

# Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

Spring 2025



## Teaching biblical sexuality

This edition focuses on how to teach biblical sexuality well. We review the new “Kaleidoscope” series for youth and youth workers, as well as the new “Relationships Matter” course for all Christians. I’m thankful that there is a growing bank of excellent resources available to help us understand and explain God’s positive vision and purpose for human sexuality. Georgios, as a native Greek speaker, explains why he remains unconvinced by revisionist arguments about the meaning of particular words in New Testament texts.

Rather than retreat in the face of this unbiblical teaching, we need more than ever to be proclaiming God’s good news for all people. In their joint article, Mark and Laura reflect on the challenges and cost of speaking in churches around the country. I hope that the magazine inspires all of us to continue to proclaim biblical truth faithfully, consistently and in a manner that reflects God’s heart.

**By Stuart, TFT Director**



## It’s all Greek to me

Page 8

Georgios explains the Greek meaning of particular words found in the bible and why he is unconvinced by revisionist arguments.



## More myself now

Page 12

Adam shares about his mixed experiences at university, as well as how he found hope in God’s promises and the support from TFT.



## Review: Kaleidoscope

Page 31

Jamie reviews these new resources from Living Out on sexuality for young people and how to engage with them.

HIGHLIGHTS

# Telling the whole story

“**W**hat is it that motivates you?” 17-year-old me was about to learn the hard way, in a dimly lit room across from the TJ Hughes department store hiring manager, that the right answer to this question at a job interview isn’t “*getting paid*”. It turns out that what they were looking for was an insight into the values and principles I hold that would make me an enthusiastic and committed member of the workforce. They wanted to know what got me out of bed in the morning, what kept me going. The truth is, at the time, I was really only interested in the spending money.... I didn’t get the job.

Now twice that age, I’d like to think I’ve got a better handle on that question. By God’s kindness, I think the same is also true of what motivates me to follow Christ. Particularly in the area of sexuality, as someone who experiences same-sex attraction. When I became a Christian at 18, I did so with a knowledge that it didn’t feel like the Bible spoke favourably of same-sex marriage or sexual relationships. Not being ‘out’ about my sexual attractions at that time anyway, I simply chose to try and ignore them. That would be my method of following the teaching.

The church I was attending at the time was quite a charismatic church and spoke powerfully of God’s unmerited favour towards us. The weekly message was one

that said “*You are under grace, not under the law*”. The problem was, I felt like I was living under the law. The only thing stopping me from going out and getting a boyfriend was a handful of Bible verses that seemed to prohibit me from doing so. Somehow, this wasn’t very motivating. It didn’t feel like the good news I was told the Gospel was supposed to be. I had no concept of why God had ordered sexual ethics in the way in which He had and no idea of how these prohibitions fit His plans and purposes. One of the great privileges of being involved in TFTs speaking and teaching work is that I now get to go out and try and share something of that broader vision with our hearers.

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**“The only thing stopping me from getting a boyfriend was a handful of Bible verses ”**

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Darrin Snyder Belousek says, “*Scripture and tradition witness to marriage as a God-ordained, three-faceted, interlocking reality: form, function and figure (or pattern, purpose, and symbol)*”.

In my teaching, I’ve found this a helpful framework through which to answer what I sometimes call the “*toddler question*”. Why? Why has God ordered sexual ethics in this way?

## Form

Form refers to what sexual relationships look like in scripture, where they are spoken of positively. In Genesis 2:15-25, we see God create a “*suitable helper*” for Adam. There are two things to notice about the suitable helper. First, she is the same as Adam. In verse 20, we see that none of the animals that were brought before Adam were considered suitable. So, God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep and, while he is sleeping, God takes a rib from his side and uses it to form a woman. She is the same, because she’s made of the same ‘stuff’; she is of the same substance.

But, the second thing we see about her is that she is different. In verses 21 and 22, whereas Adam was formed out of the dust of the ground, Eve was formed out of Adam’s side. She is of the same substance, but there is something different about the way she is made. And Genesis 2:24 brings together these two beings – the same, but different – and unites them together in marriage. The actual word used in Hebrew to describe this union carries a sense of a gluing or adhesion. In other words, this is a relationship not intended to be broken apart. Through scripture, the only place we see physical/sexual unions spoken of in a positive light, is in the context of this exclusive, adhesive relationship between the God-ordained suitable partners.

## Function

The question of function deals with why marriage is ordered in the way it is above. Genesis 1:26-28

helps us towards our answer. In verse 27, we see two truths. First, mankind is created in the image of God. Second, God has created us male and female. These two truths are followed immediately by God’s first instructions for us in verse 28. We are to be fruitful and increase in number in order to fill the earth, and we are to subdue and rule over it.

These verses show us that the way God has created us is intimately connected to His purposes for us. Being created in God’s image separates us from other creatures. It allows us to reflect something of who God is in the creation that surrounds us, and to act as vice-regents, looking after His creation, under Him. But being created male and female allows us to fulfil that other purpose: to fill the earth with people ruling under God. God longs to see an earth full of people made in His image and walking in relationship with him, enjoying and stewarding His good creation.

Of course, that’s not to say that marriage is all about children. Augustine of Hippo is perhaps the most important influencer in the western church traditions’ thinking on marriage. He suggested marriage brings with it several “*goods*”. He suggested four: charity, chastity, fidelity and children (as we’ve already discussed). Charity involves the giving of all of ourselves to another person. Chastity is a way of expressing our sexuality in a manner that is holy and pleasing to God. Fidelity is about covenant keeping and keeping promises. Another prominent thinker in this area was

John Chrysostom. He arrived at similar conclusions. He said marriage was about children, moderation of life (in that it contributes towards of Christian growth) and also points to something beyond itself.

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**“Marriage in this life tells us something about the love and longing Jesus has for His church”**

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### Figure

That question of what marriage points to beyond itself is what is meant by figure. Ephesians 5:25-32 particularly unpacks this. The first thing to notice in this passage is the quoting in verse 31 of Genesis 2:24. Paul (the author of Ephesians) carries that definition of marriage from Genesis 2:24 into the New Testament and goes on to say that our earthly marriages are to tell us something about the relationship between Christ and the Church.

What’s interesting is that the Bible starts with a marriage (Adam and Eve in Genesis 2) and ends with another type of marriage: we see Jesus with His bride, the Church, in Revelation 19. The love and longing that we experience for our partners in this life tells us something about the love and longing Jesus has for His church. Augustine suggested that marriage is about giving all of oneself to the other. In the union of Christ and the Church, we too give all of ourselves to the other. We give all of our sin to Jesus, and He gives us all of His righteousness. This might

sound like He gets the bad end of the deal, but what’s amazing about this marriage is that this is what God has decided to do in order to be in perfect relationship with us once again.

