

# Ascend

The True Freedom Trust Magazine

Autumn 2020



## Is TFT Safe?

One of the criticisms sometimes aimed at True Freedom Trust (TFT) is that it brings together people who are all same-sex tempted and places them into a pressure cooker of mutual temptation! Maybe a glib response would be to say that the world is full of attractive people, so there's plenty of same-sex temptation out there already! Same-sex attracted people are arguably exposed to greater temptation than 'straight' people in everyday life – one example is when they have to use single-sex changing rooms.

At TFT support groups and conferences, we do provide opportunities for people of the same sex to build friendships and spend time with one another. Inevitably, sexual attractions sometimes arise, and our staff and volunteers do what they can to help those involved navigate their way through the temptations. Doing this in a supported way can actually help

members to understand themselves better and build stronger support for the future.

We should, of course, “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18), and this is exactly what Joseph did when the temptation of Potiphar's wife became too much (Gen 39:12). But, if we are not in immediate danger of acting immorally, our response to temptation can be bolder. In the desert, Jesus did not run away from the devil with his hands over his ears. Instead he confronted the temptation with biblical truth (Matt 4:1-11), which had the decisive effect that “the devil left him” (4:11). Each person will need wisdom to discern whether involvement with the TFT community will lead to undue temptation or whether meeting with like-minded Christians will, in reality, strengthen his/her resolve to live a pure life.

With most activities in life, there is an element of risk, and good risk management is done well by assessing the likelihood of each risk and then mitigating its impact. Of course, there is also the risk of not doing the activity. For example, going running or cycling involves a risk of injury or accident, but the long-term risks to our health resulting from inactivity are generally worse than these more immediate hazards. We saw this with the Coronavirus pandemic: the government lockdown response kept many people safe in the short term, but this needed to be balanced with the significant costs in terms of lost jobs, delays to cancer treatments and the impact on many people's mental health.

However, it is essential for TFT to be a safe place for all. Safeguarding, in its fullest sense, should be given prominence across our community. This builds trust and protects us all, particularly our more vulnerable members. We need to be realistic and not assume that Christians are beyond harming one another. So, how can we bring people together in the TFT community without undue risk?

### *1. We need to assess new members carefully*

Although TFT is not a church, the staff and Voluntary Workers have a responsibility to protect our members. In Paul's parting words to the Ephesian elders, he called them to "...be shepherds of the church of God... after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock" - (Acts 20: 28-29). TFT has always been a personal ministry, and we ensure that one of our team has had significant personal contact with each new enquirer before introducing them to a Barnabas Group or inviting them to our National Conference.

### *2. We need to be vigilant in our groups and gatherings*

Most of us are at risk of finding another member attractive. And such attractions are more likely to arise in a support group (online or in-person) or at a residential conference. A group member might be innocently unaware of a growing bond forming with another member of a group – others in the group might be better able to see growing signs of a preoccupation with the other person. By having a tactful word, with either the person(s) involved or the group leader, unhelpful behaviours can be brought into the light before they become a problem.

There are also positions of power even within a friendly and non-hierarchical organisation like TFT. We need to notice people using their position/age/intellect/charm etc. to influence unduly another person in an unhealthy way.

### *3. We need to be honest about our own behaviours and motivations*

Every member of TFT needs to take personal responsibility for the way he/she behaves with other members. 1 Cor 8:9 calls us to be careful "that the exercise of [our] rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak." Each of us needs to examine our motivations and ensure that the way we interact with others is not leading others (or indeed ourselves) astray.

### *4. We need to build emotional safety*

When we think about safety, we often limit our thinking to keeping one another safe from physical or sexual harm. But anyone who's spent time in a support group or with a therapist will be familiar with the importance of building emotional safety. We've probably all experienced those long silences in a church small group, where people don't feel confident enough to

respond to a deeper question, and that's frequently because we don't feel safe enough to be vulnerable.

This might be in the form of ground-rules (e.g. "what is shared here, stays here") for Barnabas Groups. We also require all new members to agree to our Basis of Belief and our Code of Confidentiality. This way, members agree not to undermine one another's beliefs, nor betray their confidence.

### *Safeguarding Policy*

In order to bring greater prominence and formality to these principles, the staff and Trustees have recently developed a standalone Safeguarding Policy, in addition to our existing Code of Practice. To support this, detailed guidance has been written for the four areas of ministry which we judge to require the most significant safeguarding focus:

1. *Barnabas Support Groups*
2. *Events (particularly residential events)*
3. *Online Groups*
4. *Pastoral Work*

We have appointed Safeguarding Officers, Safeguarding Trustees and provided Safeguarding Training to our volunteers around this new policy and guidance.

You can also read the Safeguarding Policy on the TFT our website: [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/safeguarding](http://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/safeguarding)

**By Stuart**

*Stuart is TFT's Director and the editor of Ascend magazine. Not being a daredevil, his riskiest activity is probably climbing a ladder to clear the gutters.*

**The theme of this Ascend is about staying safe, and we've tried to go deeper into the idea of what safety means for Christians than the simple slogan "Stay Safe"! Adam's article explores the biblical message – there is much in the Bible about protecting the vulnerable, but it also calls us out of our comfort zones to take appropriate risks. Jesus tells us that our physical safety is secondary: "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt 10:28)**

*Jeanette helps us to identify when another person's attractiveness triggers our vulnerabilities with her "red flag" system, developed from years of struggle in this area. And Chris's honest article helps us to reflect on when we might be a threat to another person's wellbeing. He calls each of us to grow in maturity, so that we can be people who consistently bless others rather than using them for our own ends.*

*Creating a safe environment within the TFT community is about building mutual trust (creating emotional safety) as well as signposting one another to the safety of Jesus (who is our ultimate refuge). Let us renew our commitment to each other's spiritual growth and wellbeing.*

**By Stuart, TFT Director**

# Free Spirit

## Bikes and Belonging

I could see that people were different at church compared to primary school. My church friends were true, loyal and kind. However, school friends liked you one week and not the next, or a fellow classmate would call you names if you beat them in PE.

My parents have always loved Jesus. They told my siblings and me about God and demonstrated His love in the way they lived. I was always a girl who preferred riding a bike or kicking a ball about. This did not concern my parents or church friends – they enjoyed it and nurtured it. I was a shy child, but I always loved my sport. Through family life, and church-family life, I could see from an early age that God was loving and that Jesus was our saviour.

Same-sex attraction (SSA) was a subject that was not discussed much in either my Christian or my non-Christian circles as a child and teenager. Whether at school or on the street, being gay was something that was occasionally observed in me and assumed about me. And that label got to me. In primary and high school, it appeared to be a way for people to leave me out of things or pick on me. In church, it seemed to be an issue that people didn't talk about and a sin that was worse than other ones, or at least just a bit abnormal. At that time SSA didn't appear to be an ok thing for a Christian or non-Christian. However, I still knew and experienced that God was good, and I continued to grow in my relationship with Him.

Since it felt as though people kept telling me I was gay and I wasn't given much

hope about living as a Christian with SSA, I just ignored it for a while. I think I needed time to work out whether it was, in fact, something I experienced – when you keep being told you are something, you start to believe it whether it's true or not.

## Travel and Truth

When I was 20 years old, I realised that although I found guys attractive occasionally, I more often noticed women and I found them easier to connect with. I learned that God loved me despite the fact that I could very easily love another woman too much,

---

**“God loved me despite the fact that I could very easily love another woman too much”**

---

and in a way that God did not design. I really began to know that SSA was not something I needed to ignore, pretend wasn't there, be fearful, guilty or ashamed of, but something that God could be loved and glorified through. I could see that I needed to address it more directly in my discipleship. Through this, I came to know God's grace for me in a deeper and more meaningful way.

In accepting that I experienced SSA I wanted to make sure it didn't make it more of an issue for me, I wanted it to decrease not increase. I desired to be someone that was a faithful Christian and a person people could trust to have a godly character and lifestyle. I also wanted God to use my SSA to reach out to others and show people who



God was in a different way from what they might expect. As I had also always, but less often, been attracted to men, getting married and having a family was something that not only seemed possible but something I wanted. Therefore, whether I remained single or not, I wanted my singleness or marriage to testify about God in ways that someone whose life did not experience SSA could not.

