

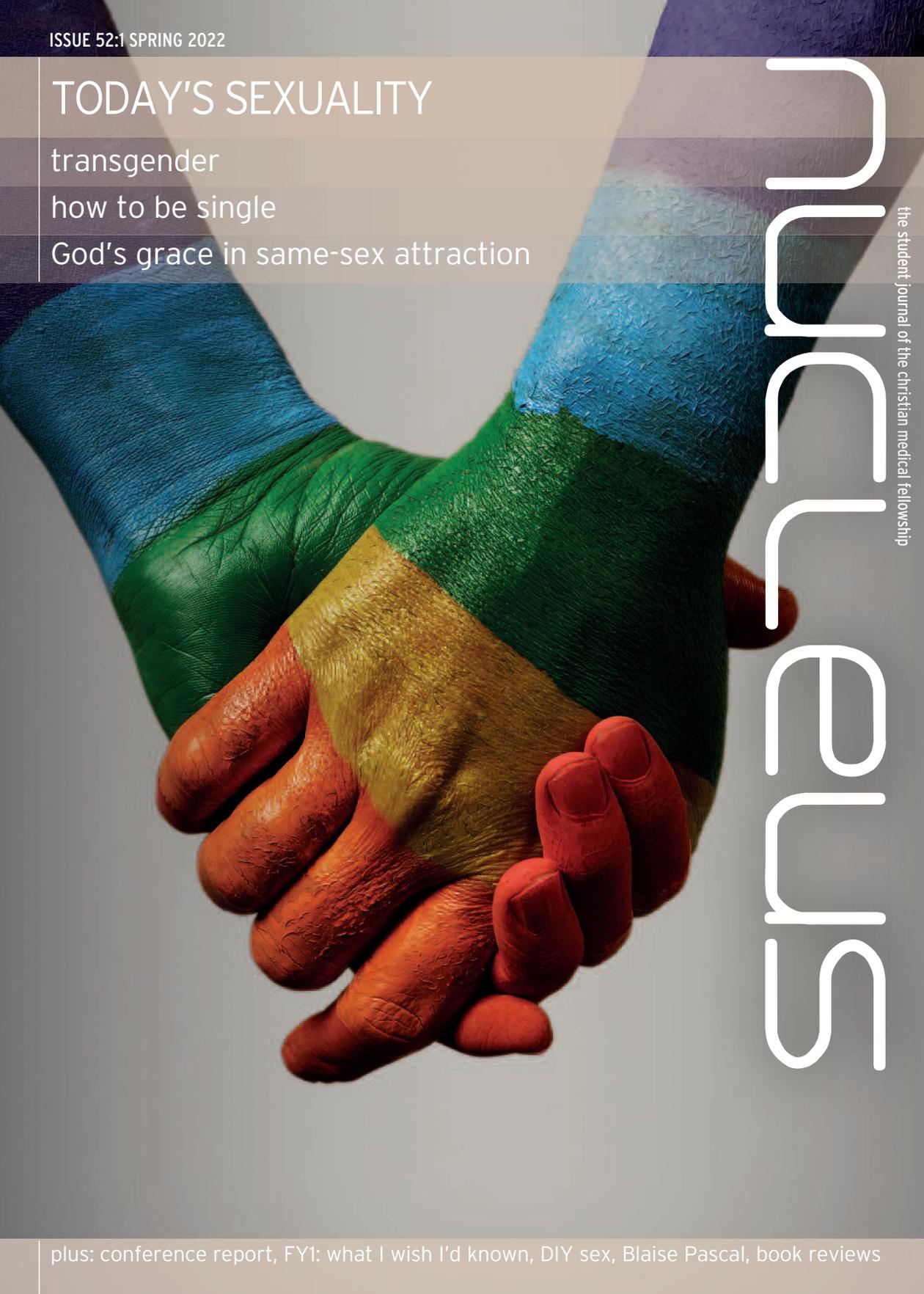
ISSUE 52:1 SPRING 2022

TODAY'S SEXUALITY

transgender

how to be single

God's grace in same-sex attraction



the student journal of the christian medical fellowship

nurseries

plus: conference report, FYI: what I wish I'd known, DIY sex, Blaise Pascal, book reviews

NUCLEUS



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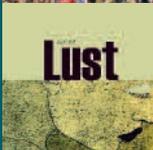
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the greatest question?



Laurence Crutchlow is managing editor of *Nucleus*

Which type of books sell best on CMF student conference bookstalls? (a clue – as you work out your answer, consider which are often the largest seminars at the same conference...)

The outside observer of CMF might answer ‘discussions on medical ethics’, or a devotional book for doctors’. Even if these are partially accurate, it is almost always sexuality and relationship topics that actually draw the biggest numbers and sales.

This has been true since I was a student. But the specific topics causing challenges have changed, and continue to evolve. Therefore, *Nucleus* is ready to revisit this topic only five years after our last edition themed around it.

Same-sex attraction is not new. But the attitude of society has changed significantly, particularly with same-sex marriage established in law. Some churches openly affirm such relationships, while others argue that same-sex attracted Christians can still uphold a biblical standard in their sexual behaviour, with God’s help. The anonymous testimony piece in this issue encourages us that this is possible. Our student co-editor Liz Birdie Ong reviews Sam Allberry’s *Is God Anti-Gay?* and adds helpful context on the huge contrast she has observed over this issue between her native Malaysia and current home in Ireland.

Gender identity has seen the most change of any area in this field in recent years. The huge increases in the number of children referred to gender services over this time raises questions not only for healthcare students but for churches and parents. This complex topic is tackled from both a biblical and practical perspective.

Singleness is an unchanging topic – and of course everyone is single at some point! Jennie Pollock explores contentedness and flourishing as a single person. Another ever-present question whether single or not is that of masturbation.

Marolin Watson explores what the Bible might have to say.

Many books that sold well in my student days are long out of print. Some of these were very helpful at the time, but others have been actively repudiated by their authors. Given that the message of Scripture hasn’t changed, does this tell us something about the way in which we are looking at relationships as Christians? Are we writing too much that is culturally determined, or perhaps going beyond what the Bible says?

While we’re right to avoid legalism, this shouldn’t lead us to say nothing at all, or to diminish commands that are clear. Some books trying to tread this path age rather better than others, and our other student co-editor Daniel Nie reviews one such example.

There has been enough to say about sexuality to almost fill this edition. We have tried to resist this temptation, knowing that our salvation ultimately comes through faith in Jesus, rather than in discussion of ethical conundrums.

Most of us probably have heard of Blaise Pascal, but in the context of vacuums and fluid dynamics, rather than faith. Retired surgeon Bernard Palmer tells the story of two fellow surgeons of the seventeenth century who practiced truly holistic medicine, sharing both orthopaedic expertise and spiritual wisdom, and thus leading the eminent physicist Pascal to Jesus, along with much of his family. We hope this encourages you to persevere in sharing the gospel.

Our *be prepared* piece testifies to the unexpected opportunities with both patients and colleagues that FYI doctor Sally Barker has seen during the year. We hope her advice and experience help readers for whom this is the last edition of *Nucleus* they will read before starting work. If that is you, we wish you every blessing for this first season of work, and look forward to receiving articles about your experiences! ■

transgender: what does the Bible say?

John Greenall searches the Scriptures





John Greenall is CMF Associate CEO and a paediatrician in Bedfordshire

During lockdowns and school closures I feel like I've watched pretty much the entire Disney+ back catalogue with my kids. I'm debating with my daughter whether *Encanto* is any good at all – she dislikes it and certainly won't talk about Bruno.

As we've watched, the question repeatedly arises in these films: *Who am I?* And the answer is consistent, too. We need to look inside ourselves. We need to throw off the expectations of others, of society, of religion and find and then embrace our true selves. Pixar – now in Disney's stable – often bring a more nuanced view as to the nature of identity. In *Toy Story 4*, Forky is created from discarded junk and made into a toy. During the film Forky thinks he's still junk and tries to jump back into the bin. He doesn't realise that his creator knows what he is made for and that because he is a toy, he finds his best life being enjoyed by children.

who am I?

We can't answer the question '*who am I?*' without asking '*how do I find my identity?*' Culture tells us to look inside and discover it (an 'internal identity narrative'). We have always seen a minority of people grapple with 'gender dysphoria', but until recently our culture has viewed sex and gender as one and the same thing (in accordance with biblical teaching and our scientific understanding). The internal identity narrative has changed that, coupled with a hyper-sexualised narrative (going back to Freud, Rousseau, Marcuse, and others)¹ that sees sexual and gender identity as the foundational aspect of our identity telling me 'who I am'. Other significant changes include a theological belief in no God and therefore no external authority; rigid media gender stereotyping; technology, including surgery to accomplish amazing things; the deification of limitless choice, and a mass media that promotes this ideology to impressionable young people. Given all this, perhaps it's no surprise that the Christian

