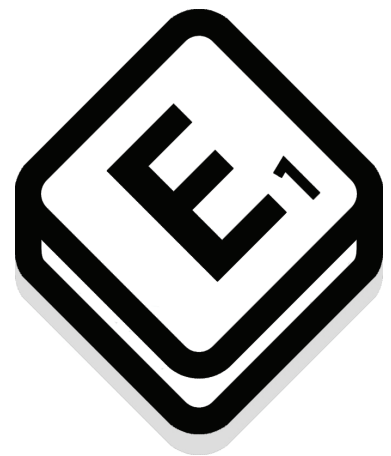




Sex
Friendship
Homosexuality
and the Christian



Testimony

'How did Robert, raised in an Australian communist household, become a Christian?'

Errold Waldron reflects on a relative's conversion.

I was asked the above question recently by my cousin about her brother. This was my reply.

Many years ago, after he had been sick, Robert began looking around in a variety of places for some spiritual dimension. When he was about 40, he told me, he remembered that a lady who had taught him religious instruction when he was at primary school had once said:

'If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

He asked me if I knew where it came from. I told him it was in the Bible, Romans 10:9. He looked it up. Then he asked me what

I thought it meant. I told him it meant what it says. Robert had already begun going to church, and so we stayed in touch.

When I rang him a few years later, he was delighted to tell me he had reread this verse—and suddenly realised that it was not only true but also that it was written for him!

When Robert grabbed hold of Jesus for himself in this way, even his Uncle Richard saw the change that followed in Robert's life.

Sometime later Uncle Richard confided in me that he didn't understand why Robert was now so different: relaxed, motivated and happy. Then Richard said, 'I don't know what Robert's got, but whatever it is I want it.' Meanwhile Robert continued to be part of a local church and a Bible study group.

Robert died suddenly this year. His funeral on 25 March was a warts-and-all celebration of various aspects of his life. This included me speaking of his faith journey, along with Robert's nephew John's video clip of *Amazing Grace* and a thank-you for Robert's part in his conversion.

Errold Waldron is a retired communications engineer and a former Bible Society vice-chairman responsible for focusing support on people groups that were both economically and biblically poor. He is currently active in lay pastoral care at St Matthew's Shenton Park, Perth.

New Archbishop

A former chair of EFAC Australia has been elected as the twelfth Archbishop of Sydney.

The Most Reverend Doctor Glenn Davies was born in 1950. He grew up on Sydney's Northern Beaches and was educated at Sydney Church of England Grammar School. With a BSc from Sydney University, he worked as a mathematics teacher. Since coming to faith during his high school years, he was actively involved in Christian ministry, including youth and campus ministry, before deciding to enter the ministry full time.

He studied at Moore Theological College (DipA) and Westminster Theological Seminary (MDiv, ThM) and was ordained by the then Archbishop of Sydney, Sir Marcus Loane, in 1981. He gained a PhD from Sheffield University in 1988.

Dr Davies served in Sydney parishes including Willoughby and Miranda, and was lecturer in both Old and New Testament and later also registrar at Moore College (1983–95). He was appointed Bishop of North Sydney by Peter Jensen in 2001, a position he held until being elected Archbishop of Sydney this August. During his time in the Northern Region, Dr Davies had episcopal oversight of 64 parishes and emerging multicultural ministries.

His passion for education led to his appointment as founding chairman of the Anglican Education Commission, and he has also been chair of Anglican Youthworks, and a member of the councils of Moore Theological College, the Australian College of Theology and Robert Menzies College.

In the national church, Dr Davies has been a member of General Synod since 1996, on its Standing Committee since 2007 (also holding a position on the General Synod Doctrine Commission since 1993), and has been Canon Theologian in the Diocese of Ballarat since 2000. For ten years until 2012, Dr Davies was also the chair of EFAC Australia.

Internationally, Dr Davies has played a role in the Lausanne Consultation on Evangelisation, the Global Anglican Future Conference, and the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans. Dr Davies was a member of the writing group that produced the Jerusalem Declaration at the landmark GAFCON 2008 in Jerusalem and the communiqué from the 2012 London Leadership Conference.

He is an engaging platform speaker and media communicator whose views on the church, education and youth, as well as faith and society have been sought by newspapers, radio and television. He has written biblical commentaries, topical articles and contributions to theological journals.

Dr Davies is married to Dianne and they have two adult children and three grandchildren. He enjoys movies, board games, walking and swimming.





Essentials Spring 2013

Promoting Christ-centred
biblical ministry.

Essentials is the journal of
the Evangelical Fellowship
in the Anglican Communion.



efac

Editorial

Marriage and sexuality are still in the news. The same-sex lobby has not slackened its pace. One by one governments are changing the laws about marriage. Christians may feel they are fighting a rearguard action. Maybe we are. Certainly our place in society is changing. The hostile parts of our community seem to be getting bolder in mockery and insult. Some of it, no doubt, the church community has asked for. One of the difficulties is to be heard. Rational discussion seems quite difficult.

So this issue of *Essentials* attempts to discuss some of the matters again for the sake of our EFAC community. **Ben Underwood** examines homosexuality from a number of angles and has a very helpful set of responses to it. **Peter Brain** reminds us of the biblical foundations of sexuality and marriage. He also proposes friendship as a challenge to the continuing idolatry of sex.

Same-sex friendship is one of the rallying cries of the debate. But Christians don't have any problem with same-sex friendships. These, together with opposite-sex friendships, are the stuff church is made of. The problem is the sexualising of such friendships—a grievous matter being highlighted in the Royal Commission and in various news reports of pastors who have affairs with members of their congregations.

Ministering among those who have same-sex attraction is provocatively discussed by **Haydn Sennitt**. Issues in ministry among heterosexual teens is helpfully canvassed in a review of Patricia Weerakoon's book *Teen Sex by the Book*. Four new books on sex and marriage are reviewed by **Cailey Raffel**—and there are other interesting bits in this issue as well.

For a complete change, **Tony Nichols** reflects on his second visit to China after 50 years and observes significant changes both in the country and the church.



Dale Appleby is the rector of Christ the King Willetton in the Diocese of Perth, and the new editor of *Essentials*

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Homosexuality

Ben Underwood asks how Christians will respond to the way our society is thinking about homosexuality.

The youth minister at my church invited me to talk to the youth group about homosexuality from a Christian perspective. I think this is a serious topic, and since it is difficult to turn on the TV or read the paper without encountering something to do with homosexuality at the moment, it also seems to me that we should be thinking and talking about it in our churches. So, having done some renewed reading in the area, I went along to then youth group and talked for just under an hour about homosexuality to the upper high schoolers. Apparently they had never been so attentive. The following article is a (grown-up) version of that talk.

What is homosexuality?

Homosexuality is a complex thing. There is homosexual behaviour, that is members of the same sex engaging in sexual practices with one another. But prompting sexual behaviour is sexual desire, and so homosexual desire, sexual desire for members of the same sex, is the inner part of homosexuality. A small minority of people experience homosexual desire, and a smaller minority experience homosexual desire consistently and persistently and may be said to have a homosexual orientation.¹ Some of those who experience same-sex attraction may take on a gay or lesbian (or bisexual or transgender) identity and join the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community. But not everyone who experiences homosexual attraction or orientation chooses to do this. In short, homosexuality is a complex thing potentially involving desire, orientation, socio-cultural identity and sexual practice.

How is our society thinking about homosexuality?

Much of this will be no news to you, but over the last generation our society has been subject to determined campaigns for a moral reassessment of homosexuality. Whereas homosexual behaviour had been considered unacceptable, because it was sinful or perverted and revolting (or both), all that has changed. Homosexuality has been decriminalised, normalised, affirmed and in many ways celebrated as a legitimate and natural state for someone to inhabit. This movement by and for homosexuals has been carried on in the arenas of science,

law, the arts, entertainment, the media and even advertising campaigns.

In science homosexuality has moved from being perceived as a rare psychopathology that may be treated, to being perceived as a not-uncommon, biologically-determined condition, not amenable to change. In legislation, Australian states and territories repealed sodomy laws between 1975 and 1997. These legal reforms by no means signalled approval of homosexual practice for all who voted for them.² But decriminalisation was only a first step towards the legal recognition of homosexual persons and partnerships. Today in Western Australia where I live, gay couples are regarded the same as de facto heterosexual couples. They can adopt, use IVF, inherit, transfer property and access medical services in the same way as heterosexual de facto couples. Anti-discrimination legislation is in place. Some other states have registers of same-sex relationships, and across Australia, campaigns to have same-sex marriage passed into law are in full swing.³

“Study and discussion of the realities of human sexual experience and behaviour is a good thing. Christians should not fear the facts.”

Gay characters sprout up in film, TV shows and books, celebrities and sports stars come out as gay, mistreatment of homosexuals is widely reported as part of the push to stir our indignation and sympathy on behalf of those whose health, safety and freedom are threatened by those who hate homosexuals. Homophobia, like racism, is presented as an evil that must be driven out of our midst. Recognising that homosexual orientation may still attract a social stigma, and that it is also associated with a higher risk of anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicide, especially amongst teenagers, a recent campaign, a poster in a bus shelter near me, summed up the cause when it invited us to ‘imagine being made to feel like crap just for being left handed.’ The poster on a local bus shelter went on to say that ‘being gay, lesbian, bi, trans or intersex is no different to being born left handed, it’s just who you are.

¹ Jones and Yarhouse quote the following figures from a 1994 study by Laumann, Gagnon, Michael and Michaels: 6.2% of males and 4.4% of females report experiencing attraction to members of the same sex; 2.0% of males and 0.9% of females identified themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 32.

² Indeed the preamble to the 1989 WA legislation begins, ‘WHEREAS, the Parliament does not believe that sexual acts between consenting adults in private ought to be regulated by the criminal law; AND WHEREAS, the Parliament disapproves of sexual relations between persons of the same sex’ (www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/repealed_act/trosa1989392/preamble.html, cited 5 June 2013).

³ See, for example, the Wikipedia article ‘LGBT rights in Australia’ at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Australia, and www.australianmarriageequality.com

So stop and think because the things we say are likely to cause depression and anxiety.⁴ Here are many elements of the modern narrative about homosexuality: you are born that way, you can't help it and can't change and yet suffer because insensitive people say things that tell you there's something wrong with who you are. And it's all as irrational as making left-handers stop using their left hand. So let's get rid of this stigma, and welcome gay, lesbian, bi, trans and intersex people into the human race.



There are at least three good things in all this. Firstly, study and discussion of the realities of human sexual experience and behaviour is a good thing. Christians should not fear the facts. Secondly, decriminalising homosexual behaviour between consenting adults is better than prosecuting it in courts. Even if one judges such behaviour to be immoral, not all immorality is, nor need be, a criminal offence. Laws are not needed to curb the spread of homosexual behaviour in our society—most people are happy with their heterosexuality, and not rushing to try homosexual sex. And thirdly, opposing the hatred and violence with which some may respond to homosexuality is an excellent thing. We are to love our neighbours, and that involves protecting our homosexual neighbours from those who hate or despise them. They participate with us as full members of the human race.

