

Relationships Matter: Affirmations Commentary

Theological commentary on the evangelical affirmations on the Bible, sexuality and same-sex attraction

Thanks to the Evangelical Alliance Theology Advisory Group for their foundational work on revising the Affirmations, and to their chair (during the relevant period), Dr David Hilborn, for facilitating that process and drafting this commentary, which represents the collective effort of a number of Evangelical Alliance staff and advisers over a significant time span. A number of same-sex attracted voices have also been involved in writing and editing this material.

Clarity, confidence and compassion

Relationships are crucial to what it is to be human. The biblical story of creation in the opening chapters of Genesis depicts humans being made in the “image of God” (Genesis 1:26–27). Firstly, the God who creates them is One who Himself lives in harmonious communal relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, He forms humans for relationship by making them “male and female”. More specifically, He intends that they should relate to each other in their differences as men and women, and as unique individual persons – but also that they should form communities and societies with one another as they worship and serve Him, and as they relate creatively to the world He has made (Genesis 1:27–30). It is through these relationships that the immense love of God for us is learned, lived out and passed down through succeeding generations.

Despite this, the church has frequently struggled to respond to the cultural challenges that relationships can present. In particular, changing views and values around sex, sexuality, gender, marriage and family have been especially prominent in western cultures over the past half century or so. This has had a profound impact on churches in those cultures and, to some extent, beyond the western world too.

This commentary builds on previous reports concerning same-sex relationships produced by the Evangelical Alliance in 1998 and 2012, both of which sought to articulate an authentic evangelical view of sexuality.¹ British social attitudes have continued to change since those publications were issued – most notably with the legal redefinition of marriage in different parts of the UK between 2013 and 2020 to include same-sex couples.² Attitudes have also shifted across the church since the 2012 report, with more sustained and widespread efforts being made to redefine Christian teaching and practice concerning sexuality, sexual relationships and gender. This shift has predominantly entailed moves to affirm lesbian and gay male partnerships, but the affirmation of transgender and queer identities has latterly become more prominent as well. In some cases, the main terminology used to describe these various characteristics, relationships and identities has changed. While maintaining the same substantive evangelical convictions that were expressed

in 1998 and 2012, we have now updated the summary Affirmations presented in those previous reports to ensure they are more accurate and more easily understood today, while continuing to uphold what we believe to be a properly clear, scriptural approach – one that accords with the core commitment of the Evangelical Alliance’s Basis of Faith to “The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament scriptures, which are the written word of God – fully trustworthy for faith and conduct”.³

This commentary briefly sets out the current cultural context regarding questions of sexuality, providing a biblical framework for engagement with that context before introducing the updated Affirmations. The Affirmations are then accompanied in turn by concise commentary. The Affirmations focus on same-sex sexual relationships, since that was the focus of the 1998 and 2012 reports. However, as in those reports, this commentary sets out consideration of these specific relationships within the broader context of an orthodox evangelical understanding of biblical sexual ethics. A distinct report on transgender identities and relationships was produced by the Evangelical Alliance in 2018, and those wishing to know about the Evangelical Alliance’s approach to that subject are encouraged to explore that resource, as well as a previous Evangelical Alliance report on the same area that was issued in 2000.⁴

As well as defining the Evangelical Alliance’s stance on same-sex relationships, then, the commentary presented here is intended to build confidence in understanding our changing culture, and in how we express and live out our beliefs as evangelicals within that culture. It is also offered as an aid to congregations to help them explore with clarity and compassion how their beliefs might be most effectively worked out in various pastoral and practical situations related to sexuality in general, and to same-sex relationships in particular.

Cultural context

Sex and sexuality are the site of so many battles in what have come to be known as the ‘culture wars’.⁵ The founding stories of modern western society often focus on freedom as an ultimate human good and, in relation to that, sexual freedom is seen as an essential – perhaps *the* essential – apex of our liberation. At least for consenting adults, it seems ever more widely accepted that we should be free to have sex when we want, with whom we want. While the history of this development is complex, the renowned Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) played a significant role in the development of such attitudes, as did his contemporary, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).

Freud promoted the idea that humans, from infancy onwards, are essentially sexual beings. He argued that our sexual desires are ultimately decisive for who we are and what brings us fulfilment, and that the repression of those desires can result positively in necessary social order, but also in personal dysfunction, repression, neurosis and even psychosis. Although many of Freud’s ideas have since been rejected as scientifically unsubstantiated, the sexualisation of identity which he did so much to foreground has persisted in the core personal and cultural narratives that have shaped our society today.⁶

Freud remained highly influential among the first generation so-called ‘postmodern’ thinkers who emerged in the 1960s – for example, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault.⁷ Just as important for those thinkers’ intellectual formation, however, was Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, Christianity had damagingly sublimated the more permissive sexual mores of ancient peasant and elite classes alike, through a supposedly stifling bourgeois attachment to monogamy and marriage that belied the more deep-seated or visceral promiscuity of

most humans in most cultures through most of human history.⁸ Just as Nietzsche instead stressed self-determination and power as more reliable dynamics for understanding sexual identity, so he prompted both the postmodern thinkers mentioned above and so-called ‘third-wave’ feminists like Judith Butler, Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid to question ‘essentialist’ or biologically-grounded definitions of sexuality and of sexual roles within society. Initially, this consolidated an earlier distinction, derived from the work of so-called ‘second-wave’ feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer, between sex as biologically innate and gender as culturally constructed. Latterly, however, that distinction was dissolved through those third-wave feminists’ and others’ formulation of ‘queer theory’, in which even sex itself came to be regarded as constructed in human discourse, and in which a thoroughgoing ‘fluidity’ was perceived in all presentations of sex and gender.⁹ In turn, this ‘performative’ interpretation of sexuality and gender has spurred the proliferation of people identifying as bisexual, transgender, genderfluid, non-binary, genderqueer and so on over the past two or three decades.

These intellectual trends have gone hand in hand with socio-political developments that have similarly liberalised sexual ethics in the west. The development and mass distribution of the contraceptive pill from the early 1960s reinforced the decoupling of sex from marriage that Freud, Nietzsche and their followers had cast as more liberative – but now without the potentially ‘constraining’ consequences of procreation, pregnancy and childbirth. Fuelled more recently still by social media dating apps, sex has become ever more casual and more detached from the emotional investment and time commitment required by marriage. Also reflecting this trend is the fact that since the Abortion Act of 1967, abortions in England, Wales and Scotland have increased by close to 1,000% – from 27,200 in that year to 232,000 in 2022.¹⁰ Even among babies carried to term, UK births outside marriage rose from 5% in 1966 to 48% in 2017. From 1996 to 2021 the total of opposite-sex cohabiting couple families more than doubled, from around 1.5 million to around 3.4 million,¹¹ while the proportion of lone parent families rose from 8% in 1971 to 16% in 2023 – in close correlation with the significant liberalising of divorce laws through the same time span.¹²

In our Freud-and-Nietzsche-influenced world, sexual identity and sexual behaviour cannot easily be separated. Self-realisation is taken to require the free expression of sexual identity, which in turn informs the notion that – again – as long as it is mutually chosen by adults, almost any form of sexual practice is permissible, and that to object to such permissiveness is to attack or harm the very underlying identity of those concerned. Indeed, since a person’s self-declared sexual and gender identity is so often seen today as inextricably bound up with their core dignity and worth, it is often suggested that it is not a legitimate topic for debate. As a result, the lexicon of such identities grows ever longer: from LG to LGB, to LGBT, to LGBTQIA+, to 2SLGBTQIA+ and more.¹³

While this current commentary is focused on the ‘L’ and ‘G’ of lesbian and gay male relationships, the above summary of rapidly liberalising mores across an ever-broadening range of sexual and gender identities helps to explain why attitudes to same-sex partnerships have become so much more permissive in recent times. When the Evangelical Alliance published its first resource in this area in 1998, the *British Social Attitudes Survey* at that point showed just 23% of the population affirming that there was nothing at all wrong with same-sex sexual relationships. By the time of our 2012 report, that figure had risen to 47%. The last occasion on which the same question was asked was in 2022, when 67% said nothing at all was wrong with such partnerships.¹⁴ The speed of social change in this area has indeed been striking.

Statistics from the Office for National Statistics published in 2022 also found that 3.3% of the UK population identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual.¹⁵ 1.8% of those over 16 identified as gay or lesbian, and 1.5% as bisexual, with rates being slightly higher in these groupings for men than for women.

This confirmed a doubling of those metrics since they were previously assessed in 2014, when only 1.6% had described themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Sub-divisions of this overall statistic show a particularly strong correlation between the prevalence of those identifying as such and those who are younger rather than older. Thus, 8% of 16–24 year olds described themselves in 2022 as either lesbian, gay or bisexual, with the largest difference being that 5.3% identified as bisexual as compared to 1% in 2014.

While these numbers remain relatively small within the overall population, they denote a growing constituency with increasing cultural influence. As such, the church must offer a clear, confident and compassionate gospel message which speaks not only to those who belong to that constituency, but also to the growing proportion of wider society that accepts its members' respective identities, relationships and sexual behaviours without demur – or, indeed, as an intrinsic good. Ignoring the questions and issues that arise from all this is not an option for thinking evangelicals who take mission seriously. Questions of sexuality and gender have become a major stumbling block for some Christians in their discipleship journey, as well as for others still considering whether to embrace the Christian faith. Lack of clarity on these matters helps no-one in the long term. The historic, biblically orthodox, classic evangelical approach set out here provides what the Christian academic psychiatrist Glynn Harrison calls “a better story” – a more ultimately hope-filled narrative than the comparatively permissive alternatives offered elsewhere in contemporary culture, whether within or beyond the church.¹⁶ The hope is that this commentary, built around the updating of Affirmations first formulated more than a quarter-century ago, will model and encourage the godly confidence, clarity and compassion that many seek on the issue of same-sex relationships, and on issues of sexuality and gender more broadly.

Biblical framing

As evangelicals seek to better understand, articulate and live out what the Bible has to say regarding sexuality, it is vital also to understand the world around us and how that world is changing. From the various figures and trends cited above, it could be inferred that that our modern society has overvalued sex; in reality, however, it has often *undervalued* it – failing to appreciate how astoundingly valuable it really is. No doubt, as previously noted, generally liberalised sexual mores, readier access to birth control, easier routes to divorce and phenomenal rises in abortion rates, have accompanied a relative de-centring of sexual fidelity, monogamy and the heterosexual married family as foundations for social cohesion and civic flourishing. Yet, while properly lamenting such trends, it is also important that evangelical churches positively and attractively commend the larger biblical story – the good, true and beautiful story of how God has established, framed and blessed sexual relationships that honour Him, enhance those made in His image, and enrich society as a whole.

The fact that we are made in the image of God as male and female means that we are profoundly physical and biological creatures, yet also that we are more than merely physical and biological: it means that we are *theologically* significant, too. It means that when we get the body, sex and sexuality wrong, we get the divine story wrong as well. As Christopher West puts it: “The way we understand and express our sexuality points to our deepest-held convictions about who we are, who God is, who Jesus is, what the church is (or should be), the meaning of love, the ordering of society and the mystery of the universe”.¹⁷

A fulfilled human life will often involve sexual intimacy – and for Christians, that is expressed in the context of lifelong marriage between a man and a woman. This is grounded in Genesis 2:24, when God mandates that “a man leaves his father and his mother and is united with his wife, and the two

become one flesh”. Jesus firmly reiterates this same pattern of exclusive marital and sexual union in Matthew 19:4–6, while Paul reaffirms it in 1 Corinthians 7:1–16 and presents it as a profound mystical analogy for Christ’s relationship with the church in Ephesians 5:31–32.

The role and significance of covenant is a key theme of the biblical story, and motifs of marriage, procreation and family appear consistently in scripture as outworkings of successive covenants between God and humanity (Genesis 9:1; 12:7; Exodus 30:21; 2 Samuel 7:12; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:31–34). Just as God requires faithfulness, selflessness and constancy from His people, so marriage and family life, as core building blocks of community, are presented as a reflection of that divine-human compact.

For all this, it is also important to remember that the Bible clearly shows us that a fulfilled human life can be lived *without* sexual activity or sexual intimacy. We need to be careful to not make marriage, and marital sex, into an idol. Jesus and the early church launched a veritable sexual revolution of their own based on consent, mutuality and a spiritual understanding of sexuality. Jesus publicly endorsed marriage when attending a wedding in Cana (John 2:1–12), while in Matthew 19:4–6 He resoundingly reaffirmed God’s creational ordering of sex and marriage – with husband and wife becoming one flesh. Yet in Matthew 19:12 He also radically reinterpreted Old Testament restrictions on eunuchs and commended those who “choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” – namely, single people committed to abstinence from sex until marriage, or to lifelong celibacy as an expression of their devotion to God.¹⁸ Indeed, Jesus *Himself* lived a life of singleness and celibacy. For Jesus, then, sex is sacred and marriage is precious – but so, too, are such patterns of chaste single living in devotion to God.

Hence, it is important to recognise that not all will receive the gift of biblical marriage. For some, this will be experienced as a faithful refraining from sex in the hope of a marital sexual relationship; for others, it will be because they receive a gift of singleness which does not deny their sexuality but places other relationships ahead of this in a life of prayer, service and witness. For others still, it may be because they do not find themselves attracted to people of the opposite sex, such that a commitment to living in line with biblical teaching means they will not seek any other form of sexual union.

Human relationships more generally come in many forms that are blessed by God, and our personhood is established in a multiplicity of such relationships through family, friends, colleagues, local community and wider society. Our task is to see God’s redemption work in all of these biblically endorsed relationships. Jesus invites us into the family of God, and as members of that family we are called brothers, sisters, adopted sons and daughters, and co-heirs (Matthew 12: 48–50; Romans 8:15–17; Ephesians 1:4–5). God names us His children, as He is our Father (1 John 3:1). Through Jesus we are called friends of God and through Jesus we collectively become the Bride of Christ, His church (John 15:15; Revelation 19:7). In the God-story, sexual union in marriage is a symbol pointing beyond itself to something even more relationally profound and eternal in the new Heaven and new earth: the perfected union of Christ with His people (Ephesians 5:25–32; Matthew 22:30). Marriage is the lifelong covenant between one man and one woman that anticipates this ultimate, everlasting union of the church with God Himself. And the place for sex is within that covenanted marital partnership.

Contemporary society may have increasingly approached sexuality in a manner that treats it like fast food, but the way the church has responded has also often fallen short – offering a starvation diet. The way we understand sexual relationships affects the church and its apostolic ministry to the world. Sexual intercourse constitutes both a ‘one flesh’ union and a spiritual union. Paul is realistic enough to recognise that marriage serves to channel sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:1–11); but it is

clear in his and other biblical perspectives cited above that it does so to the greater ends of mutual affection, love, procreation and communal enrichment within and beyond the church. Marriage within this biblical framework is therefore a means of sexual expression, but far more than just that – and certainly far more than a purifying of passions.

Hence, in speaking about sexuality, it is vital neither to underestimate the scale of the cultural shifts that have occurred around it, nor to become overwhelmed by the challenges they pose. In fact, the repercussions of those shifts present significant opportunities for prophetic and pastoral witness to the God who gave sex and marriage as a blessing to humanity, and to the Son of God who both reaffirmed and further illuminated its significance.

An evangelical response

As noted above, a year after our 2012 report, marriage was legally redefined in England and Wales to include same-sex partnerships. Scotland followed suit in 2014, and Northern Ireland in 2020. Those legislative moves were supported by some within the church at the time, and they have met with more support from churches since. For evangelical Christians committed to maintaining a biblical approach to marriage and sexuality, two key questions arise in the face of these significant developments: “Why should sexual activity be reserved for a marriage relationship?” and “Why should that relationship be restricted to an exclusive, lifelong heterosexual bond?” Behind both questions lies the key issue of biblical authority. Yet before we more specifically address the Bible’s responses, it is crucial to note that the same holy scriptures from which we draw answers to *what* we should affirm in relation to such questions also guide us as to *how* we should do so.