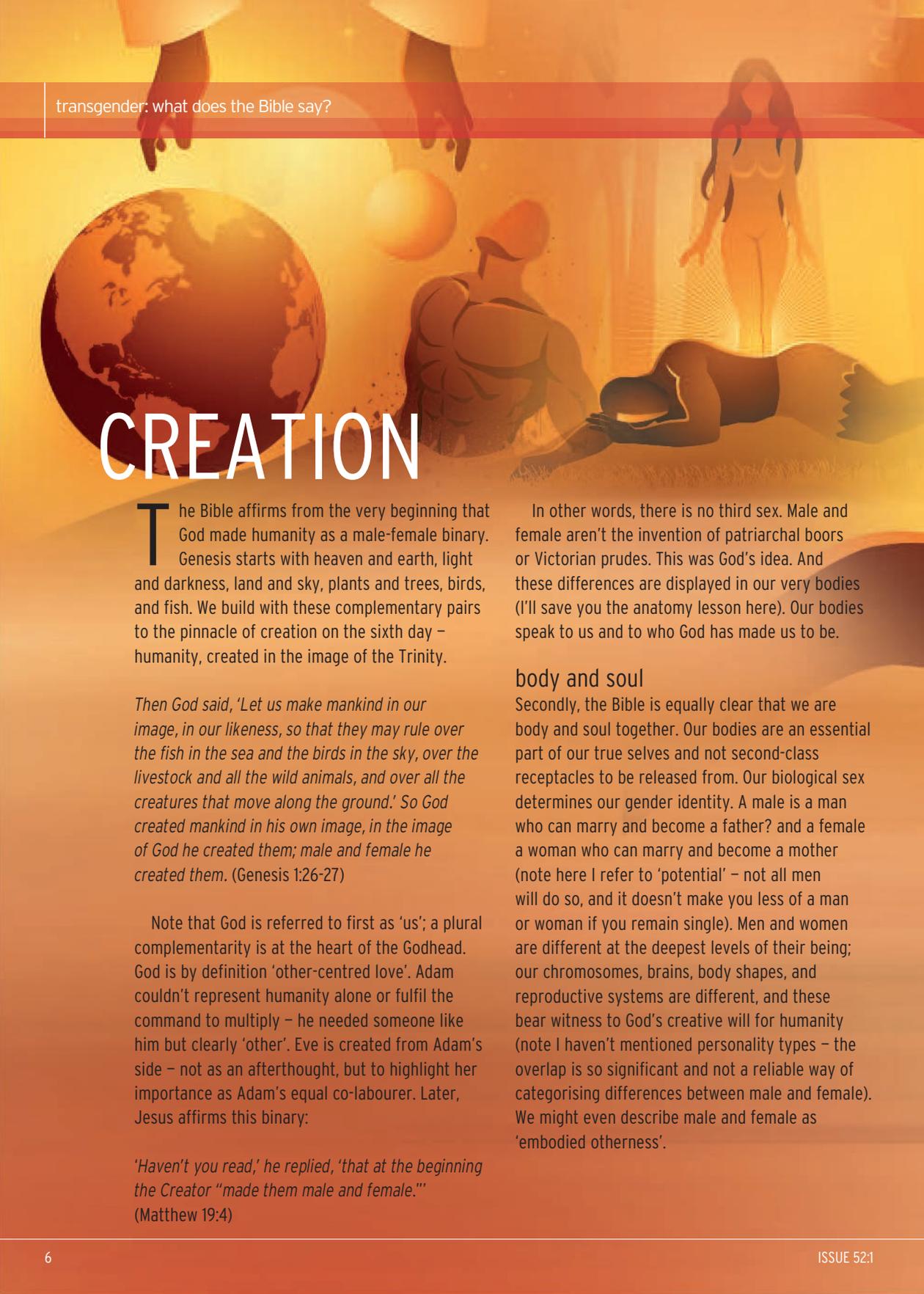
message on gender and sexual identity is so incomprehensible to many people.

a counter-story

And yet, ironically, the internal identity narrative doesn't work. Feelings and desires change. As a paediatrician I meet kids who have changed from one feeling to another over weeks and months. Acting on our feelings doesn't always deliver – prison is full of people who acted according to their feelings! Indeed, we all inhabit a story. The story our culture weaves together tells us who we are (creation), what went wrong (fall), and what the solution is (redemption). It is all around us – not just in the latest Disney film. We need a counter-story because arguing the facts and figures doesn't wash. That's despite the sexual revolution being an utter catastrophe when it comes to rates of mental health,² sexual intimacy,³ loneliness,⁴ pornography addiction,⁵ childhood sexualisation,⁶ and more. No, we need to grasp and be able to tell the biblical story as a good-news story, even though it may sound plain weird to many around us.

authority, knowledge, and trust

Before we consider this though, we must accept some assumptions before we open the Bible. We need to answer the following questions: whose *authority* are we willing to submit to? As Christians, when we accept that we are created beings we learn to suppress our 'inner-Forky' feelings, and submit to our maker's instructions. We have to ask, 'who knows what is best for me?' 'Do I really know myself best?' 'Do I understand the impact of my decisions?' 'Who do I trust most on these issues – me or God?' We find out who we really are when we find our place in the story of God's salvation. There we find perfect authority, knowledge, and trustworthiness for a secure, stable, and unchanging answer to the question 'who am I?'.⁷ So, let's unpack that story as we consider transgender issues.



CREATION

The Bible affirms from the very beginning that God made humanity as a male-female binary. Genesis starts with heaven and earth, light and darkness, land and sky, plants and trees, birds, and fish. We build with these complementary pairs to the pinnacle of creation on the sixth day – humanity, created in the image of the Trinity.

Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Note that God is referred to first as 'us'; a plural complementarity is at the heart of the Godhead. God is by definition 'other-centred love'. Adam couldn't represent humanity alone or fulfil the command to multiply – he needed someone like him but clearly 'other'. Eve is created from Adam's side – not as an afterthought, but to highlight her importance as Adam's equal co-labourer. Later, Jesus affirms this binary:

'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female."' (Matthew 19:4)

In other words, there is no third sex. Male and female aren't the invention of patriarchal boors or Victorian prudes. This was God's idea. And these differences are displayed in our very bodies (I'll save you the anatomy lesson here). Our bodies speak to us and to who God has made us to be.

body and soul

Secondly, the Bible is equally clear that we are body and soul together. Our bodies are an essential part of our true selves and not second-class receptacles to be released from. Our biological sex determines our gender identity. A male is a man who can marry and become a father? and a female a woman who can marry and become a mother (note here I refer to 'potential' – not all men will do so, and it doesn't make you less of a man or woman if you remain single). Men and women are different at the deepest levels of their being; our chromosomes, brains, body shapes, and reproductive systems are different, and these bear witness to God's creative will for humanity (note I haven't mentioned personality types – the overlap is so significant and not a reliable way of categorising differences between male and female). We might even describe male and female as 'embodied otherness'.

FALL

In Genesis 3 we see Adam and Eve doubting God's authority, knowledge, and trustworthiness. By taking the fruit, they exhibit the heart of human rebellion: 'I know better'. When they sinned, God's perfect creation was damaged and broken; suffering and pain and distress entered the world. All of us live with some degree of dissonance between what God says is true of us and what we feel to be true in everyday life. This isn't about it being hard for someone with gender dysphoria and easy for me. That they have a problem, and I don't. We can say, 'I know what you feel – know where you are coming from. There is that tension in my own life'.

The Bible is clear about distinguishing between *affliction* and *sin*. People who experience genuine gender dysphoria are not culpable and it isn't something people say they have chosen. It is a result of sin entering the world – indeed we see this at every level from physical to psychological to social to the very ground we tread on – but it isn't in itself a sin. That said, how we respond to life's challenges is important. The Bible contains a range of condemnations of behaviours that fall under the general banner of gender bending (eg crossdressing,⁸ sexual effeminacy,⁹ and gender ambiguity¹⁰). Deciding to let the feelings rule is sinful because it is deciding that your feelings will have authority over what you define as right and wrong (see Adam and Eve and that fruit).

pro-sex

Thirdly, the Bible is unashamedly pro-sex. A man is someone able to become one flesh – have sexual intercourse – with a woman, and a woman is someone who can become one flesh with a man. The distinction between men and women reflects the distinction between God and human beings. God is longing to be united with us – made possible through Christ. This can only be imaged through two distinct and different complementary 'others'. As Ephesians 5:32 states, the joining of man and woman in the sex act is 'about Christ and the church'. That may sound gross, but it is what the Bible teaches. The very act of an orgasm and the joining of male and female are a picture of Christ and the church and a foretaste of heaven. And so, if God has authority and if God knows what is best and can be trusted above all others, then we must heed the Bible's teaching



REDEMPTION

In his earthly life Jesus affirmed the binary nature of male and female; he was incarnated not as gender neutral but as a circumcised Jewish male. And yet he lived his entire life in a way that challenged stereotypes as to what a male and female should look like; he never had sex, and he never got married (which would have been the expected thing for a Jewish rabbi to do).

As Saviour, Jesus came to enter into the profound suffering of so many, and then to walk through it and out the other side. He came to deal with sin, to disarm it and do away with it. Redemption isn't found by measuring how well a person's gender identity aligns with their biological sex. Instead, redemption is being drawn to the person and work of Jesus Christ and to the power of the Spirit to transform us into his image. Jesus could often be found walking with the marginalised, the hurting, the derided and the untouchables. The Bible is good news to those who struggle with gender identity.

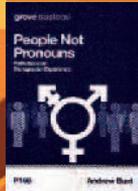
And yet most gender dysphoric adults don't see the healing they may desire. Indeed, the Bible doesn't promise total freedom in this life.¹¹ We can, however, point to our certain hope that one day

Jesus is returning, and he will apply in full the victory he has won. Every bit of pain and suffering will end. God himself will wipe away our tears.¹² On that day those dissonances will be gone.

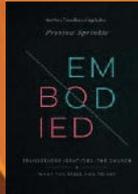
compassion

These reflections become very personal when you have sat with someone who has attempted suicide because of their dysphoria. As Jesus did, we are to have tremendous care and compassion for people. We must listen and understand before we can respond well, walking alongside people, perhaps groaning inwardly with them¹³ and offering the comfort that we too have experienced¹⁴ as part of a community of God – be it church or CMF. And whilst the best way to honour God's truth is to love people, the best way to love people over time is to bring God's life-giving truth.¹⁵ Not explaining God's story and plan for sex and gender would mean omitting a key act of love.

FURTHER READING



- Bunt, A. *People Not Pronouns: Reflections on Transgender Experience*. Cambridge: Grove Books, 2021.



- Sprinkle, P. *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church and What the Bible Has to Say*. Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2021.

summary

As we live alongside non-Christians, we can explain that we approach the Bible believing that our creator speaks to us and knows what is good for us. God has complete authority, perfect knowledge, and is utterly trustworthy. We have a secure foundation for our identity; rather than discovering it, we receive our identity from God even when we don't feel it. And yet we recognise the hurt people feel; we lead with compassion, and we point them to Jesus who walks alongside the hurting.

