



# **FAITH, HOPE AND SHADOWFEET**

A PAPER ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE  
EVANGELICAL CHURCH AND THE LGBTQIA+  
COMMUNITY.

**MARTY REDHEAD, OCTOBER 2024**



# FOREWORD

Study leave, generously provided by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ), provides an opportunity to engage deeply with topics that enhance ministry, contribute to personal and professional development, and facilitate meaningful dialogue on important issues.

As a church we find ourselves in a constantly evolving cultural landscape. This requires us to navigate new challenges and opportunities while remaining steadfast to God's word, and tenets of faith that define us. In this context, Marty's study leave has focused on exploring the complex topic of how a church with a traditional view of marriage and sexuality connects with the LGBTQIA+ community.

As part of the Hope Network of churches, we acknowledge that this conversation is ongoing. While we are grateful for the insights and perspectives presented in this report, it does not necessarily reflect the final position of the church on this multifaceted issue. The reflection, reading and work done here by Marty will inform our collective discernment as we move forward, but this report is not intended to represent the formal position of the Hope Network or its churches, but rather those of the author.

We thank you for taking the time to engage with these reflections and invite you to continue to pray for us as a church as we seek to live in the truth and light of Jesus Christ.

Blessings,

Steve Talbot

Lead Pastor - Hope Presbyterian

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines how an evangelical and orthodox church can thoughtfully and compassionately approach the LGBTQIA+ topic, emphasising that while theological convictions remain rooted in the traditional approach to scripture, our approach and posture can and should evolve. This report aims to create discussion that guides the church toward a relationally oriented, humble, and empathetic response to LGBTQIA+ issues, reflecting Christ's love while maintaining scriptural and doctrinal integrity.

## Key Insights

- 1. The Complexity of the Issue:** LGBTQIA+ matters are deeply complex, involving individuals who earnestly seek to live a life faithful to Christ while also grappling with their sexuality or gender identity. This is a topic that requires more than theological answers; it demands understanding and relational support.
- 2. Broken Mirrors:** Regardless of sexual orientation or identity, all humans are "broken mirrors," reflecting God's image imperfectly and in need of redemption. The call to become more like Christ applies universally, emphasising compassion and understanding as we walk with each other toward healing.
- 3. Not a Salvation Issue:** Homosexuality and gender identity do not alter the truth of Christ's love and sacrifice. These are not issues that determine salvation but are instead opportunities to extend grace and draw closer to Jesus, who calls us to love one another as we are.
- 4. Value of Singleness:** Singleness, often overlooked within the church, is a legitimate and fulfilling life path that can provide opportunities for deep connection with God and others. Singleness should be celebrated and supported as much as marriage within the church community.
- 5. Understanding Transgenderism:** Gender identity is a multifaceted and often painful journey for many. The church's response should be one of patience and support, recognising that time, grace, and conversation are invaluable as individuals navigate their identity.

## Conclusion

While this study has not dramatically shifted my own foundational theology, it has transformed my approach to LGBTQIA+ issues, moving from a stance of doctrinal certainty to one that includes deep relational connection. I would be advocating a starting posture of openness, listening, and authentic relationship-building, demonstrating a willingness to engage with individuals' experiences in a way that points to the love, grace, and truth of Jesus Christ.

### A NOTE ON THE TITLE OF THIS PAPER:

In Brooke Fraser's song "Shadowfeet," the term "shadowfeet" represents the idea of standing firm and grounded in faith, even as life brings challenges and uncertainty. The imagery of "shadowfeet" conveys vulnerability and a sense of being rooted in something beyond oneself, often associated with the shadows cast by one's feet when standing under light.

# WHAT IS THIS PAPER?

Good question.

Over an eight-week period between August and October 2024 I took some study leave to read, listen, reflect, pray and write about the topic of the LGBTQIA+ community and its intersection with the church. I had been watching and listening from the sidelines on this topic for years, knowing that I wanted to and needed to engage more fully and was curious about it, so when thinking about study leave topics this one seemed the most appropriate. Study leave for the Presbyterian enables the Pastor to not only take time out from the rhythms of ministry, but also spend concentrated time investigating a topic. The findings of that exploration are then shared with the church they serve, the Presbytery and the National Church. It is with that framework that I step into this interesting and complex topic.

What was the question I started with? What does it look like for us as an orthodox and evangelical church by nature, to connect with, care for and ultimately disciple those who are part of or connected to the LGBTQIA+ community in some way? As with most research topics, regardless of word count, one starts at one point and ends up at another. This paper is no different.

Thank you to the team who have helped me on this. To Rev. Jono Barb, your connections, conversations and time were a gift – thank you so much. To Rev. Dr. Malcolm Gordon, not only a close friend but an outstanding study leave supervisor. Your ability to reach into my head and articulate it better than anyone I know is amazing – thank you for the weekly phone calls and love – I so appreciate it. To Ruth Velluppillai, thank you for your editing services. To our wonderful Hayley, thank you for the design work to make this paper look fantastic. To Steve, Esther and the wider staff team at Hope Hornby along with the elders – you have all been so supportive and stepped in to fill the gaps in my absence. Thank you so much for being a wonderful team to be a part of. To all the people I interviewed – thank you for your time, your honesty, your willingness and your heart to follow the God we all serve – it enriched my life having talked to you all. To my church family at Hope – thank you for the gift of this time to step aside and study this important topic. I hope and pray that this paper is helpful, stirs your thinking, maybe even makes you a little uncomfortable; but ultimately helps point us all to God and reveals the heart of Jesus Christ for all humanity.

For His Kingdom and for His glory.

Marty

# SOME OPENING COMMENTS

“

“When the world has fallen out from under me, I'll be found in you, still standing. When the sky rolls up and mountains fall on their knees, when time and space are through, I'll be found in you.”

*Shadowfeet - Brooke Fraser*

”

## **“This is a complex issue.”**

As I have sat with interview participants, read books, heard people's stories, read articles and watched pastors preach on this very topic, I have heard the phrase, “this is a complex issue”, used a number of times. As I have stepped into this topic more fully than ever before, I would agree. And should we be surprised? All that God has created and gifted humanity has simplicity and complexity all rolled into one. The universe, our bodies, the church, living organisms, even the Word of God all have simplicity and accessibility for everyone and yet profound complexity about them as well.

It is evident that no other issue in this generation carries with it so much hurt, pain, conviction, confusion, pride, shame, challenge, contentious biblical interpretation, social pressure and complexity than the LGBTQIA+[1] issue. It is difficult to find many people who are not connected with, part of, or associated with the LGBTQIA+ community. This affects us all, some in everyday ways and others less so. Regardless, we cannot just ignore this as an “out there” issue while we stay within the safety of that with which we are comfortable.

The scope of this paper is not so much to discuss the theology of homosexuality or gender dysphoria – although it would be impossible to write this paper without spending some time talking about theology. Rather, the primary driver is to explore what should be our response on this issue that a large swathe of our community is already comfortable with?