This great marriage is Jesus and His chosen suitable helper in His work, the Church. It’s Jesus (someone who is the same in His humanity, but different through His divinity) choosing to give all of Himself to us in an exclusive covenant that, in His perfection, He will not break. Jesus loves and cherishes us, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

### From Prohibition to Purpose

Great teaching on biblical sexual ethics goes beyond simply teaching the prohibition passages and connects the hearer to their place in God’s great story. It motivates them not merely to follow a set rulebook, but to want to actively participate in His plans and purposes. In God’s great vision, human marriage ought to provide a taster of Christ’s relationship to His Church. Singleness ought to point to our contentedness in only Christ, as will be experienced in the age to come. In our churches, let’s be asking that “toddler question”. It’s often when we ask why, that we find a satisfying answer.

*Simon must have got better at job interviews since that fateful day at TJ Hughes as he now serves on the staff team of TFT. He leads our team of speakers as we aim to get UK churches excited about the Gospel.*





# Book Review

“The Six Conversations: Pathways to Connecting in an Age of Isolation and Incivility” by Heather Holleman  
£11.25 paperback, £7.99 Kindle, 224 pages, 2022, Moody Publishers

Every book review is likely to reveal as much about the biases of the reviewer as it is about the book. I don't think this one will be any different!

For the most part, I found this a surprisingly helpful and thought provoking book. It is not a long read – 190 pages with supporting references. The style is appropriately conversational and engaging. I express surprise because generally I have an allergic reaction to any author who tries to categorise topics in lists. Here we not only have six conversations, but also four mindsets! Part of the author's aim is to help you identify your own conversational style preferences. I just found it personally confusing, but it may just be me. For others it may be very helpful.

Once I got past my own reaction to the structure of the material, I found it thought-provoking and challenging as a book. The basic premise is that we are living in Western societies that have become lonely places. The consequent isolation and disconnection from one another leads to relational poverty. We don't have, as a result, as fulfilling a life as we might have. A solution is to improve the way we relate to one another and good conversational practice will enable this. Broadly speaking I agree with

this. It is a little simplistic and the book does not really explore the causes which would, for this reader, give greater weight to the argument and the proposed conversational solution. As far as it goes, it is fine.

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“The style is appropriately conversational and engaging”

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By this point in the review, I envisage you will be sitting on the edge of your seat wondering what the six conversations are. Here is the list:

1. Social (we talk about our relational lives)
2. Emotional (we talk about our feelings)
3. Physical (we talk about the practical aspects of life)
4. Cognitive (we talk about what we think)
5. Volitional (we talk about our decisions)
6. Spiritual (we talk about faith)

The author suggests for each category a range of open, inquiring questions we might use to help stimulate conversations. She argues

that we have conversational preferences that mean we get into habitual patterns of relating. These do not always serve us well if we are seeking to relate to a diverse range of people. I think this is a very good point and spoke to me as I reflected on my own patterns. The four mindsets that the author suggests underpin good conversational practice are being curious, believing the best of others, expressing concern and sharing your own life. All good stuff!

The content that stirred me most was an exploration towards the end of the book about God and our conversations. This is worth a book in its own right. As I reflected on how Jesus engaged in conversations, the more I felt moved to reflect on how my conversations might be patterned on His approach to people.

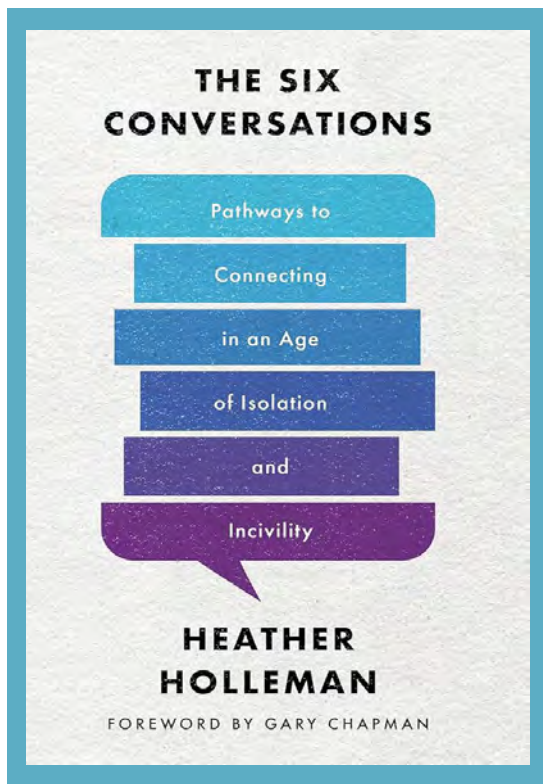
I would have liked much more of this. The author, however, is attempting to reach a wide variety of audiences at the same time. Firstly, I suspect she wants her students to read it. She is a university lecturer and does, in my view, irritatingly remind us of this at a number of points. Secondly, she is aiming for readers of faith and those of none. I think she may be seeing this as a form of evangelism and at times she shares something of her own testimony of God's work in her life. It is a difficult balance. I leave it to you to judge if she succeeds.

Overall, there is much practical good to take away from this book. It is relevant to all ages and circumstances in life. I don't think,

content-wise, it favours one gender over another. Culturally there are differences between the author's US approach and this reader's own preferences, but these are not insurmountable. What is missing is any proper consideration of the impact of technology and social media on the nature of conversation. Maybe this will be in a future volume?

A worthwhile read in the end.

*Stefan is still learning how to resist eating cake in Yorkshire. He has just used his walking boots for the first time since he bought them 5 years ago. Currently, he is working through how to lead a more relational life as he moves into a new phase.*







finds inconsequential: sexual orientation.

### Visibility of homosexual acts at the time

Homosexual acts are explicitly mentioned in the Bible and they were perfectly known throughout the Ancient Greek and the Roman world. Institutions such as the *erastes* (an adult male in a relationship with a younger male) and male concubinage were so widespread that the Early Church took extra effort to fight them (e.g. see the Didache, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian).

Regardless, modern revisionists starting with John Boswell have tried to reinterpret Greek words in the New Testament in order to fit them into a new sexual (un)ethic. Many interpret “πορνεία” (*porneia*) using the classical meaning of prostitution, as if the New Testament was written by an Athenian of the 5th century BC and not by Hellenistic Jews. Since the 2nd century BC and during the Apostolic Times, the word had come to include sexual immorality in general, as is apparent in Hellenistic Jewish texts, such as the Book of Sirach and the New Testament itself. When Jesus, according to Matthew 5:32, promotes the impermissibility of divorce, he inserts an exception, “on the ground of *porneia*”, which no sensible reader has ever interpreted as prostitution! Still, guided by the same bad translating principles, queer Christian associations today have ended up approving unthinkable things, such as polyamory. At least it is not prostitution, of course! Another word in the New Testament that

attracted revisionists’ rage is the Greek word “*αρσενοκοίτης*” (*arsenokoites*) widely used by Paul. For this, the revisionists employed a dual strategy. Firstly, they tried to get these verses out of the way, by mocking them as “*clobber passages*”. This is nothing more than an *argumentum ad hominem* (i.e. dismissing the writer rather than engaging with the arguments) and not worth any further consideration.