This is a wild story for many in our culture, but it's one we can confidently grasp and live out before a hurting world. That's the hope of the gospel. Now let's live it in all its glory for the sake of Christ. ■

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transgender: how do we support young people?

Laurence Crutchlow explores a fast-growing dilemma





Laurence Crutchlow is CMF Associate Head of Student Ministries and a GP in London

Don't go there!' If the preceding article sparked that sentiment, this piece is for you. Wouldn't it be easier if the Bible allowed us to 'let it be' about gender and transgender? How can we be loving to people if we don't affirm the feelings they describe?

Yet we don't take this approach in other areas of life or medicine. We consider carefully what the Scriptures say. We don't necessarily affirm every feeling a patient may share, or accede to everything they might request.

context

There have always been patients who question their gender identity. The diagnosis of 'Gender Identity Disorder'¹ was thought rare, although had huge implications in the lives of those affected.

The clinical and societal picture has changed. More people present with gender identity difficulties. Patients tend to be younger, with a much bigger focus on children and adolescents, and far more likely to have been born female than before.

This affects far more people than just patients and healthcare professionals. Teachers in particular have to navigate this complex topic much more often than before. Pastors and church youth workers are far more likely to need to support those in their congregations who are dealing with such questions first-hand. And of course, parents must navigate something that was very rare indeed in their own generation.

Yet many clinicians or pastors are extremely wary of this subject. Church leaders may feel it is 'medical' and hard for them to tackle. GPs or community paediatricians may feel it is a complex area, best 'left to experts'. But 'experts' are hard to find, with specialists having long waiting lists. The generalist who wants to help is in a difficult position. Most treatments are unlicensed and have a limited evidence base. The toxic nature of social media interaction around this subject is not likely

RESOURCES

CMF has recently produced a series of 'Quick Guides' to gender dysphoria. These are succinct, referenced sources of information, with different versions aimed at parents, youth workers, pastors, and healthcare professionals.

The 'healthcare professionals' version provides much of the academic material for this article, and can be consulted for references at cmf.li/3MXas7L.



to attract a church leader into engagement in the wider world.

medical treatment and consent in young people

Not all 'transitioning' need involve medicine. 'Social transitioning' describes use of a new name or pronouns or adoption of obviously opposite-sex modes of dress. While not medical as such, this is in itself a significant intervention, and parents or schools who need to choose whether to enable this or not have limited evidence on which to base a decision.

Not everyone who socially transitions will necessarily want any other treatment. For those that do, medical treatments for young people fall into two main categories. GnRH analogues effectively 'switch off' sex hormones, and stop the progress of puberty. They have long been used temporarily to delay development in cases of precocious puberty. In a transgender context, they are often labelled 'puberty blockers'. In theory, these drugs are given so that an adolescent has time to decide whether they might want to stop the drugs, or go onto take 'cross-sex hormones' (oestrogen or testosterone) with the aim of developing secondary sexual characteristics of the opposite sex.

Neither puberty-blockers nor cross-sex hormones are licensed for these specific uses. Recent reviews suggest that a very high proportion

of patients who use puberty blockers do go on to take cross-sex hormones, suggesting that they are not actually allowing them 'time to decide'.

Safety data regarding the long-term effects of puberty blockers is very limited.

All of these concerns (which are referenced in detail in the *CMF Quick Guide*) make proper consent for these treatments very difficult. There have been ongoing court cases in England during 2020-21 over these issues. The Department of Health is currently awaiting full findings of an independent review commissioned into the subject.²

The potentially irreversible nature of these treatments is a particular problem when only about one in six of those who suffer with gender dysphoria in childhood will still express this after puberty.

what can a Christian medic do?

learn

England's sole gender dysphoria service for young people is currently offering first appointments to those referred more than four years ago.³ Young people need support while waiting; we cannot simply 'leave it to the specialists'. What is to stop us learning about it? We can engage with training and resources and improve our knowledge so that we can be of some support.

Indeed, by the time someone has reached the top of the waiting list at a gender clinic, they will likely have been 'socially transitioned' for some time, already set on a path that may lead to irreversible treatments. The non-specialist (who may not necessarily be a GP, but could be a school counsellor, or a medical student on placement) is likely to meet them earlier in this process. It may then be possible to explore the factors behind feelings of gender dysphoria, and talk about the evidence (or lack thereof) for treatment. Later on, patient expectations of a particular pathway for care may make such exploration harder to do without appearing to disregard a decision the young person has effectively already made.

remember 'normal' healthcare

Quite understandably, young people with gender dysphoria may find interactions with health professionals difficult. Like others, they may have little experience of seeking care for themselves. They may be unsure how their feelings will be received. Physical examination may be more difficult for them if they are deeply uncomfortable with their body. There is a high incidence of co-morbid mental health problems in those suffering from gender dysphoria, and patients are more likely to be on the autistic spectrum. All these things need care as good as we would give to anyone else. It is very hard to do that without some understanding of their gender issues. This is all the more reason for anyone hoping to serve this patient group well to develop at least a basic understanding of their needs.

help others to talk about it

Most of the time as students or non-specialist professionals, we aren't the 'front-line' person dealing with gender dysphoria. This is more likely a parent, youth worker, or teacher.

Given that our studies force us to confront these questions, we may be able to serve the church and wider society in helping with at least the healthcare aspects of the topic.

We need to be clear about what the Bible does say, but also what it does not. If emphasising differing roles for males and females, we need to be careful to avoid narrow stereotypes that often draw more on culture than Scripture. Otherwise, for the Christian teenager surrounded by peers questioning their gender identity, we may create a problem where there was none.

It may help to differentiate between formally diagnosable gender incongruence and the much wider range of feelings around gender. Some element of the latter has always been quite common among teenagers and is surely not pathological. It does not follow that every young person who questions their gender identity has a diagnosable problem or requires treatment.

We can use current medical reports to challenge the perception that there is a clear pathway for care in gender dysphoria. The CQC rated the only children's gender clinic in England as 'inadequate' in 2021. Concerns included poor documentation of risks, and a culture in which staff could not easily raise concerns. Dr Hilary Cass' independent review of services published an interim report early in 2022. Notably, this suggested that far from a clear consensus behind treatment for these children in what was, after all, a specialist centre, there was 'lack of consensus and open discussion about the nature of gender dysphoria and therefore about the appropriate clinical response'.⁴ The interim findings have led Health Secretary Sajid Javid to review the topic urgently.⁵ The review is expected to eventually give clearer guidelines on puberty-blocking drugs, following a NICE evidence evaluation's finding that there is very limited evidence of their efficacy against a range of measures.⁶ All these findings can help challenge the narrative that the only option for a gender questioning young person is to begin hormonal treatment.

clinical questions

Often in ethics we are keen to draw a line about what we will not do (for example, prescribing drugs for a medical abortion). If as Christians we are uneasy with the idea of medically assisting transition between genders, at what point might we feel we cannot be involved? Most of these will arise after qualification. I have considered some of the issues in an adult context in *Nucleus* in the past.⁷ There is also a helpful document from the Royal College of General Practitioners⁸ that covers many of the concerns that any non-specialist should have around prescribing these medications. Safety and medico-legal concerns may well stop us prescribing before any conscience questions come into play.

Another question might be around referrals for further care. It may well be appropriate to refer young people to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services if there are underlying mental health concerns. There may be more discomfort around

referring to what is currently the only available gender service for children, particularly given that the CQC rates it 'inadequate'. However, the non-availability of anything else leaves little alternative.

CMF has also received questions from members (often nurses) who have concerns about administering 'puberty-blocking' drugs. In these cases, as well as around referrals, the best option if there is a conscientious objection would be to reach an accommodation with an employer that someone else should deal with these patients.⁹ This choice is likely to limit our own opportunities to care for these patients and therefore needs to be weighed carefully.

conclusion

The vast majority of our interactions with young people who are questioning their gender identity will involve 'normal' healthcare and discussion. Therefore, we need to engage as much as possible, stepping into a gap that few are willing to fill. If we are ready to talk about these symptoms, as we do about any other health condition, we can explore young people's stories, we can help them receive support with any concurrent mental health conditions. We can ensure that they have a real and informed choice over any transitioning treatments they may eventually want to pursue. ■

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God's grace in same-sex attraction

Josh from London shares his story



My first memory of being attracted to other boys in my class was at age twelve, although it wasn't until I was about 16 that I came to the realisation that that meant I might be gay. That same year I was baptised, having attended church all my life. But instead of the freedom and joy I thought it would bring, the tension with my sexuality only brought anguish and pain.

I always longed for a relationship with a woman and had dreams of getting married one day and starting a family, but instead I was drawn towards gay culture and sought sexual encounters with men. I had a few short romances with women, but it seemed my body wouldn't respond in the 'right way' no matter how hard I forced my mind to want it.

The world I discovered was a sordid one fuelled largely by lust and selfishness. In my experience, there was no desire for a lasting relationship, nor was there any sort of activism to normalise homosexuality and give it an equal footing with God's design for sex and marriage. All I knew was a hidden world that revelled in being subversive and in the dark.

Because of the light and dark contrast between my faith and my sexual behaviour, I became depressed and suicidal, knowing that the two worlds could not exist side by side. My thoughts and behaviour did not match my professed faith – what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

After many dark years, I spoke to a trusted church leader, and through confession and the power of prayer, bringing my failures into the light brought healing and a peace that I had never known before. There was a breaking of chains and I was freed from the grip of pornography addiction. However, the way my mind and body had been accustomed to respond to sexual attraction remained.

I gave up my dream to one day be married and began to put my hope in the Lord alone for fulfilment and satisfaction. I would daily read a 'letter from God' that a Christian friend shared with me, where I was encouraged to be 'satisfied and fulfilled and content with living being loved by God 'alone'.

I began to believe that the Lord Jesus truly did satisfy and that he was all I needed. I found a joy in serving him and submitting to his ways and plans for my life. Taste and see that the Lord is good!