Without doubt, we need to speak transparently and authoritatively as we exhort others to live in accordance with God’s revealed will in scripture – even when doing so positions us as counter-cultural outliers (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3). We must help people to have trust in the gospel, despite its being rejected or sidelined by a majority in society (2 Corinthians 4:8–12). Of course, we should avoid deliberately antagonising others on the one hand (Galatians 5:22) and retreating to mere self-defensiveness on the other – a stance that seeks solely to protect our own freedom to guard what we believe for ourselves, without heeding Jesus’ call to be witnesses in the world (2 Corinthians 9:12–15). Yet while transcending such instincts to unwarranted aggression and insularity, we should also resist any temptation to collude with values, beliefs and worldviews that are contrary to the gospel (2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

With these core principles in mind, it is important to acknowledge and repent of the fact that the church has not always been a hospitable place for gay and lesbian people. Too much fear, misunderstanding, prejudice and even open hostility has been shown towards them by a church that Jesus challenged to model radical graciousness towards those deemed ‘other’. This was acknowledged by the prominent Anglican evangelical leader John Stott when he wrote: “Love is just what the Church has generally failed to show to homosexual people”.¹⁹ With this in mind, we must challenge ungodly discrimination towards people on the grounds of their sexual orientation. We should not hesitate to reject and condemn violence towards those who identify as LGBTQ+. We should oppose wilful bullying, hatemongering and dehumanising attitudes and speech towards them. We should enable them to feel at home in worship services, evangelistic meetings, enquiry groups, church social events and other such gatherings – even while being honest and open about our conviction that living out their identity through sexual behaviours aligned to that LGBTQ+ spectrum falls short of God’s intentions for humans as sexual beings, and thus is sinful.

Showing Christ-like hospitality to another need not entail full endorsement of their outlook or behaviour: as the Canadian theologian Stanley Grenz has noted, evangelicals can and should be *welcoming* towards lesbians and gay men – but not *affirming* of same-sex sexual relations.²⁰ Granted, certain of those who have endorsed same-sex sexual partnerships and marriage in recent years while maintaining ‘evangelical’ as a self-descriptor have questioned Grenz’ distinction, sometimes consciously dubbing themselves ‘affirming evangelicals’ over against it.²¹ Here, however, it is maintained that it is a properly biblical distinction which, as such, is more coherently and authentically evangelical. On that basis, rather than using the negative term ‘non-affirming’ to describe this authentic evangelical belief in God’s best for same-sex attracted people, in what follows it is presented as the *classic* evangelical perspective.²² Moreover, this whole commentary is built around statements on sexuality that, with certain textual updates, the Evangelical Alliance has consistently termed ‘Affirmations’ since 1998 – again because we believe them to summarise God’s revealed mandate for human sexual and relational flourishing. To adopt the oppositionist moniker ‘non-affirming’ would be inconsistent with that heading and with the commitments it entails.

For some, the term ‘conservative evangelical’ might seem a more familiar descriptor to use than ‘classic evangelical’ in this context – and conservative evangelicalism is undoubtedly a major component of historic and present-day evangelicalism. Yet to deploy that term would be to ignore the fact that several major streams of evangelicalism *beyond* conservative evangelicalism maintain that sexually-active same-sex partnerships and sexual relationships defined further along the LGBTQ+ spectrum are incompatible with God’s purposes for human identity and relationships as revealed in scripture – for example, Pentecostal, charismatic, reformed, independent, denominational and ecumenical evangelicalism.²³ In the North American context, Gregory Alan Thornbury has defined classic evangelicalism as the mainline, interdenominational manifestation of evangelicalism associated with leading representatives of it such as Carl Henry and Billy Graham.²⁴ In the UK, it would be fair to say that it has been most tangibly represented by our own organisation, the Evangelical Alliance, since its formation in 1846. Globally, it is expressed through the work and witness of the World Evangelical Alliance, of which the Evangelical Alliance is a founding member.²⁵

Another virtue of using the term ‘classic’ here is that it suggests a wider connection to orthodox, creedal Christian traditions which might not themselves identify as evangelical, but which hold kindred convictions on sexual and other foundational ethics – for example, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Indeed, the American evangelical theologian Thomas Oden defines ‘classic Christianity’ as “consensual ecumenical teaching” in ethical and other areas that is self-consciously rooted in scripture, apostolic and patristic doctrine, and that is held as foundational across Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical, charismatic and mainline Protestant traditions.²⁶ One signature example of these various ‘classic’ traditions coming together around such moral imperatives is the Manhattan Declaration of 2009, which joined evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in common affirmations on sexuality, marriage, the family, abortion and euthanasia.²⁷ By contrast with the orthodox biblical stance adopted by this and other such classic statements on same-sex relationships, what follows will also occasionally use the term ‘revisionist’ as a parallel to ‘affirming’, particularly when discussing more liberal or progressive re-interpretations of key biblical passages on sex and sexual relationships.

While maintaining the classic evangelical distinction between welcome and affirmation, we must nonetheless emphasise that those who maintain the classic view still need to do better in training and equipping one another to understand and address issues of sex and sexuality. For too long too many church leaders and congregations have avoided this task because it has become so potentially difficult and divisive. Yet, ultimately, this does not help anyone. It can mean that those who hold to a classic view do not feel sufficiently supported or encouraged in doing so. But it can

also mean that those who align with an affirming position can feel understandably confused or let down if they discover that a church they attend has adopted a classic stance that has not been plainly or openly articulated.

So, we need to work harder at commending a holistic vision for sex, marriage and family – a vision that is rooted in the broader story of love, healing and reconciliation that God has embodied for us in Jesus, and that through Jesus offers hope to a confused and hurting world. We need to inhabit and commend a divinely graced moral reality that is both distinct from and more attractive than the *de facto* mores that have come to define our relationally and spiritually impoverished culture.

Against this background, the following pages unpack each of the ten Affirmations, as revised and updated from their previous iteration in 2012. In doing so, they seek to explain and apply those Affirmations in ways that will hopefully prove relevant and helpful to the many churches, organisations and individuals who are members of the Evangelical Alliance, as well as to those beyond the Evangelical Alliance who wish to understand the evangelical position on sexuality, and on gay and lesbian sexual partnerships more specifically.

Process, language and acknowledgements

The initial spur to re-addressing, revising and updating the Affirmations from the previous form they had taken in 2012 came from a special two-day council meeting of the Evangelical Alliance on sexuality held in London in September 2018. Following that meeting, the council, board and leadership team of the Evangelical Alliance asked its Theological Advisory Group (TAG) to work on redrafting the Affirmations, which it duly did, disrupted somewhat by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, TAG itself signed off on a final revised draft and presented it to the leadership team and board for consideration. Further minor amendments were suggested by those bodies before they approved the final revision in 2023. At the same time, they commended TAG's proposal that the updated Affirmations should be accompanied by updated resources including a longer commentary.

This commentary draws on previous reports in this area, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* (1998) and *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality* (2012), as well as material from a paper presented by Dr David Hilborn to a special Evangelical Alliance council meeting in 2018 and subsequently revised and updated for TAG.

This update seeks to take account of the considerable range of additional work published in this area of theology and sexuality since 2012, from classic and affirming evangelical sources, as well as from sources beyond evangelicalism. Similarly, statistical data has also been updated in line with new findings. Finally, the language of this commentary has been updated in places to reflect current usage. Where appropriate, an important theological distinction between sexual activity and 'same-sex attraction' or 'same-sex orientation' is maintained – in full awareness that secular legal terminology routinely takes 'sexual orientation' to entail sexual practice.²⁸ The term 'same-sex attracted' is often used by evangelicals – like those affiliated to the True Freedom Trust and Living Out networks²⁹ – whose orientation may be towards people of the same sex, but who have chosen to live abstinently or celibately out of conviction that it would not be right to act on that attraction in a gay or lesbian sexual partnership.

The legalising of same-sex unions as 'equal marriages' across the UK has also presented a dilemma for classic evangelicals who hold that the term 'marriage' should be reserved for marital unions between men and women only. While fully recognising and agreeing with this reservation theologically, the legal reality of an institution called Same-Sex Marriage being on the statute book

means that, where appropriate, we will use that specific term in that specific legal sense in what follows – yet always on the understanding that this is not marriage as we believe it to be defined in scripture.

While *Biblical and Pastoral Responses* devoted significant space to pastoral practice, several practical scenarios are now included in the [*Affirmations Guide*](#) produced by the Evangelical Alliance. This commentary intersperses analyses of particular Affirmations with first-person testimonies from the lived experience of same-sex attracted evangelicals who have gone on the record to share their stories of seeking to live faithfully in alignment with the word of God and with the call of Christ on their lives.

Affirmations and commentary

1. We affirm the goodness of creation, and the dignity of all people as those made in God's image. We recognise that all of us are sinners, and that the only true hope for sinful people – whatever our sexuality – is in Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that His love, truth and grace would always characterise evangelical responses to debates on sexuality.

Good news foundations

It is essential that evangelicals begin with the gospel that gives them their name – the *evangel* or good news of salvation realised in the life, ministry, death, resurrection, glorification and eternal reign of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1, 14; Luke 4:18). That same gospel should foundationally shape what we say, how we speak, and the ways in which we interpret the world. This is as important for internal church discussions about sexuality as it is for how Christians address issues of sexual behaviour and identity that arise in wider society. The fact that a majority in that wider society now disagrees with evangelicals' approach to these questions is no excuse for adopting an aggressive or antagonistic tone. Any disagreement we express in this and other areas should be characterised by compassion and grace.

What we believe about sexuality is closely bound up with what we believe it means to be human. More specifically from a Christian perspective, it rests on a realistic and robust understanding of the goodness of humanity's creation in God's image, and of the damage done by and to humans in the fall (Genesis 1:26–3:24). The fact that every person bears the imprint of divinity means that each person is worthy of dignity. Irrespective of their belief or behaviour, human beings are animated by God's life-breath (Genesis 2:7). As such, they are to be treated with value. The rebellion of humanity which follows the biblical creation account indicates that the image of God in men and women can be deeply tainted by sin, and that humans' God-inspired life can be obscured by their rejection of Him – whether in their beliefs, their actions or both. Even so, as we oppose unbelief and ungodly behaviour and respond pastorally to perpetrators and victims of sin, we need humbly to recognise our *own* sinfulness and need for forgiveness (Romans 3:9–23; 7:7–25).

It is only through union with Christ in new birth, faith and baptism that God's promise of salvation from sin is borne out, and only through such salvation that God's gift of eternal life becomes our inheritance – our everlasting hope. That hope is to be lived out by Christians in obedience to God's commands and Christ's teaching – not least in the sphere of sexual conduct – but it is the same hope for those who experience same-sex attraction as for those who do not. This is why the first Affirmation here strikes a keynote for the rest by emphasising our shared need for Jesus and His word.

“So much of my life as a homosexual Christian... has simply been learning how to wait, to be patient, to endure, to bear up under an unwelcome burden for the long haul... Washed and waiting. That is my life – my identity as one who is forgiven and spiritually cleaned and my struggle as one who perseveres with a frustrating thorn in the flesh, looking forward to what God has promised to do.” (Wesley Hill)³⁰

Common humanity

Focusing on our common humanity and on our shared sinfulness as fallen human beings enables us to avoid branding people as ‘righteous’ or ‘unrighteous’ purely on the basis of their sexual orientation – as if sexuality were a problem only for non-heterosexual people. The St Andrew’s Day Statement issued by the Church of England Evangelical Council in 1995 remains salutary in this regard:

Our sexual affections can no more define who we are than can our class, race or nationality. At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as ‘a’ homosexual or ‘a’ heterosexual; therefore there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation.³¹

This statement also recognises the general scientific consensus that some people’s sexual preferences exist on a continuum rather than at one polarity or another.³² This ‘graded’ view of sexual inclination might appear more overt in those who describe themselves as bisexual, non-binary or genderfluid. Yet recognising the fact that sexual orientation or attraction can look different for different people is not the same thing as endorsing all the behaviours that might follow from such varied attractions. Jesus in fact raised the threshold of holiness in sexual ethics by casting heterosexual adultery as something that can take place in a lustful eye or heart, rather than only through an actively adulterous physical relationship (Matthew 5:27–29). As it is, evangelicals and other Christians have disagreed on how this and related biblical texts that make a clearer distinction between temptation and sin (eg Hebrews 4:15) might bear on any distinction between same-sex attraction alone and actual sexual activity. Specifically, this disagreement has concerned: a) whether same-sex attraction that is not acted upon is itself inherently or individually sinful; b) whether same-sex attraction as distinct from same-sex sexual practice is a more general consequence of the fall and thus closer to temptation than sin; c) whether same-sex attraction is morally neutral; or d) whether same-sex attraction might even sometimes be a positive spur to chaste singleness within the providence of God.³³

Beyond these more detailed intra-evangelical debates, evangelicals can surely agree on the importance of approaching the issue of same-sex attraction and same-sex relationships with humility and self-awareness where our *own* sins and failings are concerned – whether sexual, marital or familial, or whether more generally relational, behavioural or dispositional. Granted, sexual sins are treated with great seriousness in the New Testament, but so are pride, anger, embezzlement, idolatry, injustice and neglect of the poor (Matthew 5:21–26; John 12:6; Acts 5:1–11; Romans 1:23; James 5:1–6; 1 Peter 5:5). Our approach to sexual sin needs to be contextualised within that broader biblical-ethical canvas.

Love, truth and grace

The heart of the gospel is that truth finds its fulfilment in God’s grace, offering the prospect of repentance, forgiveness and renewal (John 1:14; Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:15). This truth is not compromised when compassion and respect are shown to an individual, nor are such responses a seal of approval on wrong behaviour. They are, rather, a sign of God’s love. In all aspects of Christian life and witness, and not least in relation to lesbians and gay men within and beyond the church, it is essential to infuse our communication of what we believe to be true with Christ-like generosity and kindness. Truth asserted without grace can be cold, condemning and more concerned with proving ourselves right than acting righteously towards others. Whether

sexually active or not, same-sex attracted people are not abstract ‘case studies’ to be cited in a demonstration of our own doctrinal soundness: they are, first and foremost, people created by a God of love and care, who deserve to be shown love and care in His name – even as they are encouraged and supported to live in obedience to His word.

2. We affirm God’s love and concern for all human beings, whatever their sexuality, and so reject and condemn all attitudes and actions which victimise or vilify those whose affections are directed towards people of the same sex. We are encouraged that many Christians now recognise and deeply regret the hurt caused by past and present failures in their responses to those who experience same-sex attraction.

God’s love for all people

Sexuality is an emotive word, encompassing deep-seated issues of identity, relationship and belief. Thus, any discussion of sexual orientation and/or sexual behaviour can quickly become very personal and charged. As already emphasised above, we should consequently take particular care to be compassionate in our language and tone when addressing this subject.

While reiterating Stanley Grenz’ distinction between welcoming those identifying as lesbian or gay yet declining to affirm lesbian and gay sexual activity, we need to accept that evangelical and other churches have too often allowed rejection of the latter to detract from the warmth and genuineness of the former. Evangelicals have conveyed fear, misunderstanding, prejudice and even open hostility towards same-sex attracted people at times – and we should apologise for any past wrongdoing where such attitudes have been present.

Jesus was committed throughout His ministry to those marginalised and cast as outsiders, whether because of their identity, their morality or their actions (Matthew 8:1–13; Luke 7:36–50; John 4:1–16). Against this background, Christians are called to nurture and model patterns of behaviour – both individually and corporately – which ensure that all are loved and valued within and beyond the church (Matthew 22:39; 5:44). We can and should ensure that lesbians and gay men receive pastoral care equivalent to others within our congregations and wider communities – including those associated with additional identities along the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

According to various UK statistics there are high levels of hate crime, including verbal abuse and physical violence, that are related to sexual orientation as defined by the Equality Act (2010).³⁴ To be clear: historic, classic religious convictions on sexuality and marriage, such as those expressed in this document, are also rightly protected under the provisions made for religion in the same Act. Moreover, when introducing the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act of 2013 for England and Wales, the government more specifically deemed those classic convictions to be “worthy of respect in a democratic society”.³⁵ No doubt, some who identify as LGBTQ+ will construe such historic understandings to be themselves innately hateful; yet the very same parliamentary statistics just mentioned also record worrying levels of hate-filled and prejudicial attacks on religious believers by dint of their beliefs – including beliefs that some might deem to be in tension with the protection of those identifying as LGBTQ+.³⁶

As often with the assertion of human rights, there are potential disjunctions between competing claims and commitments. Yet from a Christian perspective such disjunctions need to be mitigated by loving, gracious and Christ-like *intent* – however much others with more liberal, radical or secularised views of sexuality and gender might infer authentic, historic, biblical sexual ethics to be ‘hateful’ or ‘harmful’ in and of themselves (James 3:9–18). We clearly believe that such

ethical convictions are not intrinsically hateful – but as well as re-stating that point, we need to demonstrate it in our actions and attitudes.