In my early twenties, I was living abroad and had some Christian counselling regarding SSA. This turned out not to be useful because the counsellor was of the opinion that there must be a reason, root or cause for the fact that I experienced SSA. I think this might be the case for some people but certainly not for everyone and probably not the majority. However, I learned through this, and it has given me an understanding of those who've had particularly difficult experiences with the church or a Christian organisation, thinking that conversion therapy is the only solution. I am of the belief that we are a broken and sinful people, and SSA is one way this plays out in our lives. But the important thing is how we chose to respond to this temptation and pursuing

God's way for marriage and sex. The best relationship I can have with a woman is as a close friend - anything else is not more; it's even less!

### **Faith and Freedom**

I've found it so helpful to have family, friends and a church leadership around me who have remained faithful in the way they have taught and supported me in being a Christian who experiences SSA. I think I could have easily been led astray but instead have real freedom in abiding to God's plan for marriage.

---

**“I know that being liked and respected by people is nothing compared to knowing and telling others about the Gospel”**

---

I have not had any romantic or sexual relationships. By God's grace, he has kept me close. It is largely in friendships where I've struggled where there is an attraction and connection. While I have lived in the UK and abroad, God has worked to use particular friendships

to expose my weaknesses and force me to grow in my response to my own SSA. Even now, at times, I have to be careful that some friendships remain helpful and healthy. Struggles can also be with strangers or acquaintances where eyes meet, and thoughts wander. Occasionally when I connect with an attractive guy, I get carried away in the hope of what there could be and the fear of missing a rare opportunity. As I think about all the people who have been the object of my affection at different seasons I'm ashamed and so thankful that I was saved from creating more mess!

I love a good movie or series to chill out with but have to be careful not to escape too much. The lustful desire for physical satisfaction can lead to impure and ungodly actions when alone. But I know God is gracious and giving me true satisfaction. It is through my experience of SSA that God has shown me that at times I am being the older brother when really I'm also the prodigal son. I always knew the father welcomed me at home, but the extent of his running embrace, celebrational feast and my undeserving inheritance means loads.

As I have matured in my faith, I have grown in confidence in who I am and what I have to offer to others. In the past, at times as a child, teenager and

uni student, I lacked confidence and self-assurance. I am glad that this difficulty gave me the additional need and opportunity to ensure my identity is found in Christ. This has also resulted in giving me more courage in sharing my faith and developing my gift of evangelism. I know that being liked and respected by people is nothing compared to knowing and telling others about the Gospel.

I heard about TFT back in 2015 when I was 25. It is so good to have a Christian community that can relate so closely, have the same outlook on the issue and seek to live in the same way. Over the last 10 years, I can see ways God has used my SSA to support other Christian friends who experience it, to equip other Christians who don't experience it and to reach out to those who don't know God. I have quality friendships and experience intimacy through close friends and close relatives... Life is FUN, God is GOOD!

**By Ruth**

***Ruth enjoys being outdoors in the sunshine or hurtling down snow-covered mountains. She's also a fan of refreshing beverages and tasty food. Sometimes, she may also be found hanging out with her lovely little niece and nephew.***



# “Never Alone”

## Online Conference Review



I was excited to hear that TFT was running a virtual conference during lockdown, with the topic “Never Alone” being apt for a single person stuck in a flat, alone. The great thing about meeting up virtually is that it doesn’t matter where in the world you physically are; we can all come together in one “place”. The online format of testimony, talk and break-out into smaller discussion groups worked very well and both testimonies were honest and encouraging.

Stuart F gave the first talk about the Body of Christ and how Christians can come into God’s presence just as we are. None of us is perfect. And yet, Jesus has made us perfect in the sight of God through his sacrifice for us on the cross. So now we can enter into the Holy of Holies directly, where God’s presence dwells. The Lord’s Prayer was used as a model of how we can communicate with God honestly. Although many of us have struggled with isolation in lockdown, we have our hope in both God and the church family to encourage us to continue to walk faithfully in our journey, knowing that we are never alone.

Stuart P delved into Philippians 4 in the second talk. He shared the secret of being content in every situation and the value of a small accountability group to help us in our Christian walk. He also invited us to consider discipling other believers. A successful Christian walk cannot be solitary but, rather, we are to walk together as a family of believers

even in challenging times. I enjoyed the break-out group where four to six of us would discuss the talks. We reflected on the wisdom of having same-sex accountability partners like Paul and Timothy, and how a 1:1 could be helpful in our Christian growth. However, we should have the wisdom to guard ourselves against possible same-sex temptations and can explore other ways such as meeting up as triplets instead.

The two hours of this conference flew by and I foresee that there is a place for a mix of physical and virtual events throughout the year as the virtual format is relevant in today’s culture. While this pandemic has kept us indoors for months, the virtual conference has just demonstrated that we are never alone – indeed, we’re all in this together as brothers and sisters in Christ. And what a blessing it is!

**By Jamie**

*Jamie is an avid adventurer and has travelled to over 30 countries in recent years. While travelling abroad is not allowed during COVID, it has been a blessing to be able to connect virtually with friends and family around the world. Music, reading, writing and crafts have been keeping Jamie busy during lockdown.*



## “Stay Safe” or “Risk Your Life”

**I**n this edition of Ascend we are thinking about safeguarding, but isn't it just a modern concept for a health and safety crazed society? Should we follow safeguarding rules simply out of a legal obligation or because we actually think they are good and right to do? What does the Bible have to say about staying safe?

All good theology starts with God, and when we look at Scripture, we see that God is a God of righteousness (Psalm 19:9, Deuteronomy 32:4). He despises wickedness and rewards goodness (Romans 1:18, 2:10). He stands up for the rights of the oppressed, avenges the downtrodden and defends the weak (Proverbs 22:22-23, Psalm 72:4, Psalm 68:5). He only ever does that which is right, good, pure and holy. Righteousness is God's middle name. If God cares about righteousness, about protecting the innocent, then so should we. He is our King, and so his concerns should be our concerns – “your will be done” (Matthew 6:10).

But we do not simply care for righteousness as God's obedient subjects, but we also care for it as his

image-bearers. This is a truth as old as time, and it changes everything. You and I have been formed in the image of our maker, and it is obvious (Genesis 1:27). Now God has many attributes that we do not have (all-present, eternal, etc.), but he also has many qualities that we share in (theologians call these “communicable attributes”). God has knowledge, power, and wisdom. And so we too have knowledge, power and wisdom (just obviously not to the same extent). God's righteousness is an attribute we also have. He has an absolute commitment to what is right and, when we are rightly living out his image, then so do we. This desire to live a righteous life is one of the outcomes of recognising that Jesus is Lord, and being washed by his sacrificial blood (Colossians 3:1-14).

### **Protect the vulnerable**

So, we care about righteousness, great, but what does this mean? Well, luckily enough, God tells us. God's Word is not passive and suggestive, but through his act of speaking God creates. Through his words, God created the universe, through his Word preached, the lost are

saved. When the Scriptures are obeyed, just and good societies and structures are formed. Once the Israelites have been rescued from Egypt, God does not leave them alone to work out how to live. No, he gives them the Ten Commandments, and examples of how these Commandments should be carried out (Exodus 19-23). Looking at these commands, you see God's righteous nature throughout. If you attack your father or your mother, your servant or your slave, or a pregnant woman causing the child to be injured, then justice must be done (Exodus 21:12-25). While, in the Old Testament, we see clearly God establishing a righteous society for the Israelites to live in, in the New Testament, we see God establish good structures for the Church. One example of this is 1 Timothy 5. Firstly, children are called to look after their elderly parents, and secondly, the Church is called to look after widows if they have no children to take care of them. The safety, protection, and care of the vulnerable matters to God. This means the Church should establish who is vulnerable within their midst, and seek to care for them.