Then out of the blue I met the woman who would become my wife. One summer during her leave from nursing training we fell in love, and I knew that I would one day marry her. Right from the outset I told her about my past and my same-sex attraction and for some reason it didn't scare her off!

I always longed for a relationship with a woman...but instead I was drawn towards gay culture and sought sexual encounters with men

On our wedding night, we did what a wise couple in our church recommended: 'Make the first thing you do together as a married couple be to pray.'

That night the Lord answered our prayers for his help and blessing in our marriage and for a closeness and intimacy that is unrivalled. My fears about how my body would respond sexually were unfounded. By God's grace we enjoyed our wedding night together and so began a marriage between an ex-gay man and a beautiful woman.

Our relationship, however, has not always been straightforward. There have been times, even on our honeymoon, where I have had difficulty in making love. The mental scars and memories of my past still linger. At these times we often turn to prayer, and it always amazes me how good God is in answering our prayers and in giving us the grace

needed to cope in what can be very awkward situations.

We've been married now for 15 years and have four children who are growing up fast. I wish I could say that my same-sex attraction has gone, but it has not. It still causes difficulty from time to time, whether it's in how my wife sometimes feels second best, or whether I get caught up in unhealthy thought patterns or fantasies.

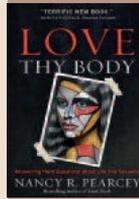
During lockdown I joined a Christian support group with others who are in a similar situation, and I've sought counselling to deal specifically with these issues. These have both been immensely helpful in being able to share honestly with those who have walked in the same shoes as I have. Therapy too has provided a safe and helpful space to unpack how and why I react like I do.

know the love of Jesus is real, and his forgiveness offered through his death on the cross is sufficient to cover every sin

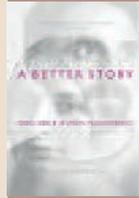
A conversation with a counsellor challenged me on the identity labels we use and how language can be so fraught with difficulties and assumptions. Even now I struggle to find the right label or words to describe myself. I don't like the terms gay, same-sex attracted, or even ex-gay – who I am is not defined by sexual attraction. Even the notion of sexual orientation I think is unhelpful. History suggests the concept is very modern, and research reveals that sexuality is far more fluid than we ever realised. The idea that one's sexuality is fixed or hard-wired is losing traction. There is much plasticity in our minds and a weakening or strengthening of our sexual desires in any given direction is certainly possible.

I'm saddened that there are those who are seeking to ban so-called 'conversion therapy'. I have found much help and support from counselling that would almost certainly be considered illegal if current activists have their way. I find it odd that the support and help for

RESOURCES



- *Love Thy Body*
Nancy R. Pearcey
Baker Books, £10.00, 2018
9780801075728



- *A Better Story*
Glynn Harrison
IVP, £9.99, 2016
9781845501891



- *Gay Girl, Good God*
Jackie Hill Perry
B&H Publishing Group, £13.99, 2018
9781462751228

those wrestling with issues of sexuality only ever seems to go in one direction.

If you want to explore an LGBT identity you will be encouraged, supported and celebrated all the way. However, if like me, you want support to obey God's word and commit to heterosexual marriage as God designed, you might soon find yourself involved in an illegal practice. You might find yourself trapped and unable to find the support needed to live a life according to your conscience.

God has been so good to me and my wife and each day I revel in his grace. I know I have failed him many times, and I do not always think or act in line with his Word. However, I know the love of Jesus is real, and his forgiveness offered through his death on the cross is sufficient to cover every sin.

What is needed day-to-day for me, and for anyone looking to live the Kingdom life are three things: first, to walk in step with the Spirit; second to live in obedience to Scripture, and third, to find supportive fellowship with other believers who take seriously the first and second points. ■

a single view of relationships

Rachel Owusu-Ankomah calls us to our true identity



Rachel Owusu-Ankomah is CMF Head of Student Ministries



‘When will you marry?’ or ‘is there anyone special in your life?’ seem to be common questions asked of singles at family functions or events with friends. Our society seems obsessed with who someone is seeing, dating, sleeping with, or married to. This fascination

is also present in the church, where not being in a relationship can make you a second-class citizen whose life will only begin when you find ‘the one’. Our relationship status has become heavily associated with our identity. Why is this, and is this a right approach to relationships?

Deep, intimate relationships are seen from the very beginning of the Bible in the Trinity, a complex loving relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, all being present at the creation of the world.¹ Out of this comes God's relationship with humanity, the triune God creating humans 'in our own image, in our own likeness'.² There is also recognition that it is not good for a man to be alone,³ a nod to what it means to image God relationally. These words usher in Adam and Eve's marriage. The Bible also ends with a marriage, the wedding of the lamb where the beautiful bride of Christ – the church – is with her bridegroom – Jesus.⁴ These Bible bookends and intervening stories about different sorts of human relationships, from Abraham and Sarah,⁵ Ruth and Naomi,⁶ David and Jonathan,⁷ to Jesus, Mary, and Martha,⁸ show that the connections we have with God and one another are important.

They are the ways through which God helps us navigate life and this world. Whether that's the means through which we hear the gospel and are saved,⁹ how we are disciplined and shaped,¹⁰ or encouraged by and pointed to the hope we have in Jesus Christ,¹¹ they ultimately should point us to him and his glory!

the fall of relationships

The plan was always God's people, in God's place, dwelling, communing with and worshipping him, thriving and flourishing in the world he created. Sin spoils that, as we declared that we want to live in God's world, our way, effectively living in his world, without him. The consequences are broad and far reaching. Primarily our broken relationship with God, but also broken relationships with one another, with our own bodies, and the world around us.¹² We can all reel off countless examples of broken relationships in our own lives and the lives of those we know. But how has our view relationships been affected by the fall?

making good things, God things

As humans, instead of worshipping the creator God

we have turned to worship and give our efforts and attentions to other things, and that includes relationships in all their guises. This good thing that God has given us has for many become all consuming. Perhaps scanning the room at a Christian event in search of our future spouse, or pining away in our thoughts and fantasies about the perfect partner. We see this with the story of Jacob, Leah and Rachel.¹³ Tim Keller in his book *Counterfeit Gods* explains this story of a lovesick Jacob willing to do anything to get and sleep with the woman of his dreams, Rachel. We see a distraught Leah, hoping that the child born by her unloving husband will improve the relationship that has caused her so much misery. It's a mess; this family, descended from Abraham, and through whom the Messiah would come instead, look to sex and relationships as their saviour.¹⁴

the sexual prosperity gospel

Relationship idolatry appears in many forms. One that has been common in the church over the last few decades is the 'sexual prosperity gospel'. Coined by Katelyn Beaty, the term refers to promises that God will reward Christians who hold to pre-marital purity with amazing marriages to the



This doesn't mean that we should shun or avoid relationships for fear of putting them above God. Rather see them in their right place in light of our identity in Christ.¹⁷ As we seek to live a righteous life, we should we bring all of our thoughts and desires to God and allow him to shape them.¹⁸ In our relationships with one another we should remember that people are created in the image of God and are thus precious and valuable. We should treat them accordingly, not just in person, but also in our hearts and thoughts.

In his short book, *Purposeful Sexuality*, Ed Shaw makes the case that our sexuality is not only for marriage, pleasure and reproduction, but also to image God and his passionate love for us. This is helpful; as Christians we can be left thinking that our sexuality is just a stumbling block into temptation or an annoying driver that makes us crave for intimate relationships in unhelpful ways, regardless of our marital status.¹⁹

We should also seek to form authentic, intimate relationships where we love one another well, not just in the context of marriage, but as a family in Christ of brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers.²⁰

Within the church we also need to be mindful of our language and attitude towards relationships so as not to perpetuate relationship idolatry. Let's, for example, affirm and celebrate singleness in the same way we do marriage. In her podcast *Living single* – Yana Conner does this, seeking to move the conversation about singleness past contentment to celebration.²¹

Next time you are asked about your relationship status, how will you respond? Let's be people that live the better story and encourage others to do the same. Let's not be defined by our relationship status but by who God says we are. ■

perfect spouse, great sex and ultimate fulfilment. It arose out of the 1990s purity culture as an antidote to the hook-up culture present in the society at that time. The reality is it can set many of us up for a fall, thinking that when we get into that relationship or get married our struggles will be gone and our desires for intimacy completely fulfilled – something God never promises. As Beaty points out, when this teaching fails it can make people call into question the goodness and faithfulness of God.¹⁵

how do we live a better story?

For the Christian, our identity should first and foremost be in Christ. Who he is, who he says we are, and what he has done for us. He alone is our saviour and the one who gives complete purpose and hope.¹⁶

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DIY sex – sinful or not?

Marolin Watson applies biblical principles

Sexual pleasure is a gift from God – yes really! Although there are probably not many Christians today who have a problem with that.

Just as the pleasure of eating ensures the survival of the individual, so the pleasure of sexual intercourse ensures the survival of the species. And just as we don't eat only what is necessary to ensure our survival, so we don't engage in sexual activity only when we want to reproduce.

Yet in his wisdom and for our good, God has set particular boundaries around the enjoyment of sex, as well as with eating and drinking. Gluttony and drunkenness are condemned,¹ and so is sex outside of the context of a committed relationship between a man and a woman.² Polygamy appears to have been tolerated by God in Old Testament times, but it is not God's ideal and this is recognised by the gospel writers.³

it's not just pleasure that drives us to eat and drink – it is the discomfort we feel when hungry or thirsty – the 'stick' to pleasure's 'carrot'

But it's not just pleasure that drives us to eat and drink – it is the discomfort we feel when hungry or thirsty – the 'stick' to pleasure's 'carrot'. Likewise, the sex drive, when denied its natural expression, can become a problem. When we pretend it's not a force to be reckoned with and suppress it, it can lead to behaviour that we neither desire nor understand.

If people vary in their appetite for food and drink, so does the strength of the sex drive – almost overpowering in some individuals and practically non-existent in others.

