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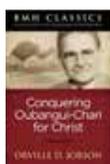


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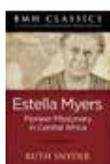
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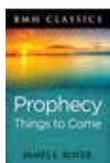
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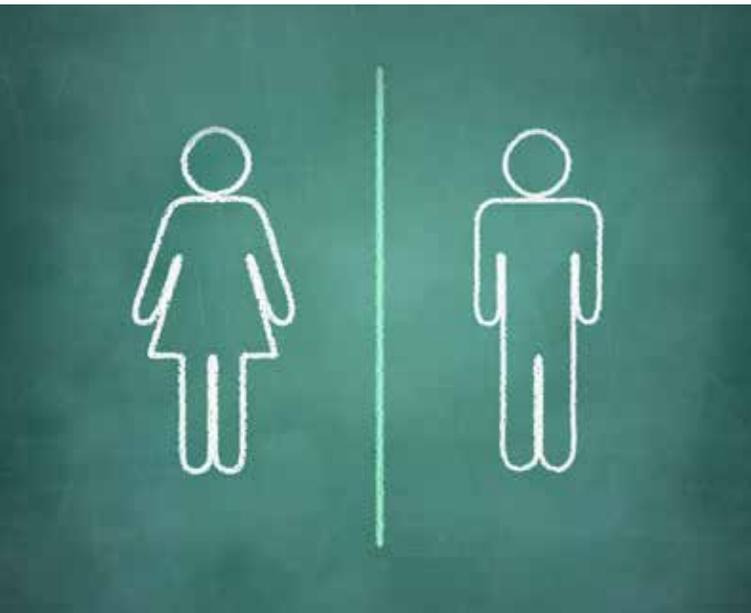
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LEARNING TO LOVE

At that moment, it was clear I didn't want to lose the friendship we enjoyed. I needed to show love.



It's been more than 25 years since a friend admitted to me that he had a same-sex attraction. Those weren't the words he used, but it was the truth, nonetheless.

It rocked my world.

I couldn't understand how someone who professed to know Christ, had attended a Christian college, and had volunteered in ministry at our church, would have reached such a conclusion.

At once, the questions I had about his new friends made sense. But then they didn't. I didn't know what to do. I assumed the worst. I knew the Bible denounced the lifestyle, in spite of his rationalizations, and it felt as if he was walking away from the faith. It was unfamiliar territory. But at that moment, it was clear I didn't want to lose the friendship we enjoyed. I needed to show love.

That experience came back to me as I prepared this issue of the magazine. In the intervening years, many things have changed. The world accepts most alternate lifestyles, gay

marriage is legal throughout North America (and much of the world), and the issue has made its way through the church doors. I'd venture to guess that many in Charis Fellowship congregations have been impacted in some way – a family member, a neighbor, or someone at work.

It's a new day, and I'll be honest, most times I still don't know what to do. One thing I've learned, it's not a new issue.

Last year, as I traveled to Israel with Charis Fellowship pastors and Dr. Randy Smith, I was frequently reminded that the world our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was born into was also wicked and perverse, maybe even more so than we know in the 21st century. Just like the first century Christians, we need to look at the Scriptures for direction.

I've appreciated the guidance of my pastors at Winona Lake Grace Brethren Church, Bruce Barlow and Kip Cone, as they have led our congregation through thinking about the gender questions that are often raised. I asked them to write for this issue, and their wisdom is spot on.

We should always respond with love.

I'm grateful, too, for Jonathan Hiller, who bravely shared his story. God is not done with him, and I applaud him for working through this topic in a very public way while providing a critical perspective.

I don't profess to have the answers. I trust these articles will whet your appetite for how you can learn to better love to those who don't view the world in the same way. I know that my world would not be the same if I'd turned my back on my friend all those years ago.

In the end, it's all about love – Jesus' love.



Liz Cutler Gates, lcgates@bmbbooks.com, is the editor of Grace Connect. Since 2010, she has served as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She and her husband, Doug, live in Warsaw, Ind.

REFLECTING THE GLORY OF CHRIST

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

by Kip Cone



September 11 is a day for remembering. As the Heartland Leadership Network's first meeting of the Fall landed on that date, we reminisced about what ministry was like before 2001, considering how things have changed.

To fuel our thinking, one of our members led us in an online poll. One entry read: "Gender terms I knew before 2001..." Of the options given, every participant selected the same answer: Two — male and female.