3. We affirm that marriage is an institution created by God in which one man and one woman enter into an exclusive relationship for life and is the only form of partnership approved by God for sexual relations. Any sexual practice outside of this is incompatible with God’s will as revealed in scripture. Holding these theological and ethical views on biblical grounds is neither harmful nor homophobic. Rather, they are views to be held and expressed with Christ-like love and grace, since they reflect the teaching of Jesus Himself.

A biblical view of marriage

At the heart of all ten of these Affirmations is the belief expressed most explicitly in this third Affirmation – namely, that marriage is ordained by God as an exclusive, covenanted relationship for life between a male and a female – one that mysteriously points beyond itself towards our eternal union with God (Genesis 1:26–2:25; Matthew 19:4–6; Ephesians 5:21–33). This is the only context in which sexual relationships are affirmed by Him. Men and women are created as such in God’s own image and, in bearing that image, are designed for sexual relationship with each other in marriage and, from the communal foundation of marriage, for non-sexual relationships with others within and beyond the marital home. Those wider relationships can take many forms in the context of immediate and extended family, friendships, workplaces, societies and churches. As such, they may be between people of the same sex, or of each sex, male and female. Again, however: where specifically *sexual* relationships are concerned, lifelong monogamous marriage between a man and a woman is the proper setting in which they are to be initiated and sustained.

God’s command to Adam and Eve that they should be “fruitful and multiply” is closely connected to His instruction that they should order or “subdue” the world around them – that they should house, feed, clothe and nurture themselves, their offspring and their fellow humans as members of a community (Genesis 1:28–30). While this is the default biblical pattern for marriage, it is important to note not all marriages produce children, while others that do not do so naturally may fruitfully provide a home and family for children through fostering and adoption.³⁷

Indeed, beyond its particular association with procreation, biblical marriage has wider significance as a key building block for society as a whole. In this sense, the one-flesh union of male and female in marriage is a profound and fundamental expression of unity in diversity more generally. Biblical marriage is not only the divinely ordained context for sexual expression, but also an archetype of what God wants for society and the world. It is within the covenant of marriage that duality and difference are reconciled – and that reconciliation points to the great Reconciler, Jesus Himself.

The unique status and role of marriage is duly reiterated and reinforced in the New Testament by both Jesus and Paul. While it is evident that polygamy and other forms of sexual relationship feature at points in the history of Israel, they do so in a fallen, unredeemed world where they are at best tolerated and accommodated for a season, rather than actively endorsed by God as part of His long-term redemptive plan.³⁸

As we have already highlighted, Jesus very noticeably begins His public ministry with the blessing of a wedding at Cana (John 2:1–12). Later, He emphasises in relation to Genesis 1–2 that: “At the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they

are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matthew 19:4–6)

In Ephesians 5:31, Paul further presents marriage as an image for Christ’s enduringly faithful relationship with the Church – an image echoed in Revelation 21:2. In addition to this, Hebrews 13:4 affirms the general biblical view that sex outside marriage is immoral: “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” Hence, not only is heterosexual adultery wrong, but any sexual immorality or activity outside marriage. This leads us more directly to the issue of same-sex sexual activity.

Same-sex sexual practice

The references to ‘sexual relations’ and ‘sexual practice’ in this third Affirmation are intentionally distinct in meaning from the reference to ‘same-sex attraction’ in Affirmation 2 (above). The experience of certain sexual attractions, or the assumption of a particular sexual orientation, do not in themselves determine how a person might or should behave, now or in the future. While debate on the origins and formation of sexual orientation is of interest scientifically and sociologically, it is not decisive theologically. The key issue for Christians is not so much how a person acquired their attractions – whether, in colloquial terms, through ‘nature’ or ‘nurture’ – but how they manage and direct those attractions now, in conformity to God’s will.

There has been much debate in recent decades regarding the Bible’s treatment of same-sex sexual activity and same-sex partnerships. Both the Evangelical Alliance’s 1998 report, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* and its 2012 publication *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality* devoted specific sections to the exegesis of relevant biblical texts on these matters, informed by both classic evangelical and liberal, radical and progressive scholarship.³⁹ A good deal more academic and popular work has been published on the same subject since 2012, much of which has expanded to include consideration of how the Bible might also inform understanding of transgender, queer, non-binary and other non-heterosexual identities. We have sought to keep pace with this more recent work, while the Evangelical Alliance’s 2018 *Transformed* report more specifically addressed the ‘TQ+’ part of the sex-gender spectrum.⁴⁰ All the same, we remain convinced that scripture is clear and consistent in its prohibition of same-sex sexual practice and same-sex partnerships that entail such practice – as distinct from aspects of attraction that might be involuntary, unwilling or unwanted. While there are relatively few direct references to same-sex sexual practice in the Bible, we shall see that where they do occur, all of them attest that it is incompatible with God’s will and, as such, inconsistent with faithful Christian discipleship.

It is beyond the scope of this concise document to expound every relevant biblical text on this subject at length. However, we will review the most commonly cited passages in summary here, and we have provided further resources for extended study in the Bibliography at the end. In addition, a range of resources in different media have been made available online to accompany the updated Affirmations and this commentary on them at eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/relationships-matter

In what follows, all that we have emphasised regarding God’s creation ordinance of faithful monogamous heterosexual marriage, Jesus’ reiteration and intensification of that mandate, and the rest of the New Testament’s witness to it, should be borne in mind. It is also important to note that despite the often-repeated revisionist trope that Jesus had ‘nothing to say’ about same-sex sexual practice or partnerships, He more specifically condemned *porneiai* or ‘sexual immoralities’ in Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21, which would plainly have been understood in His Jewish cultural

context to have included same-sex sexual practices.⁴¹ That, too, should be noted as we now consider biblical texts that more explicitly address such practices.

Old Testament

Genesis 19:1–29

The first renunciation of same-sex sexual activity as such in the biblical canon is typically taken to occur in Genesis 19:1–29. Here, the ‘men of Sodom’ forcefully lust after two visitors to Lot’s house whom they assume to be males, but who are in fact angels. Indeed, the English term ‘sodomy’ is derived from this passage, denoting anal sex between men.

Most evangelical commentators now align with a more general scholarly consensus that the chief presenting sin here is in fact a gross breach of hospitality.⁴² The men of Sodom are obliged to protect Lot’s visitors but instead they treat them with contempt, indicating a selfish indulgence and disdain for the needy that prompts God to destroy their city (cf Ezekiel 16:49). Moreover, both the broader underlying context of God’s wrath here (Genesis 19:12–14) and Jesus’ later denunciation of Sodom in Matthew 10:14–15 and 11:20–24 suggest that it was also punished for even deeper-seated offences of idolatry, pride and rebellion.

For all this, evangelicals still tend to argue that this passage does bear some relevant implications for same-sex sexual practice today. Certain more liberal/revisionist scholars like Derrick Sherwin Bailey and John Boswell have gone so far as to deny *any* same-sex dimension here, claiming that in verse 5 the verb usually translated ‘know’ means simply ‘get acquainted with’ rather than ‘have sex with’.⁴³ Yet the context is one in which Lot himself seems to have viewed the desire of the men as sexual. There are also clear parallels between this account and that of the rape of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19:22, 25, which plainly uses the verb ‘know’ in a sexual way.⁴⁴ As a result, even the more generally gay-affirming Old Testament scholar Martti Nissinen is clear that “the sexual aspect of the actions of the men of Sodom cannot be gainsaid”, while the evangelical Robert Gagnon notes that “few scholars today, even among supporters of homoerotic behaviour” take the Bailey-Boswell view.⁴⁵

It is also pertinent from a canonical perspective that the New Testament text Jude 7 seems to regard Sodom’s sin as at least partly to do with wrongful sexual behaviour. The repudiation there might be more focused on the fact that sex with angels is condemned by God in Genesis 6:1–4. Yet as Gagnon, Stanley Grenz, Ian Paul and Kevin DeYoung all point out, the fact that the Sodomite men were unaware of the visitors’ angelic status means that it would be more cogent to see Jude as condemning *both* the same-sex sexual practice they intended *and* the intercourse with the ‘strange flesh’ of angels that would have resulted had their intentions been realised.⁴⁶

Clearly, however, the more specific act envisaged by the men of Sodom here is gang rape, and this calls into question any blanket application of it to the sort of non-violent, consenting same-sex unions that are primarily at issue in church debates today. That said, evangelicals have often emphasised that the word translated ‘abominations’ in the gloss on this text provided by Ezekiel 16:50 is used elsewhere in the Torah or Old Testament Law to condemn more general manifestations of homosexual activity. More specifically, in Richard Davidson’s terms, “that the opprobrium attached to the Sodomites’ intended activity involved not only rape but the inherent degradation of same-sex intercourse is confirmed by the intertextual linkages between this text, Ezekiel 16, and ‘the sexual ‘abominations’ mentioned in Levitical legislation”.⁴⁷ It is to that Levitical legislation that we turn next.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

These verses could conceivably refer to Canaanite cultic prostitution. If so, they would not be so directly relevant to the sort of faithful, loving same-sex relationships that most more liberal and ‘affirming’ churches would seek to endorse today.⁴⁸ Leviticus 18:22 is immediately preceded by a reference to idolatrous worship of Molech, which might seem to support this notion. In his influential revisionist study *Dirt, Greed and Sex*, Bill Countryman suggests that both texts are concerned specifically with breaches of Jewish purity laws defined in the Torah – laws that were intended to separate Jews from Gentiles, and that therefore no longer pertain under the New Covenant. Such laws included prohibitions on eating shellfish, donning mixed fabrics and sex during menstruation, none of which apply to Christians. In the same vein, Countryman argues that any condemnation of same-sex sexual practice here must be seen as confined to the Jewish ritual purity system, and as abrogated by the superseding of that system when the church was formed, and when Gentiles were admitted to it. Countryman’s case has significantly informed subsequent revisionist approaches to these texts, including those presented by Jeffrey John, Keith Sharpe and James Brownson.⁴⁹

Despite all this, classic evangelicals have retorted that the broader orientation of both chapters 18 and 20 of Leviticus is against *all* forms of ungodly sexual behaviour – incest, adultery and bestiality as well as same-sex sexual practice.⁵⁰ These are viewed as a threat to marriage and family, each of which, as noted above, plays a pivotal role in Hebrew culture and religion. They are deemed wrong not simply because pagan Canaanites indulged in them, but because God has pronounced them wrong as such.

In declaring, “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman”, Leviticus 18:22 seems to prohibit men from taking the ‘active’, penetrative role in same-sex sexual intercourse, even though this was deemed comparatively respectable in several contemporary cultures as compared to the ‘passive’ role. This verse also deploys the generic term ‘male’ rather than any more specific word for ‘man’ or ‘youth’, which again points to a more comprehensive understanding of same-sex sexual activity.⁵¹ Furthermore, the death penalty in 20:13 applies equally to the active and the passive partner. There is no implication of rape, in which case the rapist alone would have been executed (cf Deuteronomy 22:22–25) – nor even of more general coercion. Comparative literary study has revealed that the Assyrians outlawed forcible same-sex intercourse and that the Egyptians banned pederasty. Israel appears to have stood alone, however, in viewing homosexual acts in this more general sense with this degree of severity.⁵² The broader question raised by Countryman is whether this more generalised construal of these texts’ condemnation might still only apply to ancient Israel rather than to the church. Classic evangelicals would affirm that it applies to the church based on the pre-Mosaic creation ordinances of Genesis 1–2 discussed above,⁵³ and in relation to echoes of the language used here in Paul’s critique of homosexual practice in 1 Corinthians 6:9 (see below).

Of course, this leaves the question of whether the ethical repudiation of same-sex sexual practice here should still be tethered to the death penalty. Characteristically, classic evangelicals point to the fact that Jesus variously mitigated or abrogated the Torah’s punishments for breaches of morality but did not thereby deny that the actions condemned by the law were wrong. This, they propose, is most powerfully seen in Jesus’ challenge to the penalty of stoning for adultery in John 8:1–11, which He applied while nonetheless upholding the moral prohibition behind the penalty when telling the woman caught in adultery there: “Go now and leave your life of sin.” Not least among reformed evangelicals, this hermeneutical approach is linked to the concept that, while civil and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law are superseded by the New Covenant in Christ, the moral aspects of that Law are maintained for Christians.⁵⁴

Romans 1: 26–27

Romans 1 provides the fullest and most apparently comprehensive discussion of same-sex relationships in scripture. It is, for example, almost certainly the only biblical reference to lesbian sexual activity.⁵⁵ No doubt, the broader context of the passage is a globalising one: charged with expounding a gospel that now includes Gentiles, Paul is keen to highlight the equal status of all Christians with respect to salvation (verse 16), while at the same time showing the equality of all with respect to divine wrath and judgment (verse 18, cf 2:3).

Against this backdrop Paul writes in verses 26–27 of men and women “exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones”, and thereby bringing “degradation” and “punishment” upon themselves. This is in fact the third of three vital ‘exchanges’ that he presents – exchanges which demonstrate a healthy and an unhealthy construal of creation, and which are thus seen to derive not only from Israelite disobedience of the Mosaic Law but also from the pre-Mosaic fall of humanity as a whole. First, in verse 23 Paul states that the wicked characteristically “exchanged (*ēllaxan*) the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.” One thinks of the Israelites’ golden calf (Exodus 32), and clearly the second of the Ten Commandments against “graven images” looms large here (Exodus 20:4). But Paul quickly broadens his conception of idolatry to take in the first Commandment too, and with it, a second exchange: “they exchanged (*ēllaxan*) the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served *created things rather than the Creator*” (verse 25, cf Exodus 20:1–3, our emphasis). This, in turn establishes the framework for the third exchange of natural intercourse between men and women for “unnatural” intercourse between people of the same sex. That third exchange is even more explicitly construed in relation to creation and its despoliation by human sin and disobedience: Paul’s theological and moral reasoning here is profoundly defined by divine creation as depicted in Genesis and, more specifically, by the depiction of humanity made “male and female” in God’s image in Genesis 1:27, and called to procreate in the context of a “one flesh” union in Genesis 1:28 and 2:24. James Boswell might have argued that no full-blown system of creation-based ‘natural laws’ was institutionalised in civil society until “more than a millennium after Paul’s death”.⁵⁶ Yet the absence of such a *system* does not in itself denote the absence of laws and ordinances in a more implicit sense, or of an outlook which might see creation order as coincident with God’s prescription for sexual relationships.⁵⁷