But the moral reassessment of homosexuality that is being recommended overturns Christian teaching about homosexuality. Some in the churches are ready to do this, and to incorporate the new account of homosexuality into Christianity. But overturning the received Christian teaching about homosexuality means reinterpreting or rejecting several biblical passages upon which the Christian resistance to sanctioning homosexual desire and behaviour is based. It is all very well to rethink how we have interpreted certain biblical passages in light of what we learn through investigating the world, but we should first make sure our science is good. And we should also remember that science can't make a moral assessment of homosexuality for us. The road from what is to what should be is not so simple as saying since people don't choose to be homosexual, they should not be discouraged from acting upon their desire for homosexual relationships.

⁴ See the campaign run by the depression and anxiety support organisation Beyond Blue at lefthand.org.au

What does science really say?

Are people born gay or do they choose to be gay?

The use of left-handedness as an analogy to homosexuality is an interesting one, because, if you are anything like I was, you might think that handedness is genetically determined, that your genes code for your handedness. But actually I discovered that it is not so. Identical twins are genetic clones, and yet 18% of identical twins have different handedness.⁵ Genes are not destiny when it comes to handedness. Other factors are at play. For at least some people handedness is acquired somehow during the history of their development. This is not to say that there is no genetic influence involved, it is just to say that genes are one factor in a complex of interacting factors which give rise to each individual with his or her individual characteristics.

Something similar could be said of homosexuality. It is a complex thing and plenty of scientists and scientific studies suggest that genes do not make you gay, but seem to have some influence. Not all identical twins share orientation, in fact it is more common for the identical twin of a homosexually oriented twin to be heterosexual.⁶ Genetically identical individuals do not necessarily have the same sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is formed by factors in addition to genetic inheritance. Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project says that the contribution of genes to homosexuality is 'a pre-disposition, not a pre-determination.'⁷

“observing and understanding the effects of individual choices is enormously difficult

This does not mean that a simple choice does not make you gay. As N. E. Whitehead points out 'two thirds of the ages of first (same-sex) attraction are in the range 6–14 years.' And he comments, 'At that age no-one chooses lifetime sexual orientation or lifestyle in any usual sense. Same-sex attraction is discovered to exist in oneself rather than chosen.'⁸ What other factors might influence the development of same-sex attraction? There are investigations into how environmental factors, from hormones *in utero* to childhood experiences and relationships, might have some influence in the emergence of same-sex attraction and homosexual orientation.⁹

⁵ David E. Rosenbaum, 'On Left-Handedness, Its Causes and Costs', *The New York Times*, 16 May 2000 (partners.nytimes.com/library/national/science/health/051600hth-genetics-lefthanded.html)

⁶ Whitehead reports that 'from six studies (2000–2011): if an identical twin has same-sex attraction the chances that the co-twin has it too, are only about 11% for men and 14% for women.' N. E. Whitehead, 'Common Misconceptions About Homosexuality' (www.mygenes.co.nz/myths.pdf, cited 6 June 2013). See also Stanton L. Jones, 'Same-Sex Science', *First Things* 220 (2012), 27–33 (www.firstthings.com).

⁷ Quoted in Michael Bird and Gordon Preece (eds.), *Sexegesis* (Sydney South: Anglican Press Australia, 2012), 13.

⁸ Whitehead, 'Common Misconceptions'.

⁹ Jones ('Same-Sex Science', 29) reports that 'Recent studies show that familial, cultural, and other environmental factors contribute to same-sex attraction. Broken families, absent fathers, older mothers, and being born and living in urban settings all are associated with homosexual experience or attraction.' Jones goes on to say, 'Of course, these variables at most partially determine later homosexual experience, and most children who experienced any or all of these still grow up heterosexual, but the effects are nonetheless real.'

And choices may not be irrelevant. Observing and understanding the effects of individual choices is enormously difficult. This makes it difficult to demonstrate the role our choices play in who we are today and might be tomorrow. Equally it makes it difficult to deny that an individuals' choices may have played an important role in making them who they are.¹⁰ The question *Are people born gay or do they choose to be gay?* misunderstands the complexity of the causes of the homosexual condition. People are not born gay, in the sense that that have genes that make them gay, like they have genes that make their skin white or their eyes brown. Nor do people choose to be gay in the sense that they felt they were free to choose to develop homosexual desires or not. Rather, the best of our current understanding is that genes, environment and perhaps individual responses to their circumstances all contribute to the way that same-sex attraction or homosexual orientation arises. But there is plenty we still don't understand.

Can sexual orientation change?

It's commonplace to hear the claim that homosexual orientation can't change, and if your genes make you gay you might expect that to follow as a straightforward corollary. Yet there are people who say that their sexual orientation *has* changed. Christopher Keane has written his story of experiencing same-sex attraction from an early age, entering a homosexual relationship in his teens and embracing the gay lifestyle in Sydney for fifteen years, before becoming disillusioned with what such homosexuality did and failed to do for him.¹¹ He decided to leave the homosexual scene and return to living out the Christian faith he had first adopted in his teens. Although he expected this to mean celibacy, as he did not expect to experience a change in sexual orientation he did discover both a diminishment of his homosexual attractions and the emergence of lasting heterosexual attraction. In Keane's view, his determined pursuit of God led to him dealing with the 'wounds, hurts and deprivations' of his past with God's help, and this dealt with the roots of his homosexuality, which lay in the character of family relationships, certain wounding experiences, and decisions of his about where he would meet felt needs.¹²

Can we add to personal testimony a scientific take on the possibility of change in sexual orientation? Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse addressed this controversial question in *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*.¹³ The percentage of those reporting suc-

cessful change is quite modest, but Jones sums up the study's finding saying, 'I conclude that homosexual orientation is, contrary to the supposed consensus, sometimes mutable.'¹⁴

Does the moral come from the story?

We have seen that there is reason to question the claim that once gay, you're always gay because you were born that way. But let's suppose it is in fact the case that homosexuality was inborn and immutable. Does it follow that we cannot censure people pursuing the fulfilment of their homosexual attractions? Does it follow that we must affirm homosexuality as a good thing?

As a culture we do censure people pursuing certain sexual attractions, whatever their origins might be. Incestuous attractions, for examples, or paedophilic attractions are regarded as attractions that should not be embraced or acted upon. We make this negative moral judgement without reference to the causes of the attraction. Paedophilia is a lifelong orientation of sexual desire with an onset even from puberty, that is difficult to change, and seems to have biological factors in causation, including genetic factors.¹⁵ Yet even though it may be true that paedophiles do not choose the orientation of their desires and cannot change them easily (if at all), we still expect them to resist those drives and classify them as a sexual disorder. This is because our moral judgement on paedophilia is based on the harm we see visited upon children when paedophiles do act out what they desire.

It seems to me that in fact our moral reappraisal of homosexuality is more about us judging that homosexual relationships between consenting adults are not harmful to anyone, and are in fact a fulfilling experience for homosexuals that no-one has any reason to deny them. If it is possible to be a happy, well-adjusted homosexual, why not let homosexual people give it their best shot if they see fit to try? Whether you were born gay or became gay, whether you could change or not become rather irrelevant then, because when we make our moral judgements on a calculus of harm minimisation, fulfilment maximisation and personal autonomy, there seems no justification for not letting gays be gay. The point is not that they can't help it, rather the point is that it's not hurting anyone. And even if you think it's hurting them, who are you to tell them how to live their life?

We can see that if the story is 'gays are born that way', and 'once gay always gay' the moral does not follow. But if the story is 'it's ok as long as you're not hurting anyone', and 'what happens between consenting adults in the bedroom is their business and no threat to anyone else', and 'everyone should be free to follow their heart', then the moral starts to

¹⁰ Hence Jones says, 'Human choice may be viewed legitimately as one of the factors influencing the development of sexual orientation, but this "is not meant to imply that one consciously decides one's sexual orientation. Instead, sexual orientation is assumed to be shaped and reshaped by a cascade of choices made in the context of changing circumstances in one's life".' Stanton Jones, 'Sexual Orientation and Reason', an expanded version of 'Same-Sex Science' published at www.wheaton.edu (2012), 11, quoting W. Byne and B. Parsons, 'Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised,' *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993), 228.

¹¹ Christopher Keane, *Choices: One person's journey out of homosexuality* (Brunswick East: Acorn, 2009)

¹² Keane, *Choices*, 61, and the personal stories in Christopher Keane (ed.), *What Some of You Were* (Kensington: Matthias Media, 2001).

¹³ Their work has now been updated as 'A longitudinal study of attempted

religiously mediated sexual orientation change', *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 37 (2011), 404-427; see also www.exgaystudy.org

¹⁴ Jones, 'Sexual Orientation and Reason', 11.

¹⁵ James M. Cantor, 'Is Homosexuality a Paraphilia? The Evidence For and Against', *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 41 (2012), 237-247, and Katarina Alanko et al, 'Evidence for Heritability of Adult Men's Sexual Interest in Youth under Age 16 from a Population-Based Extended Twin Design', *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 10 (2013), 1090-1099.

follow more obviously. The trouble is that Christians aren't sold on that story. We decide moral questions in another way, guided by the gospel of Jesus, as given by God in the Bible.

What does the Bible say?

Is being gay sinful?

To think Christianly about homosexuality with its dimensions of attraction, orientation, behaviour and socio-cultural identity we need to set these in a Christian account of human sexuality in creation, fall redemption and recreation. So here's a brief attempt at this.

God is our creator and he has an intended order for his creation. As it touches our sexuality, here's Jesus:

'[A]t the beginning of creation God "made them male and female." "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.' (Mark 10:6–8, NIV)

That is to say that the sexual difference of male and female and their sexual union in marriage is what God has ordained. This leaves two places for human beings to inhabit: faithful sexual union in marriage, and abstinence from sexual relationship outside marriage.

“same-sex attracted people are not singled out as the only ones denied marriage, and sex, by their circumstances

To our world this binary absolute may seem unrealistic and unhealthy, and perhaps these days nobody really believes Christians might believe that, much less live it out. And yet that is the foundation the Bible lays. Part of the reason this may seem unrealistic is that our sexual desires hardly line up with this demand. It seems to me that we don't find our sexual desires simply awakened by one other person of the opposite sex, whom we marry and remain exclusively attracted to, while the rest of the race leaves us cold. Rather, for most, our sexual desires are awakened as teenagers and we experience all sorts of attraction to all sorts of people, and while our love for and attraction to any spouse we might have might remain strong and deep, it might also wax and wane, and others might turn our heads, either occasionally, or even pretty constantly! Those who have any sexual desires generally find they need to manage and discipline those desires and learn to express them in ways considered appropriate. And those who decide to explore what happens when you break the usual rules, and explore different sexual territory often find their desires shift and become open to being aroused in all sorts of practices.

