

Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

Christmas 2018



Am I my brother's keeper?

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother, Abel?” “I don’t know”, he replied “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 3:9) Of course, Cain knew exactly where his brother was, but the question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” rings down the ages.

Within the Body of Christ, we have a family responsibility to one another as God’s children. Paul talks about this in Romans Chapter 14 and in 1 Corinthians 10 v23:33. The context of both passages seems to be eating and drinking, but

in 1 Corinthians 10:32, he states, “Do not cause anyone to stumble.” These passages clearly indicate that we do have a responsibility before God for our brothers and sisters in Christ – and, indeed, as a witness to those outside the Kingdom. As TFT members, our focus on obvious sexual sins can perhaps make us blind to more hidden sins (especially pride and selfishness) that are so often the root of other problems in our lives. Because we know and experience a level



of freedom in Christ (John 8:36), it is easy to ignore the effect our actions can have on others. But sometimes when we reflect honestly, our actions might be exposed as fundamentally selfish. How much do we really think of others more than ourselves (see Jesus' example in Philippians 2:3-4)? How often do we use our freedom as an excuse to put ourselves first?

Eating and drinking may seem to us to be a fairly trivial issue in the 21st century. Nevertheless, many of us might have wondered how a person who abstains from alcohol (perhaps due to a previous addiction) could be reacting to our freedom to drink. With practice, we probably come to a conclusion on what course to take in each situation, and hopefully it is appropriate.

How often do we use our freedom as an excuse to put ourselves first?

When we start to think about our position in the Body of Christ, it becomes apparent that we firstly have a responsibility to all of our fellow members and, secondly, that the principles apply to a wide range of behaviours. How much are we challenged by what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26: "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it"? I was convicted a few years ago by what Watchman Nee wrote in his book ("What should this man do?"), implying "if one part sins, every part is affected." It made me realise that because of the unity we have in Christ, any sin I commit affects the health of the whole body. That is quite a heavy responsibility if we take

it to heart: rather like the butterfly effect, do we take the effect of our actions on the rest of the Body seriously enough? How much do we recognise that we are one in Christ Jesus?

A simple example: do we think carefully about what we wear in certain situations? Are we being provocative or modest? Instructions such as 1 Timothy 2:9 ("Women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing") needn't be limited to women.

These verses are deeply challenging to all of us who struggle with sexual temptation: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister." – 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6

We can easily fail to realise that what we are doing or saying may be taking advantage of someone. It can be all too easy when sharing our own stories to become a stumbling block for others through flirting, hugging, graphic descriptions of behaviours/fantasies, taking others to gay bars etc. Even when we feel that we are strong in these areas, mentioning such things could be triggers for someone else. Are we guarding our tongues in conversations (real or virtual)? Paul cautions us, "it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret" (Ephesians 5:12). How we behave and what we say in these areas



has consequences for fellowship. Friendships have been broken, and feelings hurt. Above all, the Body of Christ has suffered. It is not my intention to bring us all into condemnation but to make us think and remind us of our debt of love to one another. I know I have fallen short in these areas on a number of occasions. However, God encourages us to high standards: Peter writes, “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16). A key part of that is making efforts to encourage and edify our brothers and sisters rather than being a stumbling block in any way.

Let us encourage and edify our brothers and sisters rather than being a stumbling block

In conclusion, I have realised that I have not used the word “church” in this article. I have stuck to the phrase Body of Christ, because that is who we are. We are individually and corporately responsible for being Jesus in the world today, and how we treat each other is vital to that witness. In John 13:35, Jesus commands us to love one another and makes clear that is how He wants His Church to be known:

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

by Phil

Image by Mindandi



The theme we are exploring in this magazine is living wisely.

It is good to enjoy healthy friendships and to meet our needs for connection with others. However, we need to “seek [wisdom] like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures” (Prov 2:4), particularly where our desires may be leading us astray. We acknowledge that views on these subjects vary amongst Christians. We’d be interested in hearing from you if you think there are biblical principles that we’ve ignored or under/over-played.

We are excited for 2019 to be touring a day conference we are calling “Pressing On” to four cities around the UK. We intend this to be an encouragement to keep on following God, year after year, whatever the challenges.

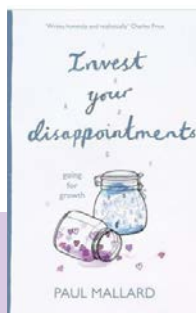
As another year draws to an end, we are so thankful for you, our supporters, for your ongoing prayer and financial support. You enable us to keep going. We wish you every blessing in the lead up to Christmas and beyond.

Alison, Paul, Phil, Rob and Stuart (TFT Staff Team)



Book Review

**“Invest your Disappointments”:
Going for Growth by Paul Mallard (IVP)
£9.99 193 pages**



How long is it since you were disappointed in something, somebody or even yourself? Disappointment ranges from serious life changing situations to minor ones such as the disappointment with my latest photo, which makes me look like an ageing fugitive from the law!

It was with eager anticipation that I bought Paul Mallard's latest book. I have been privileged to hear him speak at the Keswick Convention and to benefit from his teaching DVDs. In his introduction he shares with us some of the weighty family situations and disappointments his family are facing. His wife Edrie's story of debilitating illness has already been told in his sister book, "Invest your Sufferings."