Modern-day safeguarding has a particular feel and flavour because the State has made clear regulations about it. But as we have seen, protecting and caring for the vulnerable is not a new idea. Justice is central to God, and so as his image-bearers, it is central for us. We should aim to build structures that ensure the vulnerable are looked after and that the strong cannot oppress the weak. Alone, without the State's intervention, this should be our aim as Christians. However, our current safeguarding practices will be shaped by the State. God calls us to obey our earthly authorities when what they command does not go against his Word

(Romans 13:1-2). This means, unless we have good reason to believe what the State is asking of us on safeguarding goes against God's Word, then we should aim to obey obediently all that the State requires of us. We do this because we care about the safety of those under our care and because we want to be above reproach.

### **Take appropriate risks**

However, if we were to finish here on the question of staying safe, then we would be in danger of only hearing one side of the Biblical witness. To understand the Biblical teaching on safety, then we must think of it like a sword. If you were to describe to me the 'handle', and then the 'blade', it would not be ridiculous for me to assume you are talking about two separate things that are not related. They serve entirely different purposes, can be of different materials and hold different shapes. However, only when they are put together, do you have a sword. So far, we have heard about the 'handle' of the Bible's view on safety, and now it is time to hear about the 'blade' (i.e. the Bible's view on taking risks). The two will sound very different, but only when we put them together will we have a clear picture.

---

## **“The safety, protection, and care of the vulnerable matters to God”**

---

God is righteous, and His Word creates just, good and safe societies and structures. However, God calls all believers not to be lovers of comfort but to lay aside our personal safety and to take risks. Moses risked it all when he refused to be thought of as a Prince of Egypt and instead aligned himself with

his Hebrew ancestors. Wealth, power, and security were no longer his, and instead he had to flee (Hebrews 11:24-27). Esther risked it all when she went to see the King pleading for the lives of her people. Before going, she asked her friend to fast and pray for her, and she said to him these memorable words: “If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16). Death was a real possibility, yet she still went. In the helpful words of John Piper, for the Christian “risk is right.” In the eternal words of the apostle Paul, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Phil 1:21) If we die for the cause of Christ, then we lose nothing and gain everything. And there is not a cause more important than this. People are worshipping idols when they should be praising the Living God. People are mocking Christ when they should be on their knees before him. When we preach the gospel, we take a risk; maybe our family will disown us, our friends drop us, our boss will fire us. Maybe it will bring about persecution or even our death. But when we live and speak for Jesus, then, and only then, will those who are heading to eternal damnation have the chance to hear and respond to the Good News and accept the invitation of eternal life. Is not that a risk worth taking?

---

**“God calls us to lay aside our personal safety and to take risks”**

---

It is necessary to sound a note of caution, however. This does not mean that God wants us to be reckless. When deciding if we should take a risk, this decision must be shaped by godly wisdom. If we think that this decision is going to put someone else in danger, maybe it is not right to make it. Perhaps

we have the responsibility to care for someone vulnerable. Just because it would be right for us to take the risk, it does not mean it would be right for them to be placed at risk. Also, if we think that this decision is going to put our eternal souls in danger, then it will not be right to make it. Maybe in our past we used to meet lovers in gay bars and so it would be dangerous for us to go back there to evangelise because we could be led astray. The risk may be right, but recklessness is not, and a good way to tell the difference is to ask for help and guidance from our spiritual brothers and sisters that God has placed around us.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, God is a God of righteousness. He hates wicked deeds and loves good ones. We bear his image and so are made to care for what is right. This means we are literally designed to create structures that enable all people to flourish. God’s words are creative, and in his written Word he makes a society and a Church that look after the vulnerable. This has always been his plan, but now, in our time, we fulfil this, in part, by following State guidelines on safeguarding as a way of obeying our earthly authorities and staying above reproach. However, even though we care deeply about the safety of the vulnerable, we should care little for our own safety. Risk is not our enemy, but the calling of every Christian. So, we wisely take the risk. We live for Jesus. We speak for Jesus. We are ready and willing to die for Jesus. If I perish, I perish. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

**By Adam**

***Adam is training to be a Church leader. He loves playing the ukulele, running and reading.***

# “Identity in Isolation” Women’s Online Conference Review



Having met the growing group of women at my first TFT National Conference last year, it has felt as though our community has been gaining virtual momentum ever since. So it felt both encouraging and natural to recognise many names and faces at our first online conference in early June.

Unable to meet for our previously planned weekend away, we were privileged still to enjoy fellowship remotely through our screens. A personal testimony at the beginning allowed us to ‘Zoom’ in to start from the individual aspects of identity before the collective, and simply get to know each other’s stories more. Later there were moments where, laughing and connecting, I forgot that we were all so many miles apart!

With so much having been stripped away or brought to the surface during the pandemic, the topic of the conference aimed to speak into the pains around identity that this could leave us vulnerable to. Looking at Ephesians 1, an incisive talk by one of the women, helped to re-ground us in God’s answer to our questions of ‘who am I?’, ‘whose am I?’, and ‘for what purpose?’. Putting aside the labels the world attaches to us, we refocused on the most fundamental truths about who we are in Christ: holy, blessed, blameless, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and so much more.

Only days after the brutal murder of George Floyd, I was personally aware that unspoken questions of identity

were incredibly poignant on many levels. It was evident that we were united here both in our lockdown woes and experiences of same-sex attraction, while also walking in our own unique struggles that intersected with our shared identities in complex ways. The conference was a helpful opportunity to step out of the fray and come before God together as His united body - knowing that He is, at the same time, compassionate towards our individual hurts.

We ended with some good old-fashioned fun in the modern format. We teamed up to participate in what I can confidently say is the most hilarious quiz I have taken part in on Zoom so far. The creativity of the group shone through as we competed (and sometimes cheated) on bizarre and frantic challenges. These included colour-coded dressing up, scavenger hunts and then creating self-portraits with those same items, identifying chopped vegetables by their sounds, and differentiating verses from Lamentations within Taylor Swift’s lyrics!

I am very grateful for the continued dedication to the women’s work at TFT, and look forward to the community growing wider and deeper over many years to come.

**By Topaz**



# Book Review

*Born Again This Way* by Rachel Gilson  
(The Good Book Company, 2020) 160 pages  
£8.99 paperback, £6.99 Ebook

Rachel Gilson's book "Born Again This Way" was published this year and describes her life and how she came to acknowledge her same-sex attraction (SSA) in her teenage years. Her first relationship was with another woman in high school. Rachel, as an academic, had also come to a point where she had firmly rejected Christianity. However, on arrival at university, she discovered that she was no longer the smartest person around and, through a series of life events, came to the point of deciding to let Jesus into her life. Her need to seek and search Scripture for what it actually said about same-sex relationships was brought to her attention when two other Christian women who were in a same-sex relationship said it was acceptable to be both. Rachel, in searching through the Scriptures, found she was unable to square this up. And so she made the decision to be Christ-centred in her walk with Jesus.

Rachel interweaves each chapter with the expounding of different Scriptures, including the relevant subject matter, life stories and experiences. The unexpectedness of each chapter is refreshing to read, and there seems to be something new around each corner.

For this review, I have just focused briefly on four of the chapters, each starting with the word "Unexpected": Ministry, Relationships, Marriage, and Celibacy.

## Unexpected Ministry

In choosing to invite Jesus in and to be central in our lives, Rachel reminds us:

*"those of us who decided to follow Christ in the midst of our SSA did so because we saw in the gospel the power of salvation—something worth leaving everything for. But the gospel is not just for Day 1 of our life with Jesus. It is for every day that follows... we won't survive if we replace our connection with Jesus with duty of morals."*

Rachel explores and expands on 1 Thess 4:3-6. She unpacks this here:

*"the ministry that SSA Christians have to the church and the world must go beyond an individualistic stance. The costliness of our obedience to God's words makes demands on others – they can, and should, find it unsettling. When people are offended by our obedience, it is because our culture, both inside and outside the church, has brought the lie that sex is merely a private matter."*

She notes that sex is, in fact, a social matter. The Apostle Paul explains this in 1 Thess 4:6 – *"In this matter [of sexual immorality] no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister."*

## Unexpected Relationships

Rachel's personal story unpacks and shows us the importance of good quality healthy relationships and how these can strengthen us when we feel vulnerable and face struggles with SSA. The importance can't be underestimated of both developing *"sibling relationships in Christ [which] create immense freedom to*

love” and nurturing intergenerational relationships within the Church family. These are all needed to provide a safe place to share, receive and give support.