The Bible does not imagine that our sexual desire is neatly tailored to heterosexual faithfulness. Another foundation for the Bible's account of our sexuality is found in Romans 1:21–27 where we read a diagnosis of the human condition as

turned, by our refusal to thank and glorify God, to futility, darkness, foolishness and impurity. We are all caught up in this corruption, but the departure from the God-ordained union of male and female found in homosexual practice vividly illustrates the attitude to God's intentions found in all sin: we turn what God has given us (in this case our sexual bodies) to uses suggested not by God, but by our own blinded and misdirected passions. And, as we do this, we bring upon ourselves our penalty.

Implicit in the use of this example is a rejection of homosexual practice as pleasing to God, and a judgement that homosexual desire is disordered.¹⁶ Homosexuality delivers a penalty to those who pursue it. It is not that homosexual behaviour is the worst of sins, but rather that all sin is somehow like homosexual sex.¹⁷ Following disordered desires does not lead to human flourishing in the end. This is why Christians regard it as an act of truth and love not to join the movement to affirm and celebrate homosexuality. Because we wish those who experience homosexual desire well, we warn them against following those desires, because of the way the Bible warns about it.

Can I be a Christian and homosexual?

Yes, in the sense that I may put my faith in Jesus, and his death and resurrection, no matter who I am.¹⁸ However, a Christian cannot receive homosexual desires and embrace homosexual practice as good and holy things. Neither can a Christian say that being gay is just as fundamental to who I am as being in Christ. Christians are called instead to 'flee from sexual immorality' (1 Cor 6:18), and to understand themselves first and foremost as a redeemed person in Christ.¹⁹ This is part of the life of repentance and faith.

This does ask those who desire to live as pleases God, who also have a homosexual orientation at least to so manage their sexual desires that they live celibate lives and do not conduct homoerotic relationships. There are others whom the gospel calls to renounce hopes of sexual fulfilment and the companionship of marriage in order to follow Christ—all who are unable to contemplate marriage, because no suitable marriage prospect emerges, perhaps because of a disability or illness they suffer, or a vocation they choose to pursue. Same-sex

¹⁶ There are those who would dispute that Romans 1 condemns faithful, committed homosexual relationships between those of homosexual orientation, and others who argue that the gospel updated by a modern understanding of homosexuality calls us to move beyond the biblical censure to a new Christian embrace of faithful, committed homosexual relationships. I don't have space to take up these debates here.

¹⁷ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 383–389.

¹⁸ As it is put in the 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution 1.10, 'We also recognise that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We wish to assure them that they are loved by God, and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ.' (www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm)

¹⁹ A point made well in the Church of England Evangelical Council's St Andrew's Day Statement, Application I (e.g. www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/book_resources/docs/St Andrews Day Statement.pdf).

attracted people are not singled out as the only ones denied marriage, and sex, by their circumstances. And there is life and contentment even without sex. Love is bigger than simply love within sexual relationships.

Yet the gospel is not at heart a stern call to 'renounce your bad desires if you know what's best for you'. The gospel is news of God's love demonstrated in the redemption of the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel is an invitation to new life, to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And in that relationship is peace, joy, love, hope, grace, healing, wisdom, help, comfort, purification, acceptance, reconciliation, strength, transformation, forgiveness, life and whatever we might need, if we seek it and patiently wait for it. 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 speaks of sinners, including 'men who have sex with men' being 'washed...sanctified...justified...by the Spirit of God.' This a reality that changes you, not a mere teaching. It might be difficult to put to death the flesh—Paul's theological term for the inner source of our misdirected and impure desires—but it is not done without the help of God's Spirit indwelling us and imparting God's love and peace to us in the midst of it all.

All this is to say that Christians who renounce pursuing the fulfilment of their same-sex attractions are setting aside one hope (the hope of love in a committed, romantic, sexual relationship) in order to embrace what they trust will prove to be a better one (knowing God through his love and salvation in Christ). And Christians who renounce a gay identity in a gay community are setting aside one self-understanding and a related belonging, to embrace a different self understanding ('I am God's beloved child in Christ, I am his and he is mine even now, and he will bring me, transformed, to glory forever in the new creation') and a different belonging (I am a full, valuable, known and loved member of Christ's church and its expression in the relationships of Christians, especially my local congregation). This a spur to us to take the inclusive and caring community in our churches as seriously as we know how.

***“since we live in a democracy, if our voice
and our vote does not win the day,
that's the way it goes***

I conclude by sticking my oar in briefly in answer to some last questions. There's plenty more to grapple with in these issues which frame and dominate many people's lives, both in and out of the churches. May the Lord teach us to deal with others fairly, graciously, patiently and faithfully in these matters.

Should we have gay marriage?

Obviously since the Bible makes a negative judgement of the goodness and holiness of homosexual practice, to affirm and encourage same-sex attracted people in such relationships by recognising homosexual marriages does not make sense from a Christian perspective. However, once you have decided that there is nothing morally wrong with homosexual relation-

ships, it makes perfect sense to normalise and stabilise them in the same way as heterosexual relationships are normalised and stabilised, not least by the public and legal covenant of marriage administered by the state. And inasmuch as homosexual communities suffer from higher rates of relationship churn, and mental illness, substance abuse etc, it is hoped that including such relationships in the mainstream of marriage will lead to improvements in such indicators of dysfunction, as those who were outcast are brought within the fold.

No-one knows whether this will happen. If it goes ahead, it will be a social experiment. It may substantially ameliorate the situation of homosexual people, or not. The Bible suggests that in the end it will not be good for homosexual people or society (although perhaps not in any immediately obvious way). But quoting the Bible is hardly persuasive to those who regard it as a discredited and outmoded book. Since Christians have Christian moral reasons for doubting the moral reassessment of homosexuality, we shouldn't use other reasons (moral or otherwise) to try. It makes us seem like we are not really saying why we are taking this position if we just talk about slippery slopes or the health of homosexual communities. Fundamentally we need to be upfront about our gospel reasons not to support the cause.

Since we live in a democracy, if our voice and our vote does not win the day, that's the way it goes. Life and Christian witness will go on. We should be gracious if we are defeated and not suffer defeat as if we were somehow entitled to victory in this matter.

What should I do if someone tells me they have homosexual feelings?
Listen, take them seriously, be their friend. Talk to them about it if they want. Find out some more and think about it so you can be of help to them.²⁰

What should I do if I have homosexual feelings?
Don't panic. Your life is not over. There is a difference between experiencing some attractions, having a persistent and consistent orientation towards the same-sex. attraction and identifying yourself as 'gay', 'bisexual', 'lesbian', etc.

You are not alone. There are others in your situation and people you can talk to, books you can read, if you reach out for such help.²¹

How do you talk about homosexuality and homosexuals?
Do you think about the fact that this is quite possibly a real and troubling issue for people around you, and especially for people at your church too? Or do you assume that no one you know is homosexually attracted? Do you think about the way you talk and joke about homosexuality and homosexuals? Does your talk and the atmosphere it creates make it harder or easier

²⁰ The books I have referred to by Christopher Keane are a good place to start: *What Some of You Were and Choices*.

²¹ Liberty Christian Ministries offers support to men and women who struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions (USSA) and to those who have friends, relatives or spouses who have embraced the 'gay' lifestyle or have same-sex attractions (www.libertychristianministries.org.au).

for same-sex attracted people to reach out with confidence and get help to figure out what they are going to do with these experiences?

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1–2, NIV)



Ben Underwood oversees the 5pm congregation at St Matthew's Shenton Park in Perth. He is married to Michelle and they have two (delightful) children. Ben grew up in Sydney, studied science at university and taught mathematics before becoming a minister. He has been on staff at St Matthew's since 2009.



Friendship

Bishop Peter Brain proposes friendship as the challenge to our idolatrous exaltation of sex.

'Friends will go anywhere with you, friends share the good and the bad,' is a truth that resonates with us all.

Kenny Marks's song squares with God's intention, 'It is not good for man to be alone' (Gen 2:18), the proverbial wisdom 'there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother' (Prov 18:24), and the longing of every human heart for a 'kindred spirit'.

My reason for writing this article on friendship is the long held conviction that friendships are the antidote to loneliness and the means by which God would meet our deep longings for intimacy and by so doing keep us from adopting the wrong strategy of seeking this intimacy in sexual relationships prior to or outside of marriage.

If we are to win the battle of encouraging sexual fidelity, we must demonstrate the wonderfully positive benefits of a whole range of friendships given to us by our loving Creator. In so doing we will understand the God given purpose of our sexuality, and the restraints he has put on it.

Many side benefits will accrue. They will include a stronger and surer preparedness for marriage or celibacy. A clearer and winsome witness to a world weary of the heartache and health hazards of promiscuity. A strengthening of relationships within our congregations that will deliver many pluses for ministry.

The concept of friendship has been raised in the General Synod Doctrine Committee's report into homosexuality. A chapter written by the then Primate, Dr Peter Carnley, is full of helpful and wise insights on the place of friendship. Sadly, the article falls at the last hurdle, when the suggestion is made that committed same-sex friendships, which are not promiscuous, but have a sexual aspect, might be countenanced as relationships worthy of church blessing.

It is always tempting, either from a pastoral concern, or simply from a desire to encourage people's faithfulness and happiness, to be less strict than Scripture. However, my own

pastoral experience has shown me that everyone thinks that they are the exception to the rule. That they are so deeply in love that:

- they don't really need marriage preparation;
- their living together is because they are deeply in love and don't need a public declaration in marriage.

This observation leads me to suggest that everyone considers themselves committed. On top of that we must inquire as to what criteria would be used to determine commitment? No other partner for six months? Only one other partner during the past twelve months? Given our propensity to rationalise, I'm very concerned about this thin end of the wedge approach both for those of same-sex and other-sex orientation.

There is a trend of thought within the church that the Spirit of God is leading us into new directions. My contention is that countless thousands upon thousands of men and women, both single and married, Christian and non-Christian have proved in their own experience the reality and joys of faithful non-sexual friendships. One could well argue that the whole fabric of society is built on such. In other words, the Spirit of God confirms within us the goodness and blessings of obedience to the revealed word of God. A return to and upholding of the plain Scriptural teaching regarding sexuality is much more likely to be the way of the Holy Spirit than a departure from it. Departures bear their own testimony through the unhappy consequences that are so evident in STDs, broken hearts, confused relationships, divorce and unfulfilled hopes. It would be wiser to conclude that departures are more likely to reflect the spirit of the age than the Spirit of the living, loving and Holy God. The way ahead for us as Christians is surely to affirm by our individual and corporate teaching and example the joyful consequences of sexual fidelity and wide ranging friendships.

