch with the real world.

In speaking with others, I realise my story is one of many. There are many reasons once strong evangelical believers are now willing to tolerate or even espouse some of the liberal and unbiblical viewpoints being propounded today.

2. Compassion for Family

The changes taking place among orthodox believers may simply be prompted by the fact that they have a close friend or family member who has come out as gay. The relative or friend may have been a Bible-believing Christian for a long time, and therefore the orthodox believer may have begun to think that perhaps faith and homosexual practice are not incompatible. They start to entertain the possibility that the traditional view of same-sex relationships is judgemental and lacking in love.

Recently, an evangelical believer in Canada shared with me his own situation. Two of his sons have openly come out as gay and one of them is living in a same-sex relationship. They both clearly show evidence of the work of grace in their lives and dearly love the Lord. As we chatted, my friend admitted to struggling to hold the line that he was taught in theological college about homosexuality; he is well-versed in the teaching of scripture and certainly has read a great deal around the subject. He spoke about the tension that can develop between parents and their loved ones over the whole sexuality debate. He strives to be a good parent to his sons. He feels the alternative is to entertain the harsh view that Christians should “have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph 5:11) and therefore reject the behaviour of

his sons and them too. However, he believes as a parent that he needs to show the grace of God.

Another friend I know is struggling with his daughter, who says she won't return to church because her church is not willing to facilitate or bless same-sex weddings.

3. Lack of change in orientation

Another important reason orthodox evangelicals have modified their position is perhaps due to the heart wrenching stories of believers who they know personally, who have battled with their sexuality and begged God to change them to seemingly no avail.

This has led some such believers to commit suicide. On hearing of some who live with deep depression and despair or who take their own lives, this has led orthodox Christians to consider that God is unfair and cruel when the person clearly did not choose their orientation and prayed fervently for it to change.

4. Unkind treatment by the church

There is much evidence of gay people being derided and scorned by the Church. Those attracted to the gospel and person of Jesus Christ have sought to discover if God really condemns homosexuality. They find that the Church, based on its well-rehearsed rhetoric, sometimes can only see the sinner and not the person who Jesus died on the cross to save. The Church may be more known for "gay bashing" rather than it has been for demonstrating

the grace and love of God to every sinner. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised when people shift their viewpoint to a more liberal approach to scripture, if those seeking acceptance from the Church encounter harsh treatment and ostracism. The Church can portray itself as being anti-gay.

The saving Word of God

I cannot end this article without adding that, while many are changing their position, it does not mean that we should abandon the clear teaching of Scripture on same-sex practice. We should treat everyone with love and acceptance, in an environment of respect. We must be careful not to guarantee any change in this life that the Bible does not promise.

If we are to avoid further weakening of the orthodox position, the church must become more positive and engaging in humbly serving its Lord. It must devote itself to responding with grace to those who are lost and wrestling with sinful behaviour. There is beauty in God's authority. The Bible is captivating in its vision for growth and freedom in our many and varied struggles. God embraces and offers us hope for human flourishing.

Robert loves searching for antiques, especially Victorian men's tie pins. Recently he has become a bit of an antique himself, as he's just retired from lecturing in Computing.



Remaining faithful

The parents sitting before me had tears streaming down both their faces. Their 22-year-old daughter was now married to another woman. These Christian parents experienced understandable grief and heartache.

“It’s not just the pain over our daughter that’s so difficult—it’s the fact that grandparents and many of our friends have embraced it all. They all see us as the problem; we’re what’s wrong in the whole situation.” Though they believed that God’s Word was their guiding principle, they feared that they, too, might cave under the mounting pressure.

This couple’s fear is not unusual when facing these kinds of challenges. Siblings, grandparents, and friends of someone who identifies as LGBTQ+ or adopts LGBTQ+ theology all face similar trials when they are called to reflect both the truth and mercy of the gospel. How do we walk through this minefield, pursue humility in our own hearts, and yet remain firm in God’s Word? Here are a few things to consider.

Expect misunderstanding

Our culture’s man-centred theology is based on the heart’s desires, where there are no absolutes and everything is relative. When we take a contrary position, we become a threat and affront to others. Nowhere is this more evident today than in the debate about sexuality and the Bible. Believing that God speaks clearly and authoritatively about sex and sexuality is supposedly bigoted, unloving, and socially incorrect. You may be viewed as the problem or the enemy. Don’t let that shipwreck you! Expecting these responses and believing on Scripture’s reliability guards you from dismay when people react against your lack of approval or enthusiasm.

Engage and ask good questions

As others voice their disagreement with you, realise that all worldviews—how people see themselves, the world, and God—stem from past experiences, wounds, and powerful emotions wrapped around sinful and twisted hearts. While we cannot correct others’ views and convictions—

which is the work of the Holy Spirit—we can try to better understand them by diving more into their story, who they are, and why they believe what they believe. This usually happens through genuine listening and asking good questions, which often helps people drop their defences, leading to more productive, non-combative conversations.