So what is the man or woman with a 'normal' to high sex drive to do if there is no prospect of a committed relationship in their future? In the case of Christian women, there simply aren't enough Christian men to go round. Same-sex attraction that won't go away despite much prayer is another reason why someone may not feel able to enter into a God-sanctioned relationship that will meet their sexual needs.

Even in marriage, one partner sometimes loses interest or becomes incapable because of psychological, emotional, or physical problems, leaving the other partner feeling deprived and frustrated. Even in sexually active relationships, men do not always realise that their partner may need extra stimulation to achieve the satisfaction that comes more easily to them.

Although celebrating celibacy himself, Paul acknowledges the strength and legitimacy of the sex drive when he writes, in 1 Corinthians 7:5 'Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.' And Jesus too, in his teaching on divorce in Matthew 19, which causes his disciples to conclude that it's better not to marry, acknowledges that celibacy is a gift not given to all.

We may feel uncomfortable talking about masturbation (which is why I use the term 'DIY sex') and you certainly won't hear many sermons about it. Even non-Christians find it a difficult subject to talk about, though nearly everyone engages in it at times.



Marolin Watson
is CMF Student Co-ordinator

The Bible has a lot to say about sex and is not squeamish about describing various sexual activities, both prohibited and permitted. Yet it has nothing at all to say about doing it yourself. Does this mean it's perfectly fine – a legitimate way to dissipate sexual tension when no other avenue presents itself? The Bible has nothing to say about gambling either, yet we recognise it can become a harmful addiction, though there may be nothing wrong with the occasional flutter or participation in a lottery.

When the Bible is silent on any particular topic, we can draw on general principles to help us guide our attitudes and actions. What Paul writes in his first letter to the

Corinthians is particularly apt: "Everything is permissible for me" – but not everything is beneficial.

"Everything is permissible for me" – but I will not be mastered by anything.' (1 Corinthians 6:12, CSB)

DIY sex becomes a particular problem when it is obsessive or accompanied

by the use of

pornography. As well as introducing fantasies of another person (warned against by Jesus in Matthew 5:28), pornography degrades and demeans this God-given gift, making it impossible for some

to enjoy 'normal' sexual relations. For those in a relationship, it can become a lazy way of meeting their own needs without bothering to meet the needs of their partner.

Paul puts it best when talking about the believer's freedom: 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' (1 Corinthians 10:31)

it is a question of balance
– meeting legitimate needs without
being mastered by them

But what does it mean to do everything "for the glory of God"? This could in itself become a strait-jacket if we don't unpack it a little. As Christians, we do many things for our own pleasure and entertainment. It is difficult to see, for example, how going on a nice holiday abroad, eating at an expensive restaurant, or driving the latest model car contributes to God's glory, and yet many Christians of all persuasions (who can afford them!) do these things without a qualm.

A good corrective to any tendency to be legalistic is found in 1 Timothy 6:17 where Paul encourages wealthy Christians not to put their hope in their possessions, but in God 'who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment' – including sex.

As always, it is a question of balance – meeting legitimate needs without being mastered by them. ■

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how to be single

Jennie Pollock explores purpose and practicalities





Jennie Pollock is CMF Head of Public Policy

WAIT! Don't turn the page just yet.

You might be thinking this sounds a really weird topic. Being single is something you just are or aren't, and are mostly hoping not to be. Why would you need any advice on how to do it?

I want to suggest that as Christians we can see seasons of singleness – however long or short they last – as something more than simply null states. What if being single wasn't just the state of not-being-something-else, but an actual positive state, a state with purpose? How might that change our approach to it?

asking the wrong question

I'm single, and have been since my last relationship ended in my twenties. I always wanted to marry and have kids, and assumed it would happen as naturally as passing my A-levels and getting a job. Come to think of it, maybe failing half my A-levels should have given me a heads-up that life might not turn out the way I expected.

The A-levels didn't bother me, but for a long time I did feel as though I was failing at life by not being married. *'What's wrong with me?'* I wondered, *'What am I doing wrong?'* Maybe you wouldn't put it quite like that, but I think many of the ways we talk about singleness and disappointments in love suggest that we think that the goal of life is marriage. *'Don't worry, you've still got plenty of time,'* we say. *'There are plenty more fish in the sea.'* *'You just haven't found the right one yet.'* Even in church we often hear that singleness gives us the chance to grow in godliness (in preparation for marriage).

This is the wrong way of looking at it.

I can say that unequivocally for one very good reason: **Jesus was single.**

Jesus never failed at anything. He never fell short. He did not need to be refined. He was single because he chose to be. It was the best state for him to live in to achieve his life's purpose.

If nothing else, that ought to dignify singleness

and help us to see that it does not equal failure to attain to the proper relational state for adults.

a purposeful state

Of course, unlike many of us, Jesus chose singleness; he didn't have it thrust upon him.

But if we believe he is in control of our lives, we have to recognise that for this season – however long it might be – he has chosen it for us. He hasn't forgotten to bring us our 'other half.' Nor is he punishing us for not being holy enough or healthy enough or hot enough. He has given us this path for his glory and our good.

what if being single was... a state with purpose

Biblically, we believe that God created marriage for a purpose – to fill the earth and to point to the relationship between Christ and the Church – so I think it is reasonable to assume that he created adult singleness for a purpose too. What might he want to show the world through faithful Christian singleness?

– it is possible to flourish without sex

We live in an age in which many people think it is literally harmful to not have sex. In a world where self-expression and self-fulfilment are the highest moral values, to choose not to follow your heart (or the urges of other organs) seems as implausible as deciding not to breathe.

For people from the LGBT+ community looking in at Christianity, one of the biggest obstacles can be the realisation that choosing him will likely mean turning their back on any hope of romantic or sexual relationships.

If they see a community of believers doing singleness well (as well as doing marriage,

family, dating, adoption, widowhood, and all the rest well), it can give them hope that this is a plausible way of doing life.

So doing singleness well in part means demonstrating the plausibility of living a flourishing celibate life. It is a powerful Christian witness.

if you're completely self-sufficient and not in need of any help, you're doing singleness wrong

Related to this, singleness shows that:

– sex isn't the only source of intimacy

We were designed as relational beings. God is Trinity. His essence is community, unity in difference. Being created in his image means being created to thrive in community, to need a wider network of people than just one other, to need brothers and sisters.

The language of siblings is helpful because it gives us a framework for thinking of close male-female relationships that are 'chaste by default' as Rachel Gilson puts it.¹ We can know and be known without having to get into bed.

This also provides a context for close intergenerational relationships. We are not just looking to have our needs met in one other person of roughly our age, but recognise that all people, of every age and stage, have great worth and can enrich our lives as we enrich theirs.

– singleness offers the opportunity for others to be needed and to be generous

Jesus was reliant on others to provide for his most basic needs. If no one offered him a bed for the night, he would have to sleep out under the stars. If no one offered him a meal, he and his disciples would spend another day fasting.

He wasn't afraid to be in need like that. He didn't think it was shameful to ask for help.

Weakness and need are not ungodly. They are part of the design – we are created as one body with many parts. No one part is meant to be able to function without the others. Seeking help is what is supposed to happen, and singleness makes that clear.

So, part of the purpose of singleness is to learn weakness and to give others the opportunity to serve. If you're completely self-sufficient and not in need of any help, you're doing singleness wrong.

contentment in singleness

Seeing singleness as a purposeful state that God has designed and chosen for us can go a long way towards helping us find contentment in our singleness. Yet many of us may have to go through a grieving process as we choose to give up one set of dreams and expectations and place ourselves into his hands.

We can find ourselves wrestling with questions like:

- **is God good?** – can I really trust him if he's not giving me what I want in this area?
- **is God enough?** – if he never grants me this request, will he be able to fill the hole?
- **is God worth it?** – if I give up my dreams and desires to him and really let him do whatever he wants in me, are the rewards, in this life as well as the next, going to be worth it?

We need to deal with those questions because they form the roots of our discontentment. For me, the assurance of God's goodness and that he was enough for me – more than enough – led me to a place of quiet trust.

Then I discovered that those things I knew I had been created for but thought I needed a husband to be able to fulfil, God was fulfilling anyway.

In Philippians we see similar developments in Paul's life. He might have thought that in order to spread the gospel he needed to be out in the streets and the meeting places. But actually, he says that while he was in prison, other people

had stepped up to preach in his place, and the whole palace guard were learning of his faith.² His circumstances weren't hindering his ministry but actually facilitating it.

His imprisonment might have felt like a negative, something he just had to survive with fortitude, but it had a purpose. God deliberately planned it for a reason, and by embracing that reason, Paul was able to have an abundantly joyful life and a far greater impact.

Here are some things we can learn from Paul, and from other Bible characters and heroes of the faith, that can help us grow in contentment:

1. **worship God** – he is always worthy of worship however we are feeling and whatever our circumstances.
2. **read the Bible** – it's easy to start to doubt God when we don't get what we want, and then we pull away and stop reading his word. Keep reading, studying, and searching the Scriptures weighing what your heart is telling you against what his Word says.
3. **pray** – for yourself and for your friends. Pray scriptural things for each other – look at what the Bible calls us to be like and pray that you and they would grow in those qualities.
4. **practise gratitude** – finding things to be thankful for helps shift our focus away from the negative things in our lives and onto the many gifts God has given us.
5. **learn to lament** – we need to learn how to take our sadness and disappointments to God and have honest conversations with him. Use the Psalms to help you structure those prayers faithfully and in a way that honours God.
6. **press into community** – it's too easy to pull away and try to get ourselves sorted out first before we try to do community. That's not how

RESOURCES



■ *If Only*

Jennie Pollock

Good Book Co, £6.00, 2020

9781784984489



Life doesn't always go the way we hope it will. Whether it's singleness, childlessness or some other big disappointment, it's hard to be content when life lets us down.

Drawing on encouragements from the Bible and the stories of others, Jennie helps readers to trust in God's plan for their lives and enjoy true contentment through a genuine conviction that Jesus is better than even our most keenly-felt hopes and longings for this life.

it is supposed to work. As with a physical body, the way to heal a bruised limb is not to cut it off and leave it in a darkened room to heal! Only by staying connected can the hurt heal and the whole limb be healthy. Learn from older believers. Serve in church. Show up whenever you can, and stay in contact when shift patterns keep you away.