### Unexpected Marriage

This chapter is full of surprises and I am not going to reveal them here. You need to read it for yourself. Rachel explores this subject area, and has also drawn on several couples’ and friends’ experiences. She gives us these helpful reminders:

*“Marriage is not the prize for faithfulness, nor the source. Jesus is the prize. The Spirit is the source.”*

*“Marriage is beautiful and possible for same-sex-attracted people, as long as it is entered into with clarity and freedom. It will be where God leads some of his people, perhaps unexpectedly.”*

*“But just as beautiful and possible is the life dedicated to God in singleness.”*

### Unexpected Celibacy

Unexpected Celibacy can be difficult to adjust to and to come to terms with. Obedience is a strong thread throughout this book, particularly in this chapter. One key thing that jumped out at me was this:

*“...our obedience is the natural and obvious response to a God who is gracious: a way of saying we choose to find our rest and hope in Him, and not in anything else.”*

Rachel reminds us that obedience always leads us to God’s blessing. For me, this reminder for thriving as an SSA person was incredibly helpful: “[we are to have] a thick relationship with Jesus, life-giving companions, and a realistic view of singleness”.

Rachel reminds us that God’s invitation to “exchange our sin for his righteousness – living forever with him – can be our anchor in the storms of life,” and that obedience to Jesus is foundational in our walk with him.

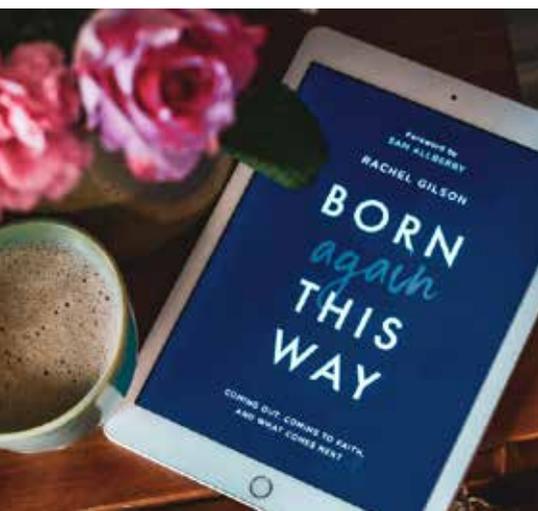
Ed Shaw describes this book so succinctly as follows:

*“[this book is] a pastoral gold mine full of biblical advice for us all – movingly illustrated by the lives of Rachel and her friends. It wonderfully tells of how same-sex attracted people can both become Christians and stay Christian in a world which often believes that neither is possible.”*

This is an excellent book to be read, and re-read, suitable for both men and women who experience SSA, as well as those who seek to provide pastoral support – both friends and church leaders.

### By Miriam

*Miriam chose to walk the narrow biblical path with Jesus as her Lord and Saviour some 26+ years ago. Life since has been an exciting rollercoaster of life experiences, emotions and unexpected outcomes, which she wouldn’t have changed for the world.*



## ***Changing desires***

I am perhaps a little different from most TFT members as my sexual attractions have changed over time. This happened to me in two distinct phases, although these were as much as 41 years apart. The reason why the overall process took so long was perhaps that I was not getting the right kind of support from people at church - it would seem that everyone was (probably genuinely) failing to understand the issues I had.

As a muddled-up teenager, I had drifted into the early stages of same-

sex desires. I believe this happened primarily as a result of various problems caused by my relationship with my father having been somewhat less good than it should have been. I do not wish to dwell on those problems, as this would be a very long story in its own right. At around the time, as I started dragging my anchor as regards sexuality, I began searching on matters of faith and so started attending the school Christian Union and also reading the Bible on my own.

Later in my teens, I came to faith and joined a church. I also realised that homosexual behaviour was not what

## **John's Testimony ↑**

## ***Finding contentment***

I've been aware of my same-sex attraction since I was around ten years old. I am now 30, but that still places my teenage years in an era where being gay just wasn't something you talked about with your peers. I already disliked sports, couldn't catch a ball for toffee and wore glasses. My peers seemed to have all the ammunition they needed to make fun of me. In a bid to stay out of the spotlight, I took what felt to me like the only sensible course of action and pushed my attractions to the back of my mind.

I became a Christian when I was 18. At that point, I already had an awareness of what the Bible teaches

about same-sex relationships, but it didn't seem like something that would affect me too much. I'd been pushing my attractions to the back of my mind for a long time and, naively, assumed this was something I could just keep doing. I'd signed myself up for a life of singleness and celibacy without appreciating what I was getting myself into. The concept of enjoying godly intimacy with others was something that was utterly lost on me, and it certainly wasn't anything I'd heard any teaching on in the church. My mindset revolved around avoiding certain types of relationships, rather than enjoying the many good relationships God had given me in the body of Christ.

I wanted for my life and, of course, I also began to get to grips with what the Bible has to say on this subject. But I then ran into major difficulties over personal evangelism. I came to realise that I was effectively trying to evangelise chaps I had noticed because of my sexuality. But they correctly perceived why I had noticed them and, as a result, they were incorrectly assuming that I was trying to follow them up for that reason. I was getting myself hopelessly tied up in knots!

Although by then I knew that the Bible is concerned with homosexual activity rather than with homosexual attraction, I knew from my problems

with personal evangelism that I wanted to be delivered from same-sex attraction. I prayed a lot and, during 1971, my same-sex attraction gave way to very weak heterosexual desires which failed to take off properly. But I felt great excitement at being able to relate to other guys properly. I naturally wanted more and more of that, in order to make up for some of what I had missed during my teen years. But my efforts to distance myself from homosexual desires were completely misunderstood as people thought that I was still homosexual. This caused significant problems within the church and horrendous issues elsewhere. After a few years of this, I more or less gave up hope of finding help with this issue, and so I just muddled on as best I could

I remember in my church at the time we had one lady who was lovely and well-meaning, but she was constantly trying to set me up with some of the young women in our church. I became pretty adept at wriggling my way out of meeting any of them, but these attempts were indicative of a culture where singleness can be seen as second best. We're wired in such a way that we crave intimacy, but the teaching on relationships in our churches can often be very marriage-centric. For someone like me, who feels called to singleness due to same-sex attraction, this poses a few questions. What hope does the Bible have for me? How has God

## ↓ Simon's Testimony

ordered creation in such a way that my attractions haven't doomed me to a life of loneliness? Not knowing the answers to these questions could cause someone who experiences same-sex attraction to seek intimacy in other ways. For me, a lot of this was through less than healthy friendships.

Of course, singleness can often leave a person feeling lonely. In my case, I didn't know any other Christians who experienced same-sex attraction. I remember feeling like I must have been the only one. It was for that reason, coupled with a desire to want to articulate why marriage wasn't

for quite a few years. Eventually (and by then it was 2012) a young chap came along who shares my interest in all things “ferro-equine” (the study of everything to do with trains!). He also came across as being very strongly heterosexual as well as being well-rounded in all sorts of other ways. After I had known him for a few months, I realised that I was starting to change; after a few more months it then became apparent that my latent opposite sex desires had finally emerged, and since then I have been becoming more and more the person I should have been all along. I still need to be a little careful in some ways as my change of sexuality

has pitched me into a point more in keeping with where I wanted to be when I was much younger. But I definitely feel much more rounded than I used to be.

I hope that my story will encourage somebody. I also hope that it will also encourage churches to be perhaps a little better at listening to the problems people have.