He has a pastor's heart and an ability to get to the core of the fundamental problems we all face: "Disappointment is the sadness we all feel when our hopes are shattered and our expectations fail to be realised." (p.3) Mallard's aim is to take us on a journey through the "Land of Disappointment" (p.3) and onwards to a place of forgiveness, restoration and hope in Christ. At the end of each chapter are questions for personal reflection or for use in group discussion.

He begins by explaining the root cause of all disappointment by taking us back to the Garden of Eden as God created it, where for Adam and Eve it was "life in close and intimate fellowship with God,

which is the purpose of human existence." He contrasts that with life for the couple after they rebelled and disobeyed.

As a natural pessimist, I found his observation very pertinent that to avoid disappointment we can often go through life in an overly negative way, expecting very little. He reminds us we should enjoy all the good things God blesses us with and rejoice in the moment. (1 Timothy 6 v17)

He also leads us helpfully through areas of disappointment found in work, relationships, the pain of parenthood and childlessness, as well as problems at church. These sections are peppered with terrific modern and biblical examples. He gives a list of practical suggestions at the end of each section.

For me chapters 8 and 9 were the most poignant. Chapter 8 covers disappointment with ourselves. Using King David and Peter as examples, he deals with the importance of repentance and a recognition that our battle with sin is lifelong: "We will also need forgiveness every day if we are to complete our journey – anything else is self-deception." (p.104) After Peter's denial ("the best documented public failure in the history of the church" - p.111) and repentance, God wonderfully restored him and used him mightily in the future.

In chapter 9, Mallard tackles the times when we feel disappointed or let down by the Lord, using the example of Elijah after the victory on Mount Carmel. He warns us “that behind the disappointments we face in the world and at home are the slimy manoeuvrings of spiritual forces of evil...we must choose to believe what God says in the objective truths, rather than succumbing to Satan’s seductive slanders.” (p.117)

He does not specifically deal with the issue of SSA in the chapter “When Relationships Fail”. But TFT members who feel a disappointment in missing out on a sexual partnership, owing to their call to celibacy, should find much encouragement in Mallard’s wise teaching and advice. In the section on “Singleness: a challenge and an opportunity”, he describes singleness as a gift from God and not God’s second best: it is a challenge and an opportunity. “Singles have to struggle with loneliness and sexual temptation. Often it is when we feel most alone and isolated, that we experience the most seductive temptations.” (p.65) Mallard sees loneliness as a scourge and emphasises the importance of Christian friendships and the love and support that is vital within our churches. Mallard affirms God’s great love for us and His desire that we should experience life in all its fullness now. For anyone disappointed in how the church treats singles or people

with SSA, the chapter “When Church Distresses Us” offers helpful suggestions of how we can respond well and move forward. Whether married or single, Mallard warns we should not look to our friends or spouses as our ultimate source of satisfaction and happiness nor allow anyone or anything to take the place of God in our lives.

Would I recommend this book? Most certainly. It compels us to face up to life in this fallen world with all its disappointments, but doesn’t leave us there. It directs us to the treasure trove of God’s grace and shows us how God comforts and restores us. It shows how God strengthens us, making us more determined to persevere, using even our most painful experiences to help others. I have found it a timely reminder that true fulfilment is found in Christ alone.

by Vicki

How my cravings for touch showed me what I really need

Some people who are single and/or attracted to the same sex find that physical touch is something they feel they lack. Despite being a person who falls into both those categories, for much of my life this wasn't a feeling I particularly shared. I'd never really thought of myself as someone who especially appreciated physical affection. It's not that I minded it – but it just wasn't something that I really thought about.

Therefore, feelings I began to have a few years ago took me somewhat by surprise. I became aware that I felt acutely untouched. I felt like I needed to be held. I felt like I had a craving for physical intimacy.

It seemed like I had a physical craving that had to be satisfied

I can't remember when I first noticed these feelings. But once noticed, they seemed impossible to ignore. It felt like they were always there, like a constant throb or hum in the background. Just as I need my cup of tea when I get to my desk in the morning, it seemed like I had a physical craving that had to be satisfied.

But whilst it was clear to me what I was craving, I couldn't work out for the life of me where these feelings had all come from.



I'd never really felt like I particularly wanted to be touched – even when I had felt at my lowest. And I'd certainly not wanted it in such a persistent way for a prolonged period of time. It wasn't as though the amount I was being touched had recently declined either. And yet, despite that, the itch was never scratched – even when I was hugged. The physical affection I received left me feeling just as empty as I did before.

Nowadays, however, these feelings seem to be a thing of the past. But just as I couldn't pinpoint when they first reared their head, I also couldn't tell you exactly when they left. Just as they first appeared without an obvious cause, they then left in a similar manner. There was no magic wand, no 10-step programme, or even any form of concerted effort to get rid of them.

I can tell you that they didn't leave overnight though. Instead, over the course of time, the cravings eased and my thoughts turned to other things. I'd guess that eventually the feelings were so weak that they simply disappeared.

But whilst I can't pinpoint a particular remedy, I can't ignore that my circumstances have changed since these feelings began. As a result, I do have my own tentative thoughts about what might have caused these feelings for me and why they then reduced. In a word, it would be: isolation.

When these feelings began, I was often working from home so it was not unusual

for me to go for a whole day without seeing another person. I was also working hard, so relationships were neglected as I neither had the energy nor made the time to see people. Then when I did show my face, I found it hard to be honest about what was going on in my life – and so even when I was with people, I still felt alone.