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**“The Bible is not interested in social constructs...because they are transient”**

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What’s more, Boswell attempted to distort the meaning of the word to limit it to male prostitution. But to do so, he did not only disregard the historical hermeneutics of the Church, but also the Jewish Scripture of the Apostolic times. “*Arsenokoites*” is a compound Greek word clearly echoing the prohibitions of homosexual behavior in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Both verses are rendered in the Greek translation (called “LXX”) used at the time by the Jewish diaspora as “*met’ arsenos koitēn*” (lying in bed with a man). In this sense, “*arsenokoites*” is the Hellenistic equivalent of the modern MSM acronym (“Men having Sex with Men”) and this is clearly what Paul talks about.

### But Jesus said nothing about homosexuality

Another common argument claims that the Lord was silent about homosexuality and the sins of the

flesh in general, which could not be further from the truth, since Jesus considered sexual immorality to be a source of human defilement:

*For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery... All these evils come from inside and defile a person - Mark 7:21-23 NIV.*

Similarly, He condemned lust as the root cause of all carnal sins:

*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart - Matthew 5:28.*

Many biblical revisionists claim that Christ did not speak about homosexuality. Indeed, the gospels contain not a single word about homosexuality, just as there are no words about rape or paedophilia. This of course does not mean that Jesus condoned these acts. After all, He did condemn some other sins that are far more acceptable today, such as adultery and illicit sexual behaviour. But Jesus asks for something more: the restraint of evil thoughts, if we really want to avoid acting out.

### **Saint Paul, or “the one to blame”**

Some modern revisionists consider the traditional Christian sexual ethic as the product of Pauline influence on apostolic theology that distorted Christ's kindly message. However, as we've established, Christ's teaching was not a license for sexual sin, but a call to chastity.

Paul's mission expanded the Christian message outside the predominantly Jewish region of Palestine and thus needed to deal with the sexual permissiveness common to the Gentiles. That's why his epistles are full of warnings against “*porneia*” and “*arsenokoitia*”.

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## **“But Jesus asks for something more: the restraint of evil thoughts”**

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In his teaching, Saint Paul makes it clear that homosexual acts are not only against nature, but also a symptom of our separation from God:

*They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. - Romans 1:25-27*

As we saw, sexual acts between persons of the same sex were not rare in the ancient Roman world. Rather in some areas, it was a required step of socialisation. For this reason, Apostle Paul felt compelled to make explicitly clear that such acts are contrary to God's will. Indeed, if left unrepented, they can lead to eternal damnation:

*Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men... will inherit the kingdom of God. - I Corinthians 6:9-10*

Arsenokoitia here is listed among the actions that can jeopardise our salvation. But God's grace is not in vain for those who accept it. This is why Paul goes on to add:

*And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. - I Corinthians 6:11*

### Sodom & other "heterosexist" NT authors

Blaming Paul for the "heterosexism" of the historic Christian sexual ethic, modern revisionists tend to imply that he is the only New Testament author writing against homosexual behaviour. At least two other Apostles do so: Peter and Jude. Peter reminds us that spiritual death brings God's punishment. This punishment was unleashed on Sodom and will be wreaked again on those who walk according to their spiritual blindness:

*...if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly... This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. -2 Peter 2:6,10*

It is significant that Saint Peter uses the word "especially" to emphasise the destructiveness of carnal sins

committed, not out of weakness, but through a deliberate denial of God's saving authority. Saint Jude similarly warns of the fate of Sodom:

*As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. -Jude 1:7 NKJV*

The words in the Greek text here are striking and the New King James Version renders it more clearly: "Gone after strange flesh..."

The sexual revisionists will now come in and argue that the sin of Sodom was not homosexuality, but pride. That's true: the root sin of the Sodomites was not a single homosexual act or a persistent homosexual orientation. It was actually what we can describe as a syndrome: a set of different symptoms that jointly comprise a disease like no other. As the Bible tells us, Sodomites displayed pride (Ezekiel 16:49), they paraded their sin (Isaiah 3:9), they were all complicit in sin (Genesis 19:4) and finally reached the point of ultimate social enforcement of "arsenokoitia" (Genesis 19:5). This was the syndrome of Sodom. Let's reflect on whether we might be at all at risk of heading in this direction today.

*Georgios is a Thessalonian who would travel anywhere to meet his friends. He likes people who view endings as a new beginning and dead ends as an opportunity to turn around.*



## More myself than I have ever been

I was brought up by two loving Christian parents. They both worked in full time Christian ministry, so I spent much of my childhood in or around church. I can't really remember not knowing God, but it was during my teenage years that it felt like I realised that God was real and I wanted to commit to following Him. I was bullied at school for being gay, but church was always a safe space for me, being away from school. I didn't understand or even admit to myself about the attractions I had and tried to ignore my attractions by thinking, *"It is not possible for me to be gay, as I am a Christian."*

When I started university, I got stuck into church. We were encouraged to invite people to the student Alpha course, so I invited a girl called Emily from my halls to come. I was surprised when she said yes and came along with me. But it turns out she was more interested in me than Jesus. One night after Alpha she invited me into her room. She sat down on her bed and started crying. I didn't know what to do.

Eventually she told me that she *'liked' me*. *"Oh no!"* I thought, that is not what I wanted. So, in order to let her know I wasn't interested, I told her, *"I've been thinking that I might be gay."* She calmed down and said, *"Well, I've always wanted a gay BFF."* *"Ouch,"* I thought. After our conversation, I went back to my room and cried and cried. I wept most of that night. I hadn't realised that it was true until I said it out loud for the very first time.

I went home in the Easter holidays and I told my parents what had happened. They told me that they would love me whatever and there was no need to rush at figuring out my sexuality. So I went back to university and didn't mention my sexuality until a year later (now aged 20). I was walking back from church with some friends and ended up in a conversation with my friend Duncan. For some reason I made an off-hand remark about the incident with Emily the year before. When I got back to my room, I had received a message from Duncan that said he didn't take what I had said lightly

and that he was in fact gay too. We met for coffee and he told me his story. I was still unsure about what my theology around this issue would be. I was surprised that Duncan had chosen the liberal perspective on same-sex relationships. This was surprising as our church had decided “*not to opt-in*” to conducting same-sex marriages (which had been recently introduced in my denomination). Duncan was someone I trusted, so maybe the endorsement of same-sex relationships wasn’t bad after all.

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**“I was able to trust God daily and I felt completely reliant on him to get through”**

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### **Mixed thoughts and feelings**

When we returned to university the following Autumn, Duncan had got a boyfriend. I had mixed feelings about this, but I trusted him and it was probably a relief that us dating was not a possibility. Duncan and I got involved launching a new Christian student group across the city that linked to a wider student Christian organisation. Our student committee included Christians from different denominations. It was a very exciting time and we had a launch event for 80 people.

However, I found a few days later that another student team member, who attended a more conservative church than ours, “*found out*” about Duncan’s same-sex relationship. She had raised it as an issue to the wider organisation. This paused all our plans and the wider organisation

was now going to go into a “*discernment*” process over the summer about whether student committee members could or could not be in a same-sex relationship. We were not allowed to talk to anyone about it (except for pastoral reasons) and we didn’t talk to each other. It felt like we had been shut down and I was unable to explain what happened to all my friends after such a public launch.