**By John**

*John has had a life-long interest in steam trains, hence the reference in the article to all things ferro-equine.*

for me, that I first contacted TFT. I'm hugely thankful for the many brothers and sisters in Christ I've met through TFT. They model what it means to experience life-giving intimacy within the body of Christ while living according to orthodox biblical teaching.

While I don't doubt God's power to change my attractions, I know this isn't something that is promised in Scripture, nor is it something I'm seeking. My journey doesn't involve a change in my attractions but does involve growing contentment with singleness. My mindset has shifted from simply ignoring/avoiding certain types of relationships to finding joy

in God's good provision through my many spiritual brothers and sisters. These relationships bring the hope that I wish I'd have known about earlier on in my Christian journey. I am grateful that the increased freedom that singleness brings, alongside now working for TFT, and this enables me to share the hope that the gospel has for people like me, with others.

**By Simon**

*Simon serves on the TFT Staff Team looking after our technology and finances. He strongly opposes the idea of pineapple belonging on pizza.*



## Keep The Red Flag Flying

**R**est easy; you have not stumbled upon an article destined for next week's edition of The Socialist newspaper. It's simply my way of remaining alert to the traps, tripwires, and general skulduggery that awaits all believers journeying along their pilgrim path to the Celestial City.

I was a 0-100 kind of person growing up and well into early adulthood. It was a case of being either all in or all out on a project or with an idea, and living largely ignorant of any other number between 1 and 99. It's little wonder I had to retake my maths '0' level exam!

Having only these two numbers certainly kept the adrenaline flowing and proved useful for my conversion to Christ, but has fared badly when

engaging in meaningful relationships or long-term healthy participation in life.

I began using my red flag system back in the late 1980s. I converted to Christ in 1985 and, in response to the Bible's teaching that all sexual activity was to

---

**“Working through a five-flag attraction requires trusted others”**

---

be within the boundaries of marriage between a man and a woman, I walked away from the active gay life that I had been living. However, although I stopped the activity, this decision had no bearing on my emotional response

towards various women. With that 0-100 mindset, I swung from dependency to detachment like a pendulum on an overwound grandfather clock. Exhausted and hurting from this emotional mania, I knew I had to devise a safeguarding strategy that could offer respite from, if not resolution to, this unsustainable turmoil.

### **Flagging up vulnerabilities**

I chose to take stock of my relational history with women to see if that would help. Assessing my past girlfriends and other various women, fictional or otherwise, I made a list of all the characteristics that I found attractive. I included the social standing of the individual as well as her physical and emotional state. I listed whatever sparked a response in me.

---

**“I swung from dependency to detachment like a pendulum on an overwound grandfather clock”**

---

Although there were some left-field quirks that I could dismiss, I began to see several qualities and attributes taking centre stage. These qualities were the ones that pressed my response buttons and caused me to surge internally towards the unsuspecting person. These women displayed some (never all) of the qualities that drew me in, fed my faltering sense of self, nurtured the orphan-spirit or bolstered the rather battered ego. Apart from there being a certain level of physical attraction added to the mix, I began to understand that my weaknesses (real or perceived) were also in play. I would scan the room and lock into potential

---

**“These red flags empowered me... I was no longer a victim to my largely unknown needs”**

---

feeding stations, looking for any scraps they had to spare.

In response, I assigned a red flag to each listed trait. These red flags provided me with power and choice. I was no longer a victim to my largely unknown needs. Instead, I became someone who could begin the process of learning about distinct levels of healthy friendship. On meeting a woman, I would mentally allocate her a certain number of flags, and that would determine the subsequent path of friendship building. Typically, one flag meant that there was little chance of any buttons being pressed, at least in the short term. Whereas five flags warned me that friendship with that woman, at least currently, may jeopardise my commitment to grow in the things of God. Three flags, however, would remind me just to keep this woman as a group friend and to not seek anything more meaningful for the time being.

### **Working with the flags**

It is critical to remember that flags allocated to an individual are not set in stone but come and go depending on the natural development of a shared friendship. Working through a five-flag attraction requires trusted others. It takes courage, humility, and transparency to share with a committed friend, or preferably friends, how a particular relationship is fairing.

The system is not without its flaws and can be painful to work through. However, it has been a critical factor for

me in revealing personal areas that have required talk, prayer, and healing. This has allowed me finally to enjoy good, healthy and intimate friendships.

The danger of inappropriate relationships may not be your issue, but do you know what presses your response buttons? Do you know your frailties as well as you know your strengths? Response buttons expose our needs. They needn't invoke a sense of shame, but instead can draw us closer to the One who knows us best. He longs for us to live as He intended and not as a broken response to all we have endured. Vulnerability is hard, but we gather

strength as we flag up our weaknesses and make faith-driven choices, thus repelling the fiery darts of Satan. Every appropriate choice helps change our old pattern of thinking and behaving. And so our weakness is transformed into strength through the presence and power of Christ Himself.

**By Jeanette**

***Jeanette is the author of three books, including *Dwelling in the Land* (2015). Her fantasy is to grow old (and probably mad) surrounded by animals somewhere in the countryside.***



To listen to an extended interview with Jeanette about her red flag system, subscribe to the **'Ascend Higher Podcast'**

[truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/podcasts)



# Book Review

*Be True to Yourself* by Matt Fuller  
(The Good Book Company, 2020) 192 pages  
£8.94 paperback, £7.38 Kindle

“Be true to yourself!” How does that phrase make you feel? Empowered.? Angry? Confused?

Maybe it matters which generation you are from. For older generations, it may seem pretty wimpish and self-centred. For younger generations, it may feel like the bread and butter of life. We have been told since primary school that if we want to flourish, we must listen to that inner voice above all others. That our personal happiness rests on being who we truly are and not what anyone else wants us to be.

Matt Fuller, with humour, biblical faithfulness and pastoral care, delves deep into the issue. He shows that to “be true to yourself” is not just a phrase, but a worldview (a values system). He places it under the microscope and, in the book, firstly shows how it is lacking. If we follow our society’s understanding of being “true to yourself” then you will end up empty. However, secondly, he shows that if we understand what it really means to “be true to yourself”, on a biblical level, this will lead to us being satisfied.

After examining the secular understanding of being “true to yourself,” he lays out the biblical alternative. We are not meant to spend all our days endlessly searching for our identity, for this will be an exhausting and fruitless quest. Instead, we are meant to listen to the voice of the One who knows who we are, for He was

the One who made us in His image. Therefore, to be true to ourselves, we must reflect the God in whose image we are made. Reflecting God is the only way we can achieve and fulfil our original purpose.

Once we start being true to ourselves, then life becomes less about “me” and more about “the other.” For God, whose image we bear, is relational. He is three persons in one. As we engage in relationships with our families, friends, and work colleagues, we are fulfilling our God-given purpose. But also, as we move from simply knowing “the other” to serve them, then we continue to reflect our God, who is ‘sacrificial-other-person-centred-love’.

Matt then goes on to argue that to be biblically true to ourselves, we must recognise the influence of sin and grace. Sin has ruined us and made it humanly impossible for us to be a true image-bearer. But grace has been lavished upon us, through the death and resurrection of Christ, enabling us to bear faithfully the image of our maker once again. The reality of our sin and this incredible act of grace changes the direction of our gaze. Society says look within for self-worth. Sin and grace say DON’T, for within there lives only despair. Instead, look to the One who knows you and loves you. Look to Christ for your value, dignity and worth.