This historic, creation-theological reading of male and female sexuality in Romans 1:26–27 is inferred from the broad contours of Paul’s discourse, and not, as ‘pro-gay’ apologists like Victor Furnish, Michael Vasey, Matthew Vines and Keith Sharpe would have it, from a dogmatic eisegesis of the single words ‘nature’ and ‘natural’ (*phusin, phusikēn*).⁵⁸ Nor would classic evangelical interpretation see it as plausible that those contours might be limited to specific, context-bound practices like pagan temple prostitution, pederasty or the transgression of marriage vows by unfaithful and excessively lustful heterosexual partners who indulge in same-sex sexual practices with others ‘for kicks’. If this *were* true, it would exempt what Jeffrey John calls “faithful, stable, permanent” gay and lesbian unions like same-sex marriages and civil partnerships from the divine prohibition that Paul portrays.⁵⁹ Granted, *phusin* and *phusikēn* might bear other meanings in scripture from time to time, but given the strength of Paul’s much wider ‘argument from creation’ here, classic evangelicals typically hold that it would take a quite extreme form of special pleading in this case to divorce ‘nature’ from Paul’s understanding of God’s universal and eternal intent for human beings in totality (cf verse 20). Besides, it is regularly pointed out that the notion of same-sex sexual practice *as in and of itself* ‘against nature’ or *para phusin* is found in several contemporary Graeco-Roman sources, and especially in that Hellenistic Jewish tradition with which Paul himself was associated.⁶⁰ Hence, as Preston Sprinkle sums it up: “Paul doesn’t say that certain types of

same-sex relations were taboo in his Graeco-Roman environment and therefore they are wrong. He says, or seems to assume, that what is wrong with same-sex relations transcends culture”.⁶¹

Incidentally, on this same basis, Romans 1 is taken to prohibit *bisexual* relations, since, as the 2003 Anglican Bishops’ report *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* made clear, these not only involve same-sex sexual practice as such, but engagement in such practice *along with* heterosexual sex, and thus a ‘putting asunder’ of the foundation of marriage *in* heterosexual sex, as affirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, and by Jesus in Matthew 19:1–12 and Mark 10:1–12.⁶²

Not least from a pastoral perspective, it is worth noting that God is multiply depicted in this passage as “giving people up” to the lusts of their hearts (verses 24, 26, 28). This implies that *all* forms of disordered sexual desire are a manifestation of sin that hardens us against the will of God as Creator. That destruction is thus as much to be regretted as castigated – a presenting symptom of a world estranged from its Maker, and a mark of that universal fallenness in which we all share. From this it is clear that sexual misconduct should not be singled out for particular scorn, even while it cannot be condoned. Indeed, the strength of Paul’s language here should not make us think that same-sex sexual conduct is the worst or only form of sinful behaviour. Paul may be highlighting it because it is a particularly vivid example of sin, or because it was especially pertinent for his readers in Rome given their cultural context. Yet as Sam Allbery emphasises: “It is important to recognise that Paul is talking here in social rather than individual terms. He is describing what happens to culture as a whole, rather than particular individuals. The presence of same-sex desire in some of us is not an indication that we’ve turned from God more than others. But it is a sign that humanity as a whole has done so. It is not the only sign, and in everyone there is no doubt more than one sign or another. But it is a sign that human nature has been changed from what God originally intended”.⁶³

1 Timothy 1:8–11 and 1 Corinthians 6:9

1 Timothy 1:8–11 stresses the need to integrate legal and doctrinal obedience (“the law is good”, verse 8) with “love which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (verse 5). Thus, while Paul is concerned here with contraventions of “sound doctrine”, he is also keen to stress pastoral care and integrity. As part of his list of those who commit such contraventions in verses 9–10, we encounter the word *arsenokoites*, which appears also in the similar Pauline list of vices found at 1 Corinthians 6:9–11.

Most translations and commentaries associate *arsenokoites* with practitioners of same-sex sexual acts. G W Knight and others argue that the sins catalogued in 1 Timothy 1:9–10 are a deliberate echo of the order of the second part of the Ten Commandments or Decalogue, and that within this framework those condemned as fornicators (*pornois*) and *arsenokoites* are seen as violating the seventh Commandment on adultery.⁶⁴ Thus, both same-sex *and* heterosexual dimensions of sexual immorality are dealt with here, and both are seen as undermining the sanctity of monogamous heterosexual marriage.

At first sight, precise interpretation of the word *arsenokoites* appears difficult, as there is no record of its use in pre-Christian literature. It is, however, a compound of two terms which carried familiar sexual connotations: *arsēn* was a specific word for male, but was often used in connection with male sexuality, while *koitēs* usually meant ‘bed’, but functioned as a widespread euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf our term *coitus*). Paul’s yoking of the two here therefore points strongly to a same-sex sexual dimension. In fact, *arsenokoites* seems most probably to have been coined by Paul in response to the vocabulary of the Septuagint version of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where its constituent terms appear as a translation of the Hebrew *mishkav zakur* (‘lying with a male’). Just

as they assert that the Levitical texts can be restricted to a condemnation of cultic prostitution or pederasty, revisionists like Dale Martin, Keith Sharpe and James Brownson suggest that Paul has the same narrower range of practices in view here, or that because 1 Corinthians 5–6, at least, is more generally concerned with Christians exploiting and litigating against one another, he is condemning sex that is itself exploitative in one way or another.⁶⁵ However, since we demonstrated above that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in fact have a broader application, and since Paul does seem to be framing the proscriptions listed here against the still pertinent proscriptions of the Decalogue, it would appear that he has a broader range of same-sex sexual practices in mind.⁶⁶

Thus, regarding the continuity of this passage with Old Testament prohibitions more generally, Preston Sprinkle offers a pithy summation: “The most fail-proof test to see if an Old Testament law is still valid for Christians is if it’s repeated in the New. Cheating, lying, stealing – it’s all repeated in the New Testament. Adultery, murder, drunkenness... it’s all there. But what about eating pork? Leviticus outlaws it, but the New Testament says that Christians don’t need to obey this law (cf Acts 10:9–23). The same goes for animal sacrifices. So are the [Levitical] commands against same-sex intercourse repeated in the New Testament?... Not only are Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 repeated in the New, but Paul uses a Greek word that appears to have been created directly from these two verses. In short: yes, the New Testament repeats the prohibitions against same-sex intercourse as it is described in Leviticus 18 and 20”.⁶⁷

In stating all this, it is important to stress that same-sex sexual practice here belongs to a diverse catalogue of sins – apparently no better, and no worse, than fornication, adultery, theft, greed, drunkenness, slander and robbery. While resisting the singling out of such practice for special condemnation, this also suggests that early church congregations contained what in more modern terms would be called lesbian or gay people (cf 1 Corinthians 6:11). Although some of these people might still have been sexually active, the clear teaching of Paul here is that continuing attachment to such activity, as to the other sinful practices he mentions, is incompatible with authentic participation in the community of God’s people.

Positive presentations of same-sex relationships? David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, the Centurion and his servant, Jesus and the beloved disciple

As we have seen, revisionists characteristically focus on seeking to prove either a) that apparently negative references to same-sex sexual activity and transgender in scripture are less negative than they appear; b) that they are only applicable to certain cultic, violent or exploitative forms of such activity; or c) that they are not about same-sex sexual activity at all. Also, however, some have suggested that more positive endorsement of same-sex sexual relationships might be inferred from certain biblical accounts of close friendships between people of the same sex.

In this vein, attention tends to focus on David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, the Centurion and his healed servant in Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10, and Jesus’s own relationship with the ‘beloved disciple’ in the fourth Gospel.

Keith Sharpe is especially keen to promote each of these relationships as actually or very probably homoerotic – albeit in some cases perhaps chastely so. In mooting this idea, he builds on earlier such suggestions made by Gerd Thiessen, Michael Vasey and others.⁶⁸ Despite his own commitment to an LGBT-affirming theology, Daniel Helminiak is more cautious, however – and properly so because, as he concedes in the case of the Centurion and servant episode, the pertinent vocabulary is simply too general and unspecific to allow any clear sexual inference.⁶⁹ Indeed, the word *pais* here more literally meant ‘boy’ as well as ‘servant’ or ‘slave’. Luke specifically identifies him as the latter (*doulos*), and in some instances younger servants and slaves were

deployed for sex, not least by senior military figures who might also have kept such male youths for this purpose on military campaigns. But young slaves and servants could have many *other* functions quite unrelated to sex, so this sexualised reading veers somewhere between speculation and wish fulfilment. Likewise, although Luke refers to the servant as “highly valued” (*entimos*) by the Centurion (7:2), this could relate to anything from the high price paid for him to the specialist skills in artisanship, education or combat that slaves and servants often exhibited. As Ian Paul notes, the exegetical moves made by more ambitious revisionist scholars here are similar to those applied to the David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi and beloved disciple discourses – that is, anachronistic eroticisations of what appear in socio-historical context to be much more obviously non-sexual bonds of kinship, friendship and fellowship.⁷⁰ Keith Sharpe’s suggestion of homoerotic relationships between Jesus, the beloved disciple and other male disciples has some precedent in the speculations of Martii Nissinen on the same front, but Robert Gagnon’s rebuttal of such speculation is stark. Firstly, he says, it ignores Jesus’ denunciation of *porneiai* in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 as cited above, which would have included the prohibition of such relationships. Secondly, it sidelines Jesus’ strong reaffirmation of heterosexual marriage as the proper, exclusive, divinely ordained context for sexual relationship in Matthew 19. Thirdly, it infers a baseless homoerotic connotation from Jesus’ endorsement of “eunuchs for the kingdom” in the same chapter. And fourthly, it downplays the fact that there is absolutely no evidence that Jesus construed the close friendship and fellowship He fostered with His male disciples in a homoerotically sexual way, or that He engaged in same-sex sexual relations with those disciples.⁷¹

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The preceding survey of biblical material has shown there to be a consistent witness throughout scripture that same-sex sexual practice is sinful as such, rather than only in certain configurations, cultural settings and historical periods. Such sinful behaviour is not uniquely wrong, but it is wrong, nonetheless. As with other sins, it is incompatible with life in the kingdom of God. Yet that need not be an end-point, but the beginning of a journey of repentance and holiness that finds renewed and fulfilled life in Jesus, who gave His own life on the cross for sinners of all kinds.

Homophobia

Concern for the serious consequences of unrepentant sin is right and proper, but it can lead some Christians to demonise those who manifest such sin, rather than seeking to share the truth of Christ with them in a loving and gracious way. In keeping with most other headline definitions, the *Oxford English Dictionary* has historically defined “homophobia” as “hatred or fear of homosexuals”.⁷² A fuller current definition describes it as “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or gay people”.⁷³ While there is an appropriately holy fear of God that deepens faith and understanding (Leviticus 25:17; Proverbs 1:7; Acts 9:31), fear and hatred of other humans can be powerful and destructive tendencies, against which Jesus warned often (Matthew 5:43–44; Luke 6:27; John 15:23; Matthew 8:26; 14:27; 17:7; 25:25; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:35; 20:19; 22:2). Indeed, the Jesus who assures and comforts sinful, fallen people with the words, “Do not be afraid” (Matthew 10:26; 28:10; John 14:27) is one with a divine Father whose hatred of sin inspires reverent fear.

Historically, these twin dynamics have prompted many evangelicals to suggest an approach to gay and lesbian people based on the nostrum of ‘loving the sinner’ while ‘hating the sin’. Although this slogan reflects biblical truth to a degree and has often been well meant, in practice the rejection of sexual activity as sinful has gained such priority that the pastoral imperative in the second half of the saying has been obscured, or simply abandoned. This has in turn fuelled mischaracterisations of the classic evangelical approach to same-sex attracted people as *intrinsically* hateful, fear-

mongering and destructive. By contrast, evangelicals, as people formed and shaped by the *good news* of Jesus, should themselves model good news to the world, as purveyors, again, of what Glynn Harrison terms the “better story” offered by God in Christ.⁷⁴ This means being willing to hold fellow evangelicals to account when they perpetrate genuinely ungodly homophobia – but it also means demonstrating that one can maintain a classic evangelical viewpoint on same-sex relationships that is genuinely motivated by love for God and for gay men, lesbians and others on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. It means bearing out that love in actions as well as in words – in hospitality and kindness towards LGBTQ+ identified people who already attend church, who are first-time visitors to church services, or who are not associated with church at all – from relatives, friends and colleagues to neighbours and casual acquaintances.

4. We encourage evangelical congregations to be communities of grace in which those who experience same-sex attraction and seek to live faithfully in accordance with biblical teaching are welcomed and affirmed. Such Christians need churches which are healthy communities where they are able to share and explore their stories with fellow believers for mutual encouragement and support, as we help each other grow together into maturity in Christ.

Attraction, desire and orientation

In the years since *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality* was published in 2012, and even more so since the first version of these Affirmations was issued as part of *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* in 1998, there has been significant growth in the awareness of Christians who experience same-sex attraction but who are committed to living faithful single lives in accordance with biblical teaching. Through the same period, the need for receptive communities of grace to support such Christians, as emphasised in this fourth Affirmation, has only increased. Back in 1998, the seventh Affirmation (below) confirmed that Christians with same-sex attraction should not be restricted from leadership positions simply on that basis; today, the UK network and Evangelical Alliance member organisation Living Out has given a more co-ordinated voice to such leaders, as well as to others in churches who are seeking to live with same-sex attraction in chastity and holiness.⁷⁵

Core to Affirmation four here is an understanding of the nature of attraction, and more specifically of its relation to desire and orientation. Sexual attraction is part of what informs our experience of ourselves and our interactions with others. It affects our personality, desires and emotions and, as such, is part of the context in which we are called to discern what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ. In a theological, as distinct from a legal sense, ‘orientation’ is characteristically applied to sexual attraction rather than sexual practice – and as such, is something that at its simplest could be defined as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. However, sub-divisions of sexuality have now proliferated far beyond that basic grid. Back in the late 1940s, the pioneer of sexuality research Alfred Kinsey collaborated with Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin to propose a seven-point scale of attraction ranging from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual.⁷⁶ Today, as discussed above, the fusion of sexual and gender identities that queer theory has done so much to promote has famously influenced Facebook and others to define upwards of 70 different genders, with an accompanying diversification of implied attractions.⁷⁷

Despite these developments, in 2014 the UK’s Royal College of Psychiatrists noted that while “it is not the case that sexual orientation is immutable or might not vary to some extent in a person’s life”, sexual orientation “for most people seems to be set around a point that is largely heterosexual or homosexual”.⁷⁸ There is limited scientific evidence for how many people experience a degree

of change in sexual orientation during their lifetime, and to what extent – although it does appear that a minority do seem to experience some fluidity, while others of older years testify to a lessening in the intensity of same-sex attraction experienced when they were younger.⁷⁹ From a biblical viewpoint, however, these are *descriptive* observations of what appears to be the case in an imperfect, fallen world; they do not in themselves detract from God’s *prescriptive* ordering of right sexual relationships around monogamous heterosexual marriage. Indeed, from that same biblical perspective, heterosexual desire might be felt similarly by various men and women *as desire per se*, but might be differently *directed* towards faithful marriage, fornication, incest, adultery or paedophilia – only the first of which, as we saw in the preceding section, is deemed godly in scripture. Similarly, same-sex sexual desire might be experienced comparably *as desire* by promiscuous gay men and lesbians, by monogamously partnered same-sex couples, or by committedly celibate or abstinent same-sex attracted Christians – but only the latter would conform to biblical teaching.

All this said, it is worth noting again here, as we have already noted above, that evangelicals disagree among themselves as to whether same-sex attraction is inherently sinful even if not enacted, whether it is a form of temptation rather than of sin, whether it is morally neutral, or whether it can function constructively in certain cases within an abstinent or celibate Christian’s life. Ed Shaw, ministry director of Living Out, certainly suggests that the latter of these options might apply as long as same-sex attraction is processed as a celebration of God-given beauty rather than as an indulgence in lust: “We need to appreciate, increasingly, that any time we’re instinctively attracted to another human being is a call to worship – a call to worship the Creator of the beauty, not the bearer of it... I want to honestly recognize that my track record is one of idolatry, of worshipping another creature than the Creator. But the experience can do me good if I end up worshipping, instead, the God whose greater beauty I have just caught a brief glimpse of”.⁸⁰

Identity and sexuality

Considering orientation and attraction along these lines in turn affects how celibate or abstinent Christians who are attracted to members of the same sex might themselves define and present that attraction. This is unavoidably linked to issues of identity and definition, and to whether it might ever be appropriate for such Christians to identify themselves as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ (or, indeed, as ‘BTQ+’, although as previously noted, the focus of this report is on the ‘L’ and ‘G’ descriptors).