7. **look to God more than the thing you long for** – ultimately, the thing we need above all, the only thing that will bring us true contentment, is Jesus. Press into him, then. Whether he gives you what you were asking for or changes the desires of your heart, you'll end up with him, which is better by far. ■

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essentials : surgery and sharing Christ

Bernard Palmer tells of Blaise Pascal's introduction to Jesus





Bernard Palmer is a retired surgeon in Hertfordshire

In Rouville, Normandy, in the early sixteenth century, there was a fervent Roman Catholic minister called Jean Guillebert who taught and followed the famous North African theologian, Augustine of Hippo. Guillebert was what became known as a Jansenist – a group with doctrines very similar to those of French reformer Jean (John) Calvin. Guillebert taught passionately about the grace of God, who was willing to accept any who truly turned to him in faith, and what this should mean for the way people live.

Two brothers with the surname Deschamps were notorious in the area for their violence, swordplay, love affairs, and their love of duels. However, when they heard the gospel from the preaching of Guillebert, they both committed their lives to Christ, and their lives changed. They transferred their energies from fighting to helping the sick. They founded a hospital and trained as surgeons.

In January 1646, an eminent advisor to French clergyman and statesman Cardinal Richelieu named Etienne Pascal (who lived in Normandy), slipped on a patch of ice and dislocated his right hip. He asked the Deschamps brothers to come and stay with him to supervise his treatment. Accordingly, the brothers spent more than three months living with the Pascal household. During this time, the Deschamps brothers shared with the family what they had learned about the gospel and the need for spiritual rebirth.

Blaise Pascal was Etienne's brilliant son who, like his father, loved mathematics and science. It was from these surgeons that Blaise understood the apostolic gospel. Blaise was not only brilliant but also winsome and had been seeking worldly distinction. The Deschamps brothers spent many hours discussing with Blaise what they understood to be the Bible's message. They lent him books and tracts and little by little he was convinced that living with and for Jesus was what God taught in the Scriptures. He understood that he needed to

move on from a merely formal brand of Roman Catholicism, and into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He understood that, in the long run, he gained nothing if he understood all the mysteries of mathematics and the riddles of the physical universe, if he gained these at the loss of his own soul. Blaise's sister Jacqueline, a poetess with a growing reputation, also joined in these discussions and she, like her brother, became fascinated with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The two then persuaded their father to listen to the surgeons' message. Etienne took longer to accept that he also needed to be converted or born again; after all he was a distinguished, reputable, and outwardly honest member of French society.

little by little he was convinced that living with and for Jesus was what God taught in the Scriptures

However, that summer the whole family went to hear Jean Guillebert, and subsequently they all made a real commitment to become followers of Jesus Christ; a new state very different to the formal allegiance they had had to the church. They became serious about the need to live for Jesus Christ.

Blaise's sister Gilberte described the dramatic change that occurred in her brother before he was 24 years old:

God so enlightened him through this kind of study that he came to understand perfectly that the Christian religion obliges us to live only for God and to have no other objective in life, but to serve him; and this truth seemed so clear to my brother, so necessary and so useful.

Blaise Pascal then continued to develop his calculating machine and began his research into the nature of vacuums, but his focus was changed. Living as God wanted was now his priority. ■

be prepared: what I wish I'd known

Sally Barker reflects on the first months of FY1





Sally Barker is an FY1 doctor in West London

How was your day?' has become an increasingly difficult question to answer. Nowadays, it takes quite a bit of time to filter out everything that could either: a) break patient confidentiality, b) completely disgust whoever it is I'm talking to, or c) cause me to break down in tears.

My name is Sally and I'm a new FY1, working in London. I came to Christ in the early years of medical school and my student days were a blur of CMF events, church, and a fair few late nights of everything else. I loved the Lord and loved the life he had provided for me – my faith felt rock-solid.

And then I graduated.

Essentially, FY1 can be hard, and I wasn't prepared for it. Sure, I knew my A-E, and could make a fairly accurate stab for a vein. I knew eye contact was important and that you should always refer to a senior. I even thought I knew how to take a spiritual history, witness to patients and colleagues alike, all whilst maintaining some daily silence and solitude.

What I hadn't anticipated was how the challenges of the FY1 lifestyle – the rota, the responsibility, the sleep deprivation, the workplace politics – could impact my faith. As I come to the end of my first year as a doctor, I'd love to share with you five things I'd wish I'd known before it all began.

1. there is always time for quiet time

John 15:5 says 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'

Psalm 27:1 says 'The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?'

Whatever your daily 'quiet time' looks like now, it will probably need to adapt to a variable working week. As a student, routine involved a period of silence and solitude in the mornings before breakfast. However, a new commute, coupled with

eight am ward rounds, made it increasingly hard to wake up early enough to fit it in. I remember once, only a few weeks in, I had missed my morning quiet time but accidentally arrived 20 minutes early for work. I had my Bible in bag and so I settled myself in the staff kitchenette and started reading Psalm 27 (above). At exactly the same time, a very formidable consultant strode onto the ward and started conducting a post-take ward round. I was petrified of this consultant noticing me at all, let alone him noticing what I was reading – until I clocked the very first verse of the Psalm.

what I hadn't anticipated was how the challenges of the FY1 lifestyle – the rota, the responsibility, the sleep deprivation, the workplace politics – could impact my faith

Over the year, I've tried setting aside time in the evening instead, or simply heading to work earlier and reading my Bible in the hospital coffee shop (which thankfully opens at 7.30 am!). For night shifts, I found the multifaith rooms at my hospital were open 24/7, and end-of-shift prayers in the car became a new but incredibly meaningful practice. Time with God, and God alone may feel much harder to find, but is vital for sustaining us (and giving us courage) for all we may face throughout the day.

2. the hospital is a mission field

Acts 16:25 says 'About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.'

When I was at medical school, I received some brilliant training in evangelism from CMF and CU. We held events specifically to evangelise: 'Text a Toastie', 'Cookie for a Question' and so on.

Whilst such events are currently lacking in the Foundation Programme calendar, there are still so many wonderful and unexpected opportunities to share the gospel whilst working as an FY1. It might be simply wearing a cross necklace or referencing church when you discuss your weekend plans with colleagues. It could be the fact that you always take a spiritual history when clerking (as advised by GMC guidelines!)¹ or always ensure chaplaincy is offered to those with a documented religious belief. It could be what's in your bag. I once left my bag unzipped accidentally in a ward staffroom, only to be instantly quizzed by two members of the nursing staff as to where I'd got my 'gorgeous Bible' from. Picture Paul and Silas in prison, not flyering, not preaching, not even praying, but simply worshipping. Witnessing to our identities in Christ may look different in different seasons but it's something we can all keep doing, no matter what the circumstances!

3. it's okay to need reminding who you are

Colossians 3:1-3 says 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.'

That being said, a long shift of medical emergencies can erode that knowledge of our true identity. You know it's not a good sign when you start answering the phone as 'bleep 221' instead of your name!

One piece of advice that was shared at the CMF FY1 Q&A last year was: make the best use of your passwords. When you start FY1, you will need to make at least five new passwords for various computer systems. What if each of these was a Bible verse? Throughout your day, every time you log on this could be a reminder of who God is and who he knows you to be. It may sound trite, but I've found it so helpful to have this almost hourly reminder to re-orientate myself to whom I truly serve.

4. you're not alone

Romans 1: 11-12 says 'I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.'

I hope this one is obvious! No matter where you are for FY1, no matter what tiny district general or sprawling tertiary centre you've been placed in, you are not alone. Try and find time to call friends regularly, even if it's hard to see each other in person. Church is always worthwhile, no matter how long you're in the area for. Meanwhile, your CMF family is global and lifelong. For example, the CMF website can be used to link up with CMF members in your area. They may be new FY1s like you, seeking community. Or they may be more senior healthcare professionals who can guide, pray and support you on the journey. Most importantly, there's always CMF Juniors' Conference coming up in November (and yes, there's still a ceilidh!)

5. invest in decent bedding

A material necessity, secondary only to the Bible. Enough said.

Colossians 3:17 says: 'And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

As a healthcare professional, 'how was your day?' will never be an easy question. Nor should it be – we have been called to stand in the gap between life and death. To find it easy, to find it simple, is demeaning and dehumanising to those we serve.

In some ways, I think it's better to focus on the question: 'how was your life?' For this is the question we will truly need to answer at the very end. No matter how difficult each day can be, let us run the race with our eyes fixed on Jesus, reflecting his love, joy and mercy as we go. ■

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new times: old agenda

Toyosi Atoyebii reports on the CMF National Conference



Toyosi Atoyebii is an intercalating medical student and Deep:ER Fellow in London



W as this CMF Student Conference 2.0? The familiarity of Yarnfield Park Conference and Training Centre led me to believe that, as I arrived. But as exciting as the atmosphere at Student Conference is, there is something incredibly special about being inspired by those just ahead (or much further advanced) in their careers, living their lives unapologetically for God. The buzz of young children enjoying the sunshine amongst the retired CMF members, along with everyone else in between, reminded me of the gift of multigenerational communities. It is such a blessing to learn from one another and share our experiences from our various levels.

I was involved in the student leadership training throughout the conference, helping to guide student links in leading their CMF groups and planning for the upcoming academic year. It was so encouraging to hear what other groups around the country were planning; seeing how God has provided and increased numbers. It was especially lovely hearing from more recently formed groups at some of the newer medical schools such as Lincoln. I look forward to seeing what God

has in store for them in the coming years!

The highlight of the conference was the main session teaching, given this year by former psychiatrist Steve Midgley, Senior Pastor of Christ Church Cambridge, and Executive Director of Biblical Counselling UK. These were around the theme of knowing, feeling, and living well as a disciple of Christ, and were separated into three sub-themes.