The same day that I had been informed about the discernment process, I subsequently went to an unrelated Christian student session, which turned out to be about faith and freedom of speech. I sat through an extremely painful session about Christians’ frustrations around not being able to express themselves in public on the same-sex topic. While the session was well intended, there was no mention of it being possible to be both gay and a Christian, and on an emotional level it felt like was quite the opposite.

This was now too much! I could no longer ignore my sexuality anymore. When I got back to room, I was completely overwhelmed with tears. This led me to the realisation that I had to be first honest with myself that I was attracted to men / was gay. Second, I had to be honest about it to God. Third, I had then to be honest about it with people I cared about and trusted. During the following week, for the first time I came out to 6 people that I cared about. This included my brother who said to me with a big smile, “*Well, I had noticed that you weren’t interested in girls.*”



After months of waiting over the summer for a conclusion to the “discernment” process, the organisation decided not to make a decision. Duncan left the group due to not feeling supported enough, while other committee members left due to not having a more liberal stance. This left me in the middle, unable to pick up the pieces. I was burnt out and so I eventually left the group too. This spiralled into a stark spiritual season for me of many “dark nights of the soul”, where I struggled over intertwined pain and the same-sex topic.

I felt unable to read the Bible during this time, for fear of what it might say, that it might contain things I could not handle. My struggles with sexuality were now caught up with the disagreement between my former friends, an organisation that I was not yet able to forgive and my grief over my group ending when I had felt like it was my calling. Every day I would get stuck in the same loop in my head: *“I know that God is good. I know that God made me, but why did He make me like this if this isn’t how He wants me to live? So how can He be good? But I know He is good!”* There was only one thing I was able to do. I would sing worship songs every single moment I was alone. I would pour out my heart to God, using words that had already been written for me. This was how I was able to trust God daily and I felt completely reliant on him to get through.

### **Receiving God’s promises**

A few months passed, and I went on the student church weekend way. During the prayer time, God made me a promise:

*“I will make you more yourself than you have ever been before.”* (Boy. Did He eventually deliver on this!)

This was a real turning point for me. I still had the pain, but I held onto this promise and over time the pain started to heal. I graduated from university and took an internship with my church. It was amazing! This was an incredibly healing time for me. I had been given the time and space to process my sexuality and unravel my pain and baggage.

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## **“Why did God make me like this if this isn’t how He wants me to live?”**

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I was able to chat about my story and theology with my minister. I was being used in church in my own right and exploring my gifting in a safe environment that slowly edged me out of my comfort zone. I remember praying for someone at church about an issue that related to same-sex: for the first time, I realised that God might be able to use my sexuality for good. I spent time thinking about what it means to have our identity in Christ and went through the Bible’s verses about who God says we are, such as us being His handiwork and His temple. I spent a wonderful amount of time praying through this and embracing it.

I was beginning to feel like God was delivering on His promise to me to make me more like myself! Then Covid lockdown hit. I was stuck again, but this time behind international borders! My parents

were missionaries abroad at this point, so I was unable to join them. I was kindly taken in by an older couple from church, but all I wanted to do was go 'home' and be with my parents ('my family'). God really challenged at this time on what my idea of family was and that He was my home. Family was a big idol that I had to give over to Him. I know now that He is the only one I can completely trust, as everything else in my life is temporary.

### **Journeying with others**

Anyway, when life became more normal, I moved city for work. I was now left unsure of how to proceed with processing my sexuality and faith. God had always provided for me in my life, time and time again. I wondered whether TFT might be a support and provision from God that I now needed, so I registered to attend the TFT day conference in London. But I caught Covid and couldn't attend. This led to me being in email contact with TFT and then regularly meeting a Voluntary Worker from TFT via online video calls. It was very helpful to be able to chat about my story and to explore my theology more.

The following year I did attend the TFT day in London and "Wow!" I was completely blown away. Firstly, I had never seen anyone speak out loud "in the flesh", who had both same-sex attraction and the conservative biblical perspective on sex and relationships. I was stunned!

The biggest thing was that the room was full of people of joy, life and faithfulness to God. Real struggles, but so much life and joy. Wow!

It was the first time being in a room, where I truly felt represented! And it was powerful. I realised that it was not only possible to live as a celibate same-sex attracted Christian, but fundamentally it was good. God's plan for my life could be one filled with life and joy (despite the real struggles). The faithfulness in the room shone; people knew the cost of following Jesus and did so anyway. God has given me the privilege to be faithful to Him.

I have been continuing to meet with my Voluntary Worker online, and it has been so life-giving and an incredible journey. I went to the National Conference. I was blown away again. I had spent years doing my absolute utmost to avoid talking about my sexuality and now I was able to spend time with people further on their journey who had wisdom, as well as talking about real-world dilemmas and struggles of living. If I was straight, I would never know God in the same way. I have encountered Him more deeply because of this journey I have been on. It is truly a privilege to be able to honour God with my whole life.

*Adam loves Jesus and recognises himself as a "beautiful and loved child of God". He enjoys hanging out with his church family, as well as board games and good food.*



## Reaching young adults

In Luke 15 we read the parable of the lost sheep and, in many ways, I think this provides a helpful framework for understanding the way western culture encourages the emerging generation to live. We read the story of a shepherd and His flock; the sheep live within the boundaries and safety of the fence; the shepherd tends to and cares for His sheep; the sheep hear His voice and they follow, trusting His leadership and care.

But then a sheep wanders away to form its own path, and finds itself amongst the thorns in the wilderness, unable to find its own way home. The culture we live in encourages us to become like the lost sheep: to break free of any boundaries, to forge our own path, figuring out who we really are. The message is, *"You know yourself best"*. One of the lies being told to this emerging generation is this: only in breaking free from the fences will they discover true freedom and real happiness, only then will they discover who they really are. But, just like the wandering sheep in

Luke 15, instead of finding the grass greener on the other side, they find themselves entangled in thorns and desperately alone, with no idea how to get home.

This modern interpretation of the lost sheep explains the philosophical term 'postmodernism'. A world shaped by postmodernism sees truth as fluid, relative and personal, rather than universal – everything is up for debate. But is it working?

Study after study shows that this generation is more anxious than any generation that has gone before it, and that more young adults are out of work. Young adults have more tools than ever before at their fingertips for connectivity. Many are spending 8 hours or more a day using screens and social media. And yet they are often called the loneliest generation. It's clear that the cultural storyline of 'Live your truth' isn't giving this generation the freedom it promised. The search for individual freedom and truth has left young adults with fragments of clashing identities and personal

truths, endless options of who to be, and a pressure to appear like they have it all together.