Forging common identities with others can often go hand in hand with a desire for political solidarity, lobbying or agitation – and this has certainly been the case with many of those self-identified as lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, etc as they have fought for social and legal acceptance, affirmation and equality in relation to those identities. Yet, for this same reason, many classic evangelicals have rejected the terms ‘gay’ and/or ‘lesbian’ for themselves, on the basis that they see their same-sex attraction as a fallen inclination to be managed individually under God’s guidance, rather than as a positive, divinely-endowed good to be celebrated and promoted. For others, ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’ function more neutrally, rather as one might describe oneself as a British Christian or a French Christian, or as a young or old Christian. What clearly matters in either case, however, is that the relevant same-sex attracted person’s prime and eternal identity should be in Jesus Christ rather than in their sexual orientation.

It is also important to understand different evangelical approaches to this issue and to appreciate more precisely why they can reach subtly different conclusions.⁸¹ The following two testimonies from committed classic evangelicals bear this out:

“The new me no longer identifies as gay.” – Jonathan Berry

...being in Christ is infinitely more important than who we are sexually attracted to. So the old me, aged seventeen, identified myself as gay; it was an important aspect of my identity. But the new me no longer identifies as gay. The new me is a new creation in Christ. This essential truth now defines me. Brad, a gay friend of mine from California, believes that I'm denying who I really am by not calling myself gay, and not acting on my sexual attractions. One time, only half-joking, he called me a 'self-homophobe' (don't worry: I've been called much worse). Obviously, I disagree with him. I've tried to explain to Brad that gay is not really who I am. No, 'who I am' is a follower of Jesus who happens to be same-sex attracted. I certainly don't deny that. But the essential me is rooted 'in Christ', not in my sexual attractions.⁸²

"I am a celibate gay Christian." – David Bennett

Christians, all Christians, are being made holy. We aren't yet perfect. We still experience the attractions of our old self. Yet because of Christ, we can live in victory. God does not wave a magic wand and remove our desires – at least, that is not the normative experience. It is equally wrong to endorse or to deny the presence of fallen desires, and that is why I call myself a gay or same-sex attracted celibate Christian...The word gay does not necessarily refer to sexual behaviour; it can just as easily refer to one's sexual preference or orientation and nothing, one way or the other, about how one is choosing to express that orientation. So whereas 'stealing Christian' describes a believer who actively steals as an acted behaviour, 'gay Christian' may simply refer to one's orientation and nothing more. This is why I rarely, if ever, use the phrase gay Christian without adding the adjective celibate, meaning committed to a life of chasteness in Christ. To call myself a celibate gay Christian specifies both my sexual orientation and the way I'm choosing to live it out.⁸³

5. We believe the acceptance by certain churches of same-sex marriage and other forms of sexual relationships outside monogamous heterosexual marriage, and permitting the ordination to ministry of those in such relationships, is incompatible with biblical teaching. We stand prayerfully with those in such churches who are seeking to resist these moves on biblical grounds.

6. We believe church services that institute or bless same-sex marriages, same-sex civil partnerships and any other forms of sexual relationship outside monogamous heterosexual marriage are unbiblical. We believe that no church leader or congregation should be compelled to perform or participate in such services.

Same-sex marriage

As noted in the introduction, the most prominent social change that has spurred the revision of the Affirmations on sexuality here has been the introduction of same-sex marriage in England and Wales in 2013, in Scotland in 2014, and in Northern Ireland in 2020.⁸⁴ This followed the adoption of same-sex civil partnerships across the UK from 2004.⁸⁵

Affirmations five and six address how evangelical churches might best respond to this momentous legal shift, and how they might more particularly acknowledge the pressure experienced by evangelical leaders, members and adherents in certain more 'mixed' denominations to accept same-sex marriages, and/or to conduct/facilitate weddings between same-sex couples. Unsurprisingly, certain church networks and congregations have accommodated their theology and practice to affirm same-sex marriage as a civic institution authorised by the state, while others have produced prayers and liturgies for the active blessing and solemnisation of same-sex marriages on their own premises.

In this altered landscape, our focus as evangelicals needs to remain on the primary authority of scripture, and on what the Holy Spirit reveals to us through scripture about how God is working in the world today. As the Evangelical Alliance's Basis of Faith makes clear, scripture is our supreme, fully trustworthy guide for faith and conduct.⁸⁶ As such, we have been emphasising here that the Bible articulates a remarkably consistent picture of godly marriage as between one man and one woman for life, to the exclusion of all others. On that basis, we continue to hold that churches who endorse or seek to endorse same-sex sexual activity – even within same-sex marriage – do so in divergence from the teaching of scripture. While acknowledging that same-sex marriage now accords legal rights and protections to gay and lesbian couples on par with those conferred on heterosexual married couples, we continue to insist that the covenant of marriage as God intended, and as the Bible confirms, cannot include same-sex sexual unions, however much they might appear to exhibit the permanence, fidelity and stability associated with biblical marriage.⁸⁷

Globally, the vast majority of churches also continue to share this orthodox understanding of sexuality and marriage, despite significant divergence on other issues of theology and practice – including the Roman Catholic Church, the eastern Orthodox churches, and most members of the Baptist World Alliance, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Communion of Reformed Churches – as well as all those affiliated to the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pentecostal World Fellowship. From the 1980s, however, certain denominations within the UK began more formally to consider the endorsement of same-sex relationships, including the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland. This trend was replicated in various other denominations in certain western countries, including the USA, Canada and Australia.⁸⁸ Typically, the movement from consideration to actual endorsement has proved lengthy and fractious but, as we publish these updated Affirmations with this commentary in 2025, the URC, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the British Quakers have institutionally approved the marriage of same-sex couples within the UK,⁸⁹ while the Church in Wales has allowed blessings for legally married and civilly partnered same-sex couples and the Church of England has approved such blessings in principle, subject to the use of prayers for them on a provisional basis.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the Baptist Union of Great Britain has resisted its congregations' either conducting or blessing same-sex marriages, albeit only after the sort of protracted and divisive debate that has marked such ecclesiastical deliberations elsewhere.⁹¹ Mostly, denominations that have affirmed such same-sex marriages and blessings have allowed 'local options' or 'conscience clauses' by which individual ministers, congregations, presbyteries and districts can 'opt out' of performing them. Inevitably, however, once the majority moves in a more affirming direction, it becomes harder for classic evangelicals to operate effectively at any more than a local or parochial level, meaning that they and other classic/non-affirming leaders and churches risk isolation and marginalisation within their wider church structures. Indeed, contention over this issue has led to significant schism in some contexts, not least across the Atlantic, where the Anglican Church of North America and other new Anglican networks have broken away from the US Episcopal Church as a result of its approval of same-sex marriage.⁹²

It is particularly worth noting the complicated position of the Church of England in all of this, given its established status and cultural profile in England, and given its continued influence within the UK parliament through its senior bishops' membership of the House of Lords. While the official doctrine of the Church of England remains that marriage is between a man and woman, in late 2023 its bishops backed prayers of blessing for same-sex couples, ostensibly for a 'trial period' and not as full-blown services or liturgies.⁹³ These changes came about after a 'Living in Love and Faith' consultation which had taken several years, and which had led to increasing unease among many

classic evangelicals within and beyond the Church of England – including members and supporters of the Church of England Evangelical Council – that it was diverging from biblical orthodoxy on this issue.⁹⁴ As things stand, it is unclear what sort of pastoral provision might be made for those who disagree with these developments, and some Church of England parishes and networks are mobilising on their own account to challenge them in law, and/or to operate semi-autonomously over against affirming bishops, dioceses and protocols.⁹⁵

Same-sex attraction and leadership

As well as reiterating the classic evangelical position on marriage, these two Affirmations make two further important points. Firstly, they make it clear that, in line with the conviction that same-sex sexual activity is sinful, the ordination to ministry or the appointment to other church leadership posts of those in such relationships should also be considered to be unbiblical.

This said, it is important that churches are consistent in their requirements for ministry, and do not single out same-sex sexual activity as a barrier when they would not do the same for other actions that are part of a persistent sinful lifestyle. It is also vital, as noted in Affirmation seven below, that Christian leaders who are same-sex attracted but committed to refraining from such activity are not treated with suspicion or intrusive enquiry in a manner that would not be true for other single or married leaders.

The second further point following from these two Affirmations is the commitment to stand in solidarity with Christian leaders upholding this biblical approach in denominations that support same-sex relationships. No Christian leader should be required to conduct services or offer prayers of blessing for same-sex marriages or civil partnerships that they do not consider compatible with biblical teaching. As things stand, we are not aware of circumstances where leaders in the UK have been compelled to provide such services or blessings. Even so, we will remain vigilant on this cardinal principle of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, in line with the Evangelical Alliance's long-standing commitment to religious freedom and toleration.⁹⁶ To that end, we stand ready to support anyone who is required to act against their conscience in this area.

Jeanette's story

I had this parallel life going on: one where I'd met the woman of my dreams, and then meeting God for the first time... I delayed becoming a Christian because of my dilemma with the relationship on one hand, and knowing that if God was who He said He was, I had to go by His guidelines, His rules, His everything... In the end, I decided God was who He said He was, and I stopped the relationship. Part of being open about my sexuality and certainly my past life meant that I had to tell my congregation. So, with the pastor's permission, I stood up on Sunday morning and asked forgiveness for not presenting the true Jeanette. I explained that I had difficulties with my sexuality, that I had homosexual attractions and temptations. And as one, the congregation stood to their feet, applauded me and said: 'Whatever help you need, we will support you'.

7. We commend and encourage all those who experience same-sex attraction and have committed themselves to chastity by refraining from same-sex sexual practice. We believe they should be eligible for ordination and leadership within the church, recognising that they can bring invaluable insights and experience to the sphere of Christian pastoral ministry.

Supporting people who are attracted to those of the same sex must begin with an acknowledgement that they will have different understandings, experiences and challenges arising from that orientation. For all those differences, however, we have made it clear that same-sex attracted people have innate value as those made alike in God's image, loved by Him, and worthy of loving reception and support from others.

We have also made it clear that same-sex sexual *behaviour* is incompatible with God's will. The example of Jesus Himself, from Matthew 19:11–12, and the teaching and testimony of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:1–16, show that abstinent or celibate singleness are entirely valid, God-given expressions of faithful discipleship alongside monogamous heterosexual marriage. Noting the witness of Jesus in Matthew 22:30 that “at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage” but will be “like the angels in Heaven”, the evangelical ethicist Oliver O'Donovan has perceptively observed that “[The New Testament church] conceived of marriage and singleness as alternative vocations, each a worthy form of life, the two together comprising the whole Christian witness... The one declared that God had vindicated the order of creation, the other pointed beyond to its eschatological transformation. In other words, marriage points to Genesis, singleness to Revelation”.⁹⁷

For some Christians, commitment to chaste singleness is a response to finding that they are same-sex attracted. Whether or not they identify as 'gay' or 'lesbian' in *orientation* – and we have already explored different approaches to that issue, too – such Christians would reject gay or lesbian sexual practice. This is not by any means an easy path, and we are grateful that the Evangelical Alliance counts among its member organisations both Living Out and True Freedom Trust, who support and encourage same-sex attracted Christians who have either committed themselves to pursue singleness as a lifelong vocation, or as the life-pattern God wishes them to follow unless or until heterosexual marriage might become possible for them.⁹⁸ Testimonies from these two organisations' leaders, members and supporters are moving and humbling.⁹⁹

Vaughan's story

I don't regard [being same-sex attracted] as my identity; it's just part of my experience of life. But my fundamental identity is as a Christian. That's who I am, and that determines how I want to live my life... God's teaching about sex is both marvellous and challenging for everyone. I don't think it's hard just for those who are attracted to the same sex. There is a particular challenge for those who are never attracted to the other sex, and who might find it hard to imagine they will ever get married to [someone of the other sex]. That could sound unfair, but we're all broken, and in the midst of the brokenness Jesus Christ has come close, and God works in and through brokenness and ultimately will heal it... God comes to those who are poor, to those who acknowledge their need of Him, and I think my experience of same-sex attraction is that it has made it a bit easier for me to acknowledge that I need God, I'm broken, I'm not a perfect person. I think I'm better at understanding the brokenness of others as well – I probably get that in a way I might not (otherwise). I've also had the huge privilege of many deep friendships... So while it might seem strange to say it, although there's been real pain in being same-sex attracted, I'm very grateful to God for what He's done in and through it. (Vaughan Roberts, Pastor, Oxford)¹⁰⁰

Ansunel's story

... [F]our years into my university degree, living far away from home, I was trying to keep my head above water with my never-ending studies. I'd made a handful of good friends and one day decided to share some news with them that I believed was wonderful – I'd entered into my first same-sex

relationship. My friends reacted with boisterous support and even elation. I received statements of affirmation like 'love is love' and 'Ah, don't worry. The Bible is an old book that is no longer relevant today'... And yet, something jarred within me. I was constantly and uncomfortably aware of a small voice of conviction of sin in my heart, but I ignored it...

A few weeks later, I sat with my aunt at the dinner table and shared with her about my same-sex relationship. The words came out much more carefully than with my friends. Being from an older generation, I was worried that she would condemn me into the fiery pit for my behaviour. To my relief, she listened intently and patiently. Then she slowly said: "Thank you for opening up to me. I can imagine this must be hard for you. I want you to know that we love you no matter what. Our door is always open with a warm welcome waiting inside. We will not be treating you any differently than before. Yet, I believe it's important that I stand on the truth of the word of God. It tells me that engaging in same-sex relationships is wrong." At this, my shoulders relaxed, as my stomach tied itself in knots...

In hindsight, I am so grateful that my aunt's statement was loving in its truth. It was evident that explaining scripture was more loving toward me, than saying she loved me a hundred times. This question has been answered for me – how am I, and how is the church, to live distinctively? We are called to abide in God's word, seeking to flourish in truth and grace. We are called to stand on the truth and still show up. We are called to love our neighbour as we ourselves want to be loved. I am both inspired and challenged by what people from one gay community had to say about Pastor Edward Dobson after he'd reached out to them in service: 'We understand where you stand, and know that you do not agree with us. But you still show the love of Jesus, and we're drawn to that'.¹⁰¹ Can the world say that of us today? Are we committed to being a people who display the same love that Jesus showed, regardless of our cultural, political or sexual orientation?¹⁰²

Tim's story

This August I will be having a ceremony to dedicate myself to a life of singleness. A ceremony like this is not a common thing. I've heard of one or two people who have done something similar, most notably Kate Wharton, who was on the leadership team of New Wine for some years. But it's certainly unconventional, so I'd like to talk about why I'm doing this...

In my younger teens, I noticed that I was physically attracted to (very few) boys/men, but didn't think much of it. When I was about 15... my desire to be in a romantic relationship became a bit of an obsession and I ended up developing a crush for one of my friends at school. At the age of 16–17, neither of us handled it particularly well. We fell out, but eventually made up, yet I still felt this massive emptiness inside. I thought that only a boyfriend could fill it and bring me happiness...

When I was 18, during the summer after leaving school/college, I was finding singleness really difficult. At a Christian festival, I called out to God, asking how much longer I could take living like this. Suddenly, God said that all this stuff I was worrying about didn't really matter. I was so loved by Him, by my family and friends, and a complete person as I was. This love inside me could be directed towards others, and, most of all, towards the God who loves me more than I could ever comprehend. That was a real turning point in my life... I've been living with that revelation ever since. I admit it has been challenging and I have developed romantic feelings for someone over that time. Nevertheless, singleness is my calling. So, why have a ceremony? There are three main reasons I want to do this.

The first is that although I've been living this way for a few years, I want to make a formal commitment before God to say this is the life that I'm going to lead for Him. Secondly, I can have

an opportunity to show my non-Christian friends what God has done for me. With some of my Christian friends and family who have had weddings, they've invited people who usually wouldn't set foot inside a church. They came to church for a wedding and experienced love and welcome. I'd be delighted to invite my friends to the church I've grown up in and pray that they will feel the Holy Spirit through the service. The third reason I want a ceremony is to publicly show people that a single life is a valid option... I'm choosing to live a life of commitment to Jesus, which will involve great sacrifice, but will also bring me untold riches and joy. God has taken me on a wonderful adventure so far, and I'm looking forward to seeing what else He has in store for me, as I enter the next chapter of my life.