But let me speak positively.

I have observed that the two clearest passages concerning sexual morality in the New Testament are 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8 and Hebrews 13:4. The first contains eight very clear reasons for sexual purity whilst the latter just one—that of God’s judgement. In both cases there appears to be no presenting problem (as in Corinth). Both are set forth as part of the Christian’s God-honouring lifestyle, the call to be careful not to conform to the ways of this passing world.

And of course this is our challenge and here is my concern. What has interested me is that following the Thessalonians passage in 4:9–10 and preceding our Hebrews text in 13:1–3 are exhortations for Christians to continue in loving one another with an intimate and practical brotherly love.

Is this without purpose? I think not. Can it be that the inspired authors, in setting forth the case for sexual purity within heterosexual marriage, knew perfectly well that this would be a difficult call for us all? In so doing they set forth the ‘brotherly love exhortations’ as one of the means God would use to keep us faithful (to our marriage partner, either in the future if single, in the present if married and to God in every case whether married or single, regardless of heterosexual or homosexual orientation).

Perhaps one fulfilment of Genesis 2:18, ‘it is not good for man to be alone’, is to be found in the whole range of friendships formed between fellow Christians.

My own experience, firstly as a single man and for the last 40 years as a married man, confirms that the rich and varied friendships of the congregation, home groups, denominational and wider Christian family are essential for our growth as persons and as Christians. I think my experience mirrors what I see woven throughout the Biblical record. The friendships of David, Jonathan and Mephibosheth bear out the Proverbs praise of caring friendships.

“friendships are the antidote to loneliness and the means by which God would meet our deep longings for intimacy

Our Lord’s concentric circles of friendships including the Twelve, the three, Lazarus and his sisters, not to mention the taunt of enemies that he was the ‘friend of sinners’, remind us of the joy and need of friendship even for the Lord of glory. How much more for us mortals? Paul had close friendships with many—Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila, Timothy and the 35 brothers and sisters mentioned by name in Romans 16. These bear eloquent testimony to God’s intention that we should derive real support and love from a wide circle. All this bears out Jesus’ promise in Mark 10:29–30 of hundreds of brothers, sisters, mothers and children for all who would wholeheartedly follow Jesus.

The implications of all this are vital for us to grasp.

In the first instance it means that the intimacy borne out of friendship is open to all people. This is in plain contrast and conflict with the popular notion that to be a real person one must be in a relationship that includes sex. This, in my judgement, is the lie of our age. It is felt most keenly by the single

young women and men of our community and churches. All the media (print, visual and song) have conspired to persuade us that to be a real person we must be in a sexual relationship which often turns out to be only temporary. Perhaps we have contributed, unwittingly by our emphasis on marriage, and carelessly by offering only selective hospitality, to this awful perversion of the truth. Its corollary is that marriage completes a person. Many talk of their ‘better half.’ Although often in half-hearted jest, it sends a message that $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$. The truth that Scripture affirms is that $1 + 1 = 1$ when it comes to marriage. Marriage provides a place where a man and a woman may complement one another but not complete one another. If we complete one another in marriage, we must say that Jesus and all the other fulfilled single men and women we have known were not whole people. That would be a travesty of the truth. Whilst many may have hoped to be married, they, along with those who chose the single life, were always whole and real persons. Along with married people we only find ourselves complete as we enter into a relationship with God through Christ and the people he gives to us to share our lives with: a ‘real person’ is a person who is daily living out what it means to be created in the image of God. It will be the opposite of the kind of ‘needs-focused’ life modelled by pop songs which cry, ‘Oh, I need you baby’, and the like. It will be the generous, gracious, out-flowing, providing, caring, supportive, responsible, faithful life that reflects the character of God. It will also reflect the mutuality, the fellowship, the rich relationships of the Divine Trinity. It is immediately obvious that this ‘real person’ is radically different from the person whose ‘reality’ is derived from relationships that include sex.

In God’s economy, sexual intimacy is reserved for one’s marriage partner but friendship intimacy is enjoyed and given in a wide range of relationships.

This means that no one needs to enter into a sexual relationship to find either intimacy or fulfilment as a person. Indeed all the evidence tells us that sexual intimacy without the publicly verified marriage relationship is a mirage delivering disappointment, deep hurt and doubt as to whether it is possible to enter into a trusting relationship. It follows that a person is most ready to be married when he/she is most ready to be single. People who marry reflecting the character of God, are much more likely to form a healthy marriage than people who marry to satisfy their ‘needs’. Larry Crabb described many marriages as a ‘tick on a dog’ relationship! With some, it’s more like ‘two ticks and no dog’. Such marriages, sadly, are often full of disappointment.

Friendship has so much to offer to so many. As a church we can offer a distinctive way of life that refuses to focus on our community’s obsession with sex. This can only be done, however if we are distinctive. There can be no exceptions or variations to the God given and Scripture revealed guidelines for the context of the sexual gift to be enjoyed. Put simply these are:

- between a man and a woman,
- married to one another,
- considerably.

Our community is showing all the signs of being torn asunder from within. Not only are there STDs of many kinds, but emotional heartache and relationship devastation are causing havoc amongst us. We have a chance to commend, by our teaching and our actions, a winsome way of living, but only if we do not dilute the biblical teaching.

Friendship as the chief ingredient of intimacy can only strengthen our marriage and family life. Marriages are put under pressure when too much is expected. The accumulated pastoral wisdom would remind us that, even in marriage, sex is not the means of intimacy and will itself be enhanced for both husband and wife where time has been taken to share as friends. The Puritan author who described marriage as a 'perpetual friendly fellowship' was surely correct.

Friendship as the means of intimacy is the only way of strengthening the hand of unmarried people (especially the young) in 'keeping out of bed'. By learning through experience the joys of a wide range of friendships, singles will be less likely to succumb to the many temptations to seek intimacy in non-married sex. All the statistical data points to the fallacy of the try-before-you-buy conventional wisdom. Living together before marriage delivers not certainty and freedom as supposed but rather at least doubling the chance of marriage failure and delivering up to four times as much depression for women. The reason is clear. Sex of itself is so powerful, so physically enjoyable that a relationship can be built for a few months on it alone, but then ironically, the couple realise that they don't know each other. Nonsexual friendship time would have been much more likely to deliver the building blocks of marriage, because non-sexual friendship delivers unpressured time to share dreams, reveal fears, show courtesy, promote listening and a whole range of mutually caring activities. All these provide the basis for knowledge and then respect—all so essential in experiencing intimacy. When that couple marries and enjoys sex it becomes the icing on the cake—the cake of mutual respect born and nurtured in unpressured friendship. Adopting this line of thinking will also make our pastoral counselling and mutual encouragement more effective. This is because we are in the position to affirm the deep longings we all have for intimacy and reveal the wrong strategy, of sexual activity outside

of heterosexual marriage, for experiencing it. In revealing the wrong strategy, God through his word is inviting us to open up the way (through repentance) for experiencing the rich gifts of relationship with himself (through faith) and others (through fellowship).

The Apostle Paul was a realist when it came to sexuality and friendship. This is why in an exhortation found in his first letter to Timothy, he said, 'treat the younger men as your brothers, the older women as mothers and the younger women as sisters, with all purity' (1 Tim 5:1–2). This kind of friendship becomes a great challenge for us as Christians. It condemns our arm's length, formal and sometimes half-hearted relationships. It requires of us a full and committed love to one another which we see called for in the many 'one another' passages (e.g. John 13:14; Rom 12:5, 10; 12:16; 15:7; Eph 4:2, 32; 5:21; Col 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thess 4:18; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:9; 1 John 1:7; 3:11, 23) and our Lord's new commandment (John 13:34–35). Yet it also reminds us of the need to maintain sexual purity in our filial fellowship and friendships. Indeed one could make a case that when sex intrudes into a friendship that is not marriage, the friendship suffers. This is because an expectation of what rightly belongs to the committed relationship of marriage has been aroused. It is just possible that one reason we have such high levels of suicide amongst young people is because we are not as clear and realistic as the apostle in the role that pure friendships play in building, and impure relationships play in destroying, self esteem.

If Mother Theresa was correct, when to the question of what she thought was the world's worst disease, she answered, 'not AIDS, not leprosy or cancer, but loneliness', we have, in line with our Lord's new command, a great opportunity. As a challenge to our idolatrous exaltation of sex, this call to pure friendship is the teaching we must proclaim and exemplify if we are to save both ourselves and our hearers.

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HOW CHRISTIANITY CHANGED THE WORLD

The Christian church has always been called, as have Christian individuals, to be different (Matt 5:13–16). Through history they have proved to be a great blessing when they have done so. Alvin Schmidt, in his book *How Christianity Changed the World* (Zondervan, 2001/2004, p.94) concludes his chapter on sex and marriage with the following factual observation and sobering challenge:

By opposing the Greco-Roman sexual decadence, whether it was adultery, fornication, homosexuality, child molestation, or bestiality, and by introducing God-pleasing sexual standards, Christianity greatly elevated the world's sexual morality. It was one of its many major contributions to civilisation, a contribution that too many Christians today (who nominally comprise about 83 percent of the American population) no longer seem to appreciate, much less defend, as feverish efforts are underway to bring back the sexual debauchery of ancient paganism. If the Apostle John were here today, he would undoubtedly say what he said to the Christians in Laodicea: 'Because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth' (Revelation 3:16).

As a matter of love for God...for our communities...for our members...for the young, we would be wise indeed to remember our calling in this, as in every area of our lives, to be distinctive.

— Peter Brain

In and Out of the Gay Lifestyle

Haydn Sennitt shares experience and insights for ministry with those with same-sex attraction.

“in so many ways churches have ignored those overcoming same-sex attraction

In today's modern, liberal, western cultures, what is the number one issue dominating public discussion? Is it climate change, whaling, North Korea, or penal substitutionary atonement? While all those issues are important to differing degrees, particularly the latter, none at the moment are as important as homosexuality. Discussions about it are occurring with gay abandon and show no sign of abating. Gay and 'straight', Christian and non-Christian, young and old, liberal and conservative all have gay relationships on their radar. Its influence is occurring beyond western borders: South Korea is now considering proposed laws that ban discrimination against gays and recently the first Zulu same-sex wedding occurred. And although previously it was liberal churches that had embraced pro-gay theology, now other denominations are either embracing it or silencing God's word on homosexuality, including evangelicals. Prominent American preacher Rob Bell recently announced, 'I am for love, whether it's [between] a man and a woman, a woman and a woman, a man and a man... This is the world that we are living in and we need to affirm people wherever they are.'¹ Emerging church pioneer Brian McLaren last year married his son in a same-sex marriage ceremony. This is raising many challenging issues regarding evangelism, church life, and the future of Christian witness.