## **What do the scriptures have to say about this issue?**

## **How should we respond to our family or friends who hold a different view from us?**

## **And how do we as Hope Church community, self-described as orthodox in approach and evangelical in nature, navigate these changing waters?**

An approach to these questions must consider some constraints.

**First**, everyone has a lens through which such complexities are viewed. My lens is that I am a heterosexual male who is married and comes from what would be called a conservative and traditional church background. In short, I am a “card-carrying” evangelical who has not spent a lot of time with those who are part of or connected to the Rainbow community. Suffice to say, after this study leave, that connection has now changed.

**Second**, it is worth mentioning that all my sources – including the interviewees – have come from outside of the Hope community in order to keep it as anonymous as possible.

[1] Throughout this paper I will refer to the LGBTQIA+ community or the Rainbow community – in the context of this paper I have used the terms interchangeably.

**Third,** there were limits to my study. Eight weeks seemed like a long time away from my church family, but a very short time to do extensive reading and work on this complex issue. Therefore, I bring this paper humbly and I do not claim personal expertise on this topic, nor am I extensively read. As Karen Carpenter said, *“We’ve only just begun”*. At a more theological level, I echo Rae and Redding’s sentiments: *“While there is enormous pressure on the Church to settle the issue once and for all and as quickly as possible, it is our belief that there is considerably more theological work yet to be done...even if that may mean continuing to live with ambiguity.”*[2] I would agree.

**Finally,** there is both the temptation and the pressure to find, hold and then defend a position on whether God is okay with, or even sanctions, same sex relationships[3]. It may not even be helpful to pursue this line, for coming down on either side of the debate in a hard and immovable way will then justify one side and shift the other side more into the shadows. Or, one side may be offended and then give unhealthy permission for the other.

In fact, it may be more helpful to renounce any form of needing to be right and instead start with relationship, knowing that every story, every experience and every person is unique. Yes, there are principles, biblical truth and church history but to approach this now out of relationship, care, compassion and a heart for growth rather than right or wrong may prove more productive and restorative in the end. Therefore, this paper is designed to create space for conversation, to dispel some myths, mine some biblical truths and create a space that, regardless of the sexual drive that we all carry within, compels us to be a community that points people to Jesus, journeys towards healing, and is honest in our reflections on sexuality and its place within all our lives.

---

[2] Rae and Redding (editors); *More than a Single Issue*; Australian Theological Forum, South Aus. 2002; 6.

[3] For the purpose of this paper I’m going to stay mostly with issue of homosexuality, although later on I do give voice to gender dysphoria and give some thoughts and pastoral responses to this issue.

# WHY ARE WE EVEN TALKING ABOUT THIS?

“I see the scars of searches everywhere I go. From hearts to wars to literature to radio. There's a question like a shame no one will show, "What do I live for?" We are Hosea's wife. We are squandering this life. Using people like ladders and words like knives.”

*Hosea's Wife - Brooke Fraser*

The wider church finds itself in a unique place in history regarding sexuality; holding what the scriptures say in one hand, while in the other hand holding on to what our friends, family and communities are saying. Although the church is accustomed to living in healthy tension, caught between faithfully following scripture, and then how society says we should be living,[4] the issue of sexuality is not something “out there”, but is inherent; something that is part of what makes us who we are. Our sexuality is one part of our identity, something that we cannot just pick up or put down, leave in a particular place or divorce ourselves from. We walk in our sexuality wherever we go and as part of what it means to be human.

It is worth stating that, generally speaking, the Christian Community is in the minority when it comes to wrestling with the LGBTQIA+ questions. In fact, most parts of society don't even give same sex relationships or transgenderism a second thought. A recent article spoke of a celebrity who has married her same sex wife – and not once did the news article even mention or reference the homosexual nature of their relationship[5]. Why? Because same sex relationships are now so normal it is no longer worth mentioning.

David P. Gushee in his book states this fact: “Many are leaving the church, or at least evangelicalism, over the LGBTQIA+ issue.

According to public relations research, 70% of America's most unchurched generation, the millennials, say that “religious groups are alienating young people by being too judgmental about gay and lesbian issues,” and 31% of those millennials who have left the church say this was an important factor in why they left.”[6] Even here in New Zealand the latest census data confirms that 4.9% of our population are part of the Rainbow community, which equates to 186,420 people[7]. Although we do not have figures on how many people support (actively or passively) the spectrum of the Rainbow community's worldview, it could well be high if the increase of “no religious affiliation” in the census is anything to go by.

**As I have read books, sat with rainbow affirming interviewees, listened and reflected, it has become clear that these followers of Christ seek to live faithfully by the scriptures in the most God-honouring way possible.**

The tension arises where the scriptures we read, our experience, our love for those around us, our social conscience and compassion, all become incongruent with a clear way forward. We all want to live a life faithful to scripture and following Jesus but is difficult to see how to do that in the melting pot of human emotion, experience, scripture, relationships and morality.

[4] For example we could go back to the tension of ‘the earth is flat’ that the early church forefather believed, the issue of slavery, women in leadership etc.

[5] <https://www.stuff.co.nz/culture/350433777/rebel-wilson-gets-married-italy>

[6] Gushee, David P.; Changing our Mind; Read the Spirit Books, Canton, Michigan; 2022; 2

[7] <https://www.stats.govt.nz/>

We must also start within a framework that faithful followers of Christ are called to live according to and within the framework of the Gospel. When we say “yes” to Jesus we are saying “yes” to placing Him first in our lives. Deitrich Bonhoeffer[8] famously stated that *“When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.”*[9] Many a man or woman have come to the end of themselves, realising that they can no longer run their lives or find fulfilment in what the world offers. So, they have placed their hope, faith, trust, future – their entire lives – in the hands of God who through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of his Son Jesus Christ brought salvation to the world. We now look forward with anticipation to his mighty and glorious return. While on earth Jesus gave the clear and direct instruction *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.’”*[10]

We see the example of Jesus Christ himself giving up his natural humanity’s driving desire and preference for things like food, political power, comfort, isolation, sleep and the absence of pain[11] and rather does what the Father asks him to do. As Hebrews 2 tells us[12], this culminated in his death on a cross for all of humanity, the ultimate example of laying down one’s preference and comfort for the gospel.

So, let us keep the LGBTQIA+ conversation in perspective – it is what has been called a “second tier” theological and gospel issue. Which means that it is not a salvation issue, it is not a gospel issue, it is not something that features in our faith’s founding creeds nor is it in our own Presbyterian Kupo Whakapono[13] statement of faith. That being said, even though this is not a core doctrine issue it still requires due consideration and time.

---

[8] Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian who stood against Hitler and Nazi Germany during WWII. He paid for this stand with his life just before the war ended, however his writings and theology has gone on to be a rather influential voice into the church. Talk to most pastors and academics or the theologically inclined and they’ll be well aware if not a fan of Bonhoeffer and his writings.