The questions we should all be asking and wrestling with within our churches are these: *“How do we reach this generation with biblical truth? How do we help them follow Jesus? What’s the best way to communicate God’s vision for sex, sexuality and relationships to a generation that has been taught to deconstruct and believes that truth is personal and subjective?”*

There isn't a silver bullet, but I think the following three messages are worth considering as we teach this generation:

### **1. The God story is big enough to hold their story**

We follow the one who is the master storyteller. Jesus told stories of farmers and fig trees, treasure and banquets, mustard seeds and weeds. There are so many moments where Jesus could just make a statement about God, but instead chooses to take the time to tell a really good story. With each story, Jesus invites His listeners to make sense of their lives through that story and to dream of their future story. Jesus's stories are packed with culturally relatable examples and yet surprise the listener in how they describe who God is, and what following Him is like.

The beauty of the God-story is that it's not generic: when our stories collide with it, everything is exposed. God gets into the nitty gritty of every part of our lives. God tells a better story for human sexuality: it's surprising and radical. It requires all of us, no matter what our story and experience is, to lay

down every part of our lives in submission to Christ.

Reaching this generation will require vulnerability: sharing what it looks like in our lives to follow Jesus in the area of sexuality and relationships and explaining how encountering the God-story has impacted our lives. This isn't just for those of us who experience same-sex attraction, although our stories are needed and important, but it will require vulnerability from everyone.

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**“The cultural storyline of ‘live your truth’ isn’t giving this generation the freedom it promised”**

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We all need to share how knowing Jesus has shaped the way we relate to desire and sexuality. By allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by telling our stories, the younger generation is given permission to work out their stories within our church walls. In doing so, we communicate to them that the God-story can hold their story, and that we're not scared of their questions. In fact, we've probably had them too. I know from sharing my own experience of same-sex attraction, that it isn't easy to share. For years I thought I never would. But I have found such joy in seeing others come to know Jesus, or walk more deeply with Him, through sharing my story. I'm sure many reading this article will have experienced similar joy.

This isn't about abandoning truth and competing with the narrative nature of culture with our stories. It's about holding to the truth, and then showing those around us how this truth is outworked and how it is beautiful to us.

## 2. They need to see through the right lens

Just like the wrong prescription for glasses can distort your vision, seeing through different figurative lenses changes the way we view the world and how we live in it. The young adults who are within our church walls live in a world full of competing narratives. We can't assume that a couple hours of church on a Sunday is enough to give them a fully formed biblical worldview, especially when it's related to a sensitive, emotive topic like sexuality.

We need to teach young adults how to read the Bible for themselves and how to apply scripture to their lives. Alongside this, we also need to equip this generation to be able to read the culture around them, to notice the water they're swimming in, how it's shaping and forming their values, thoughts and behaviours. It's only through being able to read the Bible and the culture that young adults will be able to see where they are being shaped by the world rather than Jesus. Someone who was born in the last 20 years might assume that the way the world thinks and speaks about sexuality has always been the case. There are many resources that can help with this. The Evangelical Alliance provides one such resource, called "*Relationships Matter*". It's a seven-week small group resource

that's aimed at helping communities understand the cultural stories shaping our views on sex and relationships, and why the God story for sex and sexuality is good and true. (Details of this course are at the end of this article).

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**“ We need to share our own stories of how knowing Jesus have shaped the way we relate to desire and sexuality”**

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This ability to read culture and the Bible will also make young adults more effective in reaching their peers, as they'll know with clarity what the fullness of the God story is and be able to be creative in how they communicate it to their friends. It won't then become mixed up with cultural narratives.

## 3. The Shepherd is looking for them

The good news for our culture, and for those wanting to reach the emerging generation, is that the Shepherd never stops pursuing the lost sheep. In Luke 15, the shepherd finds the sheep, hitches it onto his shoulders, and does what the sheep couldn't. He walks it back home, back into the safety of the fences and the flock where there is much celebration. We can trust that God is pursuing this generation that has been shaped by postmodernism. No matter how entangled in thorns they are, how far from home they've strayed, or how against the flock they are, the Shepherd is looking for them. God deeply cares for those



who are lost.

In Matthew 28, God makes it clear that we don't passively wait for this to happen. God invites us to partner with Him to see disciples made. We have a role in seeking out those who are lost and telling them all about the Shepherd who is seeking them. There is a welcome party getting ready for their arrival, a family they are invited into and the fullness of life that is on offer. God is the only one who can save, and we can trust Him with the lives of the lost. But God will give us opportunities to invite people in. For those of us who experience same-sex attraction, God will probably present us with opportunities to reach the LGBT community and it will take courage to do so.

The truth continues to be true, the gospel is still good news and the Lord is seeking and saving the lost. I have faith that many from this generation will turn to Jesus and find their home in Him.

*Katherine Brown is the “Being Human” engagement lead at the Evangelical Alliance. She speaks on evangelism, reaching young adults and how the God story tells a better story for human sexuality.*

*The Evangelical Alliance has recently launched Relationships Matter: A seven-week course to explore the good true and beautiful story of relationships, sex and sexuality. This course aims to help communities understand the cultural stories shaping our views on sex and relationships, and why the God story for sex and sexuality is a good and beautiful truth to live and share. You can find out more by going to the Evangelical Alliance's website [eak.org](http://eak.org)*



## Reaching young adults podcast

In this extended conversation, Stuart and Katherine talk about Katherine's story and how to engage with Generation Z .

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



# Relationships Matter

## Review: Relationships Matter course

The “*Being Human*” team within the Evangelical Alliance has recently published their “*Relationships Matter*” course. It is aimed at encouraging Christians to explore and chat about the subject of sexuality within the culture we live in. Yes, a course inviting discussions about sex among Christians in an open and honest way! A subject that for many of us, perhaps, is quite personal and sometimes complex. Few of us will have heard it discussed deeply enough in our churches.

The course is hosted by Peter Lynas, Damilola Makinde and Katherine Brown. They take us through seven short 15-minute videos. Peter is married, Damilola is single and Katherine is married (having been in a same-sex relationship before she became a Christian). So, the course is suitable for all, as it raises discussions on issues relating to singleness, same-sex attraction and marriage.

The format of the course is relaxed and likely to result in lively discussions around how and why a Christian might be shaped by our

culture. The videos start off by looking at philosophies that underpin our culture, as well as how we can speak God’s truth into the culture in which we are immersed. Time and again throughout the videos, there is assurance that “*there is nothing that we have done, or has been done to us, which would put us beyond God’s love in this broken world*”. In Jesus, we find grace, mercy and forgiveness available to all. As each session progresses, it should lead to helpful in-depth discussions to strengthen one another with God’s Word and to pray together, as we live in this broken and messed up world.

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**“This resource would help small groups to chat freely about sexuality”**

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There is little, or no, preparation required for leaders and group members. Each session aims to conclude within an hour (of course, it can run longer!). The videos and material are free and come with an

accompanying Leaders Guide. The Leaders Guide provides helpful tips, summary points of each video and discussion questions. There is a 'Response' section at the end of each session suggesting ideas on how to reflect more personally on the material. In addition, there are useful recommended resources, including the offer of pastoral support from TFT to go with the sessions where Katherine shares about her same-sex feelings. There is also an email address to contact the "Being Human" team if there are any questions.