The cravings I had for physical contact were the fruit of my isolation

These days, things are different. I now work in an open plan office and there's always someone else around. Work also takes up fewer of my waking hours, so I have time for important things outside of work. In the relationships I have, I feel more able to let others know what's on my mind and heart. I feel more known, and rarely truly alone.

Therefore I can't help but wonder if the cravings I had for physical contact were the fruit of my experience of isolation. And since that experience has now come to an end, these cravings no longer have a place in my life.

But whilst the cravings seem to have gone, I've not been left unchanged by the experience. I'm aware that now when someone shows me physical affection, I notice it more than I would have done before.

The other week at work I came across a lady, perhaps in her 50s, outside the lifts, looking around and clearly unsure where she was going. After I enquired whether she was alright, she exclaimed something like "Is this the first floor, or the second? I'm meant to be on the second but I think I've got myself confused!" And as she said that, she reached out and touched my arm. It was done without any thought, but communicated an appreciation and warmth that took me by surprise.



A few years ago, I'd never have even been aware of what she'd done – the movement passed in a moment. Yet now, whilst I'd struggle to remember what the woman said or what she looked like, it was her touch that left the greatest impression on me.

So whilst physical touch is no longer something I crave, I do now value physical affection more than I did before.

by Jonny



Am I kidding myself?

Celibate same-sex attracted Christians, while accepting that they need to say “no” to their desires for sexual intimacy with another person of the same sex, often long for another way of meeting their God-given hunger for connection and intimacy with others. Behind this is this reasonable question: “Are there any healthy alternatives to sexual intimacy that will ease loneliness and physical isolation for celibate Christians?” In this article, I’ll offer some biblical principles to steer our hearts and minds towards discerning whether a particular way of developing intimacy is sensible or if it’s just going to lead to greater temptation.

Are there any healthy alternatives to sexual intimacy that will ease loneliness?

Hungry for connection

In biblical times, there would have been more non-sexual everyday physical contact between same sex friends for both practical and cultural reasons than is usual in modern Western society. For example, Ecclesiastes 4:11 says (in the days before central heating!): “if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?”

Ironically, since the so-called sexual revolution in the 1960s, non-sexual physical contact has actually become harder in our culture. For example, a hug or a squeeze on the shoulder might now be seen as flirting. The sexual revolution has

sought to overthrow taboos in the name of freedom, but in some societies in the Middle East today men have the freedom to hold hands together purely as friends because the sexual taboos around same-sex relationships free them from suspicion.

Despite how connected our smartphones claim to make us, many people in our society today are feeling lonely and disconnected. Our culture continually tells us that the answer to this is sexual intimacy. Is there a godly answer to this for faithful Christians?

What intimacy is wise for the celibate Christian?

Over many years of providing pastoral support at TFT, we’ve heard same-sex attracted Christians suggest a number of ways of meeting their longings for intimacy:

- Hugs with a same-sex friend
- Visiting naturist beaches
- Visiting gay bars or nightclubs without the intention of sexual intimacy
- Using an online chatroom or a dating website/app to meet other same-sex attracted people just for friendship
- Sharing a house or going on holiday with another person of the same sex
- Solemnising a particular same-sex friendship

There is no “one size fits all” biblical answer to many of these suggestions, although some of them (eg the dating app or visiting gay bars) ring more alarm bells than others.

What seems relatively safe behaviour for one person might be “playing with fire” (Prov 6:27) for another person. We are all wired differently and at different levels of maturity in our Christian walk. For example, one person might find going on holiday with a same-sex friend provides great companionship and helps to deepen friendship. But another person, particularly where there is sexual attraction towards the friend, might discern that there would be too many temptations and not enough accountability. What is important is that each person seeks to be utterly honest about his/her own heart desires and vulnerabilities, whilst recognising that it is so easy to deceive ourselves (Jeremiah 17:9), and also reviews the impact on others involved.

The rest of this article gives five biblical principles to consider.

Principle 1: Flee from sexual immorality

We are commanded to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18). We need to have a broad understanding of sexual immorality, including those outwardly innocent behaviours that might have sexual undertones. God gave us a long list of unlawful sexual relations in Leviticus 18, but Jesus developed further the definition of sexual morality in his teachings to include our sexual thoughts and motivations (Matt 5:27-30). For example, for a woman to hold another woman’s hand in one situation might be reassuring, but in another context it might have sexual energy.

We need to be honest with ourselves where

there might be a sexual element in our interactions with others and, where this is the case, to flee from sexual immorality. We must be aware of the seductiveness of immorality (see Proverbs 5-9) and its ability to warp our thinking into justifying our desires.

But don’t take from this principle that the Christian life is one of hiding, and isolation from others. Not at all. Instead, we should practise love, service and hospitality within our churches (1 Peter 4:7-11) and find biblical contentment in our current situations - Paul wrote about this as a single man in Phil 4:10-13.

Principle 2: The cross AND the heart

It is right to take up our crosses daily (In Luke 9:23, Jesus says “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me”). It is also right to pursue the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4 says “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart”). Like many biblical truths, there is a right tension to pursue here and we need to avoid being simplistic. Yes, we need to crucify ungodly desires and expect complete satisfaction only in the life to come (Rev 21:4), but Jesus himself promised many blessings in this present life for the believer who has made sacrifices (Mark 10:29-30).