Once Matt has established what it biblically means to “be true to yourself”, he then explores several different

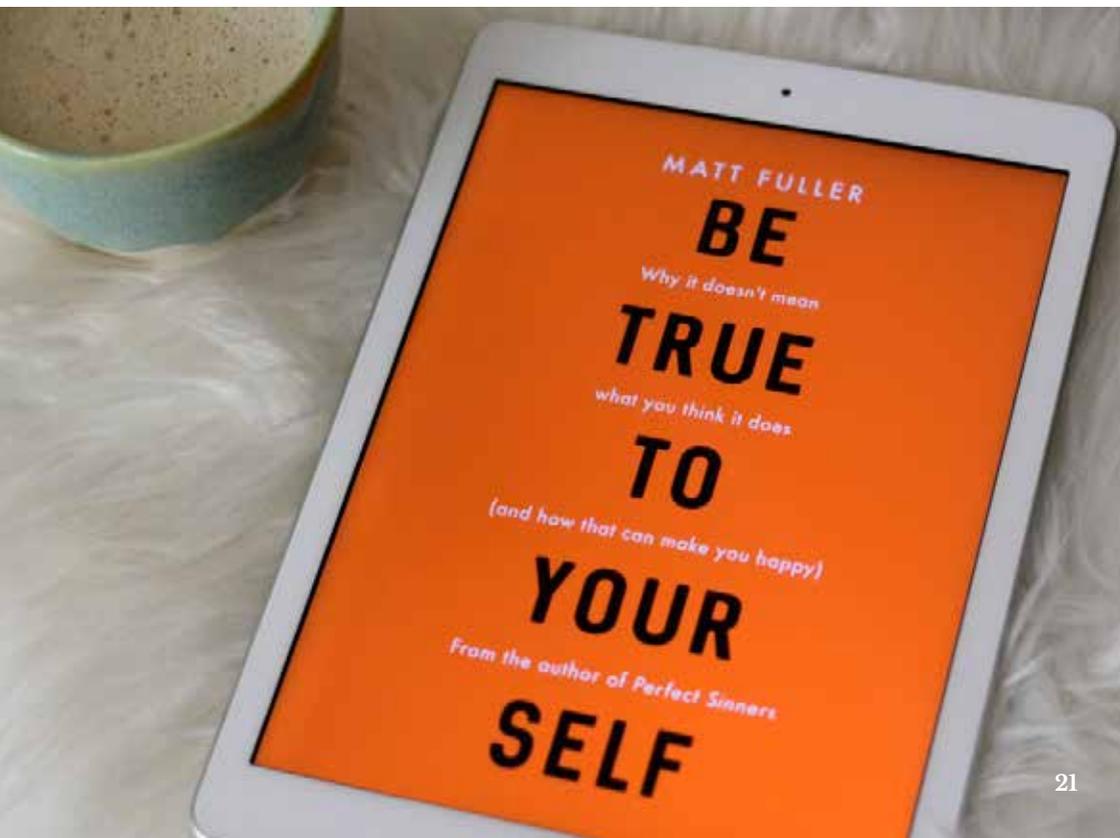
areas. From identity through gender and sexuality, sex, relationships, the community, to being true to ourselves online, he applies this biblical principle of being an image-bearer to each area. In every chapter, Matt is pastorally very insightful and deeply challenging. He shows, again and again, the folly of the secular worldview and highlights the joy of being a true image-bearer.

I, personally, found this book wonderfully helpful because it reminded me of why I am here. I do not walk on this earth to please and satisfy my inner cravings and desires. I live, I breathe, I exist, for a far greater purpose than that. We are here to be image-bearers of God and to reflect His magnificent glory out to the world. We live, we breathe, we exist to act as little mirrors to the One who is so beautiful

that living to point people to Him is not a chore, but a joy. It is not a cruel task, but the greatest of responsibilities. It is not a burden, but a pure delight.

For those who are same-sex attracted, I commend this book to you. It will help you analyse the secular “be true to yourself” worldview and see how empty and meaningless it really is. It will help you establish why you are here and what your purpose is. It will practically help you think through how to live out that purpose in your decision making, your relationships, your online presence and in many other ways. But above all, it will lift up your eyes to focus on the One who made you, loves you and who has good plans set before you.

By Adam





## Living Through History

**I**t seems that we are currently ‘living through history’. I realise that, in one sense, we are always ‘living through history’, but this feels like one of those periods that people will refer to in the years to come; one of those ‘big’ events where not only individuals but the whole world has been affected. I anticipate that there will be days to come when we say to ourselves, “we managed to get through this, so we can get through x”, whatever x may be. It is likely that there will be changes in how we do life after recent months and who knows (God aside) what life going forward will look like?

‘Living through history’ sounds exciting - until it happens. The reality is that the last few months have been difficult. I have noticed that other people’s reactions have had an impact on me. At their best, they encourage me and spur me on. At their worst, they drag me down, or make me feel ‘less than’. I find it most encouraging when people have shared with me both the good and the bad. For example, that they are enjoying the sunshine (which has been lovely), but finding aspects of social distancing difficult (because I can relate to that).

Also, I value how they are coping with it, because then it is not all doom and gloom. Let’s face it, who needs more bad news at the moment?

*So, what have I found helpful?*

### Turning the pain into a longing for eternity

At times, the lockdown period has been really hard, and I have found myself longing for a return to ‘normal’ life, such as wanting to be able to go to the swimming pool, see my friends, go to the cinema, leave the house more often and even to go out to work. As I have felt that longing for a return to so-called ‘normality’, I have let that point me towards the deeper desire that I have for the new creation, for the day when Jesus will return, and when “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away” (Rev 21:4). Pain is not new to me (and I suspect that I am not alone in that among this readership). I have often found myself longing for eternity even before Coronavirus. But being locked down has deepened that longing, and for that I am grateful.

## Hearing what my fears are communicating

I read a book called “Untangling Emotions” (by J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith) earlier this year, and have found it helpful. There is a chapter in it on fear, which was for me the most helpful chapter in the entire book. Fear goes by many names, including anxiety, apprehension, worry, panic, and terror. I have felt anxious at times during this period (e.g. about my mental health and the impact that lockdown will have had on it, and about how long social distancing will last and whether there will be further restrictions on what we can do). This book helpfully tells us that fear communicates to us that something we value is under threat, making it a helpful tool in identifying what matters most to us. The fears around my mental health tell me that I value well-being. The fears around further restrictions tell me that I value freedom. Knowing that fear communicates has given me a curiosity when I have felt anxious. I have started asking myself, “what is this particular anxiety telling me about what I value?” Becoming interested in what my emotions are telling me has lessened my fear.

## Lifting my eyes

I have also found it helpful to lift the focus off myself and the difficulties

of my current circumstances. A few weeks into the lockdown period I started praying through “*Operation World: the definitive prayer guide to every nation*”. At a time when I had been in the house far more than I would have liked, I found it so encouraging to read what God is doing in other parts of the world, including countries where being a Christian is difficult and where sharing the gospel is hard. I have been particularly encouraged to read about the growth of the church in places where I would not have expected it.

So, even at a time when we living through a challenging time in history, we can remind ourselves that we may be “chained”, but the gospel is not.

## By Nat

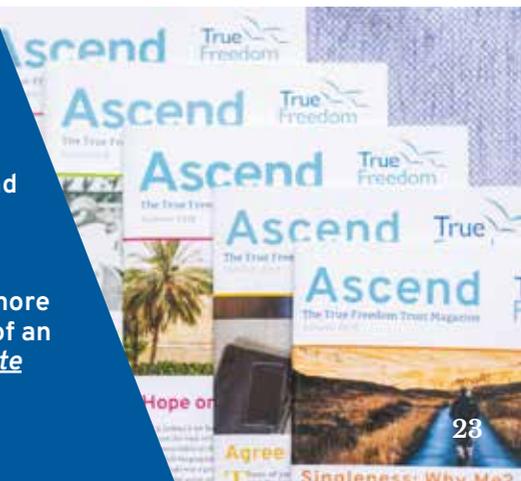
**Nat loves Jesus, words, board games, stories, stories about what God is doing, wild swimming, and the beauty of God’s creation, especially the sea, lakes and other places where she can swim.**

*This article is based on a short video testimony given at the Never Alone online conference in Summer 2020. The video was prepared during the early COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.*

## Donate a Year’s Subscription

Each quarter we deliver over 750 Ascend magazines free-of-charge to our members, donors and partner churches. The printing and postage of Ascend to one recipient for a year costs £4.44.

