

# Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

Spring 2023



**Encouraging single leaders**

In this edition, we are focusing on single people who are leaders in the church, who can sometimes face additional hurdles to taking on leadership roles. Some of the articles and testimonies recognise the real challenges of taking on leadership responsibilities without the support of a spouse, but they also reveal how the unmarried leader can be "single-minded" in their service (1 Cor 7:32, 34) without the distractions of family life.

My intention is that this magazine may be an encouragement to all those who serve, or are considering serving, as single leaders. I also hope that it will challenge others to recognise how much unmarried leaders are often giving to the life of their churches, and show us how we can be better at supporting them.

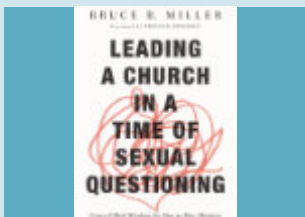
**By Stuart, TFT Director**



## Life as a single pastor

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Andy describes his experiences as an unmarried pastor at a church in Oxford over a period of 19 years, including both the tough moments and the benefits that his singleness brought to the role.



## Review: Leading a church in a time of sexual questioning

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Adam reviews this book about how to help a church think through what the Bible says about sexuality and how to apply it.



## A rarer type of women

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Sophie shares her story of growing up feeling like a boy and how she eventually came to accept herself as a female.

# How my singleness declares the gospel

**M**arriage reflects the gospel by representing Christ's love for the church. This is a glorious truth I have heard proclaimed at countless weddings and whenever marriage is spoken of from the pulpit or in Bible study. Yet on the other hand, when singleness is brought up, the only positive thing you hear about it is that those who are single can be undivided in their service to God. This, too, is a biblical perspective (1 Corinthians 7) that rightly should be taught, but the overarching message that tends to be communicated in the church is that those who are married have, entwined in their identity, an innate reflection of Gospel truth, while those who are single have the outward practical benefit of having more time.

## Reflecting Gospel truths

Looking beyond 1 Corinthians 7, a biblical theology of singleness not only speaks to the undivided attention that singles can give to the things of God, but it becomes clear that healthy singleness also points to something greater, innately reflecting Gospel truths. Peter Scazzero, in his book "The Emotionally Healthy Leader", goes further in saying that if you are single, "singleness is your loudest gospel message." He describes this saying that, "as a single leader, you bear witness to the sufficiency and fullness of Jesus through your celibacy" and "you bear witness to

the reality of the resurrection in a unique way." Let's consider each of these more fully below.

The sufficiency and fullness of Jesus is reflected in those who remain celibate because, rather than giving their bodies away and fulfilling sexual pleasure, they instead find satisfaction in Christ. In other words, celibate Christians show that a relationship with Jesus is enough for a fulfilled life. I am part of a TFT Barnabas group, a support group that has been reading the book "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" by Julian Hardyman, who was also a speaker at a recent TFT conference. What has stood out to me is the intimacy that we enjoy with Christ. He calls me beloved.

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**"Healthy singleness also points to something greater, innately reflecting gospel truths"**

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## Christ and the Church

Believers who are single *will be* part of a marriage, that which is between Christ and the church. Jesus calls himself the bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29) and the kingdom of heaven is described like a wedding banquet (Matthew 25:1). In Revelation 19 we see that "...*the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*" This is the ultimate marriage to

which earthly marriages serve as a signpost. Singleness says that the real thing, the union with Christ, is so much better and more important than just the sign.

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## “We have a responsibility to steward our singleness well”

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Singleness also bears witness to the resurrection by focusing on what is eternal rather than what is temporary. In the Old Testament, marriage and procreation were the primary means through which God grew His covenant people. The first command God gave to mankind was, “*Be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1:28). Through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on, the covenant promise was carried through physical offspring. In his book, “A Biblical Theology of Singleness”, Barry Danylak continues to trace this important connection between offspring and covenantal blessing throughout the Old Testament.

This is the culture into which Isaiah wrote, “*For thus says the Lord: to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.*” (Isaiah 56:4-5). In this new perspective that the prophets are looking towards, there is something *better* than sons and daughters here

on earth. Those who keep the covenant get a name that is everlasting. That was a radical perspective in a culture where blessing was dependent on offspring.

### Future reality

Isaiah 53 looks towards the Messiah and His death that will bring salvation. We know this to be pointing to the work of Christ on the cross. In this context of salvation, Isaiah says, “*He shall see his offspring*” (Isaiah 53:10). The idea of offspring continues to be turned counterculturally in the New Covenant. Isaiah 53, in the context of the atonement at the coming Messiah’s death, says that he shall see his offspring (Is. 53:10).

Galatians 3:7 and 26 describe being sons of Abraham and sons of God by faith. Jesus, during His time of earthly ministry, also redefines familial relationships (Matthew 12:46-48). So, it is spiritual regeneration and faith in the atoning work of Christ that creates the new covenant people and family. It is this family, the church, that is eternal. John Piper describes church family saying, “relationships in Christ are more permanent and more precious than relationships in families.”

That is good news. A few years ago, I stood at my grandfather’s grave in the days following his funeral. I reflected on my family heritage, yet I grieved that I was watching our family line begin to die out, as

neither my cousin, my sister or I seem likely to have children. By remaining steadfast in my singleness, I am saying that I trust the promises that the future reality will be even better. By investing in my spiritual children, those with whom I am teaching and leading in the ways of Christ, and finding deep and meaningful relationships with my brothers and sisters in Christ, I am reflecting the importance of spiritual family and the eternity of the church. Of course, having children in your earthly family is a great blessing, and there is nothing wrong with that desire, but for anyone, married or single, to whom God has not given children, there is an opportunity to show that what is eternal is more important than what is temporary.

### Satisfaction in Christ

For those of us who are single, if singleness is our loudest gospel message, we have a responsibility to steward our singleness well. This starts with our own relationship with Christ. As we grow in our love

of Christ and His Word, He will strengthen our faith which allows us to be fully satisfied in Him. As these truths shape the way we see ourselves and our singleness, they begin to flow out of that singleness to be evident to those around us.

Sam Allberry summarizes these ideas saying, *“Marriage shows us the shape of the gospel in that it models the covenant promises that God has made to us in Christ. Singleness shows us the sufficiency of the gospel because it shows us the reality of what marriage points to—which is our own relationship with Jesus.”* May those of us who are single pursue and embrace healthy singleness, knowing that in doing so, we shine forth these Gospel truths.

*Sarah loves all kinds of outdoor adventures. She also plays several musical instruments and uses music as part of her full-time ministry.*







## From paganism to Christ

I was born in Shrewsbury and raised in the somewhat odd border town of Oswestry, where I think it is fair to say I retain some rather fond memories of my early years. In my primary school years I, of course, had not developed any real identity or serious interests that would define who I was. Perhaps maybe apart from being sucked into playing music, where I was once a brass band member for a good ten years. Once I entered adolescence, apart from the usual teenage rebellion, I started experiencing hugely challenging situations, which rocked the stability I had been used to as a child. I now praise God that I had a lovingly supportive, albeit rather strange family.

When I moved to secondary school, I was blissfully ignorant of a hostile outside world. I didn't have any major personal responsibilities and felt quite indifferent about this next stage in my education. I did lose friends from my previous school, as I moved to an entirely different school to my peers, but on reflection, my lack of emotion

was most likely caused by autism. Even today I struggle to experience emotion. For people with autism, emotion is disordered and experienced in extremes - either far too much or, like me, far too little.