And we need to read these verses in context and let the whole Bible interpret each passage. So, for example, notice in Psalm 37:4 cited above that the first thing is to “Delight yourself in the Lord”: only from this spiritual position will

we increasingly desire what is good according to God. So “he will give you the desires of your heart” is not the same as “you can have whatever you want”. We should expect blessings in the form of meaningful relationships with others, but those relationships might not be with the people we find most attractive!

Principle 3: Pursue wisdom

We do need to know where God’s boundaries are for our behaviours, but we should beware of supplementing these with our own legalistic rules of behaviour to define what is safe versus what is risky. An example of this might be “I mustn’t give my friend a back rub with his shirt off; but it’s fine if he’s got his shirt on.” Colossians 2:16-23 advises us that such man-made rules can do nothing to turn our hearts from sin, so although they might contain some wisdom we need to be wary of relying on them to guarantee a safe experience. Verse 23 states “These [invented rules] have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” So if a behaviour is not clearly prohibited in the Bible, we are to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5), since some things are biblically allowable but not pastorally wise.

Here are some questions to help determine the wisdom (or otherwise) of a proposed behaviour:

- Does it satisfy and ease my desire for connection or does it leave me aroused and wanting to go further next time?
- Is there a safer way of meeting this desire? For example, rather than channelling all my energies into developing one “special friendship”,

could I spend time with two or three friends to avoid getting emotionally enmeshed with one person?

- Do any others involved share my Christian faith and agree to the same boundaries as me?
- Am I being honest with myself about my motivations? I mustn’t pretend that I’m trying to evangelise or support another person, for example, when it’s really about my own needs.

Principle 4: Consider others

If, by way of example, a lady were to attend a Sunday service at your church wearing a skimpy or tight-fitting outfit, she might enjoy showing off her body. But we need to be careful about the impact of our free choices on other people. For her fellow church-goer, for example, she might become a stumbling block, unnecessarily triggering thoughts and feelings such as lust or jealousy.

Paul writes in Rom 14:21: “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.” In his day, there were controversies around what was permissible to eat and drink and Paul generally advocated freedom in this area; but where it might cause difficulties for a less mature Christian, he calls us to abstain from otherwise legitimate behaviours. Don’t assume that because you have the self-control to engage safely in an activity that it will be the same for another person. Part of the cost of living in Christian community is not always getting to do what we’d like to do. So we should always be aware of the impact of our behaviours on others and err on the side of abstinence if we think it might lead them astray.



Don't assume that the other person will have your level of self-control

Principle 5: Walk in the light

Where there is no conclusive biblical principle around behaviour that has a strong appeal, and hence the need to exercise godly judgement, we are rarely wise to rely on our own discernment. In John's first letter, he calls us to live in the light (1 John 1:5-10). We are to seek counsel and then to continue walking in the light, keeping our behaviour open to scrutiny by mature Christians. This may need to be an ongoing accountability arrangement where the other person would be willing to challenge you when appropriate. Another possibility could be to explore pastoral care, counselling or spiritual direction with a wise Christian.

A good test of whether Jesus is really Lord in this area of our lives is to ask ourselves this question: "How might I respond to another Christian challenging the wisdom of what I'm doing?" If we would genuinely respond with thoughtful consideration, that is a good sign; but if we would respond with angry defensiveness, then

that may indicate that we are not open to challenge in this area (Proverbs 10:17 says: "Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray").

If the person I'm thinking of involving in my activity also faces similar temptations, then forming a larger group may provide more accountability.

Communion with God

In this article, I've tried to avoid setting forth "dos" and "don'ts", but rather set out five biblical principles to help us live Godly but fulfilling lives in how we relate to others. However, we must have realistic expectations about our relationships with other people – they will always include disappointments. Ultimately, we need to develop genuine intimacy in our relationship with God. At our June 2018 conference, Tim Keller described how he has found satisfying "communion with God" through daily meditation upon the Psalms (see his book "My Rock My Refuge"). I will give Jesus the last word on the depth of relationship that he wants with each of us: "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

by Stuart

TFT in numbers

As we look back over the last financial year, we are very grateful to God for his provision to us. We depend solely on the gifts of Christians, churches and other charitable trusts who share our vision for promoting biblical sexuality.

We would like to say a big thank you to all our members who give to the work of TFT so generously. Those of you who commit to give regularly by standing order, along with the related Gift Aid, contribute to almost half of the donations we receive.

Income 17/18



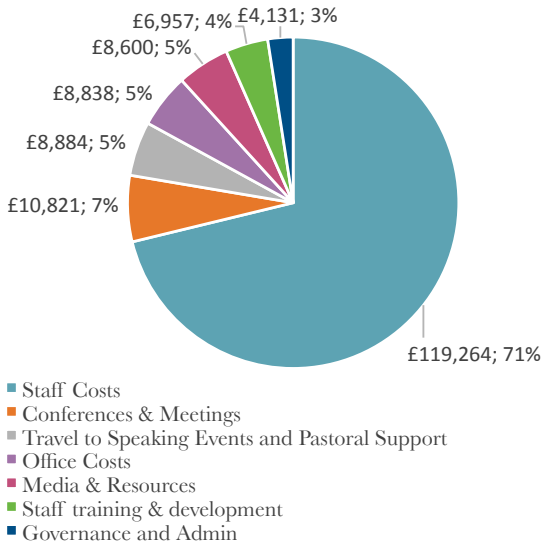
However, these donations only help towards around 50% of our necessary expenditure. So we are also very grateful for the one-off gifts we received throughout the year from members, supporters, churches and trusts.