[9] Bonhoeffer, Deitrich; The Cost of Discipleship

[10] Matthew 16:24-25

[11] Philippians 2:6-8 “Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges, he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”

[12] Hebrews 2:17-18 “Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.”

[13] <https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-ministers/worship-resources/confession-of-faith>

# SOME MORE ABOUT THE CALL OF JESUS AND BROKEN MIRRORS

---

“If I find in myself desires nothing in this world can satisfy, I can only conclude that I was not made for here... Speak to me in the light of the dawn, mercy comes with the morning, I will sigh and with all creation groan as I wait for hope to come for me.”

*C.S Lewis Song - Brooke Fraser*

Regardless of our sexual orientation, our sexual identity or our sexual preference,[14] when we follow Christ we are all asked to lay down every part of us that needs shaping and renewing into more of His likeness. We all bring our “stuff” to every relationship that we have, be it a relationship with others (friend, family or spouse) or even a relationship with ourselves. Even though it might seem a new idea to think about having a relationship with “yourself”, how we see ourselves is really important. We may see ourselves as permanently broken or as being made whole. Or as needing to hide from God or seeing God as lifting the shame from us. Or as the sum of our problems. Alternatively, we may see ourselves as being renewed and moulded by a powerful and grace-filled God.

So, let us all humbly acknowledge that we are broken mirrors, that we reflect God’s beauty to the world around us, but we also have chips, cracks and missing bits that we need God to renew, restore and reshape as only he can. Not just the bits like “I need to spend more time praying or reading the Bible” or “I need to let God help me be a better parent to my kids”, but also the sexual thoughts that float through our mind that we never share with anyone, and the bottle of wine we cannot not finish when we open it on Friday night. It is the pride we hold that means we never apologise first to our spouse, friend or children. It is the resentment we harbour towards our boss or work colleagues.

In the context of this paper, what Rosaria Champagne Butterfield states about our sexual brokenness is accurate. *“We need to be clear, not just that we are all sinners, but we are all sexual sinners.”*[15]

So, when we say the rote prayer of *“thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* it is not just a nice prayer for out there so that hungry children in refugee camps can have something to eat. This is a prayer for “in here” (in the heart) for renewal; so that we lay down our preference for being right, proud, or even being fully seen and heard; and instead we echo what Jesus said on the cross: *“Not my will, but your will be done, God”*.

Under the leadership and sovereignty of Jesus Christ, we are all called to lay down what we would prefer so that we can with humility and love be made more into the image of Christ. As John the Baptist so wonderfully put it: *“He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.”* (John 3:30)

**So, with humble hearts and open hands, let us dive into this complex topic.**

---

[14] David P. Gushee has a helpful distinction between these 3 categories in his book “Changing our Minds”. For some more comment and expansive conversation on these categories see page 20 of his book.

[15] Champagne Butterfield, Rosaria; Openness Unhindered; Crown and Covenant Publications, Pittsburgh, Penn; 2024; 4

# ARE YOU BORN GAY?

---

“

“Am I lost or just less found? On the straight or on the roundabout of the wrong way? Is this a soul that stirs in me, is it breaking free, wanting to come alive? ‘Cause my comfort would prefer for me to be numb, and avoid the impending birth of who I was born to become.”

*C.S Lewis Song - Brooke Fraser*

”

I grew up in the small rural town of Gore, which was once considered by many the “Bible belt” of Aotearoa – the place where one was white, straight, Christian and Evangelical. However, during the 1990’s when TV personalities, Newsboy and Havoc (Jeremy Wells and Mikey Havoc), came to Gore and labelled it “Good ole’ Gay man’s Gore” the “Gay Capital of NZ”, it was not without its sense of irony. Then to everyone’s surprise, that phrase somehow stuck and made it into the colloquial culture of New Zealand. If there ever were gay people in Gore, it was well hidden. Some suspicion existed, but that was it. However, with the passing of time it turns out there were people who eventually, “came out”.

The wider evangelical church has sometimes become somewhat (understandably, yet unhelpfully) focused on the “why” people are same-sex attracted. With multiple theories bantered around from childhood abuse, formative traumatic experiences, significant relationship impact with a parent, environmental factors (growing up in a particularly masculine or feminine environment) or even biological causes, some have attempted to answer the why. Yet, there is no adequate evidence pointing to one or any of the above to answer the why question in fullness. The need to find an answer is completely understandable, for the heart behind it is to help and support the person in their sexuality; but it can often feel like a bait and switch: solve the why and solve the “problem”.

Whether one is born gay or chooses to be gay can become a weaponised question with a fraught answer. If one is born gay, then much like ethnicity, height and those inherited dodgy knees from your mothers side of the family, nothing can be done about it and perhaps it should be accepted. For if you deny your gayness, then you are denying something as core to you as your ethnicity. Whether it is reasonable to be expected to deny something as core as identity is debatable. On the other hand, if a particular moment or series of experiences can be identified as the catalyst leading to same-sex attraction, then it would make sense that through therapy, prayer and support, healing can come to this area of life and then eventually, the “gayness” *might* then dissipate.

The reality is though, in the case of the interviewees, those I observed, listened to and read about, sexual orientation and identity were realised in childhood or early adolescence. They have hidden their feelings away, ignored them, buried them and tried to get on with life. For some it has been a result of one or more of the factors listed above; for others, like Pastor and author Ed Shaw, who remains same-sex attracted, there was no trauma, broken relationships, biological anomalies or anything that might make a gay orientation inevitable. Yet with none of that present, his same-sex attraction remains strong and unshifting and to deny that would mean he was not being honest with himself or others.

Author of “Gay and Catholic,” Eve Tushnet, came out to herself at the age of 13, and her parents shortly after that.[16] This seems to be typical of most who first come to terms with themselves and then share it in fear and trepidation with those closest to them. Jackie Hill Perry, states in her book, “Gay Girl, Good God”, *“Same-sex desires are actual. Though born of sin, they aren’t an imaginary feeling one conjures up for the sake of being different.”*[17] Ed Shaw would agree saying *“There is little scientific evidence that we ourselves can simply turn our own desires on and off by an act of our will (although we can, of course, choose to intensify them).”*[18] Both these evangelical authors would agree with the Rainbow community’s experience that the desires that sit within us cannot be turned on and off like a tap. Admitting same-sex attraction to self, to God and to others is choosing to walk a difficult road, particularly in a church community where such things are not talked about. Why would one voluntarily choose a path of “hard” unnecessarily?

One interviewee was a woman, whom we will call Sarah, who was long retired, loved the evangelical church to which she belonged, was single and gay. In our opening conversation Sarah candidly identified that her same-sex attraction was most likely due to the fact that as a pre-pubescent child she was sexually assaulted and abused by a man while on holiday with her parents. So traumatic was the experience that she could recall only the events immediately prior and after the abuse occurred. Since then, Sarah has been attracted solely to women, even though she tried dating several men for years and even received a marriage proposal from one, which she politely declined. Was the experience of her abuse the only thing that projected her towards same-sex relationships? Or did it simply awaken something already there?