Not knowing anything about autism at the time, I only now understand that it defined the relationships I had with others in my new school. I spent the majority of my first year quite alone and cut off from everyone else, like there was some great barrier between us. I was bullied mercilessly. I did eventually make a rather good friend by the end of that year. To my ignorance, it never crossed my mind that that person would unknowingly reveal to me my same-sex attraction. I was twelve years old at the time.

Over the next year, my feelings and attraction for my then best friend grew, but I did not think anything of it. As far as I was concerned, it was normal. Though I did know that the word 'gay' was often associated with feelings for the

same sex, it was such a secretive and insulting word. I did have an interest in girls, but I had become so infatuated with my best friend, I never thought about girls. My strong feelings for my best friend were becoming a problem. I was lonely and what was worse, from my perspective, the boy I was so infatuated with was with a girl. My jealousy was like a raging furnace, fuelled by my selfish desires and loneliness. It reached a point where I confessed my feelings towards him, which was the worst thing I could have done.

I felt I was often singled out during my adolescence, which resulted in some rather unpleasant encounters. Not long after my great confession to my best friend, I started to hear talk of my, as people put it, “perversion.” My school experience got increasingly worse, until I fell into a gaping pit of darkness, depression, anxiety and pure, intangible anger. My sister became incredibly ill due to the amount of bullying she was also subjected to. She became the focal point in my family. It was the start of seven years of what I thought was hell. I felt unable to address my problems and started exploring alternative ways of coping.

I discovered the world of Celtic polytheism and the occult. The practice of this interest didn't get too entrenched, but it was the one thing that made me feel secure. Previously, I had bumped into Christians who came across as being very disturbed or angry

about my same-sex attraction. I didn't like Christians; I didn't want anything to do with them and had crossed Christianity off my list of possible religions I would be interested in.

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**“I fell into a gaping pit of darkness, depression, anxiety and pure, intangible anger”**

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Jumping forward a few years, I left school and flitted between jobs in a pharmacy, in retail, gardening and as a carer. I had no clear purpose or drive and felt like a sojourner who was anchor and rudderless. By this time, I had already had two relationships with men. I was with a man for the best part of three and a half years, but all was not well. Because of my now strong beliefs rooted in the Celtic polytheistic faith and my fascination with the occult, and due to how myself and my sister were treated by others, my heart was swelling with anger. I'm not even sure I could say I had a heart. Anger became the only emotion I could feel and I basked in its manifestation. I hated people with a passion I could not even imagine now. I was lost in that gaping pit of darkness, with only evil desires occupying my thoughts.

Looking back, I am not able to recognise myself; I feel exceedingly grateful for the amount of grace I receive today.

I was 22. In the Autumn of 2020, after celebrating Samhain, or Halloween, as it's more widely known, I started experiencing a series of "nightmares". Now I call them dreams. You shall see why momentarily.

My only experience of Christianity and encounters with Christians were, in the majority, rather negative. But I was nevertheless acquainted with people, whom I would refer to, as my "favourite Christian friends". I was never made aware of the Gospel or the meaning of Christianity by them or by anyone else. All I knew was that they proclaimed they were Christian and that they went to a church building every Sunday. All in all, I had no knowledge or understanding of the message that Christ had brought to the world.

These "nightmares" were set in the dark and I would envision many crosses dotted around the place. I would follow familiar people, who wore crosses, up a hill to this rather fancy, but quite impractical building, full of gaping holes. Bright sunlight shone through the holes in the walls. Even I was wearing a cross! The building had a classic church building shape, with its tower and long grand hall, but the walls resembled that of vine-like roots, which were made of stone.

These dreams continued for about a week or so until I had an overpowering urge to pray, to fall on my knees and call out to God.

He was saying to me, "Follow me, follow me" and I said, "Yes Lord. Here I am". This now very much reminds me of the relationship between Samuel and the Lord in 1 Samuel 3. It was personal, so powerful and so overwhelmingly beautiful. I gave my heart to Him, my soul to Him. I wept tears of relief, but also with sorrow, as I knew in my heart what it meant for my same-sex attraction and my relationship with the man I was with. Six months later, after a very rocky start to my relationship with God, I joined a church where I am now, delightfully happy.

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**"Scripture was so clear...  
giving me the strength to  
take up my cross and  
follow Christ"**

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God had delivered me into the hands of a church family, who would guide my desires and my heart in living more for Him and that of course came with a great cost. After Halloween, this time, I had decided to make that sacrifice for Christ. Scripture was so clear, yet so empowering and soul-nurturing, giving me the strength to take up my cross and follow Christ. I had to end my same-sex relationship, which only deepened mine with Christ. I could not live without Christ or His word. But if I can assure you of anything, it would be that Christ is worthy of it all. God's Word and His holy Scriptures are the foundation of my life. My identity is in Him.



*“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:8*

I was asked this question by my fellow brothers in Christ, “If you could press a button that removed your same-sex attraction (SSA), would you?” In response to this question, I can assuredly answer “no”. The struggles and sufferings I experience with my SSA have only deepened my relationship with God. If I did not have that as my struggle, what would my relationship with God look like?

*“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit” – 1 Peter 3:18.*

*Tom joined TFT in the summer of 2022 and it has been one of the best decisions he has made. He has returned to college, as God has called him into furthering his service. He just can't stop talking about the undeserving, overwhelming grace of God.*





## Life as a single pastor

A few years ago, I visited a church to preach. I vividly remember the small talk with somebody before the service. “I assume you are married with kids,” they said. “No. I’m single actually,” I replied. They were somewhat surprised. “Oh! Have you never found anybody you liked?” And then an altogether different suggestion struck them. “Or have you never found anybody who likes you?”

I was one of the pastors of Woodstock Road Baptist Church in Oxford for 19 years before finishing last summer to lead a ministry training course and work with Living Out. Across that time, most people outside the church assumed that as a pastor I must be married – although generally people didn’t express that quite in the manner above. Woodstock Road itself was wonderful. The elders knew about my sexuality before my

appointment as pastor. The church didn’t and initially most assumed I would get married (and a few, in a kind but possibly misguided manner, told me they were praying this would happen). However, when I spoke publicly about my sexuality ten years into the role, I could not have wished for a better response. In all my years there, nobody said that I would be a better pastor if I were married.

### Tough moments

Nevertheless, being a single pastor had its tough moments. The nature of all ministry is that we give of ourselves. You are visiting somebody in hospital, a church member in the midst of agonising bereavement, a friend going through depression or a long-standing Christian talking about their doubt issues for the first time. As you listen to people’s pain, you inevitably share in some of that yourself - or at least you should do!

Or there are the leadership meetings where there is a difficult decision to be made, where you know that whatever the final call, some people you love are going to be hurt or disappointed. Alongside the thrill of new Christians, there is the pain of those deciding to leave the church. In other words, there is an inevitable cost to doing ministry. *“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus,”* Paul says as he describes serving others (2 Corinthians 4:10).

Of course, what makes that much harder is doing it alone. Sometimes the challenge was coming back to an empty house after a painful meeting. It would have been great to have somebody to download on, whereas instinctively I would stew on whatever event I’d just come from. I have always had a tendency to overwork and being single meant there was nobody to tell me to say no. At times, self-pity would creep in. The pattern of thinking would go something like this - “I’m trying to help lots of people. I’m bearing the emotional cost of that. But who’s doing it for me? I’ve just got nothing left to give.” Now that was at best a half-truth: there were loads of people in the church and elsewhere who loved me and cared about me. But the challenge of singleness is that you are aware that you are not the number one human priority for anybody else – understandably that place will go to family members. And recognising that made life lonely and left me wondering where to find the resources to keep serving.