Your donations are primarily spent on paying for the staff team to undertake and coordinate the core activities of pastoral care, speaking engagements and provision of events. Other expenses include providing trustworthy resources in the form of our quarterly Ascend magazine, and on our website, and maintaining high standards of training for our staff and volunteers.





Expenditure 17/18



2017-18 facts:

- 8 Barnabas Groups
- 4 Online Support Groups
- 1 Manchester Day Conference
- 125 at National Conference (23 for the first time)
- 50 speaking engagements
- 1,047 pastoral interactions
- 1,610 TFT members
- 142 Partnership Churches
- 6 new Voluntary Workers
- 42 trained Voluntary Workers
- 13,512 website users (53% from the UK; 20% from the US)

This coming year we would love to continue to do the same, and more. As the demand for clear Biblical teaching on the subject of same-sex attraction continues to grow, we have a vision to develop our team of volunteers who are willing to speak at churches and events across the country.

Please pray:

- For **God's continued provision** in terms of finance and resources
- For more churches and likeminded organisations to **support our work**
- For a growth in committed, **regular giving**

The published summary of the receipts and payments accounts is available on the Charity Commission website.

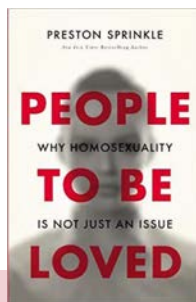


Book Review

People to be Loved
Why homosexuality is not just an issue
by Preston Sprinkle

Zondervan, Dec 2015 226 pages

£10.99 Paperback Kindle £6.99



Preston Sprinkle (don't you just love that name!), is an author, teacher, and speaker with a PhD in New Testament. He's written a gem of a book called 'People to be Loved.'

Pastoral warmth

I appreciated how Sprinkle recognised the sensitive, personal nature of the topic. Not content to talk about this topic in the abstract, Sprinkle rightly centres the conversation on people. Although Sprinkle does not experience same-sex attraction himself, he gets the tone just right. As a result, his writing radiates a pastoral warmth. For that alone, I highly recommend this book.

Biblical teaching

The book also takes seriously the challenge of revisionist teaching. Sprinkle is obviously well read and goes through the Bible's teaching expertly. There were occasions, however, when I felt he could have pressed the case further. For example, at the end of chapter two, Sprinkle states that sexual difference in marriage alone is not enough to settle the debate on same-sex relationships. He could, of course, be right about that. But having just written so well on marriage and creation, I think he could have drawn a much stronger conclusion to that chapter than he did. I think the warm tone that makes the book so good, may work

against him when the orthodox case could be pressed further.

Useful insights

Alongside the good biblical teaching and warm pastoral tone, this book is also packed full of useful insights. For example, in chapter four, Sprinkle undermines many revisionist arguments by exploring the evidence of same-sex relationships in antiquity. It is often claimed that any notion of same-sex orientation was absent from the ancient world. Sprinkle, however, provides good evidence that some ancients believed same-sex desires were fixed at birth. Sprinkle also offers examples of consensual, equal-status, same-sex relationships in the ancient world. He, therefore, shatters the myth that we should only think that exploitative same-sex relationships are in view in the New Testament.

I highly recommend this book. If you're looking for something with genuine pastoral warmth and top-level scholarship for a popular audience, then this is the book for you. With its sensitive tone, it also makes a great book to give away. So, if you know people who are struggling to reconcile their faith and sexuality, or others who are led astray by revisionist teaching, then you should encourage them to have this on their reading list.

by Rob

A National Conference to remember



After a few emails exchanged with the office for reassurance, I decided to go to my first National Conference in spite of my apprehensions. The registration was pretty easy - only a few steps to follow. The programme was impressive: very well balanced and organised around talk sessions as well as different activities to choose from (scenic walk, visiting a castle, low ropes course). The grand title said it all: “Loved: knowing and experiencing the liberating, transforming Love of God.” Wouldn’t you want to taste some of the love of God to help your faith grow?

Throughout the weekend, I saw the love of God, experienced it and was helped to dig deeper into it. I felt I could be myself, at the same level as everyone else. I could be vulnerable, not needing to pretend. This was a remarkable place where I could be honest, sharing with others what was going on in my life. I could listen to others’ stories similar to my own and exchange encouragements. I discovered that I could relate to so many aspects of others’ lives, hopefully helping one another. Without any pressure, I was invited to share every part of the weekend. Starting each day with praying together set some good priorities.

Having meals together, with a full English breakfast to start each day, brought the fellowship of a special occasion. Then, before the first session, I was able to breathe some fresh air, admiring the beautiful place painted with the autumnal colours of God’s creation. The worship was a privileged time in the presence of God’s love.

The days were punctuated by amazing talks, each one focusing on one aspect of God’s love. We enjoyed great messages of encouragement that helped tremendously on our journeys of faith. We could see the presence of the Holy Spirit that had worked between the different speakers to make it a unity, building on and complementing each other. We could tap into God’s love to let ourselves be transformed and liberated. Even if at the time it did not happen, we could let ourselves be open to a further work of the Holy Spirit, as prayer goes beyond time and space. We could be authentic and ultimately feel loved. It was surely a time to remember. Would I come next time? I would, now that I’ve seen how good it is. This was a place where I felt safe, accepted and resourced.

by Philippe

Jesus full of grace & truth

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14 NIV

Jesus full of grace & truth

Jesus embodies a fullness of truth and grace. He's the only person who has done it perfectly. In any given interaction, He knew what delicate balance each person or situation needed of these valuable commodities. To the religious leaders of His day, He often gave a pretty full dose of truth. But then he gave a more tender version when they sought Him in secret (think Nicodemus). He showered oceans of grace on those who were downtrodden and oppressed (remember Him weeping over Jerusalem?). For those caught in sin, it seemed He could compassionately “see” the true person and potential. I think of the woman caught in adultery or Zacchaeus. Even in their state of grace, Jesus still exhorts each to “repent”. Grace and truth offered in the exact measures needed. Go Jesus.