Evangelism

When it comes to homosexuality, much evangelistic witness has been impeded because of judgementalism and homophobia (real or perceived), and in so many ways churches have ignored those overcoming same-sex attraction. When I was dealing with it in my own life and shared with many pastors and preachers my struggle, I was brushed off, ignored, and even told that the church had no way of helping anyone with the issues I had.

¹ 'Rob Bell on Gay Marriage Support: God Pulling Us Ahead to Affirm Gay Brothers, Sisters', *Christian Post*, 22 March 2013 (www.christianpost.com/news/rob-bell-on-gay-marriage-support-god-pulling-us-ahead-to-affirm-gay-brothers-sisters-92395). Tellingly, popular preacher Joel Osteen has denounced gay marriage as unbiblical, saying, 'You know...it's a fine line. We're for everybody. But of course as a Christian pastor, my base is off what I believe the Scripture says. Marriage is between a male and female... I think we have to be compassionate about it all [but] when I've come back to the Scripture, as much as I am for everybody, I don't see same-sex [marriage] in the Scripture' (www.christianpost.com/news/joel-osteen-im-for-everybody-but-same-sex-marriage-is-not-in-the-bible-92920).

I had to swim on my own and get support outside the church or sink. I laboured to understand this because I assumed that the church would be understanding and get behind me (Ps 68: 5–6). I felt betrayed and hurt and that my only alternative was to fit in with a Christian type of heterosexuality that I found alienating. This is a very common experience for people of a same-sex background and, understandably, has caused a lot of hurt and alienation. So what is the answer? Is it to change or muffle the word of Scripture on sexuality (e.g. Rom 1:18–32; Gen 2:15–24; Matt 19:4–5; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9–10; 1 Tim 1:9–10; Jude 7; Rev 21:8)? Is it to enhance the theme of God's grace at the expense of truth? Or should we react against the world and sit on the sidelines to await the Rapture?

These matters are hard for modern-day evangelical Christians to consider because evangelicalism has at its heart a strong desire for all people to know Jesus as we know him (John 3:16). Christians wish for all to be saved from sin because those without Christ are under God's righteous curse (John 3:36; 10:10). However, the tragic reality in this world is that the gate to life in Christ is *narrow* (Matt 7:13) and the way that leads to life is *hard* (7:14). No changing of God's word is going to widen that door or make the journey easier, and if we try then we put ourselves in danger of a strict judgment (Rev 21:18; Matt 7:15–23).

But the problem regarding same-sex attraction is bigger because so often we tell ourselves 'God hates the sin but loves the sinner' and when we (rightly) articulate that homosexuality is not God's best for people then we encounter a problem because most gay people² regard their sexuality and sexual expression as their *identity*.³ So if Christians say that a gay person's 'iden-

² This is even seen among those who regard themselves as 'gay Christians'. At some point in their journey they either will choose an identity in Christ that is grounded in God's word or renounce Christ and embrace homosexuality (Matt 6:24).

³ The gay community has often articulated gay marriage as a right. This has been predicated on the assumption that their being gay is the same as an African being black—they are simply born with it and to reject their life choices is to discriminate against them and a core part of 'who they are'. This is despite no actual proven biological evidence confirming that anyone is born gay (see www.mygenes.co.nz). Nonetheless, the 'born gay' argument has proven successful in both recruiting people into the gay lifestyle (if someone believes they are born that way then they have no choice but to live it) and to elicit public sympathy and demand rights. Yet not everyone in the gay community believes this (www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity/newly-bald-cynthia-nixon-angers-gay-community-says-homosexuality-a-choice/story-e6frfmqi-1226253451895).

tity' is a sin that God hates, then by implication it means that God hates them, which would lead them to question whether God loves the sinner! If this is the case, then how are Christian people to witness to people who believe this?⁴ The only way to navigate through this is to demonstrate that a person's identity is not tied up in their sin as a follower of Christ, that in fact living in such sin works *against* a person's nature (Rom 1:18–21, 26–27) and hence their best interests. This needs to be shown even if they regard themselves as Christians who also identify as gay and believe dangerously that they can continue living in same-sex sexual relationships. They need to be shown that being truly human is to live for God according to his ways (Ps 119:1–3) by living in faith and obedience (John 10:10; 1 John 1:6, Jas 2:14). That can only happen by renouncing sin, not living in it any more (Rom 6:1–2) because no one can serve two masters. If a person is born again into Christ, she or he has been made righteous and set apart (1 Cor 6:11) so continuing to live in sin is a contradiction of their new nature. This is true for all Christians, regardless of what vice, sin, and folly is in their life and being called to live for Christ and be a godlier person is what the gospel is all about. Adapting to the world, as Rob Bell has demanded the church do, will kill its witness rather than enhance it. But this call must be done in love, humility, openness about the church's own shortcomings, and an understanding of God's heart (Ps 34:18).

Church Life

Once people become Christians, things can get tricky: sins don't just melt away and although frequent Bible reading, leadership, church attendance, and prayer can be of enormous benefit for those with same-sex attraction, their issues do not simply go away simply by virtue of those good things. Overcoming this issue is not all about 'praying the gay away', although it is possible in the case of some like musician Dennis Jernigan that some do experience quick, long-lasting change after a spiritual encounter. Nor is it about throwing up one's hands and saying, 'Well, no one can change because no one has and the Bible promises nothing.' The reality is more complex and dare I say victorious than that. That reality is the middle road, which is to say that change and healing can occur—but, more often than not, it takes a long time.⁵ Churches really need to get behind those struggling with this issue because their journey is long, hard, and often very *very* lonely: the world does not understand it and sadly many in church don't either. Because of that many

⁴ Although this is a prominent issue when witnessing to GBLT people, it is also true when witnessing to other people groups. For instance, if being a true Indian is seen as being someone who practices Hinduism, then you encounter the same problem when doing evangelism in India!

⁵ In 2 Chronicles 35, the boy king Josiah launched a program of reforming Israel. From the time he started to the climax of that healing, it took him 18 long years (35:19)! There is nothing wrong with expecting miracles, but often they take longer than most would like and not according to man-made schedules (Isa 5:18–19). Lasting change is possible, but it goes with a lot of hard work (Matt 7:14).

with same-sex attraction live a private double-life of being saved but still addicted to lust. Advice given to them typically is either to white-knuckle it until they meet God in glory, or are told to just keep asking God for forgiveness without being given accountability and the occasional hard word for backsliding. In my own journey with homosexuality I witnessed both of these extremes and they were disillusioning because the former judged me without giving me any support whatsoever and the latter merely gave me cheap grace that undercut the seriousness of my sin when I was acting out in physical sexual relationships with other men while still going to church. It wasn't until a minister lovingly, but seriously, rebuked me in accordance with Matthew 18:15–20 that finally I began to see the seriousness of my sin, the frightful hardening of my heart which came with that, the cost it would have on my soul (Heb 2:14–17). It was only then that I finally took my sin to heart and became serious about expunging it from my life.

Yet today if someone is in church and committing sexual sin, what should be done about it? This is related to the question of whether churches should ignore church discipline mechanisms (Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5:5, 11–13; 2 Cor 7:8–11; Gal 6:1) for the sake of keeping people in the church—even if they are flagrantly disobeying God and weakening their kingdom communities. Yes, all sin is equal in God's sight regarding judgement (1 Cor 6:9–10), but we're told that sexual sin is worse than other offences (6:18). It—along with greed, drunkenness, idolatry and theft—has enough potential to shipwreck entire churches (5:11, 13) and, like cancer, it will spread through and kill. Instead of hiding church discipline behind well-intentioned truisms like 'Everybody sins, no one is perfect. It's okay, just ask God for forgiveness', it is worth considering discipline and enacting it because it really can save people's souls—as long as it is done in humility and properly (Gal 6:1; Matt 18:15–20). Why? Because without holiness none will see God (Heb 12:14; Rom 12:1–12), the very same God who is called Jealous and is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29).

Future of Church Witness

Lastly, Christians need to carefully consider how to witness to the world with respect to homosexuality, how to embrace the person without accepting their sin. Few people I know would allow their friends to ransack their house or pop over without permission: indeed, if a friend kept doing that and showed no sign of remorse—even if he did keep saying sorry—why would we stay in fellowship with them? In the same way God operates, loving the person but seeking their good in asking them to hate sin and leave it behind (John 8:11).

Yet Christians today are urged to be worldly and embrace same-sex marriage not, as we're told, to redefine it but simply to make it more inclusive, because apparently God is love and therefore love is god and love is meant to be blind to its object.

But for Christians to do this, and in particular ministry leaders, is a great sin and the consequences for doing it are unfathomable. Christian folk, as well intentioned as they may be, risk provoking God's anger by embracing homosexuality in much the same way that Israel did in re-defining marriage in the days of Ezra (Ezra 9:10–15; 10:2–4). Christians can only be who they are and be attractive by maintaining a distinctive witness by faithfully and dutifully proclaiming God's will for people as defined in Scripture (2 Tim 3:16–17). Yes, it is *grace* that sets people free from sin and law (Titus 2:11–14), but it must be grace that is grounded in truth, not a blank cheque to keep on sinning. Communicating and practising this is the great challenge facing the church today, as always it has throughout human history.

“churches really need to get behind those struggling with this issue because their journey is long, hard, and often very very lonely

As Sydney archbishop Peter Jensen recently stated at a ministry training event in Sydney that I attended, the church will lose its distinctive witness the day it no longer reveres the authority of Scripture especially on the issue of homosexuality. The church need not capitulate and teach what people want to hear (2 Tim 4:1–5; 3:1–9; 2 Thess 2:11). It should be the particular prayer of all Christian believers today who love God, his ways, and his word that we continue to do this as a faithful witness both to the world and to those in church who are struggling with same-sex attraction and seem to have all things stacked against their favour.

Haydn Sennitt recently stepped down from leading Liberty Christian Ministries (www.libertychristianministries.org.au) in Sydney, to focus on his studies at Morling College. He is married with two daughters. He has shared God's work in his life in mainstream media and has been published at the Gospel Coalition and in *Christianity Today*.

REPORT: Genetics and Homosexuality

Earlier this year, John Tay spoke at a seminar in Perth about the genetic basis for homosexuality. Dr Tay graduated from Sydney University in medicine (with the University Medal) and was until recently Professor of Paediatrics and Head of the Division of Human Genetics at the National University of Singapore.

A large group heard him report on his review of peer-reviewed scientific papers published over the last 20 years concerning the roles of genes and environment on homosexuality.

The conclusion is clear according to this research: the role of genes is far less significant than environment. In a key study based on the Australian Twin Registry, the heritability of homosexuality was only 26%, a figure that is not statistically significant. Environment factors are much more significant. According to Dr Tay, 'No properly qualified geneticist today will ever say or agree with the statement, "I am born gay, and I cannot change."'