The next query read: "Gender identity classifications I know now..." All but one selected the answer: "three to nine." Sure enough, we were able to list more than ten gender labels, from "gender fluid" to "gender non-conforming."

How did we go from two gender identification terms to an ever-increasing jumble of overlapping labels? If self-identification is the only criteria for the determination of gender, it appears that the number is limited only by people's imagination. But should something as deep-seated and consequential as gender be left to the imagination? This sparked a lively discussion, which resulted in a few good takeaways.

Everyone in the room agreed that God made human beings in His image and that in creating people God formed two genders — male and female (Genesis 1:27). However, just stating this fact, it was concluded, doesn't do the discussion justice. It needs to be thought through. In particular, a robust and practical theology of biblical masculinity

ANY BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF PERSONHOOD RINGS HOLLOW WHEN WE DON'T CARE ENOUGH ABOUT PEOPLE TO DIGNIFY THEM BY HEARING THEM OUT.



(maleness) and femininity (femaleness) needs to be articulated and lived out by believers.

It is too easy to write off all these gender identifications as the result of sin and leave it at that. The confusion about gender is rooted in mankind's rejection of God and His revelation; however, behind every label is a person. People matter, regardless of what label they stick on themselves.

Each person has a story. That story may be filled with unfulfilled desires, shattered expectations, abuse, and rejection (sometimes at the hands of people who claim the name of Jesus). Before we start dispensing discussion-ending statements about gender, we should first listen and try to understand. Any biblical theology of personhood rings hollow when we don't care enough about people to dignify them by hearing them out. The worn cliché is still true: people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. We would do well to start by listening.

When it comes to masculinity and femininity, talk is cheap. What is needed are real-life examples. To say that most people do not grow up in families where biblical masculinity and femininity are modeled well is a massive understatement.

Because my father died when I was very young, I grew up in a single-parent home populated with females. My heart longed to understand what it meant to be a man, so I was constantly on the lookout for male role models.

I was fortunate. Men in the church stepped up and engaged me, so I have never lacked "fathers." Men

being role models of fathers and husbands was the most important ministry the church offered me in my early years. Rather than bashing the plethora of gender labels, we would do better to put our energy into relationally relating the goodness of God's purpose in making us male and female. This means engaging and including people so that they can see and experience God's goodness in gender.

Of course, before we can live out God's intended purpose for men and women, we first need to understand biblical masculinity and femininity. We need to work at (re)discovering God's good vision for men and women. What was God thinking when, after creating man and woman, he proclaimed them "very good"? What is the essence of male and female? What is "very good" about biblical maleness and femaleness? What is healthy and life-giving about biblical masculinity and femininity, and how do they play out in our 21st-century culture?

These questions are well worth rolling up our sleeves, digging in, and answering. Here are some starter thoughts.

Don't overlook the obvious: gender goes deep, but race (i.e., humanity) goes deeper still. When Adam awoke from his slumber and saw Eve for the first time, I'm sure he immediately noticed and appreciated some of her differences. However, his first remarks highlighted their similarities: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:23).

Adam initially exulted in the fact that he now had a companion who was like him—another human being. As a relational being, Adam was delighted to have someone like him to talk to, to work together with, to care for, and to love. Both Adam and Eve were image-bearers of God, capable of reflecting justice and mercy, strength and beauty, protection and nurture. Regardless of gender, humans share an essential sameness and equality, which must be valued and respected.

Adam and Eve were also created to be an effective and unified team. Eve was not an exact clone of Adam. When Adam saw Eve, it was only kind of like looking in a mirror. Indeed, it was far better than looking in a mirror!

After creating Adam, God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). God's solution to this problem was not a replica of Adam. Instead, God determined, "I will make a helper suitable for him" In other words, God solved man's "aloneness" problem by creating not just another human being but another gender of human being who complemented and completed Adam. Harmoniously united, male and female reflect most completely the image of God. God's intention was that the complementary nature of male and female working in harmony and unity would reflect Him on earth.

Eve was a "suitable" helper for Adam expressly because she complemented him and filled out the team. God created woman to be a strong warrior at man's side so that together they could accomplish what Adam could not accomplish alone, namely, rule creation as God's representatives,



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BEHIND EVERY LABEL IS A PERSON...AND PEOPLE MATTER, REGARDLESS OF WHAT LABEL THEY STICK ON THEMSELVES.



reflecting His nature. The Hebrew word for “helper” (ezer) appears 21 times in the Old Testament. Twice, both in Genesis 2, it describes the woman. But the majority of uses of this word refer to God himself as the helper of his people. If “helper” is part of the nature of God, then “to help” is to reflect something true about God.