### Comparisons with married life

Yet, for all the times of pain, I don’t regret serving as a single pastor for a moment. Indeed, it was possible to see the benefits. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul is profoundly realistic about marriage - *“Those who marry will face many troubles in this life.”* (v28).

Those who are single are set free from this. Instead of needing to focus on how to please their spouse, they can have one clear goal. *“An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs- how he can please the Lord.”* (v32). As a pastor I definitely saw this was the case as I looked at my fellow church leaders. Yes. It was a challenge to go from a challenging meeting to an empty house. But I’m not sure that was more difficult than going home to a sick child, to another facing problems at school or just the constant busyness of making sure everybody had what they needed.

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**“It was the pain of singleness that enabled me to care for others and forced me to depend on the Lord”**

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Occasionally I would listen to friends serving as pastors who would talk about family problems and then church problems and never really having time to rest and I would wonder, “How on earth do they manage it?” More than that, being a pastor removed any sense of naivety that marriage was always

straightforward. Part of a single person's problem is that we go to joyful weddings and assume that marriage is always like that. But, in doing pastoral care, I sat with enough couples in difficulty to know that that really wasn't the case. Indeed, I came to a clear conclusion - being single may be more difficult than being happily married, but it is easier than being unhappily married.

As a single pastor, therefore, I did have more freedom than my married counterparts. In part, this did make me more flexible and available for ministry. But it also enabled me to have time to enjoy good things in creation that refreshed me - sport, reading, walks and so on. I well remember talking to another church leader with several small children. "Did you see the football?" I asked. "Andy, I am a married pastor with small kids. Of course not!" he replied.

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**“Being single may be more difficult than being happily married, but it is easier than being unhappily married”**

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### **Benefits of singleness**

Perhaps more seriously, I was aware that there were benefits even in the pain of singleness.

2 Corinthians has been a source of constant encouragement for me in

ministry. In the letter, Paul is candid about the sufferings he has faced and the deeply painful thorn in the flesh that he endures. My sexuality and singleness have been my thorns. But throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul insists that it is the pain that enables ministry, helping him to know the comfort of Jesus and so comfort others who are suffering (chapter 1), showing that the power is from God and making him more like Jesus (chapter 4) and preventing him from becoming proud (chapter 12). I empathise with that. Other than my sexuality and singleness, life has been smooth for me. I would have been a rubbish pastor had I been happily married, because I would have struggled to talk to those in pain. It was the pain of singleness that enabled me to care for others and forced me to depend on the Lord.

There was one other benefit to singleness that I only realised on my last day as pastor. We had a lunch where some in the church managed to find nice things to say! One single lady commented how much it had meant to her to have a single pastor. She sensed that I could empathise with her and it showed the church giving dignity to those who are single. As it happens, the church was in a good position in having elders who were both married and single. We complemented each other well.

They did more marriage prep than I did (though I did enjoy preaching at lots of weddings) whilst I spent

more time with the single adults. And hopefully as a leadership team, we communicated that marriage and singleness were equally good gifts in God's eyes.

### How I persevered

So what helped me to persevere through the joys and challenges of being a single pastor? Friends were massively important. Of course, friends aren't around all the time, but their encouragement meant that the loneliness was sporadic rather than constant. For most single people, close friends have a similar emotional importance to a nuclear family for those who are married. That's certainly been true for me. I am part of a group of six church leaders spread around the country that meets for 24 hours three times a year. There's real trust and openness there and they became my main sounding board for advice. But alongside this, I worked hard to develop friendships more locally. I have to confess to being an off - the - scale introvert (I find my own company endlessly fascinating!) which meant that I generally loathed small talk. But the benefit of this was that most of my friendships went deep quite quickly. Within those friendships, there was the joy of being known.

Over time, I could begin to spot the lie that my self-pity told me that nobody cared.

But, above all, the Lord cares. *"An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs."* I reckon I was a lousy single pastor when I focused on what I didn't have. And I did some good as a single pastor when I looked to the Lord and fixed my attention on Him. I found two aspects of the Lord's character particularly important. One was His sympathy. I love the fact that Jesus is fully human, was single Himself and so, according to Hebrews 2, completely able to feel for us and with us. In the deepest sense, I was never the only one in the house, for He was always with me. Pouring out my heart to Him and thanking Him for His presence was generally helpful. But the other beautiful truth is that He is the bridegroom.

Singleness may be painful but its only temporary. I'm looking forward to the wedding day. *"Sorrowful yet rejoicing"* is another description that Paul uses for ministry. It's also phrase that describes life as a single pastor.

*Andy is Training Director for Living Out and South Central Gospel Partnership. He is a northerner in exile based in Oxford, trying to persuade the locals there is no "r" in bath.*

*Andy will be the main speaker at the 2023 TFT National Conference.*





## Being an unmarried elder

**I**ndependent evangelical churches very rarely appoint single men as elders. Personally, I don't know any other single elders. The reasons for this are cultural, historical and a mis-reading of Bible teaching. The key texts used in the argument against single elders are 1 Timothy 3:2 where the elder is to be the husband of 'but one wife' and Titus 1:6 which again talks about the elder being a husband of 'but one wife' and 'whose children believe'. If you follow through this line of interpretation, the teaching in Titus also implies that a man who is married, but without children, is also prohibited from the role of elder as would be a widower. Other texts are used to shore up this position. Those who understand the original Greek much better than I ever could, argue that the focus of this 'but one wife' phrase is about sexual purity and fidelity. As a single man in an eldership role, I need therefore to ensure that my Christian walk is morally pure. I am not restricted by God from the role of elder because I am wife-less.

I have been given the blessing of a being a member of a church that accepts this understanding of Bible teaching. The membership also recognises the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 about how the state of singleness can enable a person to serve the Lord wholeheartedly given that they do not have family commitments which need attention.

The result is that two years ago the church invited me to join the eldership. In this article, I reflect on the encouragements and challenges I have faced and how the Lord enables me to serve in this role.

### Deepening my faith

In the economy of God, serving Him and His people leads not to deprivation for individuals, but to great blessing. I think I always understood this, but since taking on eldership responsibilities, the truth of it has become more and more apparent. I have been reminded that the church, local and universal, is the apple of God's eye and He is building it. A church is not mine or yours, but His. The result is that I



must rely on the builder to do the work only He can do. The way to do this is to pray, and do so continually.

I have seen my own prayer life take off as I realise that much of what I am involved in is beyond my control and often beyond my understanding. Of course, as we pray, we see how God loves to answer prayer. The result for me has been a strengthening of my faith with an increasing reliance on God.

During the last two years, I have witnessed some terrible things said and done by people who claim to be believers. I have feared at times for the church and its people. I have been at my wits' end in some situations, wondering what will happen next. To pray and trust God was the only thing to do. Surprise, surprise! This is the place where God meets us and rescues us from our fears and doubts. He has proved completely reliable. His ways are far above ours and it has been a privilege to be involved in His work.

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**“His ways are far above ours and it has been a privilege to be involved in His work”**

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### **Finding support**

Being a single man has had its challenges in these circumstances. I have needed to recognise that I am a part of a team of elders and that I need to share with them all what is going on for me. I need to hold

myself accountable to them and lead a transparent life. Not easy when many of my struggles with same-sex attraction have involved shame and seeking to cover myself up and hide from others. Again, the Lord enables and has provided support for me. I am grateful for a network of wise friends who complement peer support. Many have extensive pastoring experience and have been more than willing to share their own learning with me. I have also developed and deepened my accountability relationships, which add rigour to my walking with the Lord in purity.