The first looked at anxiety, based on Luke 12:22-34. Steve asked rhetorically why, if worrying is forbidden in the Bible in much the same way as theft is, why is it that it's less embarrassing to admit we're worried than to confess to stealing something? Group discussion made clear that worry is not actually forbidden in such a simplistic way. Steve spoke about how the things which we're anxious about reflect what we truly desire; for example, if we desire success the fear of failing will be the cause of our anxiety. Therefore, our anxieties show who or what our hearts are tethered to. It's important to reflect and search our hearts for these earthly idols, which we desire outside of God.

To avoid anxiety, we must have the correct perspective on God; when we worry unduly, we're behaving like orphans who don't have a Heavenly Father taking care of us. We see ourselves as being more in control than we truly are; this is a burden that we don't need to bear. We are reminded of the promise of Matthew 6:33: 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added onto you.' If knowing God is our sincere desire, the only thing we need to worry about is whether our hearts are wholly committed to the things of God.

Steve's second message centred on anger and the glory of God, based on Romans 12. 'If your enemy is hungry feed him, if he is thirsty give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head.' (Romans 12:20). Steve spoke about how it may often be sweet to think of avenging someone's wrongdoing but surely, it's sweeter knowing that God, the ultimate judge, will deal with all of us in the way we deserve in his own time.

Steve described anger as the 'moral emotion' which establishes a view about whether something is right or wrong. But who are we to determine what is righteous? It's important to remember that anger undermines and disrupts our relationship with others, our relationships with God, and also our own peace.

The takeaway message was simple but meaningful; we shouldn't ever try to take God's place. No matter how we feel we've been treated we won't ever have a bird's eye view of the situation, so it's not our place to seek justice as that's God's job. Instead, Romans 12 instructs us to overcome evil with good, as we can rest peacefully in the promise of justice from God.

The final instalment of the main conference talks ended on a more joyful note and looked at Philippians 2:12-18 and how we can find joy as Christians. Steve spoke about four ways in which Christians might live their lives, and outlined their consequences.

1. God, not me

This produces a passive attitude, where we are always waiting on God without ever initiating anything ourselves.

2. God, then me

This is the idea that God converts us and then the rest is up to us from there, without need for his input.

3. God, plus me

Suggests that life is a collaboration between us and God, but we need to remember that God is able to achieve his purpose without us.

4. God in me

This is what we should be striving for; 100 per cent God and 100 per cent us with the knowledge that we must be obedient. We have a responsibility to work out our salvation as it is written in Philippians 2:12.

Because the world is so difficult and so dark that gives us more of a reason to 'Shine like Stars', which might remind you of another 'shine' command in 2 Corinthians 4 if you attended this year's Student Conference!

Beyond the main meetings, I was also able to attend the regional CMF meeting for those who live and work in London, hearing about how plans to expand the reach of groups, making them more accessible to a wider range of Londoners.

One thing that I believe God revealed to me over the weekend is the importance of the gift of community. From the regional meeting to the general atmosphere at the conference, it became clear that we should rejoice because of one another and the unity of the communities we are in. If you get the chance to go to CMF National Conference as a student, I would truly recommend you take it! ■

the LGBTQ+* situation abroad

Liz Birdie Ong shares how experience of two different cultures led her to learn



Liz Birdie Ong is a medical student in Dublin and *Nucleus* student co-editor



Which was the first country to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote? This historic referendum happened in May 2015 in the Republic of Ireland and led to the 34th Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland (Marriage Act 2015). As a student who hailed from a conservative Christian background, being raised in the conservative Muslim country of Malaysia, I could barely, if at all, recall instances of this issue rearing its head in my childhood. However,

as I entered my pre-university days, hearsay about people I know or their close friends being 'gay' began to emerge and lodge themselves as little nagging pebbles in my shoe.

Unlike Ireland, same-sex marriage almost certainly will remain illegal in Malaysia unless a constitutional overhaul occurs. This is due to the religious underpinnings and Sharia (Muslim) laws that govern this country, which criminalise same-sex relations, transgender expression,

as well as freedom of expression and social advocacy for these issues (such as university Pride parades). Under these laws, offenders may face anything including caning, whipping, fines, ridicule, up to 20 years' imprisonment, and physical and sexual abuse by police officers and other inmates. Even in 2021, new laws that crack down on opposing views and related activity are still being considered or put in place.¹

The situation in Malaysia is not so different to that in Ireland just a few decades ago, where same-sex relations were criminalised. Ireland has taken a rapid and dramatic U-turn in its stance on issues that have divided the world, such as abortion and same-sex marriage, and has moved from being an overwhelmingly conservative, Roman Catholic country, to a leader in liberal ideology.²

today's Malaysia is not so different to Ireland just a few decades ago, where same-sex relations were criminalised

Currently, Ireland ranks in the top 20 countries in the Gay Travel Index 2021, which measures how ideal the legal situation, safety, and living conditions are for the queer* community in each country.³ Dublin's Pride Parade, the second biggest festival in Ireland after St. Patrick's Day, and the largest LGBTQ+ festival in the island of Ireland, occurs in the last two weeks of June, the official Pride Month around the world.

However, despite the global trend towards liberal views on same-sex marriage, scores in the transgender and gender nonconforming community are still being killed every year globally – at least 57 in 2021, likely more unreported or misreported – with most victims being Black and Latinx* women.⁴

Moving to the incredibly liberal country of Ireland to pursue a career in medicine has made these issues unavoidable and forced me to consider and contemplate where I stand – both as a Christian and a healthcare provider. How should we respond to LGBTQ+ ideology or inclinations in the people around us, or even within ourselves?

*DEFINITIONS

- **Latinx** – people of Latin American origin, with a gender-neutral suffix (as opposed to Latino or Latina)
- **LGBTQIA2S+** – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, 2-spirit, and other identities
- **Queer** – may be generally used to refer to an orientation other than straight⁵

Where do Christian healthcare providers stand on this issue that has inevitable influences in the health of those involved?

These questions compelled me to buy a little grey book (*Is God Anti-Gay?*) sitting on the bookstall at CMF's last Student Conference, to help me better understand the experiences of many people in this country I now call my second home – the lives of people from dear classmates of mine to my current and future patients. ■

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3. Spartacus. *Gay Travel Index 2021*. Berlin: Spartacus; 2021. spartacus.gayguide.travel/gaytravelindex_2021.pdf
4. Human Rights Campaign (HRC). Fatal Violence Against the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Community in 2021. *Human Rights Campaign*; 2021. bit.ly/3GkzJWN
5. Ashley F. Queering Our Vocabulary – A (Not So) Short Introduction to LGBTQIA2S+ Language. *Medium*. 2018. Available from: bit.ly/3LLmRKF

book: *Is God Anti-Gay?*

This little book packs a powerful and persuasive punch, empathetically yet peacefully tackling this controversial issue. Written with intimately personal and honest experience, this book is firmly rooted in biblical principles, yet compassionately so.

Homosexuality is considered in relation to five themes: God's design, the Bible, the Christian, the church, and the world. The foundation is set with God's design and purposes for gender, sex, and marriage, followed by discussion of what the Bible has to say on homosexuality, what it means for Christians, how the church should respond, and how we could bring what we believe to the world around us.

One of my favourite features of this book was the compact, high-yield columns in which Allberry succinctly answers some of the most critical burning questions we all have, questions such as:

- 'Surely a same-sex partnership is OK if it's committed and faithful?'
- 'Aren't we just picking and choosing which Old Testament laws apply?'
- 'Isn't the Christian view of sexuality dangerous and harmful?'

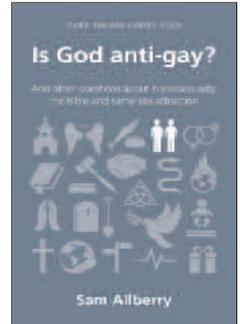
The suggested approach to anyone that comes to us and the church should be to help them grasp the overwhelming God of the cross and resurrection – which has implications for their view on sexuality. Just as we do not immediately confront newcomers to church with their specific sins, we should not subject those who are same-sex attracted to such a double standard and consider their sexual orientation the defining feature of their identity.

We are also to realise that though homosexual activity is a serious sin, 'it is not alone in being so... If we are to be faithful to Scripture, we must also preach against' all the other sins which have been 'trivialised in western society'. It is important to remember that the Bible condemns homosexuality in the context of other sexual sins (i.e. all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage) and indeed, other sins – for example, Paul includes idolaters, adulterers, and thieves among a list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

Interspersed within the truths and answers were Sam's personal struggles with homosexual feelings that were an unwelcome conflict for him, which makes his brutal honesty in stating truths all the more powerful. Jesus' call to everyone is the same – to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow him. It involves 'saying "no" to [the] deepest sense of who [we] are, for the sake of Christ', for our lives are not ours, but created and bought by him.

conclusion

As a medical student, I take away from this book a much clearer idea of where I stand as a Christian and a firm foundation from which to base any future decisions and readings in relation to this issue – as well as great comfort and reassurance in knowing how to better welcome, support, and counsel those who grant me the privilege of being trusted with their most personal stories. ■



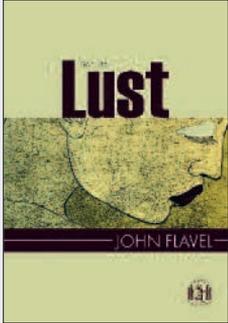
Is God Anti-Gay?

Sam Allberry

The Good Book Company, 2013,
£3.99, 96pp
ISBN: 9781908762313

Liz Birdie Ong is a medical student in Dublin and *Nucleus* student co-editor





Impure Lust

John Flavel

Banner of Truth, 2008
£3.25, 80pp
ISBN: 9780851519814

Daniel Nie is a final year medical student in London and *Nucleus* student co-editor

Many books have been written on the subject of lust and sexual sin over the years, but the test of time often demonstrates which books prove most helpful for believers battling this perennial, serious foe. John Flavel may not be the best-known Puritan, but his writings have been appreciated by many down the centuries. I came across this little book at the Banner of Truth Youth Conference earlier this year and it makes for a revealing but wholesome read.