I highly recommend this resource if you think it would be helpful for your small group to chat freely on the subject of sexuality. It is a helpful course that we can use to

strengthen one another with God's Word. It will help us to submit our desires to the Lord Jesus better, as we await his promised return and the new creation. The course is called "Relationships Matter" because our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ matter; and our personal relationship with Jesus matters. So, I encourage you to check out the course on the Evangelical Alliance website, and see if it is suitable for use in either your Barnabas Group or the small groups in your church.

*Yen is TFT's Operations Administrator.*

[www.eauk.org/relationships-matter](http://www.eauk.org/relationships-matter)

## Help us to produce free resources

*At TFT we are continually working to make more resources available online and in print. To do so, we need continued funding in order to develop resources and to make these freely available to all. If you are able to support our work financially, this will help churches and individuals.*

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



## "Could you give us a talk on...?"

*Laura and Mark share, in this article, their experiences of speaking regularly on behalf of TFT.*

### What's normally involved?

**Laura:** Typically, church leaders contact Simon (TFT's Teaching & Outreach Manager) to request a seminar or a talk at a church service. This means a speaking engagement could last anything from around 40 minutes to half a day. Simon asks an appropriate member of the speaking team (based on their location or availability) if they'd like to speak at the event. Once agreed, the speaker is put in touch with the church to discuss content and format. Sometimes two speakers go to longer or larger gatherings.

**Mark:** Afterwards, the church leader is invited to feed back to Simon, who passes the comments to the speaker. This helps to ensure that talks stay engaging and relevant.

### How do you feel before a talk?

**L:** Simon does an excellent job of making sure we're well prepared, but, of course, giving any kind of Bible talk is nerve-wracking. You're conscious of wanting to serve God well and present his Word clearly

and faithfully, whilst always mindful of his abundant grace and patience. Throw in a few stories where you admit personal struggles and the stakes feel even higher. Talking about biblical sexuality adds another level of challenge. Whilst it's true that being vulnerable facing a bunch of strangers can be tough no matter how many times you've spoken before, many Christians value honesty, especially when church leaders and members have historically been fairly reluctant to discuss personal sin and struggles. People generally warm to you and are on your side, even if the topic of sexuality has never been tackled by their church before.

**M:** What makes it different from giving a regular talk on a Bible passage or chairing a discussion at a TFT conference is the fact that you don't know who will show up or what they believe (in terms of how much they've thought about this issue before or whether they're in agreement with TFT's stance or not). I'm often (unnecessarily!) apprehensive about how vocal congregations might be in any Q&A or discussion time, particularly if they have more liberal views. Having said that, I've had to be a bit

more realistic of late, conscious that some conservatives are vigorously debating related issues. These include: how same-sex attracted Christians should describe themselves; the use of pronouns; and the approach Christians should take when engaging with secular culture, philosophy and politics.

### What's it like for you afterwards?

**L:** Anyone who delivers talks on subjects they're passionate about (or that affect them personally) experiences a mix of relief and exhaustion after being on their feet for a time. But there is also an emotional slump or sadness at it being over, followed by anxiety as they worry about how it was received. They might turn over in their mind questions, such as: *"Did I say enough or too much?"*; or *"Could I have phrased things more persuasively and biblically?"*

**M:** Yes, I agree that those are normal responses after any form of Bible teaching. But maybe they are slightly harder to manage in our context. Time constraints mean there's only time for a bit of feedback, often from the pastor of the church and one or two attendees. More significantly, you don't have chance to process your feelings with your church family. Church family and Christian friends pray for you, but they never see what happened on the ground, so you don't get specific feedback or encouragement on talks from those who know you best and whom you most trust.

### For someone who's never given a talk like this to understand the emotional journey, what's a comparable common experience?

**M:** I know not everyone will know what this feels like, but the closest example I can think of is giving a familiar presentation to an internal team at work who you don't know well. Whilst your audience broadly wants to be there and is supportive of what you're doing, you still feel somewhat exposed. Even though you've spoken on the subject many times before and essentially know what you're going to say, you worry about how you're pitching your material and whether you'll be asked curveball questions.

**L:** I wouldn't say it's any easier or harder speaking on this subject to people you know as opposed to a group of strangers. Both situations have their challenges. It starts to feel more *"normal"* to open up about this topic in front of anyone after the first few speaking engagements. For many of us on the speaking team, that process started when we began opening up to friends or by going to a TFT conference. Speaking publicly won't be for everyone.

### What's been your most awkward moment when speaking about your sexuality?

**L:** For me, it was speaking to a much **older** audience than was apparent from the discussions with the event organiser beforehand. It was a challenge, on the hoof, to introduce a topic like this to people who had never spoken in public before about personal relationships, let alone homosexuality. Once I'd finished, I let them loose on the case studies.



The outcome was better than I expected, but did encompass some amusing remarks, questions and turns of phrase.

### **What's been the hardest context in which you've spoken about your sexuality?**

**M:** It's been discouraging on a couple of occasions to realise on arrival at an event that the church leaders had invited a TFT speaker because they were unsure about the Bible's teaching, and that they would therefore be welcoming a more liberal speaker the following week. Whilst I'm glad churches like that want to wrestle with the issues, it's sad to see churches who think they can't be confident about God's good design for sex, relationships and marriage. At these times, you have to remember Jesus' firm promises about how the gospel looks weak and small, as unnoticeable as a mustard seed, but that it will grow and yield massive amounts of the fruit in the end. You also need to remind yourself that the Word of God always advances, despite apparent setbacks, ridicule, confusion, disagreement and opposition. This is the clear pattern established in the book of Acts.

**L:** I'm sometimes surprised that questions that TFT members would have thought through years ago, like *"Why is gay sex wrong but wearing clothes of mixed fibres isn't?"*, are still being asked by Christians generally. Also, that many don't have much idea about where they might go in the Bible to find the answer. I know some speakers have encountered real hostility from those with a revisionist viewpoint, and others who have observed homophobic

attitudes from Christians; unintended, but worryingly casual.

**M:** The more polarised nature of debate at present means that some attendees find it hard to understand the balance of grace and truth that Jesus modelled and that I am trying to copy. They may think that a conservative theological position must mean curbing compassion to the lost, out of a fear of conceding truth. So, sometimes you get people who want a general moan about the evils of *"the gay lobby"*. I try to remind them that Jesus' Word is powerful, and that we don't need to worry. Jesus himself was clear that Christians would be a minority (the road to eternal life is narrow and few find it, he says in Matthew 7). I also need to ask Jesus to help me be like him on these occasions – neither angry nor anxious, but loving and firmly trusting his sovereign purposes.

### **What have people said or done that has been especially helpful?**

**L:** It's really great when friends tell me they've been praying for me. Or when I get an encouraging text from a friend a few hours before the event kicks off. I want those who are reading this interview to know that their prayers are much appreciated and that the Lord uses them to bring fruit in the lives of TFT speakers and in those who come to events.

**M:** I love chatting to older, single, female saints after meetings; they are the group most likely to thank me. I think that this is because they find it refreshing to see someone up front at church speaking positively about singleness, especially if they

have been striving for sexual purity as a single person either all their lives or as a widow, and have often been given the impression that being single is second best.