Also, consider sharing your testimony, particularly highlighting your need of God's grace. Admittedly, being able to do this is a supernatural work, especially when it comes to our families, where emotions can run high and quickly escalate. But taking initiative in conversations like this can actually strengthen your faith and make you feel less defensive yourself.

Embrace the hurt that comes with being seen as the bad guy

Even though you may attempt the first two points above with sincerity, you may still experience real, ongoing pain and heartache. When we see family or friends pursuing a destructive path contrary to God's will and his Word, we often feel powerless and hopeless. I've found that many Christians who eventually adopt the mentality of "gay is okay with me and with God" usually do so because they simply feel worn down and want to be thought well of by others. You may feel like you are alone in a desert, barely holding your own with your beliefs about God's Word—but know that

Jesus is with you. He too was in those desert places as he obeyed the Father and stood on Scripture.

“Scripture’s reliability guards you from dismay when people react against your lack of approval or enthusiasm”

Remember these are spiritual issues

Ephesians chapter six reminds us that there are often forces, behind the scenes, invested in keeping those we love in confusion and error. Ultimately, only God can address the spiritual issues of family and friends' blindness and rebellion. If you constantly feel pressured to change others' views or make them see the light, you will likely end up frustrated and perhaps even begin to question your own beliefs.

Those who walk in blindness need what Tim Keller calls a “self-quake” and a “God-quake.” God is the one who must intervene to change hearts. Can you relinquish (not abandon) your family, friends, or loved one to the Lord? Can you trust God to write his story in their hearts and lives in his way and in his timing? The gospel is the greatest need for those who pursue sexuality on their own terms—along with those who agree with them and buy into worldly sexuality.

Bathe everything in prayer. Pray for those who disagree with you. This is pretty self-explanatory! Prayer both softens our hearts and allows us to seek the best in and for those who we love. You may feel incapable of doing anything about what others believe—or believe about you; for the most part, you are! However, we can pour out all of our troubles, fears, confusion, and hopes at the throne of grace, as well as gain the courage to boldly persevere.

Hold on to the Word yourself and seek the support of others

You are vulnerable to outside voices tempting you to give in, but the best remedy for standing firm for the long haul is to remain in God's Word, continually steeping yourself in his perspective and truth. When I speak about how the Bible should inform our sexuality, someone invariably comes up to me and says, "Thank you. I needed to hear that and be reminded of

the real truth again." We always need to be reminded of the truths of Scripture. But we also need the help and encouragement of others who will walk with us, shoulder our fears and burdens, and hear our pain and confusion—people who will always point us to the Saviour and the truths of God's Word.

This blog post was originally published on 5 May 2022 at harvestusa.org

John is the founder of Harvest USA, based in Philadelphia, USA. He started the ministry as a volunteer while still in seminary and has a deep burden to see those who struggle with pornography, homosexuality and other sexual addictions experience changed lives through Jesus Christ.



Recommended Resources

The 2023 Recommended Resources leaflet is now available in printed form and in electronic form on our website.

National Conference 2022

"Show me your face..." These words were the soft undercurrent of a series of four talks given by Julian Hardyman at the 2022 National Conference, for which members gathered on a mostly sunny weekend. The teaching, entitled "Jesus, Lover of my Soul", came with a tough challenge: can we show Him our face and accept His love?

For this rather new TFT member, the question came at a good time. I joined TFT in late 2020, during "peak pandemic" and also - as life would have it - "peak divorce"! There's nothing like a constellation of crises to set us either adrift in the world or scrambling for God. I was grateful to discover TFT and find support to cling to the latter option. As it turned out, I wasn't alone in my sexuality or my Christian ethics; nor was I alone in the solitude it can bring, even in life's most joyful seasons. If the world deemed me crazy, TFT reminded me that it was a battle worth fighting, and that I was fighting in very good company.

With a programme of talks, small group sessions, prayer meetings, outings and home-cooked meals, the weekend was just structured enough to keep things moving, whilst allowing plenty of opportunities for fellowship and moments to slow down and breathe it all in. The historic landscaped grounds invited strolls and quiet prayers of gratitude, aided by lovely autumn weather. The highlight for me was the praise and worship - so powerful that it felt more like an old-school revival than a conference. I was repeatedly struck, as we sent our harmonies heavenward, that this was how Christian worship was intended to be, and this was how close and personal God longed to be in our hearts.

Jesus, *Lover of my soul*? I'd heard of Jesus as liberator, saviour, jail-breaker, miracle-worker, promise-keeper, light in the darkness... but *Lover of my soul*? It's a hard teaching for this rather road-worn believer. But it's knowledge and experience I'll carry resolutely forward, especially as the world leans in heavily with its own messages of non-forgiveness, non-redemption and (above all) non-love.

Thank you to my many new TFT friends, for a powerful and unforgettable weekend. I hope to see you all again soon!

Ric lives in the US, where he has been a college professor almost long enough to qualify as an old bore. He spends most of his spare time on his back porch overlooking the woods, where he catches the occasional glimpse of a bobcat.