As the above testimonies and others like them affirm, chaste, single, same-sex attracted disciples of Christ can bring particular gifts and insights to the life of faith – and in some cases those gifts and insights can be fruitfully applied in public ministry. In no way should singleness itself be a bar to consideration for such ministry; by the same token, the biblical disciplines and standards of sexual propriety and fidelity to God's word that we have reaffirmed here should apply to the selection of *all* people for Christian leadership, including those who are same-sex attracted.

To reiterate: celibacy is a lifelong vocation or commitment to singleness in which the celibate person undertakes to devote time, energy and affection to a life of godly prayer, service and mission that might otherwise have been expressed sexually in relationship with another and, potentially, within a married family. Abstinence is a discipline of faithful obedience that entails refraining from sexual intercourse unless or until a heterosexual marital relationship becomes possible. Both forms of singleness are in turn versions of biblical chastity, which is a term more broadly applied to all Christian lifestyles that confirm to biblical sexual ethics, whether those pursuing them are heterosexually oriented, same-sex attracted, bisexually or otherwise inclined.

8. We affirm the work of those helping Christians who experience same-sex attraction and who want to live in accordance with biblical teaching. Such pastoral support may involve prayer and counselling and must be done in a responsible, consensual, and non-coercive way. We acknowledge that some people have experienced changes in their sexual attractions, with or without such support, though this outcome is not necessary for Christian faithfulness and should not be promised.

Support for those experiencing same-sex attraction

Pastoral support should be available from churches to help all people, regardless of their sexuality. Churches should be places of generosity and warmth, while also encouraging those who attend and commit to them to live lives aligned with Christ – lives that grow in likeness to Him (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Such pastoral support is a key aspect of Christian discipleship and ministry, and it should include help for those seeking of their own volition to refrain from sexual activity outside monogamous heterosexual marriage and to live a fulfilled and flourishing way as a single person – either until a marriage partner of the opposite sex arises at some point, or for the whole of life if the person in question has committed him or herself to celibacy. In some cases, as in Vaughan's testimony above, and as echoed in Tim's story, such a commitment to celibacy might stem from recognition by the person concerned that they find it "hard to imagine they will ever get married" to an opposite-sex partner due to the persistence of their same-sex attraction and their ongoing lack of attraction to people of the other sex. For the avoidance of doubt: support offered to those pursuing abstinence

or celibacy is a legitimate means of enabling individuals who choose to live freely in these ways. It cannot and should not involve coercion or manipulation, nor should it entail unwarranted promises about the eradication of unwanted sexual feelings or desires.

Pastoral support for same-sex attracted people – as for any person – is not authentic, Christ-like support if it is coercive, manipulative or misleading. Hence, insofar as what is often called ‘reparative therapy’ or ‘conversion therapy’ exhibits these characteristics, this eighth Affirmation repudiates it. This is distinct, however, from help offered to those who voluntarily seek appropriate prayer, counselling and guidance as they strive to live out their own commitment to chaste singleness in the light of experiencing same-sex attraction. As Ed Shaw notes:

It all comes down to Jesus. I am willing to forgo a permanent, faithful, stable same-sex sexual relationship in the here and now because I am already enjoying a permanent, faithful, stable relationship with Him in all His beauty. A relationship that will, one day, be perfectly consummated in the new Heavens and new earth. His is the truest vision of life that I know, and so I’m willing to put my trust in Him.¹⁰³

Choosing personally to abstain from sexual activity or to embrace celibacy due to persistent, unwanted same-sex attraction is one thing – whether undertaken with or without therapeutic help. Therapeutic action to help someone actively *change* the direction of their same-sex attraction towards a heterosexual orientation is a somewhat different matter, and it is one of the most controversial aspects of current debate on religion and sexuality. Some have undoubtedly experienced significant harm from it in the past. The Evangelical Alliance has consistently supported attempts to end abusive and coercive conversion therapy practices while ensuring people can receive the prayer and spiritual support they choose.

Therefore, the use of ‘conversion’ as a pejorative catch-all denouncement of *any* ministry focused on enabling a potential shift in *any* person’s sexual orientation is problematic on two counts. Firstly, it belies the very point highlighted above, corroborated by sex researchers since Kinsey, and ironically asserted with such confidence in queer theory – namely, that the strength and direction of sexual preferences can change through time, and that they are thus to a greater or lesser extent ‘fluid’ for certain people. The notion that such change and fluidity can apply to *all other shifts* within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and from heterosexuality towards *any point* in that spectrum, but *never* from same-sex attraction towards heterosexuality, is illogical, incoherent and factually belied by the testimonies of both Christians and non-Christians alike who have, in fact, moved in that direction of their own free will, with contentment and fulfilment.

Two of the most prominent such Christian testimonies in recent years are those of the formerly lesbian gender studies professor Rosaria Butterfield, and the formerly lesbian rap artist, Jackie Hill Perry – both of whom are now married to men, with whom they have had children.¹⁰⁴ Beyond the church, the prominent gay screenwriter and spokesperson Russell T Davies’ 2001 drama *Bob and Rose* depicted a gay man falling in love with a woman, while the author and singer of the hit 1978 anthem ‘Glad to Be Gay’, Tom Robinson, later married and had children with a woman. Granted, both Davies and Robinson would deny that the shifts in sexuality entailed in these cases were diametric conversions from ‘gay to straight’, and have instead presented them as movements from a gay to a bisexual or queer identity.¹⁰⁵ Yet if such movements towards fulfilled heterosexual relationships from a wholly or predominantly gay or lesbian lifestyle are accepted as possible, it makes no sense to insist that absolutely no one else could freely make and own a journey from same-sex attraction to a monogamous heterosexual relationship based on an exclusively or predominantly heterosexual orientation. Indeed, such a blanket insistence would amount to a

serious denial of the personal freedom, agency and religious liberty of Christians like Butterfield and Hill Perry.

Again, to be clear: this does not detract from the need for classic evangelicals to take seriously the testimonies of those who have experienced coercive or abusive attempts to change their orientation. This includes some nurtured within classic evangelicalism who have recounted significant damage caused to their own confidence, health and esteem by ‘gay conversion therapy’ or ‘reparative therapy’, and on that basis have expressed their determination to see it banned by the UK government. Yet, while being vigilant in eliminating ungodly and unbiblical therapeutic and pastoral practice in this sphere, questions are still begged at the *legislative* level by how precisely ‘conversion therapy’ is to be defined, and particularly by whether its definition might become so expansive as to threaten the freedom of Christians to choose how they wish to live as Christians, and whom they wish to engage in helping them do so.

In 2018, a government survey of the LGBTQ+ community in Britain presented statistics on those who had undergone or been offered conversion therapy. In that survey, conversion therapy was framed in line with a recent Memorandum of Understanding signed by various UK health organisations, which had defined it very broadly as: “an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual’s expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis”.¹⁰⁶

Shortly after the 2018 survey was published, the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced that steps would be taken to ban conversion therapy.¹⁰⁷ Despite this intent, a House of Commons update on the issue in February 2024 confirmed that although “successive administrations” had since committed to making conversion therapy illegal, such efforts remained in a “state of flux”.¹⁰⁸ That flux was due, it noted, to disagreement about whether the issue might better be addressed through non-legislative measures, and about whether it should include safeguards around both sexual orientation and gender identity, or just sexual orientation. Importantly from an evangelical point of view, it also indicated that various government attempts to revisit the issue since 2018 had been affected by concerns that any ban based on too wide-reaching a definition of conversion therapy might have a “chilling effect” on key rights and freedoms, including “rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights... particularly the Article 8 right to private and family life; the Article 9 right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and the Article 10 right to freedom of expression”.¹⁰⁹ Similarly to the May administration, the new UK Labour government elected in July 2024 committed itself to enacting “a full trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices” – albeit “while protecting the freedom for people to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity”.¹¹⁰ As previously, the two parts of this commitment reveal that the legislative complexities and rights-related tensions around such a “full” ban remain very challenging.

Quite apart from these problems of definition, more radical advocates for criminalisation of conversion therapy appear to assume that anyone who opts – even voluntarily – for pastoral support, prayer or advice that might fall within the most expansionist codification of it will *inevitably* or *most probably* be harmed as a result. A 2017 report by the classic evangelical-turned-affirming evangelical Oasis Trust, entitled *In The Name Of Love: The Church, Exclusion And LGB Mental Health Issues*,¹¹¹ gained attention when it suggested compelling causalities between classic evangelical/classic Christian ministry and poor mental health outcomes and suicide among lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians. Yet, as Peter Ould demonstrated in a review of the report, any evidence adduced for this link was purely anecdotal and suppositional, and the pertinent empirical

studies were not cited. Indeed, Ould's survey of such studies by Barnes and Meyer (2013) and Lease *et al.* (2005) showed that, if anything, what they called 'conservative' or non-affirming churches had improved rather than worsened the mental health of the LGB people who had joined them, whereas the affirming faith experiences of LGB Christians in liberal churches had seemed to have had no direct effect on their mental health.¹¹²

These studies did not specifically investigate whether conversion therapy featured in most, some or any of the classic evangelical churches concerned, yet while hard statistical evidence of net benefits or harms related to such therapy is limited and debated, classic evangelicals will need to remain informed of parliamentary developments on this front to ensure that genuinely harmful, coercive and exploitative therapies and practices are properly censured while sensitive, mutually agreed prayer and ministry support continues to be permitted, in keeping with the UK's historic protection of key personal and religious freedoms.¹¹³

More specifically, while Core Issues Trust and certain other ministries focused on those with unwanted same-sex attraction continue to offer forms of what the 2018 government report would call conversion therapy, others like Living Out have distanced themselves from it, based on their conviction that homosexuality in itself is not an illness, that gay or lesbian orientation *as such* is not a sin, and that "godliness is not heterosexuality".¹¹⁴ This has caused some disagreement within the classic evangelical community, born of long-standing differences we have already summarised on the continuities and discontinuities between sexual dispositions, temptations and sins.¹¹⁵ In terms of the wider consequences or outcomes that might be expected from faithful Christian discipleship with respect to sexuality, however, Living Out express a shared and definitive conviction of classic evangelicalism when they state that "the real goal" has to be "sexual purity expressed either in fulfilled marriage or in fulfilled singleness", where neither is regarded as better or more holy than the other.¹¹⁶ While classic evangelicals might disagree on the best means by which to attain such sexual purity for those who are same-sex attracted, it is clear that we must be realistic about the prospects of those who do have same-sex attraction being able to move towards a heterosexual orientation – even if that is their sincere desire. Overall, recent medical studies show that while so-called 'sexual orientation change efforts' (SOCE) can have *some* moderate effect in some circumstances, that effect is not sufficient to warrant any sort of promise or guarantee of re-orientation.¹¹⁷

9. We believe that sexual relations outside marriage without repentance, and public promotion of such activity, are inconsistent with faithful church membership. While processes of membership and discipline differ from one church context to another, we affirm that churches should be free to follow these processes in relation to those who engage in, or promote, sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage.

10. We encourage evangelical congregations to love and welcome all people, whatever their pattern of sexual behaviour. We are called to be communities of gentleness, patience and ongoing pastoral care in which all of us who are living outside God's purposes will come in due course to see the need to be transformed and live in accordance with biblical revelation and orthodox church teaching.

Creating communities of disciples

Churches are not closed societies for the already perfect, but sanctuaries for sinners seeking salvation by grace through faith. As Paul indicates, however sudden and dramatic a conversion

experience might have precipitated it, that salvation is to be worked out over time, with “fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). With this sobering biblical reality in mind, churches should, of all places, provide a humble, winsome welcome to everyone who comes into their midst with a desire to know more of God – however faint or flawed that desire might initially be. Sadly, as we have acknowledged, such essential humility, winsomeness and hospitality has too frequently been suspended or diluted by evangelicals where those in their midst have been same-sex attracted. This basic level of welcome should not be offered or withheld depending on whether the same-sex attracted person is sexually active or not; if that were the case, Jesus’ own willingness to engage with those deemed sexually immoral would itself have been wrong (cf John 4:1–30; 7:53–8:11; also, possibly Luke 7:36–50, cf Matthew 21:31). This fundamental imperative of hospitality informs Affirmation ten, and it should underpin all that we might then go on to say about sanctification, the moral standards to be expected of full church membership, and the strictures that might accompany church discipline. In this sense, it could seem strange that Affirmation ten follows Affirmation nine here. Yet even where such standards and strictures might be warranted, the greater goal of love, restoration and renewal in Christ should never be neglected (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3–4; Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 12:7–12; James 5:19–20; 3 John 9–10). That, therefore, is the note on which the Affirmations end.

Yet, while gentleness and patience should mark our individual and communal character as disciples and church communities, the integrity of the church does depend on ensuring that, however specific denominations and congregations might choose to organise themselves ecclesologically, core biblical ethics should inform their criteria for membership and/or active participation in their leadership and decision-making processes.

Since its formation 18 decades ago, the Evangelical Alliance has typically refrained from pronouncing on how particular church bodies and networks should order their own ministry, membership and disciplinary procedures. Yet, because sexual ethics are so fundamental to God’s ordering of creation, we do still believe it important to reiterate in Affirmation nine here the basic principle the Evangelical Alliance expressed in the 1998 and 2012 reports – namely, that long-term engagement in and/or promotion of a same-sex sexual relationship or relationships is incompatible with church membership and/or full participation in the ministry and mission of a church. To be clear: this need not, and indeed *should* not, detract from the more general grace and kindness that scripture calls us to extend to those who attend church. But active *membership* and *representation* of the church as an ambassador of Christ is not unconditional. While the church is a society of sinners, and while it should allow space for exploration and debate on difficult issues, it is also a society of sinners who are called to holiness. And while the pursuit of such holiness may continue to be hampered by sin, the *trajectory* of that pursuit does need to be commonly defined in relation to scriptural teaching – not least in relation to something as consistent and foundational as the Bible’s teaching on fidelity within monogamous heterosexual marriage and chaste singleness outside it.

We do not underestimate the particular challenge that this might present to sexually active same-sex couples, some of whom may now be in state-sanctioned marital unions or civil partnerships, and who in certain cases might have children. Again: evangelical churches should welcome and lovingly engage with such couples, and with their children, as with all same-sex attracted people. Yet, as they do so, it would be disingenuous of us as an Evangelical Alliance holding in all sincerity to a classic evangelical position on this issue if we were to deny what we believe to be the call of the gospel with regard to sexual behaviour. As the former chair of the Evangelical Alliance’s Theological Advisory Group, Steve Holmes, suggests, different classic evangelical churches might work out their specific pastoral support and nurture of those already committed to same-sex marriages, civil unions and households with children in different ways. For Holmes,

historic analogies are suggested for this from how various western evangelical missionaries accommodated to the reality of polygamy and polygamously-structured families in certain cultures in which they worked and witnessed, as well as from the ways many evangelical communities have worked out pastoral accommodation to those who are divorced and divorced-and-remarried.¹¹⁸ Yet, like Holmes, we would emphasise that any such accommodation should not be confused with the ethical standards, trajectories and goals indicated in scripture 'from the beginning' and expounded by Jesus and Paul in relation to sexual relationships, marriage and chaste singleness. In maintaining these standards, trajectories and goals, in commending them to others, and particularly in supporting and encouraging those with same-sex attraction to live faithfully by them, all of us together can be assured that God's grace is sufficient, and His power made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

Tracey's story

Before I became a Christian... I hated Christians, I couldn't stand them. I knew I was gay when I was 12; I dealt with that when I was a teenager. Then, in my twenties, I lived a normal life as just another gay person in London. I had a girlfriend; we had a mortgage... I really couldn't stand Christians and their homophobia.

The thing that really surprised me about my first trip to the church that I now go to was how wonderfully welcoming and friendly everyone was. They weren't any of the things I associated with Christians: they weren't self-righteous... they wanted to know who I was, what I did, and they genuinely wanted to get to know me. And then, the second and third time I went, they remembered me. They remembered my name: they asked about what I'd told them I was going to do, and it was obvious that they were just clearly happy I was there.