**L:** There are some lovely surprises too, perhaps when a Christian parent opens up to you and asks for advice on how to love their child or another family member who is struggling with their sexual identity.

### **And what's been unhelpful?**

**M:** It can be frustrating when people misunderstand me, although I guess church leaders face that constantly. Someone once said during a question slot, *"Like you say, love is love and we've just got to accept people"*, even though I'd never said that. Whilst I could see they'd grasped that the church must improve its welcome for gay people, the mention of *"love is love"* made me wonder whether they'd understood God's good pattern of heterosexual marriage. But again, patience is required. Unlike my own church family, I don't know the individuals, and people are always at different stages: visitors, non-believers; Christians viewing this topic with a biblical lens for the first time. The effect of a 25-minute talk is limited. It takes time for people's hearts and minds to be changed, as the Spirit of Jesus works in them.

### **What other aspects of speaking on this subject have made the pressure or cost to you feel more intense?**

**M:** It's tempting to focus on myself by either getting stressed about content or becoming complacent. Then I end up forgetting that this is a spiritual battle and I rely less on God in prayer. Rather than being

confident in past experience, please pray that I'd commit all my preparation and delivery to the Lord, and arrange good prayer support before each speaking engagement.

**L:** I'd echo that. I also know that it's costly for a few speakers to spend several Sundays each year away from their home church. However, things are much better than a few years ago, as TFT has a larger pool of speakers. Praise God for how gifts from members have enabled people to be trained up!

### **What do you enjoy about it?**

**L:** I think we'd both agree that it's a real privilege to have an opportunity to speak about this really key topic in a biblically faithful way. As we give presentations and engage with people, God definitely strengthens our confidence in the truth and willingness to persevere in it.

*Mark, an East Midlander by birth, has been involved with TFT since when the Eurovision Song Contest adopted a generic logo. Although his scratch cooking skills improved during lockdown, he's discovered that there's way more to learn about cooking than he first imagined.*

*Laura, based in Lancashire, works as a GP in her spare time when not serving at church or with TFT. She loves to grow flowers and vegetables, although her efforts are often frustrated by the persistent rain of the northwest.*



# How to teach biblical sexuality badly

**I**n this article, I explore what I see as four common pitfalls when it comes to teaching on biblical sexuality. It's not easy to get everything right when explaining this sensitive topic. But, if you can avoid these blunders, that's a good start!

## **Pitfall 1: Change your theology**

Perhaps the most fundamental error starts from a misunderstanding of (or refusal to accept) what the Bible plainly teaches about sexual activity being only for the marriage of one man and one woman. This departure from orthodox belief is often driven by compassion for those with same-sex feelings. However, misrepresenting the word of God to others is never excusable (eg Matthew 18:6 – *“It would be better for them... to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*).

## **A better way**

Rather than starting with our own instincts, or the world's viewpoint, it's important to study the Bible first to see what it teaches about sexuality. There are some very helpful books available to navigate through this, such as Preston Sprinkle's *“Does the Bible support same-sex marriage?”*

## **Pitfall 2: Make it an "agree to disagree" issue**

A less drastic-sounding approach, compared to Pitfall 1, is to downgrade the issue of sexual morality from a non-negotiable doctrine to a mere secondary issue. But a church adopting this approach ends up with a *“pick and mix”* approach to theology, where each person displaces God by defining sexual (im)morality for themselves.

Romans 14 recognises that there are “debatable matters”: Christians can hold a range of viewpoints on infant baptism or 7-day creation. However, the Bible is clear that a person's practice of sexual morality is of primary importance: in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul makes it clear that *“wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God”* and explicitly includes “men who have sex with men” in his list of such wrongdoers.

## **A better way**

When strongly-held differences within a church on the definition of sexual morality emerge, some fellowships have been able to look humbly and carefully at the Bible together and reach an agreement on doctrine.

However, if there are irreconcilable differences within the members

and/or leaders of a church on biblical sexuality, then the reality is that the church has already divided. Navigating through the painful process of splitting will be more realistic in the long-term than trying to stay together when such fundamental differences in belief remain.

### **Pitfall 3: Talk too much or too little about sexuality**

Sometimes, church leaders recognise how controversial the biblical teaching is on same-sex practice, and decide not to teach on this at their main gatherings. The short-term benefits of this approach are that it's possible to present the gospel in a more palatable way to non-Christians, and it avoids uncomfortable disagreements between Christians within the church. In churches adopting this approach, leaders will often reveal the (normally orthodox) position of the church if requested. However, this approach means that people will make (often incorrect) assumptions about what the church believes. Later, when they discover the official position of the church is different to what they had assumed, they will be understandably aggrieved if that blocks them from participating in membership or leadership, for example.

The opposite fault can be overemphasising this topic, particularly when other forms of sexual immorality or other awkward topics (eg divorce) are not given equivalent attention. Those working this matter through in their own lives (or where it affects someone close to them) can end up feeling unfairly judged. Note that not all

teaching in churches is done through the sermon: if the main message through notices and newsletters is about campaigning against "LGBT activists", then this will also tend to convey a harsh or judgemental attitude to those struggling in this area.

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## **“Let’s be courageous in tackling difficult topics at church ”**

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### **A better way**

Let's be courageous in tackling difficult topics at church and proclaiming "*the whole will of God*" (Acts 20:27). Yes, sadly people may leave the church because they disagree, but it's much kinder to be honest and up front than to hide doctrines from people because we don't want to offend them. 1 Peter 2:8 tells us that Jesus is, "*a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall*". The gospel is offensive, because it calls us all sinners. We shouldn't add to the offence, but nor should we mask the gospel with artificial sweeteners.

If you are concerned that newcomers (or even regulars) need to be regularly reminded of the church's teaching on sexuality, then one option is to have an online video series on this topic to which people can be signposted.

A helpful corrective to teaching too much or too little on this topic is to focus very carefully on your tone. Let your words, "*be always full of grace, seasoned with salt*" (Col 4:6).

#### Pitfall 4: Stifle discussion

Sometimes, church leaders decide to teach about biblical sexuality from the front, but don't trust their small group leaders to host discussions following the teaching. Whilst this at least gets the biblical teaching across, it misses the opportunity for members of the congregation to talk it through and apply it to their own situations. It also makes it harder for leaders to gauge the pastoral impact of the teaching within the congregation.

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**“We should equip our small group leaders to handle this topic pastorally”**

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#### A better way

We should equip our small group leaders to handle this topic pastorally and with biblical integrity. You may need to run a training

course for small group leaders before bringing teaching to the whole church, as well as checking in with the small group leaders along the way. You could also offer the whole church a workshop on the topic at the end of the series. That way, small group leaders could note down any tricky questions that they don't feel confident to answer well, and then could encourage group members to attend the interactive workshop.

#### Conclusion

Although I've tried to highlight some pitfalls to avoid, please don't let this article put you off teaching from the Bible about sexuality. Feel free to get in touch with our staff team for advice or to invite one of our speakers to contribute to your speaking series or to help train your leadership team.