The result is that, whilst I am single, I have not considered myself single-handed in the task of eldership.

### **Using my gifts and experiences**

Before I was asked to be an elder, I had a growing sense that the Lord was drawing me into caring pastorally in a church context. I was conscious of His prompting. I prayed about it and waited. Before long, and out of the blue, an invitation came to consider joining the eldership. It seemed that the Lord had been preparing me for this time. I also became aware that my gifts and experiences also matched some of the needs of the church and contributed to those of the existing eldership. Some say that, if you do not feel drawn to the work of eldership, then don't do it! I was honest about my experiences of same-sex attraction. I shared my testimony with the eldership. To my surprise, they shared some of this

detail with the wider church and yet it did not prompt concern. This encouraged me and subsequently can see how past experiences are enabling me to serve people. I am continually amazed at how God uses that which I consider the most painful in my life for the building up of His church. It is yet another illustration of how God's ways are so far beyond ours.

A couple of areas of how elders serve in my church prompted some anxiety. We regularly lead services, including the Lord's Supper, and also teach regularly. Neither of these I feel are my strong points, especially preaching on a Sunday. Thankfully, 'teaching' is widely defined and I can contribute in various ways. To my surprise, I was encouraged into the pulpit one Sunday to preach. The Lord blessed me and others, so I am contemplating preaching again in the not too distant future. Becoming an elder has definitely resulted in being stretched in my faith and increased my willingness to serving in new ways.

### Being single

Becoming an elder as a single man has prompted me to take even more care of how I 'manage' myself and my life. I can see dangers in immersing myself in church work to the extent I don't keep sufficient watch on how I am living my own life. For example, I know I need relationships with people who ask me how I am doing. Yes, people in my church do ask, but I need



conversations where I do not feel slightly guarded. In psychological terms, I am even more conscious of the need for appropriate boundaries in different contexts. I enjoy those conversations where I can talk about nothing in particular. They are a gift and an opportunity to relax with those who know me well and feel they can be rude to me!

Over a third of church members live a single life. Being single is enabling me to connect, support and empathise with them. I can ask questions which married friends might not think about asking. I have developed formal and informal accountability relationships with some. Having the role of elder gives me permission to ask some pointed questions of people and opens up conversations that previously I would not have had. My knowledge of same-sex attraction is allowing me to teach and support people facing questions in this area of life



and relationships. I find plenty of opportunities to signpost the work of TFT!

On a practical note, I do have more flexibility than others when responding to needs. My employment also gives me freedom to meet people for a coffee at odd times of the day. I

am proving the truth of Paul's teaching about singleness, that it gives opportunities to serve that others might not have.

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**“My knowledge of same-sex attraction is allowing me to teach and support people”**

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### **Spiritual warfare**

Sometimes the term 'under-shepherd of the flock' is used to describe the work of an elder or pastor. This draws upon the teaching of Peter in 1 Peter 5:2, where he encourages the elders to consider themselves as the shepherds of God's flock. The Chief Shepherd is Christ and we are to do His will and work. Indeed, He will hold me

accountable for what I do in the role. Eldership is a heavy task and without depending fully on God, I am not up to it. It is a spiritual task. The wolves are always on the lookout for those they can devour and lead away from Christ. I have become acutely aware of the need for me to pray for church members regularly and in an informed way. I find it easy to fill my hours with activity and need to set time aside for prayer. I also need to prioritise studying God's word and helping others to do likewise. In this way, they will become more aware of God and His call upon their lives. There is certainly much practical care I and others need, but the spiritual care has to be the focus in my role.

I am in the war myself and sometimes it feels very much like it when attacks on the sheep occur. So, I need to submit to His Word and also to my fellow elders. This is never easy for someone so self-willed as me, but is an essential discipline if I am to be a faithful and useful servant. Please pray for me. Indeed, please pray for all leaders single or married that they may stand firm in the war and serve you well on Christ's behalf.

*Stefan is busy discovering the joys of the North after living mainly in the South for most of his life. He is, evidently, a big fan of large Yorkshire portions and cake!*



# Book Review

“Leading a Church in a Time of Sexual Questioning” by Bruce B. Miller

£11.99 paperback. 224 pages, May 2019 Thomas Nelson

On the back cover of “Leading a Church in a Time of Sexual Questioning”, the claim is that this book offers “...biblical guidance for ministering God’s love in a sexually diverse culture.” The words “God’s love” are circled in red, emphasising that central theme. Compassion drives this book. Miller shows great care and concern, and urges his readers to exhibit those same qualities, for the queer teenagers who are being raised in a Christian home, the gay man who has walked away from his Christian faith and the lesbian couple who have never even been in a church. He exhorts this posture of compassion through sharing relevant statistics, data and personal stories of the sometime distressing scenarios faced by LGBTQ+ people. Above all, his obvious declaration of the gospel and the Lordship of Jesus Christ is foundational in demonstrating the grace of God.

Love moves the book on, but Miller is never judgemental of those who wrestle with following the call to show the same concern for the struggler that he espouses and reaches out to them. He empathises, both with the reader who grew up in a culturally conservative world, and the pastor

who will have difficulties ministering in a similar milieu. He challenges those people to take a more Christ-centered posture of compassion, but never stands above them wagging a finger.

Its two great strengths are these: it makes love central and it covers a wide range of topics. There is a biblical overview of the purpose of sex and the issues surrounding same-sex sexuality. It delves into tricky questions of identity, attractions and orientation. Miller takes us to Jesus as his example of how we should welcome all people; how do we engage with sexual sinners, whilst not affirming a sinful relationship? He offers wisdom on leading people who are hostile to LGBT+ individuals, as well as guidance on helping LGBTQ+ people live holy lives. There is an overview of the current debate on covenantal friendship. In the last few chapters, this practical book takes it up a gear by offering a liturgy of healing for those who are sexual sinners, with advice on issues surrounding church membership, baptism, marriage and many other topics.

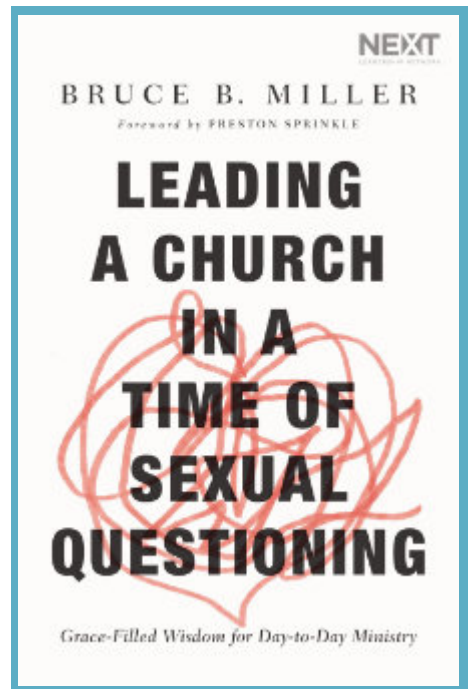
I think this is a good book and I’m glad I’ve read it, but I have two critiques. Firstly, is it too broad? The book covers so many topics

and it does so very quickly. Sometimes I think this works well - the discussion on orientation was incredibly stimulating and made me want to read more, but I think Miller made his point and I'm glad we moved on. At other times, it felt like we shift from issue to issue without properly discussing each one. He has a section on how we should deal with those who hold a different viewpoint on marriage to us. It is not a bad section, but it is just too brief. The argument is complicated and needs to be fleshed out for it to be of any use. A pastor friend of mine is also reading this book. He found the discussion on church membership to be so simple that it didn't aid him in the difficult decisions he needs to make.