Flavel begins his book with a stern warning based on the observations he made of the society of his time. He notices how pervasive sexual sin is in the lives of many, professing Christians. One of the things that makes this book age so well is its vivid description of the seriousness of lust. Flavel expertly brings out what the Scriptures have to say on this topic. He expounds on the gravity of this sin and its consequences, the very reason he is confronting this topic. He gives ten arguments why Christians should flee from this sin and put it to death, all of them hard-hitting and based on Scripture.

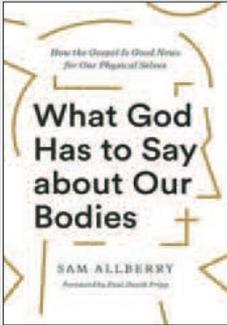
His arguments include: Scripture strongly condemns lust and its partner in crime, adultery. He shows the contempt God has for this sin, meaning Christians should have nothing to do with something that God hates so much. He argues that such a sin leaves a blot that might never be taken away in this life – reference David after his affair with Bathsheba and the murderous conspiracy in its aftermath. Very few repent and are restored back to life after succumbing to this sin, leading to a tragic end not just for one, but two or more people.

Thankfully, he doesn't leave us defeated with the devastating consequences of lust and adultery. Instead he leaves us with what all true ministers of the gospel should leave us with – the gospel of grace with its solutions. He offers seven directions we should take to avoid this sin or be restored back onto the right path. Examples include begging God for a clean and renewed heart and for his sanctifying grace to be present in our lives; walking in the fear of the Lord all day long, knowing that he is always watching us, and exercising ourselves diligently with the profession that God has given to us. If we apply ourselves to our medical studies diligently, then lust has less of a chance to make deep inroads into our hearts causing spiritual havoc, since we are focusing on our God-given work.

Overall, this book is a classic that takes the time to deal with the seriousness of lust and sexual sin carefully and thoroughly, and it also points out the path to spiritual restoration. The temptation is to quickly brush over this and focus on grace. But understanding the critical nature of this sin enables us to appreciate the amazing nature of the grace given to us through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what this book so wonderfully does. ■

Reviews

book: *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*



What God has to say about Our Bodies:

How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves
Sam Allberry

Crossway, 2021, £12.99 208pp
ISBN: 9781433570186

Eleanor Sture is a CMF Deep:ER Fellow and medical student in Edinburgh

Our bodies are not just the tupperware container to store the real us, our souls; they are intrinsic to who we are. Our bodies and souls are equally important. In this book, Sam Allberry unpacks why we have bodies, what happens when they go wrong, and how the Gospel means that we can look forward to enjoying the new creation in a resurrected body.

When we base so much of our identity on our appearance, and society tells us we must *uncover our true self* and simultaneously *can be anyone we want to be*, it is easy to become wrapped up in confusion and heartache. Here, the author helps us think practically through what it means to be fearfully and wonderfully made, and how we can change the narrative. This book isn't afraid to tackle the big issues, such as transgenderism, eating disorders, and death, from the perspective of biblical truth, while being written with great compassion and understanding.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit...You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

We could feel trapped and restricted knowing that our bodies do not belong to us alone; however, belonging to Jesus is the way to true freedom. We are joined to Christ in everything we do, and it is a fantastic truth that he desires our whole selves, including our bodies, that we are so often embarrassed about.

I would recommend this book to anyone who has a body. ■

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Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 – disappointing progress

Sustainable Development Goals include reducing premature mortality globally by improving nutrition and social protection, the provision of adequate housing, and safe learning environments for all children. The SDGs may have been idealistic, and perhaps even unrealistic, from their inception, but the COVID-19 pandemic, the very real and the negative effects of global warming, and other avoidable humanitarian disasters occurring in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and elsewhere have made them seem even more unachievable, especially within the ten-year timeframe that remains.

Nevertheless, a recent article published in the *Lancet* calls for ‘action to make children central to the development agenda and to identify several priority actions’. Of course, a major barrier to progress is funding and it is difficult to see where cash-strapped governments will find the spare cash for such worthy aims. Neither do the authors consider the difficulty of ensuring compliance from countries run by corrupt and self-serving regimes. If you are interested in global health, then there is a rich bibliography associated with this article.¹

1. Bhutta, ZA et al. Optimising child and adolescent health and development in the post-pandemic world. 7 May 2022. [bit.ly/SDGsLancet](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)00444-1)

chronic stress – epigenetic effects on the digestive system

Medical students probably know better than anyone that long-term stress can cause digestive sensitivity, discomfort, and conditions like irritable bowel syndrome and even stomach ulcers, but the mechanism for these effects was not well understood. Recent studies revealed significant changes to gene expression in the colon epithelial cells of rats subjected to stress, resulting in reduced ability to maintain gut health, with an increase in the production of inflammatory cytokines and chemokines.¹

A sub-set of these rats showed quite significant levels of altered gene expression, which may account for the fact that some people suffer more under conditions of sustained stress than do others.

1. Wiley J et al. Chronic psychological stress alters gene expression in rat colon epithelial cells promoting chromatin remodeling, barrier dysfunction and inflammation. 29 April 2022. [bit.ly/ratstudy](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ratsstudy.2022.100001)

epigenetics and drug development

Epigenetic changes modify genetic information without altering the DNA sequence.¹ As highlighted by the rat study on the effects of chronic stress on gene expression in the colon, dysfunction of the epigenome can cause serious disease, ranging from cancers to autoimmune disorders. ‘Increasing knowledge of the role of epigenetics in disease and the reversibility of these modifications explain why pharmacological intervention is an attractive strategy for tackling epigenetic-based disease.’

Research into effective drug therapies for epigenetic changes leading to disease is complex and focuses on first identifying and understanding ‘the role of proteins responsible for writing, reading, and erasing epigenetic marks in disease’, then developing and trialling compounds that inhibit or modulate their action.

1. Holdgate G et al. Drug discovery for epigenetics targets. April 2022. [bit.ly/eptherapy](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eptherapy.2022.100001)

why Alzheimer’s causes sleepiness

Alzheimer’s patients are often drowsy during the day, but it’s not because they don’t sleep well at night. A recent clinical trial that monitored the sleep patterns of a group of Alzheimer’s patients and then examined their brains after death, revealed that the cause is a loss of neurons whose function is to keep us awake.^{1,2} One of the study’s co-lead authors is a medical student at the University of California, Joseph Oh. He explained: ‘You can think of this system as a switch with wake-

promoting neurons and sleep-promoting neurons, each tied to neurons controlling circadian rhythms.’

The study was aided by comparing the brains of Alzheimer’s patients with those suffering from a neurodegenerative condition that makes sleep difficult, called progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP), as well as with healthy brains.

Another key finding of the research is that tau proteins, and not beta amyloid, are ‘a critical driver of sleep disturbances’. It is hoped that the study will enable better ways of managing sleep disturbances for both Alzheimer’s and PSP patients.

1. Medicine Net. New Insights Into Why Alzheimer’s Can Bring Drowsiness. 8 April 2022. bit.ly/Alzheimerstudy
2. Oh, JY. Subcortical Neuronal Correlates of Sleep in Neurodegenerative Diseases. 4 April 2022 bit.ly/sleepneurology

and why it doesn’t pay to pull ‘all nighters’ when preparing for exams

It will come as no surprise to medical students that sleep deprivation causes cognitive impairment.

Once again, genes are involved, and it seems that ‘the temporal and spatial oscillations of circadian genes are severely disturbed after sleep deprivation, leading to a progressive loss of their physiological rhythms, which in turn affects memory function.’¹ Sounds pretty serious. And it is, with chronic sleep deprivation potentially leading to neurodegenerative disease and even accelerated aging. Yet there has been little research into how circadian genes affect memory and the immune system with a view to finding suitable therapies. This is especially important given that the fast pace of modern life often militates against healthy sleep patterns.

Research on sleep-deprived mice at the cellular level has greatly increased understanding of the 29 genes involved in regulating the circadian rhythm, of which seven were identified as being particularly influential. And with better understanding comes the possibility of developing treatments to both prevent and mitigate the effects of sleep deprivation, an

occupational hazard for most healthcare workers involved in clinical work.

1. Ke, P et al. Relationship between circadian genes and memory impairment caused by sleep deprivation. 21 March 2022. bit.ly/SDgenes

Covid variants play ‘hide and seek’

Although Covid may feel like ‘old news’ now that the worst appears to be over, at least in the UK, the virus in its various forms continues to be of concern globally. Two studies conducted by an international research team and recently published in *Nature Communications*¹ speculate that ‘People suffering from COVID-19 could have several different SARS-CoV-2 variants hidden away from the immune system in different parts of the body’. The mechanism by which the virus achieves this appears to be a ‘pocket’ on the spike protein which persists within the different variants because it allows the spike protein to change its shape depending on which organ it invades and thus evade the immune system.

‘Our results showed that one can have several different virus variants in one’s body. Some of these variants may use kidney or spleen cells as their niche to hide, while the body is busy defending against the dominant virus type. This could make it difficult for the infected patients to get rid of SARS-CoV-2 entirely,’ reports Dr Kaptil Gupta, lead author of the study. However, the ubiquity of the pocket in the different variants also offers hope. Research at the University of Bristol is seeking to develop a pocket-binding antiviral that works against all variants of the Covid virus. *(Additional references provided for those interested in the scientific details of this research.^{2,3})* ■

1. Drug Discovery Today. SARS-CoV-2-infected individuals could have different variants hidden in different parts of the body. 1 March 2022. bit.ly/clevervirus
2. Gupta K et al. Structural insights in cell-type specific evolution of intra-host diversity by SARS-CoV-2. January 2022. bit.ly/clevervirus2
3. Staufer O et al. Synthetic virions reveal fatty acid-coupled adaptive immunogenicity of SARS-CoV-2 spike glycoprotein. 14 February 2022. go.nature.com/3N2JgnB



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