He criticised the role of the media in spreading the lie (that people are born that way) and went on to emphasise the role of fathers in the bringing up of children.

— Dale Appleby

Two Online Articles

'Conscientious Objection to Creating Same-Sex Unions: An International Analysis' by Bruce MacDougall, Elsje Bonthuys, Kenneth Norrie and Marjolein van den Brink, *Canadian Journal of Human Rights* 1/1 (2012; ssrn.com/abstract=2134325)

From the Abstract: In jurisdictions that recognize same-sex marriages and unions, the question arises as to the extent to which civic officials who normally preside at such unions can refuse such participation for religious reasons. This paper examines this issue in the context of four jurisdictions: Scotland, Canada, the Netherlands and South Africa.

'Men And Women In Marriage', a document from the Faith and Order Commission published with the agreement of the House of Bishops of the Church of England and approved for study (churchofengland.org/media/1715479/marriagetextbrochureprint/.pdf). From the Purpose Statement:

1. When the British Government held a consultation in the spring of 2012 on projected legislation for same-sex marriage, the Church of England replied that it could not support the idea. The arguments were set out in its response, and this document does not propose to repeat them. The disagreements now need to be set against a more positive background of how Christians have understood and valued marriage.

2. In 2005 the Bishops stated the Church of England's position in these words: 'marriage is a creation ordinance, a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace. Marriage, defined as a faithful, committed, permanent and legally sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman, is central to the stability and health of human society. It continues to provide the best context for the raising of children.'

3. What follows is intended to enlarge on that summary, drawing on what has been said by the Church of England historically and more recently, and especially on how the sexual differentiation of men and women is a gift of God, who 'created humankind in his image...male and female he created them'. It is on male and female that God gives his blessing, which is to be seen not only in procreation but in human culture, too.

4. Marriage, like most important undertakings of life, can be lived more successfully or less successfully. Mistakes are made, by couples, by their friends and relatives, and sometimes also by pastors and institutions of the church, and these can be costly in human terms. Lack of clear understanding of marriage can only multiply disappointments and frustrations. Public discussion at this juncture needs a clear view of why Christians believe and act in relation to marriage as they do, and this statement is offered as a resource for that.

— Dale Appleby

God's intention for sexual expression

Peter Brain reminds us of the biblical foundations.

That there is an endemic confusion about our sexuality is clear in our society. So many are hurt by this confusion. Some nurse broken hearts as trust has been betrayed in serial sexual relationships. Growing numbers experience ongoing harm from sexually transmitted infections (evidenced by the alarming increase in chlamydia). Our deep longing for intimacy fails to find consummation since it is increasingly sought outside of the God-ordained parameters of a committed and mutually considerate, sexual relationship between a man and a woman, who are married to each other. Sex without commitment or even friendship can never deliver God's gracious purposes.

The fundamental texts for the proper expression of our sexuality are to be found in Genesis 1:26–27 and 2:24. Being found in Genesis, they are creational, applying to all people of all cultures for all time. The two passages are found in the complementary creation accounts and teach us fundamental truths about ourselves, marriage and the sexual relationship.

Genesis 1:26–27 reminds us that God created both men and women in his own image, thus establishing our equality in God's eyes and our dependence on God. The truth established here is that we are real people as individuals, independent of our being married or in a sexual relationship. Intimacy is not found primarily in our human relationships, but in our relationship with God. Procreation is clearly seen to be a reason for the male–female relationship, which is so clearly evident from our anatomical makeup. That same-sex relationships are unable to procreate is evident to all.

Genesis 2:24 establishes the complementarity of men and women. Eve does not complete Adam. They are both fully human beings made in God's image and able to relate to God as individuals. Eve and Adam complement one another and so in marriage we make the personal choice to leave parents and unite publicly with our spouse before experiencing the private sexual one-flesh relationship

The public relationship means that there is a decision to tell others and commit openly, thus locking all other sexual partners out. This decision, along with the commitment to transfer allegiance from parents to each other underpins and safeguards the new one-flesh relationship. Couples who save sex for marriage, as Genesis 2:24 teaches, are saved not only from sexually transmitted infection, but also those inevitable comparisons and heartaches of pre- and extra-marital sin. The wonderful forgiveness for sexual sin to be found in true repentance and faith in Christ, does not remove the consequences of our sin. Obedience to this text will bring the freedom of learning to relate to each other with consideration and respect. It would also lend support to the suggestion that pornography and romantic fiction be avoided, since they inevitably set up expectations of the other and oneself that are often unrealistic and always inimical to the caring and considerate building of marital intimacy.

The two texts rule out all other forms of sex including same-sex, pre- and extra-marital sex, polygamy, group sex, incest, rape and bestiality. That they are both quoted by our Lord in Matthew 19:4–5 helps us understand his attitude to same-sex sex. They form the basis for the joyful male–female sexual relationship proscribed for us so lovingly in Scripture (e.g. Proverbs 5; 1 Thess 4:1–8; Heb 13:4). For the same reason they underpin the numerous passages that affirm male–female sex over and against same-sex sex (e.g. Rom 1:18ff.; 1 Cor 6:9–11).

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:21–33, where he quotes our foundational Genesis 2:24, deserves to be heard for the following reasons:

At a stroke of a pen in 5:25, Paul elevates women above his own cultural norm—where they were seen as either chattels, mistresses or second-class citizens—to those who were to be loved and respected by husbands in the same way that Christ gave himself on the cross for the church.

Our primary relationship is with God through Christ (5:32). We do not need to marry to be a complete person. This is vital since we are all single once, and for many twice. Biblical mathematics is not $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$, but $1 + 1 = 1$.

We value Christ and his ways (as outlined, for example, in Ephesians 4:1–6:4) as these fit us for a life of fellowship and freedom in the church, marriage and community. When these are worked through by married couples, they become the nourishing cake of marriage. Sex may well be the icing on the cake, but where there is no cake, sex will soon lose its appeal. The full range of non-sexual friendships, built upon this cake of respect, will deliver true intimacy to all who are not married, and give sex its true meaning for those who are. The intimacy derived from our relationship with Christ (5:32) and with each other (5:18–21) at one and the same time contributes to a healthy marriage and renders sexual relationships unnecessary to those who remain single, whether of same or opposite gender attraction.

The expectation for a single person of either orientation to refrain from sexual relationships is neither unreasonable nor harmful. To expect a married couple to be servants, not only of each other but of others, flows out of Christ's example and teaching.



Peter Brain, formerly Bishop of Armidale, is now the rector of Rockingham in the Diocese of Perth

What will our children inherit?

The French proverb 'be sure that you want the consequences of what you want' alerts us to the fact that arguments for same-sex sex work against the male–female security of marriage. The summary of J. D. Unwin's monumental study of 90 cultures, *Sex and Culture* (OUP, 1934), is salutary:

Every civilisation is established and consolidated by observing a strict sexual moral code, is maintained while this strict code is kept..., and decays when sexual licence is allowed... Any human society is free to choose either to display great energy, or to enjoy sexual freedom: the evidence is that it cannot do both for more than one generation.

Dr John Court, in his book, *Law, Light and Liberty* (Lutheran, 1975), notes, 'Al-dous Huxley has paid considerable attention to Unwin's proposition that the viability of a culture depends on the extent to which controls are exercised over sexual impulses. He describes Unwin's book as 'a work of the highest importance' and, after spelling out the main conclusions that Unwin comes to, Court concludes:

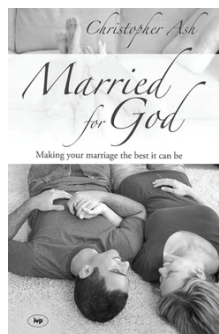
The evidence for these conclusions is so full that it is difficult to see how they can be rejected. They are conclusions which will certainly seem unpalatable to the middle aged relics of a liberal generation. Such Liberals are Liberals, not only politically, but also in the sense in which Shakespeare's 'liberal shepherds' were liberal. They have been 'heard to declare', very frequently and loudly, that they 'wish to enjoy the advantages of high culture and to abolish compulsory continence'. Living as they do upon the capital of energy accumulated by a previous generation of monogamists, whose wives came to them as *virgines intactes*, they can make the best of both worlds during their own lifetime. Dr. Unwin's researches have made it certain, however, that it will be impossible for their children to go on making the best of both worlds.

Our children and culture are at risk. The capital of monogamy and fidelity has been selfishly wasted and those who have wasted it so recklessly are not wise or humble enough to own up to their foolishness but compounding their sin are hell-bent in commending their own folly and dissolute ways to their children. The resultant heartache, hurt and confusion can, and will, only increase if we fail to heed God's ways. It is said that when a man spits into the wind he spits at himself. To put it another way in the words of St Paul: 'We reap what we sow' and 'God cannot be mocked'. The chilling phrase, thrice repeated in Romans 1—'Therefore, God gave them over...' (1:24, 26, 28)—can be road-tested by our observation of the sexual confusion seen amongst us. Any governmental legislation that approves of same-sex marriage can only add to our already confused community, which in commodifying sex has contributed to the denigration of women and the lustfulness of men. Nobody wins in this equation. Churches that endorse same-sex relationships by condoning non-biblical behaviour, whether through ordination or the blessing of relationships, can only expect a withdrawal of God's blessing. Judgement, the Apostle Peter reminds us, 'begins with the household of God' since we should know, from Scripture and experience, the joy of his better way.

— Peter Brain

Sex and Marriage

Five useful books reviewed by **Cailey Raffel** and **Ben Underwood**.



Married for God: Making your marriage the best it can be

Christopher Ash
IVP 2007
ISBN 9781844741892

167 pages, with
discussion questions
after each chapter plus
a comprehensive list
of books for further
reading

This is not a book of commonsense wisdom about sex and marriage with a coating of Bible verses to make it Christian. Rather, Ash wants to start with God and have God central to his whole discussion about marriage. Recognising that disappointment is one of the biggest reasons for marriage breakdown, he starts with the question, 'What are proper hopes and aims for marriage?'

Ash calls us to line up our goals behind God's rather than expecting God to line up his energies behind my goals. His bottom line is: put God at the centre and strive to want what he wants, and you will have a better marriage.

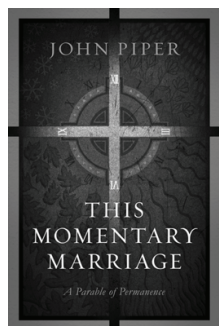
The snapshots of relationships which set the scene for each chapter give the book a contemporary feel. It is easy to read, although challenging in many ways as Ash tackles unhelpful ideas that exist within church circles and broader society. I appreciated that over ten Bible passages discussed are quoted in full.