If you enjoy Ascend and want to see it bless more people, why not consider donating the price of an Ascend to TFT at [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate](http://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate)



# You Looking At Me? Wink, Wink

**W**illiam Barclay, a British theologian, tells a story about a boy who came to an intersection of the road, where one sign pointed to the city of Seattle, and another pointed to the city of Tacoma. The boy then wondered to himself, “How many people could I send down the wrong road if I changed the signs?”

Our lives are signposts with signs on. Are we sending people down the wrong road or the right road?

I’ve been asked to write about flirting, and using others to meet our physical and emotional needs. So, are these behaviours always wrong?

Let’s face it, most of us know when we are flirting; it usually starts when we fancy someone, and the behaviour we show to that person is different from what would be normal for us; prolonged eye contact, we touch someone whilst they talk, even laughing when they say something that isn’t particularly funny. Playful affection in and of itself probably isn’t wrong, but it depends why we’re doing it, and what is our end goal. That’s when it’s especially good to ask ourselves questions like, “What do I really want?” If we want what God wants, then we can follow that up with, “What does God want me to do in this situation?”

## Made for community

We were made by God for community (“it’s not good for man to be alone” – Gen 2:18) and, as His hands and feet in this world, God uses others in our lives to help meet our physical and emotional needs. When examining our relationships with others, a good

question to ask is, “what wisdom does God give me about healthy boundaries for these relationships?”

God speaks in so many ways about how we need to be careful about the effect of our actions, or lack thereof, on others. For instance, in Romans 14:13-23, especially verse 21, it says “it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.” In my first job after university, I worked with people trying to overcome alcohol and drug addictions. So, for over five years, I didn’t drink a drop of alcohol, primarily because of this verse. The young men and women I worked with had stolen so consistently from friends and family that many came to the charity, usually straight from prison, utterly estranged from their loved ones. Yet, despite knowing to a certain degree the consequences of their actions, they would pretty much do whatever was needed to get their next fix. In their moments of craving a fix, part of their brain (the responsive part that is most associated with fight, flight or freeze), took over their reasoning logical part.

Biologically there can be a conflict, such as unhealed issues, frequently stemming from our childhood (but not always), often meaning we have developed ways of thinking and behaving that are more related to the emotional parts of our brain than the logical parts. We can rarely truly understand the action we took with our ‘logical brain’ after the event.

## Our brain can be our friend!

For those that have developed bad habits or ingrained behaviours as a

part of their lives, their brain in these situations is not their friend. For instance, “my spirit wants to do one thing, but my flesh does another” (Rom 7:15-23). But our brain can become our friend! There are very real things we can do to help our brain change. Verse 2 of Romans 12 describes not being conformed to the pattern of this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our mind. This is not just make-believe – it is very possible!

An emotional need that I carried from childhood was a desire to be accepted by my peers of the same sex. In adulthood, I found seeking other men who’d want to kiss me, or do other inappropriate behaviour, meant that somewhere in my brain I felt that emotional need was being met. It was invariably followed by shame, as the consequence emerged of doing something that logically I genuinely didn’t want to do.

Part of my story is that relying on my prayers, white-knuckling, accountability

relationships and talking with my close friends about struggles just wasn’t cutting it. With the help of an excellent therapist, recommended by someone in the TFT office, God has enabled me to understand my own brain a little better, and the way it works, and allow it to be my friend. I’ve also joined a support group, and through this I benefit greatly from having twice-weekly check-in calls and honest conversations with someone who has in the past struggled with similar behaviours to myself.

Last year I got a puppy and found that the regular cuddles I get from her, combined with the therapy, has meant that I don’t crave for guys to meet my emotional needs as much in an unhealthy way, meaning that resisting temptation has become so much easier.

Regularly pausing and reflecting on our emotions can be immensely helpful. Personally, I like to use the moment I’ve just made a cup of tea before it’s cool enough to drink. I ask myself questions such as, “What am feeling at the



moment? What is causing that feeling? What does God want to say to me right now about this?"

## Stumbling

When someone does something that causes someone else to stumble, or draws someone away from God,

### **“Make sure that single people know how they can reach out for help”**

relationships are damaged. Both sides usually end up being hurt. Anger at the sin is a godly thing. The perpetrator may also feel deep shame. As brothers and sisters observing from the outside, how can we love both the perpetrator and the one who has stumbled?

In Mark 9:42 Jesus warns, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” One commentator, Matthew Henry, notes that Jesus said it is better to endure all possible pain, hardship and self-denial, and to be happy forever in heaven hereafter, than to enjoy all kinds of worldly pleasure for a season and be miserable forever. We would do well to bear this in mind next time we are tempted to flirt or take advantage of our relationships for ungodly purposes.

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus talks about God’s forgiveness and love for us, and our responsibility to forgive others. We can think that tempting others is just enticing them to do wrong. At its core, though, all temptation is an attempt to draw someone away from God. Jesus says this could be

by stopping others serving (Mark 9:38) or discouraging them from approaching Jesus (Mark 10:13-16). Have we established rules that keep others from fulfilling their God-given responsibilities of serving Him or learning more about Him? How are we getting in the way of the gospel? How are we, in fact, a stumbling block?

## We all need our heavenly Father

The Gospel message is one of grace, filled with love. It recognises that we all fall short and all need our heavenly Father. If we become aware either of our own inappropriate behaviour or witness it in our fellow brothers/sisters, I think a loving question would be something like, “is this a behaviour that you want to continue?” If they answer with “No”, then lovingly explore alternatives with them that might help them become an overcomer in that area of their lives. If you’ve observed ongoing behaviours in yourself that you think displease your heavenly Father, and you’re struggling to stop by yourself, I urge you to talk to someone in the TFT support team who can help point you in a good direction. You don’t need to struggle alone, and many people within our organisation do genuinely love you and want your walk with Jesus to be ever closer.

By our own actions, or lack thereof, we can choose where our signposts direct others. Whom do you need to encourage today to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus?

## By Chris

***Chris is a business coach, enjoys walking his puppy ‘Pepper’ and, outside of lockdown, plays underwater hockey.***

# An Unlikely Ally

**H**ow did a single, celibate, fifty-something Christian woman become an ally of those struggling with their sexuality and gender?

By giving up on the truth of God's Word? By discovering a convenient theology of liberal grace? Or by selling out to a worldly mantra of tolerance?

Actually, it was none of these. Rather, unexpectedly, it was the answer to the prayer of a naïve eighteen-year-old, arriving at university to be greeted by the GaySoc (that really dates me) and asking God to help her show love to people, without compromising His Word.

Perhaps some context would be helpful here: I became a Christian from an unchurched background when I was twelve. God encountered me, and I knew I'd never walk away from Him again. I was curious about all sorts of

---

**“I can see the loneliness in the lives of many same-sex attracted Christians”**

---

things but, fortunately, I was part of a church which was confident in Christ and answered my questions (which I thought were original, but they'd probably heard a thousand times before!) with great love, patience and unerring biblical accuracy.

My spiritual mother (the lab technician at my secondary school) had a friend called Martin Hallett, who was in the process of setting up True Freedom Trust. He did quite a lot of teaching in my church, and I was fascinated, intrigued, and amazed.

That teaching set the basis for my understanding of sexuality. In my teenage years, it guided me through as I tried to negotiate that other species who were male, and it helped me develop good friendships with women as well as men.

**Abandoning the moral high ground**  
So, I arrived at university with a sincere desire to be a good witness in the new setting God had put me in. I prayed that prayer over the GaySoc letter and then dived into Christian Union activities. It was easy to go through university life inside its protective bubble, maintaining



the moral high ground by not getting drunk or sleeping around, but instead by being terribly nice and condescending to those with an alternative lifestyle.

The challenge came when one young male Christian small group leader came out as gay. Those of us within the leadership of the Christian Union asked him to stop leading the small group. That decision led to a major furore

---

### **“We are called to show the compassion, grace and mercy of Jesus”**

---

with the aforementioned GaySoc. The story reached the Sun newspaper – “God Squad Bans Gay”. Our council of reference (local church leaders) were divided in their counsel which bemused us because we were all supposed to be Bible-believing.