Now that I've become a Christian it doesn't mean that I'm going to become straight, or get married to a boy... Walking into church on Sunday feels like coming home. It's like walking into a family living room and being greeted by your siblings – only there are hundreds of them, and it's just a wonderful experience.¹¹⁹

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Where a full book or article is available free online in digital form as well as in hard copy, it may be cited below along with the hard copy reference. Certain key online statements, declarations, reports and agency websites are also listed here. Otherwise, as indicated above, online-only sources and online articles requiring subscription or payment are referenced more fully in the footnotes.

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Endnotes

- 1 ACUTE (Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals) (1998) *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Andrew Goddard and Don Horrocks (eds.) (2012) *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality*. London: Evangelical Alliance.
- 2 Same-sex marriage was legalised in England and Wales in July 2013 and in Scotland in March 2014. It became law in Northern Ireland some time later in January 2020.
- 3 <https://www.eauk.org/about-us/how-we-work/basis-of-faith> (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 4 <https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/transformed-understanding-transgender-in-a-changing-culture/transformed-the-resource> (Accessed 27/5/24). An earlier report in the same area was published by the Alliance's Public Affairs Commission as *Transsexuality*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000.
- 5 For an early use of this now ubiquitous phrase by a prominent analyst of American evangelicalism and of its relation to culture, see James Davison Hunter (1991) *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America*. New York: Basic Books.
- 6 Sigmund Freud (1991) [1903] *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. London: Penguin. See also 'Human Sexuality' (Chapter 5) in Sigmund Freud (2005) *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (ed. Anna Freud) London: Vintage, pp. 269–432.
- 7 Roland Barthes (1977) *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana; Jacques Derrida (1976) [1967] *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press; Jacques Derrida (1991) *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (ed. Peggy Kaupf). Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Jean-François Lyotard (2015) [1974] *Libidinal Economy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic; Michel Foucault (2020–2023) [1976–2018] *The History of Sexuality*, vols 1–4. London: Penguin.
- 8 Friedrich Nietzsche (2013) [1886] *Beyond Good and Evil*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; Friedrich Nietzsche (2013) [1887] *The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*. London: Penguin.
- 9 Simone de Beauvoir (1997) [1949] *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage; Betty Friedan (2010) [1963] *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Penguin; Germaine Greer (2012) [1970] *The Female Eunuch*: London: Fourth Estate; Judith Butler (1990) *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge; Marcella Althaus-Reid (2016) 'Queer Theology', in Martin Davie *et al.* (eds) *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*. London: IVP, pp.723-724; Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. London & New York; Lisa Isherwood (2011) 'Queer Theology', in Ian A. McFarland *et al.* (eds), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Cambridge: CUP, pp.423-424. Also: Susannah Cornwall (2011) *Controversies in Queer Theology*. London: SCM (esp. Ch. 4 on Queer Theology and the Bible); Linn Marie Tonstad (2018) *Queer Theology*. Eugene, Or.: Cascade.
- 10 <https://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/ab-unitedkingdom.html> (Accessed 4/4/2024).
- 11 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN03372/SN03372.pdf> (Accessed 12/5/24).
- 12 https://www.cpc.ac.uk/docs/2014_WP48_The_changing_demography_of_lone_parenthood_Berrington.pdf (Accessed 12/5/24).
- 13 <https://www.ourspectrum.com/resources/what-does/> (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 14 <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/bsa-40-liberalisation-attitudes> (Accessed 01/2/24).
- 15 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2021and2022> (Accessed 4/4/2024).
- 16 Glynn Harrison (2016) *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing*. London: IVP.
- 17 Christopher West (2020) *Our Bodies Tell God's Story: Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, p.5.
- 18 For more on the exegesis and application of this passage about eunuchs since the early church, see Megan de Franza (2015) *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female and Intersex in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 68–106.
- 19 John Stott (2017) *Same Sex Relationships*. Epsom: Good Book Company, p. 80.

- 20 Stanley Grenz (1998) *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- 21 <https://www.gaychurch.org> (Accessed 18/5/24); <http://wheregraceabounds.org/gay-affirming-evangelical-churches/> (Accessed 19/5/24); James Brownson (2013) *Bible, Gender and Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Matthew Vines (2014) *God and the Gay Christian*, New York: Convergent; Mark Achtemeir (2014) *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox; Jayne Ozanne (ed.) (2016) *Journeys in Grace and Truth: Revisiting Scripture and Sexuality*. London: Via Media/Ekklesia; Jayne Ozanne (2018) *Just Love: A Journey of Self-Acceptance*. London: DLT, 2018; Vikki Beeching (2018) *Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole and Living Free from Shame*. London: William Collins; Steve Chalke (2020) *A Matter of Integrity: The Church, Sexuality, Inclusion and an Open Conversation*. London: Oasis, available at: <https://www.oasisuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A-MATTER-OF-INTEGRITY.pdf> (Accessed 17/5/24); Richard B. Hays and Christopher Hays (2024) *The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality within the Biblical Story*. Yale: Yale University Press; Peter Valk (2024) 'When Heavyweights Change Their Minds: Richard B. Hays and Human Sexuality', available at: <https://firebrandmag.com/articles/when-heavyweights-change-their-minds-richard-b-hays-and-human-sexuality> (Accessed 19/5/24); Ian Paul (2024) 'Is God 'willing to change his mind? Richard Hays on Sexual Ethics', available at: <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/is-god-willing-to-change-his-mind-richard-hays-on-sexual-ethics/> (Accessed 19/5/24); Patrick Strudwick (2014) 'Vicky Beeching, Christian Rock Star: "I'm Gay. God Loves Me Just the Way I Am".' 13/8/14, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/vicky-beeching-star-of-the-christian-rock-scene-im-gay-god-loves-me-just-the-way-i-am-9667566.html> (Accessed 19/5/24); Religion News (2015) 'Jayne Ozanne, Church of England Evangelical Activist, Comes Out As Lesbian', 3/2/15, available at: <https://religionnews.com/2015/02/03/jayne-ozanne-church-england-evangelical-activist-comes-lesbian/> (Accessed 19/5/24); Tony Campolo (2015) 'For the Record: A New Statement Urging the Church to Be More Welcoming', 8/6/15, available at: <https://tonycampolo.org/for-the-record-tony-campolo-releases-a-new-statement/> (Accessed 17/5/24); Religion News (2016) 'The Politics of Jen Hatmaker: Trump, Black Lives Matter, Gay Marriage and More', 25/10/16, available at: <https://religionnews.com/2016/10/25/the-politics-of-jen-hatmaker-trump-black-lives-matter-gay-marriage-and-more/> (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 22 Cf. Preston Sprinkle (2015) who aligns with the classic evangelical view but argues for 'non-affirming' as a preferred term: *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 23–24.
- 23 Conservative evangelicalism is highlighted as a key strand of evangelicalism in typologies produced by Nigel Wright (1996) *The Radical Evangelical*, London: SPCK, pp. 6–7, and by Oliver Barclay (1997) *Evangelicalism in Britain 1935–1995*, Leicester: IVP, pp. 12–14. Barclay in fact deploys 'classical evangelicalism' as a synonym for conservative evangelicalism, but our preferred term 'classic evangelicalism' is applied in a somewhat broader sense in this commentary. Both Barclay and Wright contrast conservative evangelicalism with the 'liberal evangelical' grouping initiated in the Church of England in the early twentieth century, identified there with A.J. Tait, T. Guy Rogers and Vernon Storr, and later developed ecumenically through the Student Christian Movement, from which the conservative evangelical Intervarsity Fellowship (later UCCF) broke away. Although sub-categorisations of evangelicalism are somewhat different in North America, Wright associates British conservative evangelicalism on this analysis with American 'old evangelicalism', which took its cue to a significant degree from the 'old Princetonians' who split away from more 'progressive' figures at Princeton Seminary in the 1920s and, like the liberal evangelicals in Britain, adopted a more positive approach towards higher criticism, the ecumenical movement, and models of the atonement other than penal substitution. Although both old and new Princetonians were in the reformed tradition, Wright sees significant overlap in the UK context between conservative evangelicalism and 'reformed evangelicalism', which tends in that context to denote a self-consciously Calvinistic rather than merely Presbyterian or Congregationalist understanding of faith and polity. In this, he reflects the reading of conservative evangelicalism offered in the rather more complex taxonomies produced by Derek Tidball (1994) in *Who are the Evangelicals?* London: HarperCollins, pp. 19–21, and by Clive Calver and Rob Warner (1996) in *Together We Stand: Evangelical Convictions, Unity and Vision*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, pp. 128–130. Tidball's classification also identifies 'holiness' evangelicals, who would be mainly conservative, yet who are historically more indebted to the Wesleyan/Arminian stream of evangelicalism. While Pentecostals and charismatics are typically regarded as distinct forms of evangelical in such typologies, their theology may often be as conservative on scripture and signature doctrinal convictions as that of more formally defined 'conservative evangelicals'. However, although Barclay is inclined to regard 'conservative evangelical' more or less as coincident with 'classical evangelical', the latter term is in practice more readily inclusive of Pentecostals and charismatics who maintain those convictions – and it is on that same basis that we have adapted it to 'classic evangelical' here. 'Classic evangelical' is itself a term applied in the North

American context by Gregory Alan Thornbury (see next note). The affirming English Anglican evangelical David Runcorn has coined the term ‘conserving evangelicalism’ as a contrast to his own preference for ‘including’ evangelicalism – but the lexical and semantic proximity of this term to ‘conservative’ is similarly liable to be understood in too narrow a sense given the fact that resistance to the affirming/including view is far more widespread than purely among those who would own the term ‘conservative evangelical’. See David Runcorn (2013) ‘Evangelicals, Scripture and Same-Sex Relationships – an Including Evangelical Perspective’, in House of Bishops, Report of the House of Bishops on Human Sexuality. London: Church House, pp. 176–195.

- 24 Gregory Alan Thornbury (2013) *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F.H. Henry*. Wheaton: Crossway. While Thornbury’s exposition of the term ‘classic evangelicalism’ is very particularly focused on the legacy of Henry within twentieth century North American evangelicalism, here we take ‘classic’ to indicate a more broadly global movement rooted in authentic, apostolic New Testament mission, the Protestant Reformation, the great trans-Atlantic revivals associated with John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century, the Protestant world missionary campaigns and societies of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond, the intradenominational work and witness of the Evangelical Alliance from 1846 and of the World Evangelical Fellowship (later the World Evangelical Alliance) from the early 1950s, the divergence of so-called neo-evangelicalism away from Protestant fundamentalism in the same period, and the re-integration of evangelism with social concern represented by the Lausanne Covenant of 1974 and its continuing influence on world evangelicalism down to the present. For an overview of these contributory movements and streams, see David Bebbington (1989) *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge; Derek Tidball (1994) *Who are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of Today’s Movements*. London: Marshall Pickering; Ian Randall and David Hilborn (2001) *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance*. Carlisle: Paternoster; Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe (2012) *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Brian Stanley (2013) *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott (A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World, Volume 5)*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller and Mark Hutchinson (eds) (2015) *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*. Nashville, TN: World Evangelical Alliance/Thomas Nelson.
- 25 Ian Randall and David Hilborn (2001) *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance*. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- 26 Thomas C. Oden (1992) *Classic Christianity*. New York: Harper Collins, pp. xiii–xiv.
- 27 <https://www.manhattandeclaration.org/> (Accessed 26/5/24).
- 28 As was noted in the original 1998 report, the still often-used terms ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ are nineteenth century constructions that many scholars consider to have been unhelpfully medicalised, and which this commentary has generally sought to avoid on that basis – except when quoting or discussing their use by others.
- 29 <https://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.livingout.org/> (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 30 Wesley Hill (2010) *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 50.
- 31 The St Andrew’s Day Statement 30/11/95. Available at: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/110-02_102.pdf (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 32 Mark Yarhouse (2015) *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, pp. 13–27.
- 33 These various approaches can be traced far back into Christian history – for instance, to the early fifth century dispute between Augustine and Pelagius over the status of ‘concupiscence’ or involuntary sexual lust: David F. Kelly (1983) ‘Sexuality and Concupiscence in Augustine’, *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 3, pp. 81–116. Modern-day intra-evangelical variations on this debate sees a spectrum of views from those who see same-sex attraction and identification as positive, neutral, or intrinsically sinful. Preston Sprinkle’s writing and ‘Theology in the Raw’ blog and podcast have tracked this debate closely for some time: e.g., ‘Is Same-Sex Attraction Sinful?’ Available at: <https://theologyintheraw.com/is-same-sex-attraction-sinful/> (Accessed 18/5/24). For Matthew Roberts’ account of his position, and Ed Shaw’s response to it, see: Matthew P.W. Roberts (2023) *Pride: Identity and the Worship of Self*. Christian Focus; Ed Shaw, see <https://www.livingout.org/resources/reviews/66/pride-a-review> (Accessed 18/5/24). For Rosaria Butterfield’s perspective, see <https://blog.choosetruthovertribe.com/a-challenge-to-side->

- [b-lgbtq-christians](https://www.thegracelife.org/pulpit.com/sermons.aspx?code=2020-03-04-MR) (Accessed 18/5/24). Mike Riccardi summarises the American debate at: <https://www.thegracelife.org/pulpit.com/sermons.aspx?code=2020-03-04-MR> (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 34 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023> Accessed 05/09/2024. See also <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8537/CBP-8537.pdf> esp. p. 35 (Accessed 25/5/22).
- 35 https://archive.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/gd_13_103-5_workplace_24-03-14.pdf esp. p. 4 (Accessed 19/5/24).
- 36 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8537/CBP-8537.pdf> esp. pp. 26–35 (Accessed 19/5/24).
- 37 For more on the theology and practice of adoption and fostering, see the various resources provided by the charity Home for Good. Available at: <https://homeforgood.org.uk/tags/theology> (Accessed 19/5/24).
- 38 Robert A. J. Gagnon (2001) *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon, p. 261 Loc 4008 (Kindle Edition).
- 39 ACUTE, Faith, Hope and Homosexuality, pp. 12–20; Evangelical Alliance, Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality, pp. 32–53; Evangelical Alliance, Transformed, pp. 10–12.
- 40 Evangelical Alliance, Transformed, esp. pp. 10–12.
- 41 See Robert A. J. Gagnon (2001) *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, pp. 185–228; Ian Paul (2014) *Same-Sex Unions: The Key Biblical Texts*. Grove Biblical Series B71. Cambridge: Grove Books, pp. 19–21.
- 42 E.g. Daniel A. Helminiak (2000) *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*. New Mexico: Alamo Square, pp. 43–50; Keith Sharpe (2001) *The Gay Gospels: Good News for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People*. Winchester: O-Books, pp. 5–14. For classic evangelicals who similarly view the main (but not only) offence as a refusal of hospitality see e.g. Stanley Grenz (1998) *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, p. 38; David Hilborn (2003) 'Homosexuality and Scripture' in Jean Mayland (ed.), *Growing into God: Exploring our Call to Grow into God's Image and Likeness*. London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, pp. 159–160.
- 43 Derrick Sherwin Bailey (1955) *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. London: Longman, pp. 3–4; John Boswell (1980) *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 93–94; John J. McNeill (1976) *The Church and the Homosexual*, Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, pp. 54–55.
- 44 For more detail on this parallel homoerotic strand in the narrative, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 71–78; Thomas E. Schmidt (1995) *Straight and Narrow, Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*. Leicester: IVP, pp. 87–89; Kevin DeYoung (2015) *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* Nottingham, IVP, pp. 35–38. For those who accept this dimension but regard the specific, violent form of homoerotic sexual practice described here as inapplicable to more general expressions of same-sex attraction today, see e.g. Daniel A. Helminiak (2000) *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*. New Mexico: Alamo Square, pp. 46–47; Matthew Vines (2014) *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*, New York: Convergent, pp. 65–66.
- 45 Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, p. 74. Cf. Martti Nissinen (1998) *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, p. 46.
- 46 Via, Dan O. and Robert A.J. Gagnon (2003) *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*. Minneapolis: Fortress, pp. 58–59; Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, pp. 39–40; DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* pp. 33–38; Paul, *Same Sex Unions*, p. 11.
- 47 Richard Davidson (2007) *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, p. 149.
- 48 For a summary of arguments to this effect see James Brownson (2013) *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 270–273.
- 49 L. William Countryman (1998) *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*. London: SCM, pp. 17–39; Jeffrey John (2012) *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-Sex Marriage*. Revised and updated edn. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, pp. 11–12; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 15–27; Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, pp. 269–273.
- 50 Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, p. 41.
- 51 Paul, *Same-Sex Unions*, p. 15.
- 52 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 111–146; Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, pp. 149–159.