My second critique is something I felt while reading the book, but my pastor friend didn't. I didn't think Bruce Miller was saying anything new. One thing I liked about the book was the number of sources he used; he quotes from theologians and same-sex attracted Christians. But this meant that I was often reading ideas I had already read before from the original sources. However, being a same-sex attracted Christian worker, I've now read a fair few books on sexuality, marriage and the Christian, so maybe because of my own broad input, I'm being unfair. My reading buddy (heterosexual) pastor friend hasn't read as much, and he really appreciated the wide perspective that was offered. To conclude, I'm glad Miller has

written this book. It is undergirded with God's love and his sincere intention is to equip Christian ministers to widen their outlook and overcome the potential obstacles they encounter in understanding and reaching those who struggle with same-sex attraction. It wouldn't be recommended reading if you've already comprehensively read round this topic. But, I would definitely read it, if you want a really good introduction to some complicated questions.

*Adam is probably the tallest clergyman in the Church of England. When he is not hitting his head against doors, he likes going to fitness classes and meeting up with friends.*







## Is the Bible positive about singleness?

**W**hen looking at this question, “is the Bible positive about singleness?”, it’s easy for us to jump straight to the Apostle Paul’s verdict, “*I wish that all men were [unmarried] as I am*” – 1 Cor 7:7. But how do we reconcile this with the consistent emphasis on marriage and filling the land throughout the Old Testament? This seems to be one of God’s priorities from the start, beginning with God’s command to Adam and Eve to “*be fruitful and multiply*” – Gen 1:28.

### Old Testament view on singleness

The Old Testament is almost silent on singleness. Instead, it focuses on the goodness of marriage and children. For example, God’s verdict on Adam was that he needed a fellow worker to help him look after the garden: “*it is not good for man to be alone*” – Gen 2:18. The first book of the Bible is preoccupied with “offspring” (eg Genesis 3:15) and is has genealogies (long lists of “X was the son of Y...”) dotted throughout. Before Jesus, singleness was exceptional – for example, the prophet Jeremiah was commanded not to marry, perhaps using the unusualness of this situation to make a particular

prophetic point (Jeremiah 16:1-4).

### ‘Offspring’ promised

Central to the narrative of the Old Testament are God’s promises to Abram, which focused on entering the land and being blessed with many descendants:

*“Look toward heaven, and number the stars... So shall your offspring be.”* – Genesis 15:5

In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Moses expanded upon God’s promises to Abraham. Moses explained to the Israelite people that, if they obeyed God’s laws, then He would bless them with land, livestock and children. The Old Testament norm was that people would marry and have children. We are interested in whether the Bible stays with this emphasis. Indeed, as they read these verses, modern-day single Christians might be thinking along these lines: “*I’m not married. I can’t afford to get on the housing ladder. I don’t have children. Is God withholding His blessing from me? Have I done something to displease him?*”

### New Testament view on singleness

In contrast to sexuality and gender, where the Bible’s teaching is consistent from beginning to end,



there is clear movement on how singleness is viewed as we progress through the Bible into the New Testament. It's not that God realises he got something wrong and changed his mind, but rather that the emphasis in the Old Testament on bearing children had a particular purpose for a particular time.

### Jesus is the 'offspring'

In Matthew 1 we encounter the genealogy to end all genealogies. Here we are invited to trace the line of 'offspring' from Jesus back to David and then all the way back to Abraham, to whom the great promises were given. Jesus is presented by Matthew as the ultimate 'offspring' (Gen 3:15, 12:7). He is the ultimate son of David (2 Samuel 7:12, Matthew 1:1).

Arguably, the greatest work of the Jewish people was to keep the generations of God's people going until the coming of Jesus, so that we could understand that he fulfils all these promises. But that work is now complete. Getting married and having children continues to be a good thing, but it is no longer instrumental to God's purposes for the salvation of humanity! From this point on in the Bible, "be fruitful and multiply" (introduced in Genesis 1:28) has a spiritual meaning: God calls us to have many spiritual children, which we'll come back to a bit later.

### Singleness vs marriage

A classic passage on singleness is found half way through Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church.

Paul is writing, as a single man himself, about whether believers in Corinth should marry or stay single:

*"I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs — how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife — and his interests are divided."* – 1 Corinthians 7:32-34

There are very similar words for unmarried women in the verses that follow (1 Corinthians 7:39-40). In these verses, Paul is unreservedly positive about the single life for the Christian: he was living proof that an unmarried person can live in undivided service to the Lord, and he commends others to live like him.

### Jesus the single man

Few would dispute that Jesus was unmarried. But was he isolated and lonely and wanting his own family? Well, in chapter 3 of Mark, Jesus responds to someone telling him that his mother and brothers were standing outside waiting for him: *"[Jesus] looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."* – Mark 3:34-35

What he was saying sounds very controversial in the culture of the day, when family was seen as very important. But Jesus here is emphasising the importance of family. He's just telling us that, when we become Christians, the definition of family expands

beyond our blood relatives. Our fellow believers are to our new family – they will be our new brothers, sisters and mothers! In a similar passage in Mark 10, Jesus adds ‘children’ to this list.

Whether or not we have children of our own, we can have godly input into the lives of the children within our church fellowships. We can look for opportunities to teach and guide them, perhaps informally or as we serve in children’s ministry. Indeed, using Jesus’ language from these passages in Mark, there is a sense in which we spiritually adopt them and become like godparents to them. We might be thinking of under-18s, in particular, or we might guide and disciple younger adults. Paul did this with younger believers as he adopted them as his spiritual children (eg “*Timothy, my beloved child*” – 2 Timothy 1:2).

Although our culture says that intimacy is found through sexual relationships, we need to develop communities where people can build real depth of friendship through deep and long-term relationships with people of all ages within their church families.

### Summary

The diagram summarises our conclusions as we respond to our original question, “Is the Bible positive about singleness?” In the Old Testament, marriage was the norm. In the New Testament, by contrast, singleness is given a status at least on a part with marriage.

Being unmarried was no longer a sign of God withholding His blessing. Great examples of fruitful, single lives were Jesus and Paul. Single people’s lives point towards their future hope, as they wait for the ultimate marriage that will eclipse all earthly marriages.



This brings us on to the life to come: in God's New Creation, Jesus is clear that there will be no marriage (in the way that we now know it): *"When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."* – Mark 12:25

We (together as the church) will be united with Jesus the Bridegroom at the wedding of the Lamb (*"For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready"*) – Rev 19:6-9).

In conclusion, there is great encouragement looking at the Bible's teaching on singleness. It must have been very hard to be a single person before time of Jesus.

For Christians, it certainly still has its challenges. But it is a noble situation, at least equal in status to marriage. This should challenge church leaders to teach and hold a high view of singleness. And these truths can invite all of us to make our churches places where single people are so connected and welcomed into relationships that they can declare wholeheartedly as they sit with fellow Christians, *"Here are my... brothers... and sisters and mothers and children!"* – Mark 3:34, 10:30.

*Stuart is TFT's Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. He likes to make full use of all the obscure two letter words in Scrabble, but still feels he's cheating a bit.*



## Emotional dependency podcast

In this extended conversation, Simon and Ruth discuss the theme of emotional dependency, where friendship turns into an unhealthy obsession with the other person. They share candidly from their own experiences of such relationships and how they found their way through the pitfalls to redeem what was good in the friendships.