In discussing Genesis 1–3, we see marriage is not designed as a cure for loneliness, or to meet my needs, but as a vehicle for serving God. Ash uses the phrase 'sex in the service of God' as shorthand for the framework of using all the resources and opportunities that marriage provides to serve God in his world.

Other chapters explore the purpose of the marriage institution (why not just live together?), of sex and intimacy, and of children. In the chapter on God's pattern for marriage, Ash helpfully shows that neither a tyrannical husband nor a domineering wife nor a mousy, doormat wife nor an abdicator husband represent God's pattern.

Ash's discussion of singleness skilfully tackles the lie our society peddles that we cannot be fully human without having sex. He highlights the different expressions, yet common purpose, that singles and marrieds share—that of serving God wholeheartedly. The need to exercise self-control and to learn contentment is also common—recognising our current state, whether single or married, as a gracious gift to us from our loving heavenly Father.

The final chapter, 'What is at the heart of Marriage?', highlights the importance of faithfulness, especially in the light of marriages being joined by God. It finishes with our need to see how great a debt we have had forgiven by God, so that we can go on forgiving our spouse.



This Momentary Marriage

John Piper
Crossway 2009
ISBN 9781433531118

180 pages, plus
subject, Scripture
and person indexes

This book is subtitled *A Parable of Permanence* because Piper's big idea is that marriage is primarily about displaying the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church. Piper prefaces each chapter with a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by Nazis before he was able to marry his fiancée. He does this to remind us that

High romance and passionate sexual intimacy and precious children may come. But hold them loosely—as though you were not holding them... [These] are temporary gifts of God. They are not part of the next life. And they are not guaranteed even for this life... Marriage passes through breathtaking heights and through swamps with choking vapors. (pp.16–17)

Piper paints a biblical vision of just how glorious marriage, as God designed it, should be. But he also stops us making it the very highest thing in our thoughts, helping us keep first things first rather than drifting into idolatry. He emphasises forgiveness and forbearance before seeking change by sacrifice—showing that God's grace gives us power for hard situations but also the motivation and power to change. These chapters will be helpful for people who think that nagging their spouse to change will work or for anyone thinking God is calling them to simply endure a miserable marriage.

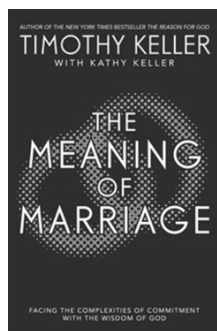
Piper spends a few chapters exploring headship and submission, sex, children and disciple making. There are two chapters given to a discussion of singleness and we are spurred on to be more excited by our eternal relationship with God than any human relationship. Happily-single Christians are a tangible illustration of the sufficiency of Jesus and the final state that we are heading towards.

There are also two chapters given to a discussion of divorce, including whether remarriage is ever permissible. Piper recognises he holds a minority view but urges his readers to consider it and whatever view they come to, to see the meaning of marriage as the flesh-and-blood display of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the Church.

I appreciated the foreword by Noël, his wife, and the honesty with which she and John speak of their 40 years together. Although the book doesn't have many stories from their marriage, John does say he waited 40 years to write it because he is no longer waiting to have it all together before writing on the subject!

The book is full of exhortations I needed to hear, expressed in a way that led me to want to pray at the end of each chapter.

[a free PDF version is available from Piper's website: www.desiringgod.org]



The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the complexities of commitment with the wisdom of God

Timothy & Kathy Keller
Hodder & Stoughton
2011
ISBN 9781444702514

240 pages, plus an appendix on how the Kellers make decisions

The Kellers' introduction says there are two groups of people the book is for:

1. Those who have discovered how challenging marriage is and want practical resources to grow through these trials;
 2. For unmarried people: many ambivalent or dismissive of marriage, others over-desiring it.
- So this book aims to provide a robustly realistic yet glorious vision of marriage and to help people work out what they should be looking for in a prospective mate.

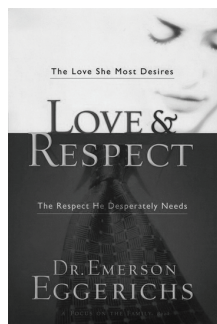
The book is worth buying for the practical counsel it gives to marriage seekers and those who want help with practical chastity. As with Piper's book, I also felt challenged as to how I could use my marriage to better serve my single brothers and sisters.

Though the book is firmly grounded in the biblical teachings on marriage, the Kellers don't assume a Christian audience, and they encourage readers who might not share their conviction that the Bible is God's authoritative word to give it a go anyway—a real strength of the book. Modern urban society is addressed and critiqued well using the Bible. The book also draws on the Kellers' 37-year marriage and pastoral experience with helpful personal anecdotes.

Ephesians 5:18–33 is quoted in full before it is put into today's cultural context. They show that God instituted marriage and that it was designed to be a reflection of the saving love of God for us in Jesus. We are shown our need for the Holy Spirit to make Christ's work real to our hearts and to give us supernatural help against the main enemy of marriage: self-centredness.

The Kellers maintain the heart of marriage is love, discussing the relationship between feelings of love and acts of love, romantic passion and covenantal commitment. The next chapter defines the purpose of marriage as two spiritual friends helping each other on the journey to become the people God designed them to be, followed by a chapter which lays out the skill-sets with which one can help the other on that journey.

Kathy writes chapter 6, 'Embracing the Other', because she has had more experience talking about and struggling with gender roles. Raised gender neutral, her first encounter with headship and submission was intellectually and morally traumatic. Yet she requests that those who are not comfortable with divinely ordained gender roles within marriage suspend judgement for the space of the chapter and consider her reflections. If you are an egalitarian on this issue or feel the complementarian model is discriminatory, you may appreciate Kathy's approach to explaining why she now considers 'inhabiting the Jesus role' a gift.



**Love and Respect:
The love she most
desires; the respect
he desperately needs**

Emmerson Eggerichs
Thomas Nelson 2004
ISBN 9781591452461

317 pages,
including five
practical appendices

*the above books can
come with a variety of
bindings, covers, pub-
lishers and ISBNs*

The pop-style of this book may turn some people off, but I found it was worth persevering with it, despite my aversion to some of the Americanisms. As a pastor counselling marriages in trouble, Eggerichs kept pondering Ephesians 5:33 until he worked out why the husband is commanded to love his wife and the wife is commanded to respect her husband.

Eggerichs's love of real-life examples and illustrations makes it easy to pick up the three main points of the book:

1. Marriages get into a crazy cycle: without feeling love from her husband, a wife reacts in a way that feels like disrespect to her husband...but without feeling respect from his wife, a husband reacts in a way that feels unloving to his wife. And so couples find themselves going around and around in this crazy cycle. The first section of the book unpacks why this is so often the case.
2. We can choose to get off the cycle when we choose to energise each other with love and respect. The second section of the book gives practical and easy-to-remember tools to help wives understand their husbands' need for respect and how to express it, and for husbands to understand their wives' need for love and how to express that. An appendix extends Eggerichs's observations about gender differences and deals with couples who think they don't fit this pattern.
3. The real reason to love and respect is Jesus. This final and briefest section deals with the fear that our efforts might not be reciprocated by our spouse. I was glad to see these chapters take us to Jesus—that we can't really do love and respect unless we do it 'as unto Jesus' and we need his help. A wife's respect for her husband and a husband's love for his wife—regardless of the other's behaviour—reveal their reverence for Christ. If we are not respecting our husband or loving our wife we must ask, 'Am I really loving Jesus Christ?'

This book doesn't have the theological depth of the prior three, and some of Eggerichs's use of Scripture and phrasing may make you squirm. But the simple focus on love and respect and the very specific examples are exactly what some marriages need. Many have already found that his explanation of how to live out Ephesians 5:33 has positively transformed their marriage, as evidenced by the examples peppered as illustrations throughout the book.

Cailey Raffel has been married to Kanishka for 25 years and has lived the last 14 in Shenton Park, Perth, with their two daughters. Two of these books were recommended by friends, another she read with her best friend (and life partner) and the other was picked off the book store shelf and read with a group of women from church.



**Teen Sex
By The Book**

Patricia Weerakoon
Fevr 2012
ISBN 9781922000507

fevr.net/teen-sex-
by-the-book

This book by sex educator, researcher and therapist Patricia Weerakoon is addressed principally to Christian teenagers negotiating the questions about sex and sexuality that confront them. Puberty, the awakening of sexual desire, falling in love, dating, how far to go, stages of male and female sexual response, cyber-sex, pornography, gender, sexual orientation and more are all discussed from a Christian point of view, by a writer whose knowledge of the study of human sexuality is longstanding and informed. Although the book is addressed to teens, Weerakoon envisages that the book will be useful for parents, teachers and youth leaders as well.

Part One is a journey through the central heterosexual experience from puberty to marriage. After a page of earthy vox-pop style quotes raising various issues and illustrating various attitudes, chapter 1 lays foundations, defining sexual activity, and asking what people think sex is for, and what God has to do with sex. The basic view that the book commends is that, sexually,

God made our bodies in a particular way. They work best when we operate within his design: God designed sexuality to operate best within a lifelong marriage of one man to one woman within a supporting family of the church. (p.23)

The confusion, disorder and pain of our sexual lives and identities is the result of living in a world ‘messed up’ by our rebellion against God (p.26), but that in Christ, Christians have a new identity, and a new, counter-cultural way of living prioritising godliness expressed in respect, care, discipline and faithfulness in our sexual activity. The book consistently encourages teens to use this map to negotiate the terrain of sexuality they encounter.

But the book is written by a sex educator, not a theologian or pastor, so the feel is more scientific and sociological than theological. There is plenty of talk of hormones and brain development, and reports of the results of sociological research into sexual attitudes and behaviour. By the time we get to the topically organised Part Two, a wide variety of sexual desires and behaviour is frankly discussed, and by setting out something of the complex and mysterious interaction of genes, hormones, family environment, peer pressure, personal convictions and choices that shape our sexual lives and experience, Weerakoon avoids simplistic analyses of the contested and emerging sexual issues of our time. Her research and counselling means she is in close touch with what teens now actually think, feel and do, and what human biology and sexuality in our world may be.

Yet at the same time, she is very far from saying that anything goes, or seeking to reshape what Christian chastity is. The book’s consistent counsel to teens is to slow down and be careful when it comes to what they involve themselves in. She points out that although the teen brain is full of awakened sexual desire and interest, that same brain has not developed adult judgement, and may make risky decisions in the heat of the moment. And, apart from the immediately regrettable consequences of posting a sensational photo online, or risking teen pregnancy, sexual choices and experiences during teen years influence brain development in ways that shape a person’s future ability to enjoy a sexual relationship within the commitment of marriage. Weerakoon encourages teens to find a peer group who seek to live out a Christian sexual ethic, and not to despise the ways parents, youth pastors and other adults seek to set boundaries and give them guidance. As examples of her specific counsel, she advises dating couples to avoid inflaming one another sexually in any way, and strongly warns boys and girls against the destructive sexual scripts being played out in pornography, scripts which are more and more influencing the mainstream culture. Weerakoon asks her readers ultimately to filter all their response to their sexuality, and that of others, through their identity in Christ, and their love of the other. This love will express itself in consideration and compassion for others, whom we may hurt by the way we treat them. Such consideration and compassion will require that the teen years are not simply an exciting coming-of-age adventure, but are also a process of learning to manage sexual desires responsibly and in counter-cultural holiness.