The culture wars - polarized grace and truth

We on the other hand, don't always do it quite as perfectly. Created in God's image, I imagine grace and truth are “instilled” in us. But we often tend to approach life gravitating towards one or championing one over the other. Have you noticed America is in a civil war of sorts - to say the least? No matter what the issue - immigration, guns or gender & sexuality, the battle escalates daily and

it can get nasty. We live in a perpetually offended culture. At a closer look, each polarized extreme side in this battle is safeguarding one of these important attributes of God. This is a good thing. One side protects the idea that we need standards, accountability and truth. The other side defends the need for mercy, compassion and grace. The problem is you can't have one exclusively without the other - it has some pretty dreadful consequences.

Truth (without grace)

Standards without compassion can become rigid and legalistic. It follows rules without regard to human pain or dignity. Truth (as in the Bible) can become a weapon, used to condemn, control or conform people to inflexible standards. In the area of gender and sexuality, it can look like strict conformity to gender roles and stereotypes. Usually, there is exclusion and condemnation for those who are “outside of the camp” and live out their sexuality differently.

Grace (without truth)

Compassion without standards leaves people enabled without taking personal responsibility. Lacking some structure for personal growth, a sense of entitlement can thrive. Truth becomes subjective and relative. Since everyone has “their own”, it's hard to actually pin things down and easy



to ignore reality. Unbounded sexuality has consequences for individuals, families and communities. And in an effort to protect the rights and privacy of some, it sacrifices the rights and privacy of others.

Standards without compassion can become rigid and legalistic

Both extremes in the culture war exhibit the same things:

Both sides of this oppositional fighting actually perpetuate the same negative ideas. Sadly, this national polarization can work its way down into a church or even within a family. The following attitudes tend to prevail:

1. Relationship is based on “we must agree on everything”

The assumption that to be in relationship with someone means we believe everything the same is pretty unrealistic. Very little or no room is given for those with a different worldview.

2. It’s either my way or the highway

Very little time is used to listen, empathize or put oneself in the others shoes.

3. Combative, intolerant and judgmental

From positions of “echo chambers” (only hanging out with those who say the same things you do) it’s easy to lob nasty insults in person or on social media at “the other side’.

Meanwhile...

As this loud, noisy battle goes on daily, hurting individuals and families fall through the cracks unnoticed. We want to actively demonstrate God’s deep love, kindness and mercy for the broken-hearted all around us. And we acknowledge we don’t know God’s truth in full - who does? Yet, we still want to humbly communicate God has standards and boundaries around our gender and sexuality because of His deep love. Can we look to Jesus who is grace and truth personified? How can we strive to be like Jesus? Can we apply standards and compassion in the measures needed for hurting people? It’s a daily effort that is worthwhile and one our country desperately needs right now.

by Roger

Roger is the Executive Director of Where Grace Abounds, based in Colorado, US.

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Can I miss an ungodly relationship in a godly way?

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I ask myself questions like this a lot:

- “Is it wrong to miss what God doesn’t desire for my life?”
- “Is it wrong to grieve a relationship that was sinful?”
- “Is there a way I can hurt AND grow in love for Jesus?”

Considering these questions, I want to give you 3 gospel truths I find helpful in these moments.

1. There is freedom in that we didn’t choose Christ, He chose us.

Don’t allow yourself to remain in a state of shame and guilt; of course you have a sinful heart! You have a heart that Christ needed to die for. But because of that death, you are in Him, and there is no power in the world that takes you from the power of the one who made it. If your main concern isn’t Christ, then that only means you can go to your Father and ask him to be those things for your heart. Christ will never let you go no matter what your feelings say.

God wants you to experience His closeness in times of heartache

2. God answers us with assurance because He knows he is responding to pain

Psalm 147:3 tells us “he heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds”. This says so much to us about God’s character and our relationship with Him, He’s someone who can actually see into our hearts. He sees the ugly thoughts inside us that we are so ashamed to reveal to even the people who love us most, and He looks into the hearts of weak, small and broken people while holding up galaxies. This verse is telling us that God is aware of the struggles we face; He is not blind to it. And He intends for there to be a healing process that comes from Him. Not only that, He intends for you to experience His closeness in times of heartache. It does not make you ‘unchristian’ to need God’s help; it defines you as a Christian. We are defined as children who lean on our Father to carry us, and it actually glorifies Him when we do so. But what does it mean for Him to “heal” hearts? When we look at the expression used of “binding up their wounds”, we see this is up close, this is personal! Has anyone ever given you stitches or mended a cut without touching you? God reaches into the heart and heals the brokenness in it in, a process our minds just can’t comprehend. In this beautiful Psalm, God is showing us such an intimate and beautiful picture of His pursuit of us in our heartache. What does this mean for us as we ask these questions? It means God is telling us, he knows what

we feel and He doesn't want us to hide it from Him, He wants us to bring this to Him, because there is no better place to be than in His craftsmanship.