Would she be gay today even if this moment in time had not happened? The answers to these questions are inconclusive and we run the risk of trivialising it if our answer to Sarah is simply more counselling so that she can then be attracted to men. She has done all the ‘things’ the Christian community would suggest, yet still the desires remain. What should our response then be?

**Selecting one’s sexual orientation is not like choosing what coffee to have at a cafe or what to order off the menu when out for one’s birthday dinner. Our sexuality is so much deeper and integral than that.**

One can point to a number of people who are faithful Christ followers who have said no to homosexuality and in time found themselves in a heterosexual marriage; but this is not always the case, nor should we hold this up as the “gold standard”. This certainly was not the case for Sarah.

Jackie Hill-Perry, who spent years as a lesbian and then over many more years and a multitude of God moments stepped away from her gayness and then later married her husband Preston, comments, *“Preston and I were brought together not so that we could become the standard of what is to become of all gay girls and boys turned believers. We were brought together for the primary reason of pointing to the mystery of God’s Gospel (Ephesians 5:32). Marriage was the way God wanted me to glorify him. Becoming one flesh would not complete me. Marriage is not what would make me whole, but it would be God’s work in and through my marriage, along with whatever else the potter chose to use to shape me as His clay that would.”*[19] All the other evangelical authors and interviewees in this investigation remarked similarly that the same-sex attraction never left them, so they live with it on a sometimes daily basis and have *“on the kitchen floor moments”*[20] with God as they pray, wrestle and ask the why question.

[16] Tushnet, Eve; Gay and Catholic; Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana; 16

[17] Hill-Perry, Jackie; Gay Girl, Good God; B&H Publishing; Brentwood, Tennessee; 2018; 20

[18] Shaw, Ed; The Plausibility Problem; Intervarsity Press, London, England; 54

[19] Hill-Perry, Jackie; Gay Girl, Good God; B&H Publishing; Brentwood, Tennessee; 2018:139

[20] Ed Shaw talks about this in his book ‘The Plausibility Problem’ where he finds himself on the kitchen floor praying, grieving, wrestling and crying out to God about his same-sex attraction and the celibate life he has chosen to step into. He calls them his “kitchen floor” moments.

**Ultimately, we do not choose any of the feelings that weave their way in and through our lives. It seems that it would be more accurate to say that the feelings often choose us.**

Science is yet to discover the “gay” gene, and it would be like chasing a rainbow if you were looking for one[21]. Knowing this should give us all compassion and understanding that our friends and family simply do not ‘choose’ these feelings, just as the heterosexual male does not choose to have thoughts about what it would be like to have a sexual encounter with a particular woman (however he does get to choose if he lets it “nest” or not).

English professor and author Champagne Butterfield helpfully writes: *“To the Christians who are reading this and do not struggle with homosexual desires, do not add weight to the burden by thinking that homosexuality is the biggest of all sins, or that its solution is heterosexuality. The solution to all sin is Christ's atoning blood.”*[22]

To that I would say yes and amen.

---

[21] “And her recent books, straight expectations, gay journalist Julie Findlay asks geneticist, Dr. Andrew Rutherford, whether it actually exists he replies, “I feel I can give you an unequivocal answer to that question, which also applies to the biology of almost any complex trait, which is, there isn’t a gay gene.” Cited in Ed Shaw’s Book, the Shaw, Ed; The Plausibility Problem; page 55

[22] Champagne Butterfield, Rosaria; Openness Unhindered; Crown and Covenant Publications, Pittsburgh, Penn; 2024; 33

# WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY

“

“If we've eyes to see. If we've ears to hear. To find it in our hearts and mouths. The word that saves is near. Shed that shallow skin. Come and live again.”

*Hosea's Wife - Brooke Fraser*

”

It is with some fear and trepidation that I even step into this part of the discussion. The word of God is a beautiful, heartfelt, powerful, mighty, empathetic and life-changing book that tells the story of the God of the universe who has redeemed and continues to redeem his people. When we read scripture, we are not just reading history with some good poetry and engaging stories – we are reading what God has ordained and breathed into life through the power of His Holy Spirit. This is the Word of God and reading it has shaped, changed and grounded my life (and a multitude of others') on countless occasions.

During the decades-long sexuality debates[23] of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in the bi-annual General Assembly[24], there came a point at which scripture was no longer permitted to be used in the debates. The reason for this was that it was being employed as a weapon from both sides to shut down the conversation. In that instance, Scripture was not being used in a life-giving and edifying way but in a *“Here is the trump card, end of discussion”* kind of way.

Scripture certainly needs to correct, rebuke, steer and challenge us at times in order for our lives to reflect the God whom we follow. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is really clear, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.”*

But in the same breath, let us not ill-use the Word that God has gifted humanity. As a gift from the hand of God, we must treat it as we would any precious, life giving and beautiful gift that we would receive.

I would not consider myself a Bible scholar, nor does this paper allow for extensive commentary or deep plunging into the scriptures that connect to homosexuality or even sexuality in general[25]. However, there are some scriptures that sit front and centre in this discussion.

According to Ray Anderson, the word homosexuality was not part of societal vocab until after 1869 when *“a Hungarian physician writing in German used it with reference to male and females who from birth are erotically oriented towards their own sex.”*[26] Nor did the ancient world have a word or concept for homosexuality as we use it today. In fact, the word didn't even feature in the Oxford English Dictionary until 1912, and the scriptures did not start using it until 1946 when in the first edition of the Revised Standard Version it was used in the scripture 1 Corinthians 6:9.[27]

Even Jesus himself did not speak about same-sex relationships! He did, however, speak about re-marriage, fornication[28] and adultery[29], but when it comes to same-sex relationships he is quiet, much to the frustration of many.

[23] Champagne Butterfield, Rosaria; Openness Unhindered; Crown and Covenant Publications, Pittsburgh, Penn; 2024; 33

[24] For the outcome of those debates and the decision reached by the General Assembly, see Appendix 1.

[25] For a more extensive reading and interpretation of the scriptures I would suggest starting with *“More than a single Issue”* which is a series of essays on sexuality and gives a good framework for approaching scripture. See the bibliography for the book reference.

[26] Rae and Redding, Ed.; More than a Single Issue; Australian Theological Forum, South Aus.; 2002; 49

[27] Ibid

[28] Fornication: A word that you'd probably only find in the Bible these days – it simply means consensual sex between two adults who are not married.

[29] Adultery: Again, a word that would be rarely used these days – it simply means consensual sex between two adults but one or both are married but not to each other.

**However, all would agree that just because Jesus is silent on a particular issue, does not then give blind permission to step into it.**

We do not hear Jesus specifically speaking about end-of-life choice, drug use, the ethics of genetic modification and modern-day slavery, yet it would be rare for Jesus' silence to be used as justification of such activities.