*Stuart is TFT's Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. He enjoys discovering routes across town that are navigable only to cyclists or pedestrians.*







## Why we are expanding our teaching

**T**his article explains why Capernwray Bible School is planning to extend and deepen its curriculum regarding what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality for its students.

Capernwray Hall is a former stately home in North West England. Think scaled-down Downton. Since 1947, it's been a Christian residential holiday centre and Bible School. It is evangelical and non-denominational. Each year we welcome around 2000 guests. At the time of writing, 130 students from 18 nationalities, predominantly young adults, are studying together in residential community. The emphasis is on discipleship, spiritual formation, outreach and a deepened understanding and experience of the indwelling life of Christ.

The teaching is delivered by a combination of Capernwray staff and visiting guest lecturers. For over two decades, True Freedom Trust speakers have been annual fixtures on the guest speaker roster. In recent years, they have delivered a three-hour seminar and offered follow-up consultations to individual students. Their presence

and input is increasingly important to the college's teaching programme.

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### **“Is it OK to experience same-sex attraction, but not act on it?”**

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In each intake, a handful of students may be non-Christians, or just unsure where they stand. The majority, however, come as established believers, often raised in strong Christian homes and vibrant churches. The questions below were submitted anonymously before a recent panel on sexuality, marriage and singleness. They reflect a common lack of conviction and clarity amongst many young believers on these issues:

- *“Is it OK to experience same-sex attraction, but not act on it?”*
- *“I don't understand why homosexuality is a sin. Every other sin I can think of has negative consequences for others or the individual, but same-sex attraction is about love. Is love a sin?”*

- *“How does it make sense that a God who is about love would consider it a sin for me (a woman) to love another woman? I have so much love to give and I am struggling with the fact that, if I experience same-sex attraction, I will never be able to give that love to someone in marriage, according to the Lord.”*

For a lot of our students, the sessions with the TFT speakers are the first time they have heard clear, honest, biblical teaching on same-sex attraction. The majority won't have encountered same-sex attracted believers before speaking openly about their experiences and convictions, whilst simultaneously upholding traditional biblical perspectives on sex and marriage. They'll know that their home churches disapprove of gay sex and same-sex marriage, but they may never before have had the chance to process clear teaching that explains why. Many will rarely have heard celibate singleness upheld and embodied as a viable and abundant lifestyle. The tone of previous discussions may have lacked warmth: as one student described it, *“We were just shouting at a bunch of people we never actually met.”*

Some will have been silently struggling, without much help, with the disconnect between the position of the church and the world they meet beyond it. Each year, we welcome students who themselves experience same-sex attraction, as the questions above reflect. It is releasing and refreshing for them to hear their questions answered by coherent, empathetic Christians with similar lived experiences.

In the 2025-26 academic year, we are expanding our teaching provision on gender and sexuality. What TFT and others offer is wonderful, but we need more time to help our students process and interrogate these and other issues more fully. Connected issues include marriage, singleness, identity, gender and pornography. We're also increasingly aware that other teaching topics should be directly informing these questions:

- Our ecclesiology (our theology of church) needs to dethrone the nuclear family and foster genuine spiritual community.
- Our eschatology (our theology of how the present relates to the future) needs to contrast the eternal marriage of Christ and his church with the temporary institution of human marriage.
- Our cultural studies need to highlight how relatively young our current era of 'authentic individualism' is, as well as the journey that brought our culture to this point. And so on.

Our prayerful hope is that TFT and similar ministries will continue to know the Lord's sustaining power, protection and provision. Their partnership in the education and training of emerging generations of God's people is hugely strategic and deeply encouraging. We are grateful to God for their work.

*Derek has been the Principal of Capernwray Bible School since 2017. Before this, he was a church leader, RE teacher and UCCF staff worker. He's a Manchester City fan, which has made the last few years a bit weird with all that winning, which he's just not used to.*



Kaleidoscope

## Kaleidoscope: A hit or a miss?

When I first came across Living Out's new youth series, Kaleidoscope, I was excited about the project. There have been fantastic courses aimed particularly at adults, but not very many current (or helpful) courses for young people. We desperately need interactive visual media for teenagers to connect with the complex matters of sexuality, gender and faith, especially since many Christians and youth groups shy away from teaching this topic. I'm very pleased to report that Kaleidoscope is a fun and dynamic resource that is pastorally appropriate, relatable and honest. Churches and organisations should seriously consider using it, especially in small groups.

From the offset, we are introduced to two presenters, Andrew and Ashleigh, who both share being same-sex attracted. They speak openly about their experiences growing up, bringing much needed authenticity to speak on matters of sexuality. The six sessions begin with the foundations of Christianity, which demonstrates the thoughtful layout of the course. Each session is a free video, of roughly 25 minutes

duration. By answering big questions about who God is and who we are, they give the audience the opportunity to get to know God's character first and foremost before even addressing the topics of sexuality and gender.

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**“Adults will learn how to support their child as they go through the course”**

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The course includes important discussion times using a simple initial question. I thought it was great to state clearly that youth are to listen well, respecting others and letting everyone have their say; the videos are designed to start conversations and create a safe space for everyone. This sort of language is used a lot in school assemblies and PHSE lessons, and goes a long way in teaching how to communicate well. Kaleidoscope speaks from a Christian perspective, but very much caters for children of Christian faith, different religions and none. There's no assumption of Christian background, which makes

it appropriate in any setting.

From the third session, this course goes into more depth about practically living out gospel truths. Having carefully laid a biblical foundation, viewers begin to see how following Jesus changes everything, especially regarding singleness and marriage. Friendship is brought to the forefront as essential for our sense of wellbeing, whether we are single or married, and Eleanor's story is a vital addition to the course. Gaby and Sean's testimony is matched alongside Eleanor's, to demonstrate the option of marriage, but neither are elevated above the other. The course keeps getting better and better in terms of practically thinking how to live lives that are pleasing to God, as well as, in the fifth and sixth sessions, answering more difficult questions.

Another wonderful support for each video is the accompanying take-home cards, both for teenagers and their parents. By assuming parents are involved in conversations on sexuality and gender, Kaleidoscope recognises young people have a wider network. I know it is a small thing to mention, but it is a valuable addition to the course. In fact, I discovered that there was in-depth training for youth leaders, parents and church leaders, all of whom can of course have great impact on a

teenager's life. The materials are thorough and detailed, and all are easily accessible. I must spotlight the section for parents though, as teenagers often shy away from talking to them about these topics. By giving parents a quick introduction to the course, adults will, by the end, confidently know how to support their child. In my experience, getting parents and carers involved is so important!

I cannot express how much I enjoyed the personal testimonies shared by other speakers in the sessions. They were very real and raw (with some jokes here and there!), and yet each person pointed to the goodness of following Jesus. Their stories touched on issues of transgender, same-sex attraction, bisexuality and more. Each one is a story of hope. We live in a world where stories are crucial to demonstrate the power of the gospel, and to see these given a prominent position was excellent.

I would highly recommend the course as a teaching tool for young people, wherever they find themselves with God. It is biblical, faithful, accessible and applicable. I loved it - five out of five stars!

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