3. Christ-like love inspires and shows us to love those to whom we are attracted.

It is never wrong to love, but it is wrong to replace cross-like love with our selfish affections. When attracted to another person, I only ever thought about what that was doing to me; I only recently realised that if He doesn't want this same-sex relationship for me, then He also won't want me to be a stumbling block for her. I thought I was rejecting a love when I refused the idea of us as a couple, but I was actually loving the other person the way God desires me to, because He also desires to have them as His child. His love is one that is never selfish, but was in fact one that laid down all the rights that He deserved (as God) to bleed gruesomely for hearts like me who deserve only punishment.

I refuse to make you for my gratification. That's how much I love you

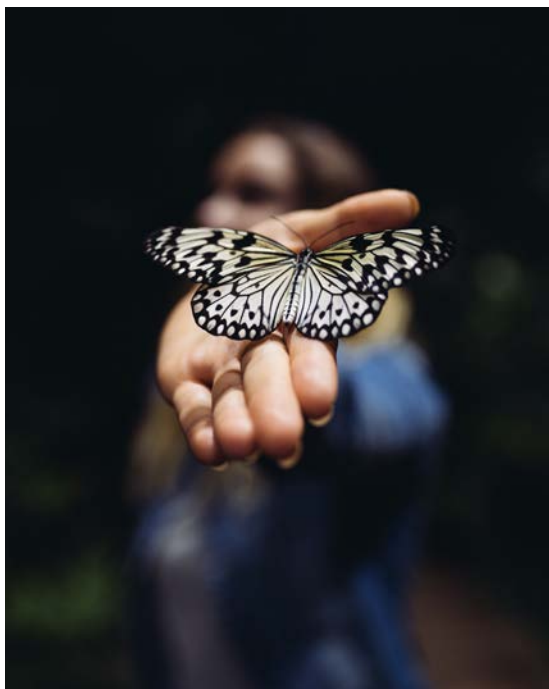
Desiring Christ does not lead to hating the person who tempts us into sexual sin; instead, it truly loves them by saying, "I love you, and because of that I will not be a barrier to you knowing the only love that can complete you. He will love you

so much better than my selfish desires ever could. I refuse to make you for my gratification and satisfaction. That's how much I love you".

When I find myself struggling with temptation or heartache, I find it helpful to think on these questions:

1. Is my main concern to be close to God in all things?
2. How do I see God and His character? Who is He to me?
3. What is my definition of love? Does this echo a Christ-centred love?
4. What is making it difficult for me to seek Christ wholeheartedly?
5. What can God do with this pain left over from my attraction to another human?

by Jacqueline



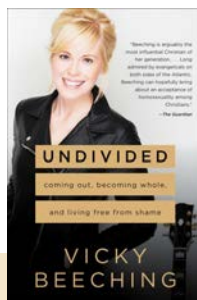


Book Review

“Undivided” by Vicky Beeching
(William Collins)

304 pages

£16.99 hardback; £9.99 Kindle



Vicky Beeching's 'Undivided' trap: why evangelicals need a better story

The release of Vicky Beeching's book *Undivided* this summer has been accompanied by media interviews, a piece in the Sunday Times and other online and broadcast material. The book tells the story of her life as a teenager and then as an adult, struggling with marrying up her evangelical theology and emerging sexuality.

Despite an international career as a songwriter, recording artist and worship leader – her songs are still sung in many churches around the world – she eventually found the struggle too much and she attributes her auto-immune illness in her late 20s to this stress. Since ‘coming out’ four years ago Beeching has become an advocate for a revisionist position on sexual activity in the evangelical world.

The full title of her book is *Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free from Shame*. It strikes me that that subtitle is worth exploring more because it raises themes that do not necessarily mean that a revisionist agenda has to be held.

There is nothing in coming out, being honest about your sexuality and finding

a life that isn't lived in shame that has ultimately to end in changing core Christian theology. There are plenty of evangelicals – me for one – who are not heterosexual but have no problem in being open about that fact and are not ashamed of it.

When I look at stories of gay people who have moved from a conservative to a revisionist perspective on this issue, I find two common themes. The first is a story of secrecy and not being able to be open about one's sexuality. This leads, as you would expect, to internal emotional turmoil because the individual is constantly having to wear a mask and be in public someone they are not in private. You find this narrative very clearly in Beeching's book and it's painful to read. It's an experience shared by many gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women, regardless of their theology. The powerful liberating experience of coming out is not to be underestimated – it transforms a life of shame and secrets into one of openness and self-respect.

The second aspect I often read is some form of conversion attempt. By this I mean some therapy, or prayer or other similar exercise that was intended to change a person's sexual orientation. When this fails, as it normally does,

the individual becomes despondent and confused. The key problem with these kinds of approaches is that they operate by necessity out of a framework where heterosexual attraction is morally superior to homosexual attraction, and frankly this is a concept we cannot find in the Bible. Rather the Bible's focus in this area is on specific sexual activity.

So back to Vicky Beeching's story. It's clear she bottled this up for two decades and that's an awfully long time to keep something like this secret. She also tells of some experiences of attempted change via prayer or other methods.

The reason why Vicky Beeching couldn't continue her ministry wasn't because she came out: it was because she came out and accompanied it with a particular theological position. When Beeching chooses a title like *Undivided* she is actually playing a very clever game, because revisionists want to so conflate orientation and activity that in society's (and the church's) inability to divide them we find ourselves defending both because there is no other possibility.