To listen to the podcast, 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](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts)





## A rarer type of woman

**T**he boy was looking at me like I was crazy. I can still see his face, bemused and laced with disdain.

“Why are you answering? You’re a girl!” It was a primary school assembly and the teacher had just asked a question, specifically directed at the boys, to which I had responded effusively. The boy’s words doused me like a bucket of icy water.

“Oh yes,” I remembered with a start, “I’m a girl.”

That was the first time I realised that despite being female, I’d assumed I was male. And it was not to be the last.

Most children, or so I’ve gathered, know what sex they are, but I required regular reminders. It’s not that I longed to be a boy, or told people, “I’m a boy,” I just assumed I was. And I can’t remember a time before it.

### Childhood memories

From the earliest age, girls seemed foreign to me. I wanted to play games like ‘Escape from the Stampede’ (heavily inspired by *The Lion King*, it must be said), but the girls were not interested. In fact, they didn’t seem to want to play games at all. They just wanted to talk - a more boring use of my time I could not possibly imagine! The boys didn’t want to talk; they wanted to play games, pretend to fight bad guys and run up and down the hill... just like me. It was as though the girls spoke a different language, but the boys spoke a language I understood. It was easy to assume I was one of them.

However, reality would often bite back. Feeling, as I did, this kinship with the boys, I would attempt to join in their football games, but they would reject me outright for being a girl. When assailed by the truth of my sex, I never insisted that I was a boy - the physiological evidence to the contrary was undeniable, even to a five-year-old.

## Female disassociation

So, there I was in no-man's-land; I was isolated from the girls and not accepted by the boys. I played on my own. I never blamed the boys. I knew they were right - I was indeed a girl. I didn't have a leg to stand on. As for the girls, I'm afraid I was less charitable. I suppose I blamed them for the annoying female norms that thrust themselves upon me in my everyday life. For example, when toys were handed out, I would get given the Barbie, my brother, the Action Man. This exasperated me no end. What does Barbie even do? She stands around with a hairbrush and a mirror. Meanwhile, Action Man is abseiling, hang-gliding and launching missiles. It was obvious to me which toy was superior, but incredibly, a lot of the girls seemed to prefer Barbie! The recognition of such a pattern, over time, bred in me a kind of contempt for girls and women. I judged them to be vacuous, vain and dull. When something would come along to remind me I was female, I would always feel deflated - as though I'd been rudely awoken from a wonderful dream. As I got older, I strove to disassociate myself from anything that was considered feminine.

## Teenage rebellion

As soon as I was old enough to choose my clothes, I refused point blank to wear skirts or dresses. I remember my poor mum pleading with me to wear something nice for my grandparents' big anniversary

party. She did not win. The grainy old home video shows a black tie event with a teenage girl in blue Adidas jogging bottoms. As a teenager, I paid zero attention to my physical appearance. Despite my mother's entreaties, I refused to wash or brush my hair. I did not care that it was a matted, knotty mess. Eventually, when it had reached the status of legitimate health hazard, she gave me an ultimatum. Wash your hair or I will cut it all off. I didn't think she'd follow through on her threat. She did.

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**“I was in no-man's-land; I was isolated from the girls and not accepted by the boys”**

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My masculine appearance contributed to several instances during my teenage years where I was mistaken for a boy. Most embarrassingly, our deputy headteacher once called upon me in front of the entire class to run an errand, addressing me as 'young man' - to much harsh laughter from the boys.

It is a strange thing, when I consider it, that as a child I should at once have felt pain upon being reminded I was female and shame upon being taken as male. What was wrong with me? I carried a sense, deep down, that I was defective.



## Gender dysphoria

I completed sixth form college and went on to study Media at the University of Sussex in Brighton. Around this time, I started noticing the fact that my body had changed (better 5 years late than never!) When trying on clothes, my body was a constant reminder of my femaleness, so I relaxed my rigid dress code and allowed some skirts and dresses into my wardrobe. Nevertheless, my default perception of myself changed little. I drifted through life thinking that I was male and, what's more, that other people saw me as male. During the times where I was aware of my 'femaleness,' envy would often flare up within. I would dwell - sometimes with bitterness - on how much better my life would be were I a man. In short, I flitted between thinking I was a man and wanting to be one. The medical label for this condition is gender dysphoria, which is defined as 'The persistent distress and discomfort with one's biological sex.'

## Work life

While this was indeed the case, I do not wish to portray my life as miserable. Overall, I was very happy. After all, there are not too many instances in daily life where one's sex comes into play, and even when it did, I was used to the feelings such incidents brought up. After university, I got a job working for my church as a video editor and there I stayed for several years with very little change in my thoughts about myself.

At 25, I cut all my hair off, only this time (apparently) it was chic! Pixie cuts were all the rage. My colleagues at work cooed over me and said that some lipstick would complement my new look. So, at lunchtime, they took me down to Boots and bought me some red lippie. I was not used to wearing makeup and as they applied it, I felt like a clown. I distinctly remember walking home from work that day with a strong sense of shame. My eyes darted around, paranoid. When walking past strangers, I expected them to stop and stare at me, as I felt like a man in drag. Then I remembered I was not in fact a man and what they saw when they looked at me was a woman wearing lipstick, which, after all, was not out of the ordinary. Twenty years had passed since that first incident in school assembly, yet still I was experiencing those pin pricks reminders that I was not the sex I thought I was.







## Autism diagnosis

Around the same time, following a build-up of problems in other areas of my life, I sought an autism diagnosis. I'd suspected for a long time that I was on the spectrum. Looking back, I didn't actually understand autism amazingly well, but I knew enough about it to recognise several of its key symptoms. After an uncharacteristically

short time on the NHS waiting list, I received a formal diagnosis for Autism Spectrum Disorder. The clinician who diagnosed me described me as 'an open and shut case of an adult female with autism.'

As I looked into my new condition, I discovered more about how autism affects the brain. There isn't time enough to go into the neurology here, but very long story short, it is clear from the scientific literature that the autistic brain resembles an exaggerated version of the typical male brain. I am not referring to stereotypes here, but to the scientifically proven cognitive distinctions that characterise the way most men think. To most people, the fact that men and women think differently

(in general) is self-evident, but if you are interested in the science, I would recommend 'The Essential Difference' by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen. Anyway, as I was saying, the autistic brain has been described as hyper-masculine. Hearing this changed everything for me. It became clear to me why I had related so much to the boys, while the girls had seemed so alien. And the answer was not that I was male. Nor was I defective. I was autistic. I was not outside the category of female, I was just a rarer type of female. This realisation allowed me, gradually, to see myself as female. Essentially, I let myself into the club from which I'd always rejected myself, and at which I had always looked with derision.

## Sharing with others

The acceptance of myself as female did not happen overnight. Rather, it unfolded slowly over a matter of years. In fact, it was several years after my diagnosis of autism that I dared even to tell anyone about my struggle with gender dysphoria. In the end, it was my dear friend Ruth in whom I confided. Perhaps 'confided' is not the most accurate word. In fact, I bawled my eyes out to her for several hours in a stairwell. Good times. This first moment of honesty opened the door to many years of pastoral conversations with elders, friends and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. At every step, I was met with compassion and a listening ear. But true love sometimes hurts. On one occasion, I was

complaining to my elder, Stephen, that women were boring and vain. To my surprise, he pointed out that I was being sexist and advised me to repent. He was right. The vision of 'woman' that I had been holding in my mind was an amalgamation of the worst excesses of the most vapid and mindless women I had come across in my life. I had conflated all women with 'her', somehow managing to dismiss the myriad women I'd met who did not fit that mould - women who were funny, sharp and principled. I repented immediately.