The strengths of this book are that it comes from an author who has studied and thought about the issues in an informed way. This leads to some distinctive contributions, such as in the chapters in Part Two, especially perhaps chapter 9, ‘Boy or Girl’, which discusses (briefly) some of the complexities of bio-

logical sex (intersex individuals), gender identity (transsexual and transgender individuals) and sexual orientation (homosexual and bisexual desire). In a climate where churches are seen as ignorant and ill-informed about the realities of sexual and gender identity, it is good to read a concise and sympathetic account of these minority experiences from a Christian point of view.

I do think the book would be improved by being clearer and more challenging in its advocacy of Christian chastity to its teenaged target audience. Weerakoon’s highly counter-cultural calls in, say, chapter 5—essentially to refrain from sexual intimacy with another person outside marriage (even while dating)—seem to me to be slightly lost in the mass of information about sexual arousal, and even hedged at times with statements that may seem to imply another view.¹ Perhaps Weerakoon should also be more explicitly critical of teen dating. When Christians advocate zero sexual intimacy of any kind outside marriage—treating ‘women as sisters’ (and men as brothers) until the wedding night—they often also advocate a pretty radical rejection of the whole culture of ‘going out’ and ‘dating’ in favour of a more directed and disciplined ‘courtship’ for those in a position to marry—not teens whose boyfriend/girlfriend liaisons are entered into years before marriage is possible, let alone probable. Weerakoon does not go this far, but perhaps she should, because it does seem to me that when teens pair off as boyfriend and girlfriend, some kind of sexual intimacy is inevitable. When you are a teen full of raging hormones, just being in the same room as your girlfriend is a sexually charged experience. Being alone with her, looking into her eyes and holding hands are already off the scale. She’s no sister in your eyes and you haven’t even kissed. This kind of experience of sexual intimacy seems to me to be part and parcel of teen dating, and perhaps to make her basic counsel more consistently worked through, Weerakoon should strengthen her recommendation that Christian teen pursue many non-sexual friendships with the opposite sex, relate in groups and avoiding dating relationships until at least the late teenage years and probably until early adulthood, in order to help teens live out this abstinence from sexual intimacy.

Lastly, given the book’s acknowledgement that teens do experience sexual desire, fall in love and have to make decisions for themselves about what they will do with these realities, I also think the book would be improved by beefing up its theological muscle. It seems to me that you need to make a strong case to persuade teens to refrain from doing what their culture, their peers and their hormones are all encouraging them to do, namely begin relationships of some (perhaps high) degree of

¹ So while, in the section headed ‘How far should a couple go when on a date?’, we read, ‘the Bible clearly tells us that sexual activity, whatever it is and wherever it lies on the intimacy spectrum, is to be reserved for marriage’ (p.104), that section opens with the statement that, ‘Physical affection and sexual intimacy need to keep in step with the maturity of the relationship. Are you engaged to be married? Or are you in a just-above-friendship and getting-to-know-you relationship?’ (p.102). This opening statement could be read as implying that engaged couples may appropriately enjoy a deeper level of sexual intimacy and physical affection than couples on a first date, despite both couples being unmarried. But Weerakoon overall seems not to endorse this view.

sexual intimacy with one another. That case must be theological and moral, fundamentally. This case cannot be made empirically (through the findings of research) or culturally (we've left that far behind), but can only rest on a revealed vision of a proper human sexuality whose mode of expression is enjoyment of the beloved in the lifelong faithfulness of marriage, which is to be pursued by faith even though it is alien to our culture and even our own flesh. Weerakoon does not leave theology out by any means, and there are plenty of Scriptural quotations but I feel that more of the gospel could be brought to bear on the questions of the purpose of sex and marriage, the nature of our fallenness, the nature of healing and redemption through Christ and especially life in the Spirit. A lot of the advice about living a godly life is on the level of; Stop and think about what you are considering doing and its possible bad consequences. Talk it over with an older Christian you trust, and then choose to live God's way and join with others who want the same. This is good advice, but if it incorporated more explicitly the gospel resources and disciplines for sanctification (e.g. Romans 6; Gal 5:13–26; Eph 4:17–5:20; Col 3:1–17), including concepts like flesh and Spirit, and the new self, being renewed in God's image, I think

the book would be more theologically grounded and integrated, and more powerful for it. There are books like Chester's *You Can Change*, Lane and Tripp's *How People Change* that are attempts to cover this territory.

Weerakoon is to be commended for her work in bringing this book together. Her obvious experience and expertise shine out, as does her concern for teens and their healthy, safe and godly development. She is keen to demonstrate her respect for their growing independence as people and responsibility for their own choices. She encourages teens to choose counter-cultural Christian chastity without glossing over the complexities of the sexual landscape of our culture. She has offered good discussions of specific topics, and her book can profitably be used, perhaps alongside some others, to help teens (and others) think about our God-given sexuality and its proper expression.

Ben Underwood oversees the 5pm congregation at St Matthew's Shenton Park in Perth



Reflections on China Revisited

Bishop Tony Nichols was one of nine from the Diocese of Perth who visited China in April. The main purpose was to visit the Amity Press in Nanjing, the largest publisher of Bibles in the world. The tour was organized by Dr Khoo Kay Keng and led by Archbishop Roger Herft. Tony, who admits to being a China watcher since his youth, reflects on his two visits to China, 50 years apart.

1963, first visit

Mao Zedong, 'the Great Helmsman', was at the height of his powers and piloting this great nation onto the rocks. Up to 50 million are thought to have starved to death in his 'Great Leap Forward'.

Christians were no longer visible. They had numbered nearly a million in 1949 when the Communists took power. Church leaders had been executed or sent to labour camps. Church properties were confiscated and became factories or warehouses. The Bible was banned (mine was confiscated). Christianity was declared to be a tool of Western imperialism. All Protestant churches had been merged in the 'Three Self Patriotic Movement' (TSPM) and placed firmly under Party control at every level. Subsequently, Mao's 'Cultural Revolution' (1966–76) brought a further wave of persecution for Christians and plunged society generally into chaos.

2013, second visit

Thanks to Deng Xiaoping (1979–97) and his successors, Mao's disastrous economic policies have been reversed. Capitalism under Party control has delivered millions from poverty and eased totalitarian repression. However, the Tiananmen Square massacre set limits to political dissent.

Most Chinese seem to accept the focus on food before freedom and are proud that the nation has become the manufacturing hub of the world and a super power. It is also un-Chinese to question authority. Nevertheless, there is increasing criticism of greed, corruption, repression, inequality and pollution.

The changes since Deng Xiaoping have had great consequences for the church whose staggering growth has no parallel in history:

- There are probably now 100 million Christians divided equally between the TSPM and unregistered churches.

- 100 million Bibles have been published since 1988 by the Amity Press in Nanjing, a joint venture of the TSPM and the United Bible Societies. The Bible is said to be a best seller.
- The Government's attitude to the church is changing. As one official recently commented: 'Previously we said: "One convert to Christianity is one less Chinese." Now we recognise that Christians are part of the fabric of Chinese society.'
- Christians are often admired and commended for their honesty and love for others. Social programmes once provided by the Government are increasingly absent in a privatized economy. Christian NGOs sponsored by the TSPM often address these needs.
- The TSPM, established to extend the rule of the Party over churches, is now subverting the system. The leadership is probably still largely liberal. But the grassroots membership is overwhelmingly evangelical. Over half a million converts are baptized into it every year. Some TSPM congregations openly run Sunday Schools and youth groups, which is illegal. Many Christians belong to both TSPM and unregistered churches. TSPM resources such as Bibles and Christian literature find their way to unregistered churches.
- Unregistered churches probably have 50 million members. Many like Watchman Nee's 'Little Flock' have survived decades of persecution. The Lord has raised up great heroes of the faith like Wang Mindao, Yuan Xiangchen and Lin Xiangao (Pastor Lamb). There are some groups that are completely heretical like the 'Eastern Lightning' cult which follows a female messiah.

How did it happen?

- 150 years of Protestant missionary work (and 300 years of Roman Catholic witness) had left a Chinese Bible and much praying and living and suffering for Jesus. Many seeds had fallen into the ground and died.
- Mao's Communists had wrapped China in roads and railways, taught literacy, and made Mandarin the national language.
- Mao destroyed the old religions of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Marxism became the official religion and was ruthlessly inculcated. Mao himself became a God-like figure.
- Communism established one sort of equality: everybody suffered. Christians suffered with the nation, but with more purpose, meaning and hope. The light shone in the darkness.

- The 'Cultural Revolution' (1966-76) and then Mao's death left a vacuum. Deng Xiaoping and successors filled this with state-controlled capitalism. Greed flourished. With both ancient religions and Marxism discredited, there was nothing for the soul.
- Deng restored a measure of religious freedom, depending on the arbitrariness of local officials. Theological seminaries were allowed to reopen. The church has been bold in creating even more space.
- Christians take for granted the authority of the Bible. Chinese Christianity is a gospel movement. The cross of Christ and his resurrection speaks powerfully to those who have been betrayed and suffered under a ruthless political and religious establishment.
- Christians are admired for their honesty and loving service to others, such as in recent earthquakes. TSPM NGOs provide social services increasingly neglected by the State in a privatized economy.
- The astonishing revival in the TSPM is hard to explain in view of longstanding liberal leadership in the State Church. But I was struck by the fact that congregations had memorized their liturgy. Psalms, hymns, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer were all recited without any books. The public reading of Scripture was also preserved. Does this have implications for our services?
- Above all the Chinese Revival reminds us that 'The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he wills' (Prov 21:1). We see this in the tyranny of Mao and the liberalisation under Deng Xiaoping, just as the Bible demonstrates its truth in the policies of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus and Caesar. We are also reminded that God's Spirit works where he wills. We need this perspective in our own discipleship and ministry.



tive in our own discipleship and ministry.

Tony Nichols is a retired bishop of North West Australia and former principal of St Andrew's Hall and Nungalinga College



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What is EFAC?

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC

To maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.
2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate:
 - a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern
 - b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.
7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.

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Essentials Newsletter

Evangelical Fellowship in the
Anglican Communion Australia
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ISSN 1328-5858
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If undeliverable return to:
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