However, scripture is not completely silent on homosexuality, as evidenced in some passages below.

The first we see of sexuality in the negative is when Adam and Eve have the experience of being in fallen humanity after they eat the fruit. They were naked and they felt shame. So, they did what they could to hide from God, doing all they humanly could to remove themselves from the ultimately pointless exercise of hiding from the God who is omnipresent. As Genesis continues to unfold, we come across the story of Sodom and Gomorrah[30] and what reads like depraved homosexual activity and the wrath on the cities that follows. It is good to note here, that scripture goes on to mention this moment 20 times. However, only once (Jude vs.7)[31] does it mention anything about sexual perversion, and even then, not specifically homosexuality. In fact, most scholars would say the Genesis passage is not pointing to sexual sin but to the value of hospitality and the men at the door wanting to bring shame and disrepute to Lot. Colby Martin comments *"it was about dishonouring the other and stripping them of their masculinity, and thereby their humanity."*[32] Colby devotes a whole chapter in his book to the passage at hand. Certain fractions of the church have sometimes connected the act of homosexuality to natural disasters and used this passage as justification for that link. Sweeping and unhelpful statements have been made in public or by keyboard warriors citing such and such natural disaster as God's judgement on such and such a place. This is totally false and flawed theology.

While there are examples of this in scripture, it is not a predominant response from God. Nor is it a New Testament response. We do not see Jesus condemning whole cities or communities, but we do hear him speaking about individuals and redeeming the ones, using examples like a single lost sheep, a single coin and of course the lost son. Sodom and Gomorrah were not destroyed because of the demand for sexual access on a particular night. It was destroyed because of the sin and because *"the outcry against this place is so great..."*[33] Sexual sin was part of but not the whole reason.

Then, as we make our way to Leviticus we see some more explicit language. *"Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable."*[34] Or further on *"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman both of them has done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads".* [35] We must remind ourselves that this constituted part of a set of laws designed as a holiness code for the people of Israel as they left Egypt and entered a new way of living. Today, neither the church nor its people call for the death of anyone who is in a homosexual relationship. Nor is Deuteronomy 22:11 applied in these days: *"You must not wear clothing made of wool and linen woven together."* The point is that we must understand the context before we roll out particular verses and use them to coerce our brothers and sisters into our way of thinking. Again, I found Colby Martin helpful here on this scripture reminding us that the people of Israel were coming out of an Egyptian culture where anything and everything sexual was on offer. *"All these things the Egyptians did. All these things the Canaanites did. Now Israel was being called to something different, something new, something better."*[36]

[30] Genesis 19

[31] Almost all the version of scripture do not use the word "homosexuality" in this verse but rather opt for words such as "sexual immorality, unnatural lust, sexual perversion" etc. For example in the NLT reads "...which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion." We must not fill in the blank spaces of scripture that don't exist and assume the writer means homosexuality. For sexual perversion can mean a vast array of non-consensual sexual acts which de-humanise and abuse power and privilege.

[32] Martin, Colby; UnClobber – Rethinking our misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky; 2016; 54

[33] Genesis 19:13

[34] Leviticus 18:22

[35] Leviticus 20:13

[36] Martin, Colby; UnClobber – Rethinking our misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky; 2016; 85

The book of Leviticus was a collection of commandments compiled for the priestly tribe – the Levites – and it was broken down into 3 main sections. Chapters 1-10 were the sacrificial rites; chapter 11-17 the Ritual pollution and purification instructions and chapters 18-27 the Holiness Code. The first two sections are how they are to function towards God, the third is how they are to function towards each other. God was calling them to a new way of living, he was calling them out of Egypt and into a new land and a new way of doing life with Him and with each other. Does that mean these scriptures we then just ignore and treat them as a nice history lesson but no longer relevant? No, not at all. But we also have to approach it with some context which then becomes part of our response – not our whole response.

Moving now into the New Testament, the applicable passages here for homosexuality are *Roman 1:26-27*[37]; *1 Corinthians 6:9*[38] and *1 Timothy 1:10*[39] and although I have done some reading on these scriptures, so far I personally, have not found enough compelling evidence to head in any other direction than how the historical church has traditionally interpreted them. For the likes of Colby Martin and Nadia Bolt-Webber, I find myself parting company with them on these parts of Scripture. Others may interpret them differently, and I would welcome a sit down conversation with them, however I still have the conviction of the historical understanding.

What I am sure of, however, is that Paul did not intend these scriptures to be employed to heap shame, condemnation or erosion of human value. Later in Romans we see Paul lamenting how he does what he doesn't want to do and does not do what he wants to do. We hear words of *"there is no condemnation..."*; *"we are no longer slaves..."*; and that *"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Full stop. End of Story. No other qualifiers.

And then Paul follows up a couple of verses later just to really hammer home his point "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved".

**So where does this leave us? How do we hold scripture in one hand – interpretation in the other – and stare into the eyes of our loved one who loves Jesus but cannot just ignore the same-sex feelings within them?**

We get curious, we ask questions, we sit in the tension and the uncomfortable of having scripture and our lived experience not always lining up succinctly. We take a posture of grace and a willingness to "love God and love others" regardless of whether we are a committed progressive or a staunch evangelical recognising that below the differences each of us are doing the best we can to faithfully follow Jesus and the Scriptures.

As I come to the end of this section let us all be reminded that neither you nor I are the Holy Spirit; that the word of God is active, is living, is breathing and is sharper than a double edged sword.[40] But it is also able to bring comfort[41] to those who are hurting and in pain - all through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let **us all** approach scripture and each other not only with conviction, but also with humility and a sense of curiosity so that we attack the devil and his schemes, not each other; so that we use the Word as the Sword of the Spirit that it was intended to be.

---

[37] 26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

[38] 9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men

[39] 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

[40] Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

[41] 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

# A WORD ON TRANSGENDERISM

“

“I still feel the guilty one, still trying to make it right. So I whisper soft your name, let it roll around my tounge, Knowing you're the only one who knows me. You know me.”

*Faithful - Brooke Fraser*

”

Our friends were up from Southland about the time that I was writing this report. They had a number of appointments around the city including the hospital, and as they tried to remember the names of suburbs and malls they had visited, they also made the unsolicited comment that there were “more transgender people than they’d ever noticed before.” This made my ears prick up – why did they say that? Maybe it was because they only visited the city every now and then? Maybe it was because they were from the South where Redband gumboots and RM Williams shirts were the norm? Or maybe it is because transgenderism is now more a “thing” than it has ever been. Whatever the reason, they were anecdotally giving voice to a growing community within our nation, cities, communities and even within our families where individuals have made the decision to transition from the gender with which they were born to the gender they believe they were meant to be.

Let me introduce you to George Jorgensen, who was brought up in church and grew up in a bustling metropolis while attending a well-regarded school and enjoyed a stable home. Growing up, he avoided the normal male dominated sports and went on to study photography before doing a brief stint in the military and time training in medicine and as a dental assistant.