“It’s all a matter of interpretation,” became a key phrase. One moment of challenge from outside the Christian circle was in a student union meeting in which a female GaySoc member explained how her sexual orientation was perfectly natural to her.

Eventually, that storm blew over: I finished university and started work as a teacher in 1988. Both professionally and personally, I always tried to show love to gay people while keeping true to the traditional interpretation of the Bible.

### **Learning to Listen**

Oh, what a privilege it is for so-called straight Christians to navigate church life. Writing this, I realise how little I actually did for decades about engaging with LGBT+ issues.

I do remember attending a “Faith and Homophobia” conference run by the Gay Christian Movement. I was unimpressed by their liberal theological stance but was challenged by their assertion that LGBT+ faith was about more than “what goes on between the bedsheets.” So, I began to listen more to the lives of Christian and non-Christian LGBT+ people.

In those days, TFT events and conferences I attended seemed to be full of stoic individuals trying to keep to the true path. Non-Christian LGBT+ events I attended had a more celebratory feel to them. How can this be when us Christians are supposed to be the ones



in possession of abundant life in Christ? Strange as it may seem, the moment of greatest clarity in my own journey concerning sexual orientation came whilst trying to sleep (alone!) at a conference venue whilst the campest playlist was being worked through downstairs. Finally, I realised I wasn't gay!

### **A compassionate approach**

As I observe the theological fault lines today, I see a so-called "inclusive" or "affirming" church versus a doctrinally-correct but often completely lacking in compassion / mission church which seems to want to bury its head in its self-righteous quicksand.

I think we are called (or at least stumble) into situations where God expects us to show the compassion, grace and mercy of Jesus. This is relevant inside and outside of church life. In recent years I have found myself deliberating standing with transgender people as they face horrendous transphobic bullying. I am ashamed of the casual homophobia demonstrated in many of our supposedly doctrinally-sound churches. But where does that leave us in terms of sharing solidarity, friendship and faith with LGBT+ people through the unconditional love of God, whilst at the same time talking with them about holiness and scripture and right living?

Jesus is the answer. Those of us who know Him can reflect His love and compassion and demonstrate the new life the gospel brings without condemnation. It's time for the Church to step up and show what holy, whole living and relationships really look like. We don't need to be ashamed of

ourselves because the good news is Jesus forgives us and helps us in our present struggles.

As 1 Corinthians 6v11 says after a comprehensive list of the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God:

*"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."*

Our non-Christian LGBT+ friends need us to witness to how Jesus has liberated us to be free to live that abundant life Jesus talked about. I can see the loneliness in the lives of many same-sex attracted Christians. I'm committed to TFT because they choose to walk alongside, while upholding traditional Christian values.

I hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit, through Paul, encouraging us to be "blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life" (Phil 2v15&16).

### **By Mandy**

***Mandy is a teacher, lives in London and is actively involved in her local church. She enjoys meals out with friends and swimming. The latter activities were seriously curtailed during lockdown, but there was always a picnic and the local canal!***



## Cabin Crew

On March 11th 2020 what was then prosaically called the “TFT Women’s Book Club”, started as a WhatsApp group with six members. I had already read “Gay Girl, Good God” by Jackie Hill Perry and knew that it would be a thought-provoking, conversation-inducing autobiography, well able to withstand scrutiny from the prolific and questioning women readers at TFT. I wrote far too many questions on each chapter, ready for the members to read and discuss them every month through our private Facebook group. This proved to be a non-starter. There was minimal uptake, no momentum and no visible community to share reflections with. I needed to re-think.

In changing to Zoom, the group took off. Two new members joined. We could see and speak to each other on the screen. We could spend time listening and appreciating each other’s insights and experiences, which three months in, have become deeper and more honest. One of our members wittily re-named the group “Fisher-Price Cabin”, because Jackie was attracted to her first woman at nursery school. We were able to listen to Jackie reading her story on the “Audible” App too, which meant that the words, written by a performance poet, came to life or “bounced off every page”. I love the fact that we have been able to be vulnerable with each other, provoked by Jackie’s incredibly honest account

of her bullying at school, the lack of a relationship with her father and his premature death, and the connecting experience of same-sex attraction. I love the fact that I am teased about not following the questions I’ve set in order. The conversation flows without my safety mechanism of a list being necessary! I love the fact that it is a safe environment which is non-judgemental, and where there is empathy and support. I love the fact that the women spur each other on to live out their godly identity in a world that believes celibacy is strange. I love the fact that I can spend time with other women who really enjoy reading. I love the fact that no-one is put down for having an opinion. I love the fact that we are gracious, and everyone gets a turn to speak. I love the fact that the members want to stay afterwards and chat.

We have realised that it could take us two years to discuss one book, unless we double up on chapters. Two years with these women and this book sounds great. Come and join us.

**By Ruth**

***Ruth is the Women’s Worker at TFT. She is learning to make tapas, has recently taken to climbing trees and loves watching recorded plays from the National Theatre on line.***

## Changes to the Staff Team

In June 2020, Alison Thomas left the staff team after eight years serving as our Team Administrator. We greatly appreciate all she did to keep on top of our finances and to get the whole team thinking creatively about fundraising. Her kind and pastoral heart will be much missed by all in the team. Alison writes:

*“I have gained so much from being a part of the TFT family. I’m so grateful to God for all that He’s gently taught me through the experience of genuine Christian love and biblical teaching over the past eight years. It’s been encouraging, challenging, humbling and heart-and-mind-transforming. I leave with lots of happy memories and friends, both from the National Conferences and from working on the staff team with some wonderful brothers and sisters. Please pray as I now humbly seek to serve and share the gospel closer to home. I hope to see you at a National Conference soon! Love, Alison”*



And at the end of August 2020, Rob Wood is also leaving the staff team after 4½ years service. He joined in 2016 as our Teaching & Pastoral Assistant and then in 2018 became our Head of Speaking & Teaching. Rob has ministered with warmth and biblical wisdom, particularly to a younger generation of members. He has also worked tirelessly to deliver tailored Bible teaching to a wide range of churches. Rob writes:

*“Dear Friends, I feel a sense of sadness that my time on the TFT staff team is coming to an end. I’m so thankful to God for TFT, which has been a wonderful ministry to work for. In September I am starting ordination training in the Church of England. I will remain an active member of TFT. I plan on continuing to attend conferences and helping as a voluntary worker. I appreciate your prayer for the future and am excited to see what God has in store. Blessings, Rob”*



Simon Byrne will be taking on Alison's book-keeping work as Team Administrator, as well as undertaking a new one day/week role as our Fundraising and Outreach Champion. He is juggling these responsibilities alongside his original role as IT Engineer, so he now works full time for TFT. Simon brings real dedication to the role as well as plenty of fresh ideas for how to serve our members and efficiently use our resources. Simon writes:

*"I'm pleased to be able to devote more time to serving TFT, which I have benefitted enormously from. While I'm sad about Alison and Rob leaving, I'm also thankful for God's continued provision for the ministry and I look forward to seeing how the work develops in future."*



## Sponsor our "Back to Church" Campaign

With finances tight at present, we are currently unable to recruit for the role of Head of Speaking & Teaching after Rob's departure. With the COVID-19 pandemic giving us a natural pause in speaking work, we have time to build up funds for a new staff position to coordinate this vital work. Rob has, over recent years, built up a reliable speaking team of volunteer speakers around the country.

We need to raise funds for a new role of Speaking Team Manager. This part-time position in the staff team will oversee our speaking work, and will focus on training, coordinating and supporting our very capable volunteer speakers as they bring a compelling combination of solid biblical teaching and personal testimony to churches around the UK & Ireland.

To fund this role for two years we need to raise an additional £30,000. If you've ever benefitted from a TFT speaker, will you join with us in funding this role and help to get TFT back to speaking in churches once more?

Please visit [truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate](https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/donate)