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**“I was not outside the category of female, I was just a rarer type of female”**

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This propensity to look at a complex set of data and come to overly simplistic conclusions is another facet of the autistic mind. Autistic people are notorious for their aversion to change and instability. We need to know exactly where we are in order to feel safe. Nuance and subtlety, therefore, are the autistic person's natural enemies. I believe this black and white style of thinking was another contributing factor to my gender dysphoria. When I noticed, at a young age, that I differed from my female peers, I could not deal with the complexity of a sliding scale of personality types ranging from feminine to masculine. Instead, I saw only two categories: girls and boys. Subconsciously, I must have

thought: 'I clearly do not fit in with the girls. Therefore, I must be a boy.'

### **Girls identifying as boys**

I was diagnosed with autism in 2015, and for the last couple of years, I can honestly say I have not found myself thinking I am a man. I am at home with the fact I am a woman. That's not to say that I don't sometimes get frustrated by the hurdles that come with womanhood, but I have accepted that being a sex - either sex - comes with challenges. There are many expectations and burdens placed upon men with which I will never have to contend. I try to be mindful of that on the odd occasion when I find myself lamenting that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. But at least now I know which side I am on. What's more, I find myself gazing over that fence less and less often.

Yes, things are much better for me now, yet, as I look at the current narrative about gender, I am deeply concerned. The number of girls identifying as transgender (and seeking medical intervention as a result) has absolutely skyrocketed over the last few years - and studies have shown that a huge proportion of these girls are autistic. I worry for them. It took me a long time to process who I was and introduce some nuance to my rigid convictions about the world. How much harder must it be for modern teenagers who are constantly being told that whether

they are a boy or a girl is dictated by their feelings rather than their physiology? I wrestled with my identity, but I always knew this to be true:

*“You are a girl whose mind causes a disconnection from that reality.”*

Never was I told the lie that girls are now being told:

*“You are a boy whose body causes a disconnection from that reality.”*

I am so grateful to God that I was shielded from this poisonous idea. It meant that in seeking a solution to my problem, I knew my mind had to be brought into alignment with my body. I was not charmed by the horrific solution offered by today’s activists: ‘Bring your body into alignment with your mind... even if it means getting a hysterectomy.’ I shudder to think that, had this ideology been around when I was a teenager, I would probably be sitting here right now with an irreversibly mutilated body and a whole reservoir of regret.

It is important to say that gender dysphoria is not always caused by autism. It can be felt by anyone who does not naturally conform to

conventional gender stereotypes. Other factors such as the disturbing onset of puberty, the terrifying expectations thrust upon them by pornography, as well as various mental health conditions, can cause adolescent girls in particular to see the rejection of their sex as a means of escape.

### **At peace**

But autism is my story. The very first time that I sat down to discuss my dysphoria with Stephen and his wife, after several hours of weeping had passed and the shame was still raw, I said to them, “I have a feeling that, sometime in the future, God is going to use my story to help other people.” I believe that, by the grace of God, that time is now. I am determined to speak up about this issue, trusting as I do that it is God’s desire that all his children be at peace with the way He’s made them to be.

*Sophie is a cultural commentator and public speaker. She plays snooker in her spare time and one day hopes to surpass her current highest break of 27.*

## **Sponsor a Pastoral Conversation**

*Every week we have enquires from people needing pastoral support about their sexuality. Our trained staff and volunteers are able to listen, to signpost them to helpful resources and 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 £22 would fund the support provided to phone a new contact each month.*

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## Starting and ending the day well

**T**he whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy. (Psalm 65:8)

Most of us have more structure in the middle of our days, normally because of work duties, which helps us in being disciplined and making good choices. But, for many Christians, the times either first thing in the morning or later in the evening can go one of two ways:

1. They can be wonderful times with God, recharging and committing our lives to Him, or...
2. They can be chaotic, temptation-ridden times, where the best of intentions goes out of the window, leaving us feeling guilty, distracted and defeated.
3. Some Christians struggle to manage to start each day positively. This can look like one or more of the following:
  - Feeling anxious or hopeless about the day ahead;
  - Launching into the day's

challenges without pausing to commit them to God;

- Trusting in their own abilities, rather than asking God to give them all that they need;

Other Christians struggle more with the hour or two before bedtime, when their duties are complete, their bodies are tired, and the troubles of the day have left their emotions unsettled. They can be tempted to turn to self-pity, pornography, alcohol, overeating or a catalogue of other unhealthy and ungodly behaviours.

Many find both these times – early mornings and bedtimes – to have their challenges. TFT now has a popular Night Prayers Zoom meeting at 9.30pm each weekday evening to help us turn to God and be reminded of His goodness at this vulnerable time of the day. The two boxes alongside this article contain some tips from Christians of different ages and backgrounds of what they have personally found helpful in settling them in the mornings and evenings.



## Helpful in the morning

“Having a walk with Jesus. That is, actually getting out of the house and praying as I walk.”

“My morning routine, for about 85% of the time is getting up as early as I can, making a pot of coffee, and sitting in the same armchair in the Lord’s presence. I love the time before much of the world has stirred.”

“I have a flask of hot water, little milk pot (hotel-style) and mug with tea bag on my bedside table so that I can make a cup of tea as soon as I wake up. I then drink that while reading and reflecting on a psalm. The helps me get over the initial shock of being awake!”

“I’m part of a Bible reading accountability group, where we share brief thoughts on a Bible

reading each day. Others’ reflections often prompt me to start my Bible reading when I’ve allowed myself to get distracted or when I’ve (mistakenly) thought that I was too busy to read God’s Word that day...”

“I have a metal cross on my living room wall. I literally kneel before it and pray every morning. It helps me remember who I’m praying to, as well as my position before Him.”

“Temperature permitting, I like to start with coffee on the patio, overlooking the woods. No phone, no distractions, just God’s presence in stillness and birdsong.”

“I listen to Christian music (traditional or popular) instead of news radio. The news apps get one ten-minute scroll per day. Facebook gets five.”

Thankfully, Jesus calls us to take life just one day at a time. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us to ask God only for one day’s bread (Matt 6:11). This perhaps reminds us of how God provided manna daily to the people of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years: He did not let them stockpile His grace to them. Indeed, many of us at TFT have become thankful for our daily weaknesses, which turn us regularly to God to seek his strengthening.

The writer of Lamentations reminds us that God’s mercies are endless and are new every morning (Lam 3:22-24):

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”*

But it can be hard to keep up the spiritual disciplines that bring us to prayer each day and remind of all that God has done. It might be easier for those who share their



accommodation with other Christians – they can encourage one another in pursuing God daily. On the other hand, those who live alone have plenty of opportunities for uninterrupted times of quiet Bible study and prayer... as long as they don't turn first to their TVs, phones etc.

Whatever our circumstances, it is good for us to reflect on which times of day we are most vulnerable. In response, let us seek to build good habits and disciplines that turn us away from fear and sin and towards our God who gives life: *“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm 16:11)*

Stuart is TFT director

## Helpful in the Evening

“Snuggling with my cat.”

“Making my room all lovely with nice lighting and candles and enjoying some scripture.”

“Playing a musical instrument.”

“Listening to a funny podcast (No Such Thing as a Fish is one of my favourites)”

“Watching a reliable feel-good TV programme (eg *Downton Abbey* or *Call the Midwife*) to help my mind wind down.”