As he grew, he felt some kind of emotional and sexual disorder and feared that he was a homosexual because of his attraction to men – but that did not explain everything. Eventually, he started to experiment with hormone replacement therapy and found a connection with Dr. Christian Hamburger who would support him in his journey. Well into his 30’s now, George eventually had gender re-assignment surgery including plastic surgery and changed his name to Christian Jorgensen. The year was 1952[42] about 8 years after the word homosexual was first even used in scripture.

Gender dysphoria, or gender disillusionment experienced by an individual over years is a classified medical condition. The American Psychiatric Association in their DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) estimate that between 1 in 10,000 - 13,000 males and 1 in 20,000 - 34,000 females experience gender dysphoria[43] in their lifetimes. Here in New Zealand, the 2023 census records that over 31,000 people identify as transgender or non-binary, a number that is growing and cannot be ignored.

Mark Yarhouse, in his book, Gender Disphoria, cites the Evangelical Alliance Policy Commission (EAPC), who speak to the commonly referenced scriptures of Deuteronomy 22:5[44] and 23:1[45] which are often rolled out to speak against such practices as gender re-assignment.

[42] Yarhouse, Mark A.; Understanding Gender Dysphoria; Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois; 2015; 13-14

[43] Yarhouse, Mark A.; Understanding Gender Dysphoria; Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois; 2015; 92-93

[44] “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.”

[45] “If a man’s testicles are crushed or his penis is cut off, he may not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.”

The EAPC denounce such cherry-picking reflections as a *“simplistic moral reading of the Bible that treats it as a sort of ethical cookbook.”* They go on to observe, *“a clear progression in scripture which culminates in the implied acceptance of the genitally mutilated by Jesus in Matt 19:12, and the conversion, baptism and acceptance into the Kingdom of God of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39.”*[46] Yarhouse goes on, sensibly, to say *“...I rarely like to cite a passage as a quick way to respond to a complicated topic. It never seems to do justice to the complexity.”*[47]

Yarhouse cites a number of possible physical reasons gender dysphoria may be present, so for those like me who struggled with 5th form science and “punnett squares”, here are some helpful biological anomalies to be aware of:

- **Klinefelter Syndrome** – in which a person has an extra sex chromosome, XXY.
- **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome** – in which a person has external female genitalia and an outward appearance as female but has XY male chromosomes.
- **Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH)** – which has many outcomes but could include XX chromosomes but male external genitalia. This is the result of an enzyme deficiency that occurs in both male and females and is inherited as an autosomal recessive disorder. [48]

Theories abound seeking to give a framework to the “why” question. One of the more compelling theories is the **Brain-Sex Theory**. The idea is that there are areas of the brain that are different between male and female which, for those who are married – or even work with anyone of the opposite sex – this would absolutely resonate!

Researchers would say these “sex-parts” of our brain wire us to have either male or female dispositions and behaviour. Research has concluded that *“sex differentiation of the genitals and sex differentiation of the brain take place at different stages of foetal development.”*[49] This would dispel the narrative that “that” person is like that because they must have had a “messed up childhood” or some such trauma which has led to their dressing in drag or seeking gender re-assignment. The truth is, *“the causes of gender dysphoria”*[50] are unknown and combine multiple layers and complexities.

It would be right to say that gender dysphoria is a real thing. There is no doubt those who are starting to enact or head in this direction question whether they are meant to be their opposite gender due to normal identity questions that all of us walk through; but this does not always necessitate a gender re-assignment journey. The pendulum has swung far and created unrestrained pathways for young people to make significantly impacting life decisions in too short a time frame. Time is a beautiful gift, and we need to push back on the fear of needing to “do it now” and to walk with those who are burdened.

It is easy to look at those who seek to cross-dress, look to change their gender or dress in drag and think, if not even say in hushed tones to the people we are with, *“What is that all about?”* or *“Oh for goodness sake.”* The reality is that the motivation for stepping into that space is complex with multiple layers prompting the individual to explore these things. For many the question arises “Why are they trying to change the gender that God gave them at birth?” It is a good question and for Christians, taps into our sense of identity as God’s creations, how we see ourselves; and whether as humans we should have the power to change something that up until 100 years ago was never considered an option.

[46] Yarhouse, Mark A.; Understanding Gender Dysphoria; Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois; 2015; 32-33

[47] Ibid; 34

[48] Ibid; 39

[49] Ibid; 67

[50] Ibid; 61

Consider the boy whose older sister dressed him up as a girl and he then proudly strutted around pretending to do girl things for the first and also last time. He liked the way it made people giggle, helped bond him and his sister and placed him at the centre of attention for a moment. As he grew up, however, he became comfortable in his own skin and continued to develop according to God's unique design for him. Masculinity, and then by definition as well, femininity, can look quite different for every person. How great if everyone could find personal value and worth in who God says they are and be slow to try and change according to their own interpretation of what men and women might be.

Showing feminine traits as a male or masculine traits as a female does not indicate "wrong gender". We live in a fallen world with brokenness being presented in a host of different ways; but God does not create mistakes. Sin and fallen-ness does that for us.

No permission is given for judging the one who looks different to the "norm". Encouragement and celebration of the differences youth and children exhibit are by far more edifying. Boys doing ballet is not just ok, it is actually awesome! Gender dysphoria is definitely "a thing" – but it behoves us to be really slow, considered, careful and give years, not months, before life-changing decisions are made.

**Hear the stories, hear the reasons why, keep the conversation open and honest but also respectful. As a church we are called to be a redemptive community for everyone (including "us") where anyone can find a place of hope, love, redemption and the God who says you are not a mistake.**

---

# SWIPE RIGHT FOR SINGLE

“

If my heart has one ambition. If my soul one goal to seek. This my solitary vision 'til I only dwell in Thee. That I only dwell in Thee.

*“Hymn” - Brooke Fraser*

”

When it comes to romantic relationships I am probably the least qualified to talk about such things. At the risk of gaining respect from some and losing respect from others, let me continue to share some of my story, embarrassing though it may be. Due to a constant void of confidence and an unhealthy amount of self-loathing growing up, the first time I even properly danced with a girl was at my 7th Form (Year 13) school ball. Incidentally, she was the daughter of the pastor of whose church I attended and would later work for. Not so bad you think...well, my first and only girlfriend was Steph[51] and the first time I ever kissed any girl AT ALL was on our wedding day in front of about 200 people at the tender age of 22. It was the “*I kissed Dating Goodbye*” era being championed by author Joshua Harris, and although I do not regret those days, I was a product of the evangelical purity movement that certainly had its place but also had its foibles. It was the age when singleness (although not stated) was considered a disease that needed to be cured by the only tool we had in the shed – marriage. I wonder if this attitude still sits with us even if the volume has been turned down a little?