- 53 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 135–142.
- 54 Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* pp. 59; 172; Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 120–122. Affirming/revisionist scholars tend to argue that this three-fold distinction is not consistently clear-cut – e.g. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, pp. 82–86. For a classic evangelical defence of this hermeneutic, however, see DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* pp. 39–47.
- 55 For a fuller discussion of lesbianism in the New Testament and early Christianity, see Bernadette Brooten (1996) *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 56 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, p. 110. This is the main pretext on which Boswell argues that Paul is only condemning certain forms of same-sex sexual activity, rather than working from universal or ‘natural’ principles to condemn it all. Specifically, he concludes that “Paul did not discuss gay persons, but only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons” (p. 109).
- 57 For a more extensive consideration of this text see Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* pp. 64–85; even more extensively, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 229–303. Also: David Hilborn (2003) ‘Homosexuality and Scripture’ in Jean Mayland (ed.) *Growing into God: Exploring our Call to Grow into God’s Image and Likeness*. London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, pp. 156–169.
- 58 V.P. Furnish (1994) ‘Homosexuality and the Bible: Reading the Texts in Context’ in Jeffrey Siker (ed.), *Homosexuality and the Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, p. 30; Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, pp. 131–2; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 44–56. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 2014, pp. 95–115.
- 59 Jeffrey John, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable*; Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, pp. 101–107; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 49–51.
- 60 For pertinent references see James D.G. Dunn (1988) *Romans 1-8*. Dallas: Word, p. 65. Cf. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, pp. 101–107; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 49–51.
- 61 Preston Sprinkle (2015) *People To Be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 93.
- 62 House of Bishops (2003) *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate*. London: Church House, pp. 212–220.
- 63 Sam Allberry. Available at: <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/18/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality> (Accessed 4/4/24).
- 64 George W. Knight (1992) *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids. Mich.: Eerdmans, p. 85. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 303–306.
- 65 Dale Martin (2006) *Sex and the Single Saviour*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, p.41; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 62–67; Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, pp. 273–275.
- 66 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp.312-336; DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* pp. 59–67. Cf. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, pp.105–166; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 57–67; Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, pp. 273–275.
- 67 Sprinkle, *People To Be Loved*, p. 51.
- 68 Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 95–161; Michael Vasey (1995) *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, pp. 118–124; Gerd Thiessen (1987) *The Shadow of the Galilean*, London: SCM, p. 106.
- 69 Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, pp. 127–130.
- 70 Paul, *Same-Sex Unions*, p. 21.
- 71 Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p.188 n2. Cf. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 118–122; Sharpe, *The Gay Gospels*, pp. 95–118; Terrence McNally’s play *Corpus Christi* seeks to dramatise Nissinen’s and Sharpe’s anachronisms on this by depicting Jesus’ relationships with some disciples as homoerotic: *Corpus Christi: A Play*. New York: Grove Press, 1998. For a contrastingly careful and nuanced scholarly survey of Jesus’ relationships with both men and women that shows Him as being alive to human sexual dynamics and impulses but faithfully celibate Himself, see Andy Angel (2017) *The Intimate Jesus: The Sexuality of God Incarnate*. London: SPCK.
- 72 ‘Homophobia’, in Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble (1996) *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 678.
- 73 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homophobia> (Accessed 21/5/24).
- 74 Glynn Harrison (2017) *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing*. London: IVP.

- 75 <https://www.livingout.org/> (Accessed 18/5/24).
- 76 <https://kinseyinstitute.org/research/publications/kinsey-scale.php> (Accessed 21/5/24). Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin 2023 [1948] *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. See also Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin and Paul H. Gebard (1998) [1953] *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- 77 <https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/facebook-introduces-more-than-70-new-gender-options-to-the-uk-we-want-to-reflect-society-9567261.html> (Accessed 21/5/24). https://www.medicinenet.com/what_are_the_72_other_genders/article.htm (Accessed 21/5/24).
- 78 http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS02_2014.pdf (Accessed 21/5/24).
- 79 Sabra L. Katz-Wise, 'Sexual fluidity and the diversity of sexual orientation', Harvard, CN: Harvard Medical School. Available at: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/sexual-fluidity-and-the-diversity-of-sexual-orientation-202203312717> (Accessed 21/5/24).
- 80 Ed Shaw (2021) *Purposeful Sexuality: A Short Christian Introduction*. London: IVP, pp. 34–35.
- 81 Sam Allberry <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/29/the-christian-debate-over-sexual-identity-orientation-and-labelling> (Accessed 4/4/2024).
- 82 Jonathan Berry (2016) *Satisfaction Guaranteed: A Future and A Hope For Same-Sex Attracted Christians*. London: IVP, pp. 100–101 (Kindle edition).
- 83 David Bennett (2018) *A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 211–212.
- 84 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/30/contents/enacted/data.htm> (Accessed 24/5/24); https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5def882440f0b64a2d92cf2e/Marriage_and_Civil_Partnership_in_England_and_Wales.pdf (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/5/contents> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2019/1514/contents> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 85 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/33/contents> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/civil-partnership-scotland-bill> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2020/15/contents> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/742/contents/made> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 86 <https://www.eauk.org/about-us/how-we-work/basis-of-faith> (Accessed 22/5/24).
- 87 Cf. Jeffrey John (2012) *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same Sex Marriage (New Edition)*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd. Contrast John's affirmation of such marriages on the basis that their permanence, fidelity and stability is analogous to Christian heterosexual marriage with Ed Shaw's critique of that analogy: <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/24/whats-wrong-with-a-permanent-faithful-stable-same-sex-sexual-relationship> (Accessed 26/5/24).
- 88 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.hrc.org/resources/positions-of-faith-on-same-sex-marriage> (Accessed 24/5/24); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality (Accessed 24/5/24); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_affirming_LGBT_people (Accessed 24/5/24); https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-take-socially-conservative-views-on-gender-issues-homosexuality/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://baptistworld.org/bwa-resolutions/sexual-morality/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/gay-christians-and-the-anglican-communion/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://lutheranworld.org/what-we-do/churches-communion/communion-building/family-marriage-and-sexuality> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://wrcr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GC2017-Minutes-EN.pdf> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://worldia.org/news/15812/wea-issues-brief-statement-concerning-sexuality-justice-and-christian-witness/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.pwfellowship.org/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/may-2-wrap-up-delegates-declare-homosexuality-no-longer-incompatible> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.sbs.com.au/voices/article/after-a-long-struggle-the-uniting-church-becomes-the-first-to-offer-same-sex-marriage/5bk3nvffc> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 89 <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-does-the-urc-think-about/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/marriage-and-relationships/guidance-and-resources-for-same-sex-marriage/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/same-sex-marriage> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/church-votes-allow-equal-marriage/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.quaker.org.uk/faith/our-history/marriage-equality> (Accessed 24/5/24).

- 90 <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/faith/same-sex-marriage/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/synod-backs-trial-special-services-asking-gods-blessing-same-sex-couples> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/your-church-wedding/just-engaged/prayers-asking-gods-blessing-same-sex-couples> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 91 <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/no-change-for-baptist-ministers-on-same-sex-marriage> (Accessed 24/5/24).
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- 97 Oliver O'Donovan (1994) *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*. 2nd edn. Leicester: Apollos, p. 70.
- 98 <https://www.livingout.org/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 99 <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories> Accessed 24/5/24; <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 100 <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories/16/vaughan> (Accessed 25/5/24).
- 101 <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2015/12/remembering-ed-dobson-a-guest-post-by-stan-gundry/> (Accessed 25/5/25); <https://theweek.com/articles/447682/bible-says-gay-sex-sin-but-christians-still-embrace-gays> (Accessed 25/5/25). <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/slacktivist/2015/12/29/ed-dobson-loved-homosexuals/> (Accessed 25/5/25).
- 102 <https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/hearing-truth-love> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 103 Ed Shaw, 'What's wrong with a Permanent, Faithful, Stable Same-Sex Relationship?' <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/24/whats-wrong-with-a-permanent-faithful-stable-same-sex-sexual-relationship> (Accessed 25/5/24).
- 104 Rosaria Champagne Butterfield (2014) *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. 2nd expanded edn. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant. Kindle Loc. 575. Also see Butterfield's various filmed lectures and interviews at https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=rosaria+butterfield (Accessed 24/5/24); Jackie Hill Perry (2013) *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been*. Nashville, TN: B & H Books. Excerpts published by Christianity Today at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/september/jackie-hill-perry-gay-girl-good-god.html> (Accessed 25/5/24); also at https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2018/august/jackie-hill-perry-same-sex-attraction-gay-identity-lgbt.html?utm_source=ctdirect&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=23645620&utm_content=603182083&utm_campaign=email (Accessed 25/5/24).
- 105 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0295071/> (Accessed 24/5/24); <https://tomrobinson.com/bio/full-history/> (Accessed 25/5/24); <https://www.gayinthe80s.com/2012/10/1985-tom-robinson-marries-a-woman/> (Accessed 25/5/24).
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- 107 Government Equalities Office (2018) *National LGBT Survey*. Manchester: Government Equalities Office. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report> (Accessed

23/5/25). See especially pp. 82–93. Conversion therapies here are seen as synonymous with “aversion or reparative therapies” and are defined as “techniques intended to change someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity”. They are said to “take many forms” and to range commonly from “pseudo-psychological treatments to spiritual counselling”. In “extreme cases” they are also said to include “surgical intervention and so-called ‘corrective’ rape”. The survey goes on to confirm that 5% of its 108,000 online respondents had undergone conversion therapies, while 5% had been offered them (p.82). 53% of the latter group had been offered them by faith organisations, and 19% by secular health care providers (p.92). For details of the Prime Minister’s statement and surrounding information see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44686374> (Accessed 23/5/24). The Equalities Minister at the time, Penny Mordaunt, distinguished conversion therapies from “psychological services and counselling”, but did not elaborate in detail on this distinction, or suggest how private, voluntary, church-based counselling on sexual issues that might touch on a person’s self-disclosed discomfort with same-sex attraction would or could be regulated or policed. She did say: “We don’t want to hamper religious freedom, but that is very different from processes and practises that intimidate people, that make people feel bad about who they are, who either coerce or force them to go through a particular so-called treatment... We will not have any qualms about tackling those appalling practises wherever they arise”. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2018/07/02/penny-mordaunt-interview-gender-recognition-act/> (Accessed 27/5/24). Clearly, any Christian counselling that intimidates or coerces someone to receive any sort of counselling or therapy against their will is hardly worthy of the description ‘Christian’.

- 108 Doug Pyper and Joe Tyler-Todd (2024) *Prohibiting Conversion Therapy*. London: House of Commons Library Research Briefing, 22 February 2024, p.12. Available at: [CBP-9972.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/resources/research-briefing/cbp-9972.pdf) (Accessed 25/5/25).
- 109 Doug Pyper and Joe Tyler-Todd (2024) *Prohibiting Conversion Therapy*. London: House of Commons Library Research Briefing, 22 February 2024, p.23. Available at: [CBP-9972.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/resources/research-briefing/cbp-9972.pdf) (Accessed 25/5/25).
- 110 Labour Party (2024) *Change: Labour Party Manifesto, 2024: ‘So-called conversion therapy is abuse – there is no other word for it – so Labour will finally deliver a full trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices, while protecting the freedom for people to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity’*, p. 91. Available at: <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Change-Labour-Party-Manifesto-2024-large-print.pdf> (Accessed 20/6/24); <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-56496423> (Accessed 7/9/24); Debbie Hayton (2024) ‘Labour’s Dangerous Pledge to ban Conversion Therapy’, *Spectator* 13 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/labours-dangerous-pledge-to-ban-conversion-therapy/> (Accessed 7/9/24).
- 111 <https://oasis.foundation/sites/foundation.dd/files/In%20the%20Name%20of%20Love%20-%20Oasis%20Foundation%20report.pdf> (Accessed 31/8/18).
- 112 <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/church-teaching-and-lgb-mental-health/> (Accessed 23/5/24).
- 113 Christi R McGeorge, Thomas Stone Carlson and Russell B Toomey (2015) ‘An Exploration of Family Therapists’ Beliefs About the Ethics of Conversion Therapy: The Influence of Negative Beliefs and Clinical Competence with Lesbian, Gay, And Bisexual Clients’, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 41(1) pp. 42–56. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24750074/> (Accessed 24/5/24).
- 114 <https://www.livingout.org/conversion-therapy> (Accessed 25/5/24); <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/7/does-living-out-support-gay-cure-or-reparative-therapy> (Accessed 25/5/24). For articles from Core Issues Trust’s perspective, see: <https://archive.iftcc.org/category/conversion-therapy/> (Accessed 25/5/24).
- 115 More specifically, divergences related to the Augustinian notion of ‘concupiscence’. For further detail see O.D. Crisp & M. Jenson, ‘Sin’ in Martin Davie et al. (eds) (2016) *New Dictionary of Theology, Historical and Systematic*. London: IVP, pp. 841–843.
- 116 <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/7/does-living-out-support-gay-cure-or-reparative-therapy> (Accessed 25/5/24). Butterfield expresses a similar concern to focus on this higher goal when she submits that the antidote to homosexuality is not so much heterosexuality as holiness. See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-are-whatand-howyou-read/> (Accessed 24/5/25). For Butterfield, deeply shaped as she now is in high reformed ecclesiology, the local church or presbytery is the best context for support and nurture through this process of sanctification, since they will focus corporately on the whole life of discipleship, whereas an individual conversion therapist might focus in on the sexual dimensions of discipleship alone. While one can appreciate Butterfield’s wide-angled approach on this, she somewhat overlooks the fact that Beeching, Ozanne and other ‘affirming evangelicals’ have keenly appropriated standard evangelical discourse on ‘holiness’ and have applied it not to “sanctified growth towards abstinence, celibacy or heterosexual marriage” for gay and lesbian Christians, but rather to a therapeutic

goal that might be summed up as “sanctified acceptance of one’s sexuality and sexual expression as a gay or lesbian Christian”. Also, while Butterfield holds that LGBTQ+ Christians do not necessarily have to ‘convert’ to heterosexuality and then heterosexual marriage, her own conversion journey has in fact followed this trajectory.

- 117 D. Paul Sullins, Christopher H. Rosik and Paul Santero (2021) ‘Efficacy and risk of sexual orientation change efforts: a retrospective analysis of 125 exposed men’, *F1000 Research*, 10, p. 222. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8080940/> (Accessed 25/5/25); R.L. Spitzer (2012) ‘Spitzer reassesses his 2003 study of reparative therapy of homosexuality [Letter to the Editor]’. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41, p. 757. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-012-9966-y> (Accessed 25/5/24). This letter resiled from more positive results for re-orientation that Spitzer had reported in 2003: cf. R.L. Spitzer (2003) ‘Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? 200 participants reporting a change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32, pp. 403–417. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203057414-6/gay-men-lesbians-change-sexual-orientation-200-participants-reporting-change-homosexual-heterosexual-orientation-robert-spitzer> (Accessed 25/5/24). See also: M.A. Yarhouse, L.M. Pawlowski and E.S.N. Tan (2012) ‘Intact Marriages in Which One Partner Dis-identifies with Experiences of Same-Sex Attraction.’ *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(5), pp. 375–394. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01926180390223996> (Accessed 25/5/24).
- 118 Stephen R. Holmes (2016) ‘Listening to the Past and Reflecting on the Present’, in Preston Sprinkle (ed.), *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 190–193.
- 119 <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories/10/tracey> (Accessed 26/5/24).