“I spend time reading Christian non-fiction books with a solid, uncompromising message, such as Ed Shaw’s *The Plausibility Problem*.”

“I try to get into at least one TV series where the good guys are honourable and noble values carry the day. Recent favourites include *Poldark* and *Shtisel*.”

“Every other week, I attend a Zoom fellowship for SSA men and women called Where Grace Abounds, which draws me back to God’s grace and truth.”

## TFT Night Prayers

A short time from 9.30-9.45pm  
Monday to Friday  
Join via Zoom

For details please contact: [info@truefreedomtrust.co.uk](mailto:info@truefreedomtrust.co.uk)



## A brief look at single “heroes of the faith”

“I want to talk about sex and relationships” said Dr Helen Roseveare as we interviewed her at the Keswick Convention as part of the 19-24s stream back in 2011. She continued. “Being single is a gift from God and we can use it to serve Him. We don’t need to go chasing a life of romance and sex”. I found that deeply challenging in a world that was telling me otherwise. I’ll come back to Dr Roseveare.

This is an article on the history of single church leaders. I obviously can’t expound on every single one, and I acknowledge there are others who I could have written about. Not all of these are church leaders, but are single people who left a legacy in one way or another.

### Defending the faith

We begin with Irenaeus who was born around 130AD and was a student of Polycarp. Polycarp was a Bishop in Smyrna, where he passed on to Irenaeus what he had learnt from the apostle John. It is

believed they travelled to Rome together, where Irenaeus met Justin Martyr, who was a big influence on him. It is well documented that both Polycarp and Justin were martyred probably within 10 years of each other. After those significant deaths, Irenaeus released his popular works “Against Heresies” and “The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching”. It is believed that Irenaeus was also martyred in 202AD under a wave of persecution by the first Severen Dynasty Emperor of Rome - Septimius Severus.

Irenaeus’s “Against Heresies” was a work criticising Gnosticism, which had infected the church in the 2nd century. The most popular of these heresies was Valentinianism, which believed 30 angelic beings made up the spiritual realm.

Irenaeus held 3 things in defence of biblical truth: Scripture itself, tradition and the teaching of the apostles. Irenaeus held to Gospel truth, commended it and used it

against heresy. He was bishop in Lyon and was an advocate of the worldwide church, including asking Pope Anicetus not to excommunicate churches in Asia Minor. He was one of the first people to hold all 4 gospel accounts of Jesus' life as equally important and was one of the first people to explain Jesus as the new Adam, taken from the apostle Paul's writings.

He truly was a good example of a single church leader who put Christ first and defended truth. It's not known why Irenaeus remained single, but it is documented that the friends he had spurred him on to experience all that God wanted to do with his life as a single man.

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**“Although he struggled with loneliness, he developed as many friendships as possible ”**

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### **Bible translator**

We move on to the 1300's and to one of Britain's most important figures in church history, John Wycliffe (statue in the picture). Wycliffe was a forerunner of Martin Luther, a pre-Reformer. He was an educated man and, for a brief time, was Vice-master of Balliol College, Oxford. His writings reveal that he both professed caution about clerical marriage and articulated a culturally traditional theology of sexuality, which he lived out as cleric himself.

Wycliffe realised that the medieval church was going seriously astray. He spoke out against 3 things: transubstantiation; the hierarchy of the church, as regards not needing to confess sins to a priest but directly to God; and finally, and possibly his legacy to us today, he translated the Bible in a way that lay people could read for themselves, knowing that they didn't understand Latin. This caused major upset within the church. Thankfully Wycliffe had a friend who protected him, John of Gaunt, a younger son of King Edward III.

Wycliffe was a big influence on the Czech, Jan Hus, who also followed and believed what Wycliffe had said on various Reformation points that later would be picked up by Martin Luther.

Wycliffe also survived the Black Plague, which is said to have had a lasting impression on him, leaving him gloomy. His reformed theology is best summed up by these words “Trust wholly in Christ; rely altogether on his sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation.”

Wycliffe's desire for people to be able to read the Bible for themselves started a whole movement that 200 years later led to Martin Luther's 95 theses and the beginning of the Reformation.

## Mission and Grace

Next, we jump to the last 100 years or so and 3 leading women who have impacted mission around the world, Gladys Alyward (1902-1970), Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983) and Dr Helen Roseveare (1925-2016).

Gladys Alyward was a missionary in China. In the 1930s, she travelled the trans-Siberian railway, where she was arrested by Russians before being allowed to continue to China. Gladys was not one to give up easily and was driven by a compassion for human suffering. In 1938 she helped take children to safety over the mountains as the Japanese invaded China, despite being wounded. Although she fell in love during the Sino-Japanese war she never married, but she did adopt one of the Chinese children, called Gordon. She always told the children about Jesus and many came to faith.

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**“Her life centred on Christ, who kept her balanced and able to follow Him”**

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Corrie Ten Boom is well known for her book “The Hiding Place”. It tells the story of the Nazi occupation of Holland, the way her family hid Jews and were caught and what life was like in a concentration camp for her and her sister Betsy. Finally, after her release, she came face-to-face with one of her captors, for whom she had to pray for God to help her

forgive. Corrie spent the rest of her life telling people about Jesus and forgiveness. She believed she was set apart by God to be single to do his work. Her life centred on Christ, who kept her balanced and able to follow Him.

Dr Helen Roseveare worked in Congo as a missionary and helped set up a hospital there. She struggled with male leadership at the hospital and put this down to her being single. Having met someone who she hoped she would marry, it never happened. From then on, she learnt to see God in the details of her life and to trust Him more fully. She was taken prisoner by rebels who held her captive for 5 months, beat and raped her. After coming home, she then went back to Congo and rebuilt many of the hospitals that had been destroyed. At all times, she displayed the fact that Jesus was enough for her life, witnessing to Him at every turn. She had bouts of depression, but used her experience to minister to those who feared they would lose their purity in the mission field. Helen helped them see their relationship with God would not be damaged, as was true for her.

These three women were dedicated to their mission fields. Their sacrificial service for the gospel is a great example of how we can serve Christ both at home and abroad. Roseveare’s book “Enough” is a great reminder that Jesus is truly all we need.



### **The advocate of singleness**

John Stott was renowned for his singleness. He believed that both marriage and singleness were a gift from God. Unlike some early church fathers, Stott never wanted to exalt singleness over marriage and was helped by 1 Corinthians 7:7: *“I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”*

Stott recognised that he wouldn't have been able to do the things he did, writing or travelling to speak, if he had the responsibilities of a family. Although he struggled with loneliness, his advice was to develop as many friendships as possible, with various ages and both sexes, knowing it wouldn't deaden the occasional pangs of loneliness, but would help. He was well aware that single people are exposed to sexual temptation, but also spoke of the danger of being self-centred. He lived his life in service of God and wrote many books, including “The Message of Thessalonians” where he wrote:

*“Alongside a natural loneliness, accompanied sometimes by acute pain, we can find joyful self-fulfilment in the self-giving service of God and other people.”*

### **Conclusion**

There is much that could have been said about other single figures in church history, such as Patrick of Ireland, Amy Carmichael, Augustine and Charles Simeon. We can learn much from Church history and be inspired by those who have gone before us. We can see how they contended for the faith, stood firm and held onto the truth. Some you could argue “changed the world” for God's glory.

**Owen** is TFT's Digital Media Technician, and while he's not working, enjoys painting historical miniatures and playing strategy games. He can be found gaming at a local club most Thursday nights.