Marriage is a wonderful gift, a God-ordained gift of two people coming together to share their lives in the most vulnerable way possible, and it also theologically reflects Jesus and the Church, often referred to as “His bride” in scripture. In my 20 years of married experience, it has been the single greatest enriching, wonderful, beautiful, humbling and life-shaping relationship I’ve ever had.

God has used my marriage to shape, form and mould me more into his purposes. However, let us not be naïve: being married is both good and hard – just like being single is both good and hard – and we must dispel from our minds (married and single people alike) that singleness is something to be removed from our lives and avoided at all costs. Being single is a wonderful gift, a gift that we should not look to return to the sender but to embrace and give thanks for the life it offers that the married life does not.

Being single is a normal and natural part of the rhythms of life. Be it you find yourself staring down at a divorce paper and adding your signature, staring down at a casket, or having never walked down the aisle, singleness comes to us all again at some stage[52]. And although this paper is not about singleness per-se, it is worth exploring this through the lens of sexuality and homosexual relationships.

Within a historical Christian framework, the only place for the full expression of our sexuality is within the bonds of marriage. A relationship that says we will be totally open, honest, transparent and withhold nothing from the one with whom we have pledged to “do life”. This commitment takes place at an emotional, spiritual and mental level and is then worked out in a physical way in the most vulnerable way possible: being naked before each other. This experience builds security and trust that this person has seen the other at their most intimate and vulnerable state and marriage calls to take that gift and treasure, honour and guard it all their lives.

[51] If you’re not from the Hope context or you’re not personally familiar with me – Steph is my wife. Just to clarify :)

[52] I want to continue to re-iterate that I have a very high view of marriage and I think an excellent paper was written by Hamish Galloway for our Hope Congregation on the value of marriage, divorce and re-marriage. This explores in a very accessible way the value of marriage, the reality of divorce and the grace of re-marriage all within a biblical frame work. If you wish to obtain a copy then please reach out.

Sex with another is the height and pinnacle of human vulnerability, there is no other moment or experience containing greater weakness and vulnerability than this. The covenant promise of marriage is the God-designed safe place for that vulnerability to be worked out. At least, that is the plan.

One of the major differences between married and single – within a Christian framework – is the sexual part of the relationship. Outside of marriage (and inside of marriage) what are the implications of not having sex? We all need air, food, water, relationship, connection, intimacy,[53] and we need purpose which ultimately comes from Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour – but do we need sex? There is the rudimentary and biological populating the species requirement of sex; but to suggest not having sex dooms one to less of a life reflects a narrow perspective.

Sam Allberry asks a helpful question: does one need to have sex in order to have a fulfilled life? He states, *“It dawned on me that the very kind of thinking that claims a life without sexual fulfillment is not really an authentic way to live is actually saying that Jesus was not a full human life.”*[54] As soon as we say that in order to have a fulfilled life we need to have sex, we are saying to Jesus himself, Paul, Mary and Martha, Lazarus, Miriam along with some of the prophets like Jeremiah and Elijah, that they did not have a complete human experience. From all accounts, this could not be further from the truth. While in India over my study leave, I visited Mother Theresa’s home – it was a wonderful experience to see the place where she lived and worked for over 50 years until her death in the bedroom that she had occupied all that time. Here had been a woman who was the very essence of humility, experiencing a large and fulfilling life, even though she remained single, never once having been in a romantic relationship. 4500 nuns have followed in her footsteps, along with so many other protestant single men and women who have not only lived remarkable lives, but have done so without ever marrying.

The evidence suggests that having an avenue to out-work relational sexuality is not required to live a deep, fulfilling and wonderful life.

It is also pertinent to give voice to the normal rhythms of sexuality that married couples experience. Seasons of sickness, medical procedures and recovery, demands from children, work commitments, long weeks, busy schedules, travel and long-term sickness all contribute to seasons (or reasons) for married couples not being sexually connected for a time.

Here is the point: sex is good and great but intimacy is better and is available to everyone. Regardless of whether being single, same sex attracted or in a marriage where sex is just not on the table at the moment, intimacy which can be achieved in a multitude of ways.

C.S Lewis said about friendship that it is *“the least natural of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious and necessary...The species, biologically considered, has no need of it.”* Ray Ortlund sums it up well, *“A brother is stuck with you. A brother is obligated to be some kind of safety net...but a friend chooses you. When someone loves you at all times, good and bad, and they don’t have to, but they choose to – that person is a friend.”*[55]

What does all this have to do with LGBTQIA+ community and the church?

**Regardless of one’s sexual orientation, there is a place for singleness to be actively celebrated within the church. Being single is as much a legitimate and fulfilling way of living as being married.**

The single, faithful people in the life of the church are to be celebrated as leaders, pioneers, people to love, people of inspiration, people who have freedom to do things that married people cannot do.

[53] Intimacy and sex are different. You can be intimately connected with someone but not have sex (think of those closest to you) – just in the same way you can have sex but not be intimate (think of one-night stands, prostitution etc). Here I do not mean sex by using the word intimacy – I mean emotional intimacy.

[54] Allberry, Sam; 7 Myths about Singleness; Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois; 2019; 26

[55] Ibid; 55

Marriage is not an antidote for singleness. If anything, marriage is the antidote for pride! Struggles with sexuality are common. There are both sexual complications and gifts when you are married just as there are sexual complications and gifts for the single – Paul exhorts both in 1 Corinthians 7.

When both sexuality and whatever relationship status we have are used to point towards the coming kingdom of God, the praise and glory rise to God. As Sam says: *“Both single and married people who abstain from sex outside of the marriage bond point to the same thing. They both “deploy” their sexuality in ways that serve as a sign of the kingdom and the faithful character of God’s passion.”*[56] Being single is a gift. Being married is a gift. Our sexuality is a gift. All can be enjoyed at the different ages and stages of our lives as simply that – a gift – knowing that no relationship would or should bring complete fulfilment. This is found only in Christ.

---

[56] Allberry, Sam; 7 Myths about Singleness; Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois; 2019; 120

# THE FINAL WORDS

**When I chose this topic for my study leave, it was something I wanted to wrestle with myself and give appropriate time to its investigation. While I am comfortable with what I have achieved, I am vastly aware that this paper has limited scope, my reading and interviews have been limited and there is more work to be done. However, there remain some things that I think are worth noting as we draw to a close.**

We can no longer roll out trite one-liners that would seek to simply shut the conversation down and draw a hard line in the sand. We must learn to hold a conviction of scripture in one hand and the relational reality of our Rainbow friends and family in the other knowing that it is God's job to convict and our job to help arrange the meeting. During my study leave I attended a night meeting of a Christian conference in the city where I sat next to the pastor of a well-known evangelical church. I was asking him about ministry-related issues and when he asked the normal "How's it going with you?" I proceeded to tell him about my study leave topic and the wrestle that was. He shot back with a quick answer – "Yeah but sin is still sin though." I found it a jarring and uncomfortable response, but even so his comment stuck with me. As I reflected on it, I was frustrated that in drawing this line in the sand, it failed to hold and keep in view the faithful followers of Jesus who are same-sex attracted. I had some sympathy towards this pastor, because in years gone by, I probably would have said the same thing. As a proud "*card-carrying*" evangelical who loves the local church and loves Jesus, along with my conviction of scripture, my own experience and my conversations with others, I would still call myself one who holds a historical view of Biblical sexuality. This does not necessitate that those who would disagree with this viewpoint should be disregarded or excluded from being part of the church, belonging to the church, serving in the church and even leading in the church.