This of course is the danger of the position taken by some evangelicals which says it's wrong to call yourself gay, even if you're chaste and teaching orthodoxy on this subject. What this stance actually does is fall for the 'undivided trap' by conflating

all aspects of sexuality into one sinful whole in a way the Scripture never does.

If we want to help our church members not struggle with mental health issues around this when they have homosexual desires then we have to make sure they are clear that these desires are not in themselves sinful and that they don't get told that if they changed they would be better.

At the moment the gay revisionist lobby is winning this debate because theirs is an authentic voice – it is their story, their personal narrative, their theology. If the evangelical church is serious about coming up with a better narrative, it has to be a genuine gay voice holding to an orthodox biblical position that shares it.

Although Vicky Beeching's book has been popular, I would recommend saving your money for another book *The War of Loves* coming out later this Autumn by the theologian and writer (and former gay activist) David Bennett. In it he narrates his life story and how he had at first been very happy with a liberal gay identity, but in time came to a different conclusion from that of Vicky Beeching.

by Peter

A longer version of this book review by Peter Ould was originally published in Christian Today, June 2018: <https://bit.ly/2yfrUQB>

Pressing on

Running God's race with endurance

At these one day conferences across the UK in 2019, we will be unpacking Hebrews 12 and encouraging one another to persevere with confident hope in God.

Belfast – 6 April

Bristol – 11 May

London – 8 June

Edinburgh – 22 June

www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/pressing-on

TFT Prayer Feed now on PrayerMate



PrayerMate is a free app available on iOS and Android, designed to help you pray more faithfully and more widely. By subscribing to our feed, you will receive updates from the TFT team every other day informing you of how you can be specifically praying for our ministry.

You may already use PrayerMate to help you pray for other organisations, your church, or your friends and family. Sign up to our feed now by scanning the QR code, or searching for True Freedom Trust in the gallery feed (we're under the category "Wider Society").

If you're not familiar with the app, it's very easy to use! Visit praynow4.org/truefreedomtrust to find out more.

Don't have a smartphone? You can still receive our monthly prayer email by contacting info@truefreedomtrust.co.uk

We really value your prayers and encouragement for our ministry.



Update on Barnabas Groups

These groups provide support for TFT members who struggle with SSA.

We currently have groups meeting regularly in Belfast, Cambridge, Dublin, Essex, Guildford, Leeds, Manchester, Southport and Southampton/Bournemouth.

A new group will be starting in Sheffield in November and there are occasional meet-ups in Glasgow/ Edinburgh.

For those who are not within reach of any of these groups, we also have an online group for men which meets by Skype on the first Friday evening of each month.

Please contact the office on info@truefreedomtrust.co.uk or via our website if you would like information on joining any of these groups.

Pen Pictures

Phil works on the staff team at TFT as the Voluntary Worker Overseer and Pastoral Advisor. He is passionate about seeing people transformed into a greater likeness of Jesus and is currently re-learning to play the organ.



Vicki is a retired teacher, who became a Christian as a teenager. Amongst her interests are history, nature and gardening, but she isn't up to Monty Don's standard yet! She enjoys spending time with friends and her favourite meal is a roast chicken dinner with Yorkshire pudding and lots of gravy.

Jonny is a voluntary worker at TFT, but usually can be found working in communications for a company. He still doesn't know what exactly his company does, but at least he can communicate something vaguely plausible.



Stuart is TFT's Director. He tries to limit himself to a daily square of 90% chocolate, but makes up for this by allowing himself unlimited peanut butter on toast.

Alison works in the TFT office which is either in the Wirral or on the Wirral (she's not quite sure which). Her favourite meal is lamb tikka biryani from the local (and best) Indian takeaway, preferably shared with friends round her kitchen table.



Rob is Head of Speaking and Teaching at TFT and regularly speaks on same-sex attraction at churches, conferences and youth groups throughout the UK and Ireland. He is an avid supporter of Manchester United.

Philippe is the one with the French accent. He is passionate about sharing with people over a home-made meal. Apart from healthy cooking, his favourite things are gardening, studying theology and cats. But his real heart and call is to be with people on the margin.



Paul is a VW and also helps with some admin in the TFT office. He was formerly a teacher for over 30 years and likes red wine and white cats.



Prayer & Praise

Please thank God for ...

A well-received National Conference, including Simon Ponsonby's heartfelt ministry

Phil's service in the staff team over many years, as he looks to step down

Several new candidates to join the team of Trustees

Two excellent Bible teachers agreeing to join us for our National Conferences in 2019 and 2020

Please pray for ...

Interviews for the newly created "Digital Media and IT Engineer" role in the staff team

Members who may be feeling lonely over the Christmas period

Donald as he takes on his new role as Chair of Trustees

The Lord's guidance for the future strategy of the ministry

Please pray for Rob (RW), Jonny (JH), Jacqui (JW), Graham (GB) and others as they speak at various churches and events on behalf of TFT

If you are interested in attending one of these meetings, please contact us for further information about which are public

November

2nd Capernwray Bible School (GB, JW, RW)

3rd Midland Men's Convention (RW)

9th Capernwray Bible School (GB, RW)

18th Horham Baptist Church (JH, RW)

December

11th DNA Training Course (JH, RW)

January

26th Kilmarnock (RW)

February

10th Beccles Baptist Church (RW)

17th St Nicholas Stevenage (RW)