When I was interviewing a pastor who was openly supportive and even actively connecting with the LGBTQIA+ community, a comment towards the end of our conversation caught my attention. When I was asking how a church might engage with the Rainbow community, we got talking about flags – 'Would you fly the rainbow flag in your church?' I asked. His answer surprised me – "No, I wouldn't" he said. "I want people to come to our church not because of the rainbow flag we fly, but because of the Jesus flag we're flying." I liked where he was going. The church should aspire to be an oasis where the love, grace, beauty, connection and transforming relationship with Jesus Christ draw people in; not our policies, position or guidelines around sexuality.

## **So, where to from here?**

I really wish that I had a nice box with a lovely ribbon that we could tie this issue up with, pop it on the shelf and move on to the next topic of significance. In reality, though, this just is not possible. This issue is the major topic confronting our generation of pastors, elders, leaders and congregation members; and regardless of where we stand on our convictions, we are compelled by the example of Jesus to approach it with humility, grace, curiosity and a posture of seeking to understand rather than seeking to be understood.

Ultimately, my hope and prayer for myself as a pastor, for the team that I lead, the hope-filled church to which I belong, the elders I stand with and the leaders I lead alongside is that we would seek to remove barriers for the gospel going forth, not put them in place.

**That we would hold our convictions in one hand and a bucket of grace and humility in the other.**

**That anyone can find a home in our church and be part of our family, offer to serve and be considered for leadership.**

**That together we would be a community that has been redeemed and continues to be redeemed as we say.**

Come Lord Jesus. Come. And may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

---

# SOURCE LIST



Those people I interviewed – with grateful thanks.

1

A retired women who is in an evangelical church (and has been for a long time) but has kept her same sex attraction hidden to the community. Some in her church do know which she's thankful for. I had the privilege of being about the 6th person she'd told.

2

A pastor who is heterosexual and works with and in the Rainbow community.

3

A young adult who is part of a long, long, generational line of church attendance – married in their early 20's and now has/continues to transition and is still happily married.

4

A gay young adult male, who is an academic theologian, follower of Christ and re-finding a church community.

5

A pastor who is gay, in a relationship with his partner and leading a church community.

6

A heterosexual pastor who is helping lead a large evangelical church.

# A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK



## **1. A member of my family is gay – this is jarring for me as I look at scripture with the historical lens – what should I do?**

Every situation with a family member or even friend who comes out gay or transgender is quite different. There are many factors to consider, including how close you would describe your relationship, how old are they, are they living with you and are they a follower of Jesus? There is no one size fits all approach. However, there are a couple of things that would be helpful:

- Be curious, ask questions and don't belittle them. This has no doubt been an emotionally heavy journey for them, so keep the conversation open and going. Shutting it down has never gone well for anyone and does long term damage.
  - Process your own feelings with someone who is emotionally disconnected from the situation. Don't emotionally unload on the one who is telling you.
  - It's important to know "your lane" in this situation. Are they telling you to simply inform you, seek advice, ask for support or something else? Knowing what your role is will be helpful in navigating the future and recognising that your voice is not the only one in their life.
  - Your conviction is important, and you need to hold to that. However, you could do so without necessarily feeling like you have to project that conviction onto your family member.
  - Pray – this is the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in yours. Let God do the work and be part of what He is doing.
- 



## **2. My work place is asking me to head in a direction that I'm uncomfortable with – asking me to use the "right" pronouns on my email signature and fly the rainbow flag at my desk etc. What should my response be?**

Workplaces (particularly corporate) are now no longer just asking people to be tolerant and accepting of the Rainbow community, but there is now persistent pressure to be advocates for them. Approach the proposed changes that come with grace, curiosity and respect. In scripture, Daniel was immersed in a foreign culture that he was required to adopt in some measure. He did not adopt it all and used Godly wisdom and conviction to discern what to accept and what to push back on. Daniel was also a man of prayer and that gave him the tools he needed to navigate the foreign culture.

---



### **3. I am feeling same-sex attracted and I'm part of an evangelical church, what should I do?**

Being fully seen and fully known in a church community is really important not only for the individual but also the corporate church. Being seen does not mean that you necessarily need to tell the pastor or leadership, but I would recommend that you share with someone you trust and have built relationship with. Your pastor or small group leader would be more than happy to sit with you and hear your story. However, if that doesn't sit right with you then find someone else in the church you're part of to share with.

If you would like to step into leadership then the church leadership would need to be brought into the conversation. I would like to think the church leadership would approach this with grace, care, dignity and curiosity; this would certainly be the case at Hope. However, you would need to make that decision for your own church context.

---



### **4. What is the way forward for the evangelical church?**

This is a great question. This conversation and challenge are not going away, in fact it would seem that churches with the historical interpretations of scripture will continually find increasing pressure to revisit those interpretations as the years go by. As that happens, I believe we need to approach these challenges with grace, humility, steadfastness, openness and the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is not a primary theological issue, and we should not compromise the unity of any church community or risk the gospel being silenced because of it. We look to do what the church forefathers did, and move through difficult issues slowly, give considered approach and work to keep the church together even in our differences.

---

# REFERENCES

Allberry, Sam; 7 Myths about Singleness; Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois; 2019

Bolz-Weber, Nadia; Shameless; Convergent Books, New York; 2020

Champagne Butterfield, Rosaria; Openness Unhindered; Crown and Covenant Publications, Pittsburgh, Penn; 2024

Gushee, David P.; Changing our Mind; Read the Spirit Books, Canton, Michigan; 2022

Hill-Perry, Jackie; Gay Girl, Good God; B&H Publishing; Brentwood, Tennessee; 2018

Martin, Colby; UnClobber – Rethinking our misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky; 2016;

Rae and Redding, Ed.; More than a Single Issue; Australian Theological Forum, South Aus.; 2002

Shaw, Ed; The Plausibility Problem; InterVarsity Press, London, England;

Tushnet, Eve; Gay and Catholic; Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana;

Yarhouse, Mark A.; Understanding Gender Dysphoria; InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois; 2015

# APPENDIX 1

## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND'S POSITION ON...

### **MARRIAGE**

General Assembly decisions affirm that the Church upholds the historic Christian understanding of marriage as the loving, faithful union of a man and a woman.

### **LEADERSHIP**

General Assembly decided that the Church may not accept for training, licensing, ordination, or induction anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful marriage between a man and a woman.

### **SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

General Assembly has decided that a minister may solemnise marriage only between a man and woman.[57]