Then, the word “helper” does not connote a position of weakness or inferiority. Instead, it highlights the interdependence of man and woman.

“In the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman,” writes Paul (1 Corinthians 11:11 ESV). We should not lose sight of this truth. Paul admonishes the believers in Ephesus to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21 NIV). In other words, believers in the church, both male and female, whether single or married, are to reveal the love of Christ by pursuing the best for each other in unified teamwork. We, the church, are a team, a body. As we work together, submitting first to Christ, then to one another, we will reflect together, as male and female, the glory of Christ.

We don’t get to see God’s intention for masculinity and femininity played out in perfection because sin enters the picture so quickly. Instead of seeing God’s positive purpose in male and female, we get the reverse: how not to live out God’s good intentions for men and women.

The Bible makes it clear that Adam was with Eve when Satan tempted her to sin (Genesis 3:6). Rather than protect her from Satan’s lies,

Adam passively followed Eve into sin. Later, rather than owning up to his responsibility, Adam callously and cowardly blames Eve (Genesis 3:12). Although it was Eve who first sinned, God holds Adam responsible. Adam had failed to lovingly lead Eve toward God, protecting her from Satan’s deceit. We have to wait for Jesus, the “last Adam,” to see biblical masculinity played out as God intended. Jesus gave himself for the church to make her holy (Ephesians 5:25-27). Among many things, biblical masculinity involves taking the initiative to lead others gently to God and to courageously protect them from evil. This kind of masculinity is not dominating and self-aggrandizing. Rather, it serves others for their good.

God’s good intention for the female gender was also corrupted by sin. In explaining the consequences of sin, God said to Eve, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16b NIV). This tragic sentence proclaims the exact opposite of what God had intended for the relationship between the sexes. Eve’s “desire” for her husband was a craving to control him (see Genesis 4:7). She wanted to dominate him, not share dominion over the earth in harmonious teamwork with him.

This verse heralds the beginning of a tragic history of power struggle between the sexes.

This competition is the reverse of biblical femininity. Woman was not created to control man but rather to complement and complete man in the mission God had given to both Adam and Eve. Biblical femininity is not competition; it’s

cooperation. In biblical femininity, the woman employs her qualities of responsiveness, compassion, empathy, endurance, gentleness, warmth, hospitality, diplomacy, politeness, supportiveness, wisdom, sensitivity, intuition, intelligence, sincerity, spirituality, vulnerability, expressiveness, faithfulness, and charm (to name just a few!) not to control and dominate the man but instead to make him better, to improve the relationship and, in teamwork with man, to help him accomplish Spirit-directed goals.

Returning to our Heartland Leadership Network, the last entry of the poll read, “In the next 15 years, I want my church to be defined by...” Of the four good options given, every single person chose the same answer: “love.”

Our highest calling as believing men and women, whether in the family or the church, is to demonstrate the love of God. We don’t do this by uncritically accepting and embracing every gender description we hear. Instead, we do this as men and women by intentionally living in unity and teamwork that reflects and exalts Christ. As Christian men and women, we must humbly and courageously take strides in the delicate dance of mutual submission, not by discarding gender distinctions but rather by living out biblical masculinity and femininity with joy.

Kip Cone is proclamation pastor at Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church. He co-chairs the Heartland Leadership Network, a regular gathering of Charis Fellowship pastors and leaders in Indiana and Michigan.

OLD STRUGGLE, NEW CLIMATE

by Bruce Barlow

The days of thinking gender issues are outside of the church walls are over. There are students, men, and women in many congregations who are wondering why they feel what they do and what to do about it.



One of my best friends began to pull back from friendships at church, dropped out of serving, and became obsessed with work and with his appearance. I feared for his marriage, wondering if he was involved in an affair with another woman.

He was not. It was an affair with another man.

I quickly got over the initial shock, because I cared about our friendship and his marriage. I knew nothing about same-sex attraction or homosexuality. I got the two Christian books I could find (this was decades ago, and almost nothing existed in Christian counseling on the issue) and devoured them. I spent hours talking with him, praying for him, and asking God to intervene to help my friend and heal their marriage.

This summer, a youth worker at Momentum Youth Conference asked whether I thought it was wise for her to honor the request of her son's transgender friend to be addressed by his new female name. Folks in my local church family struggle with same-sex attraction. The days of thinking gender issues are outside of the church walls are over. There are students, men, and women in many congregations who are wondering why they feel what they do and what to do about it. Some who have same-sex attraction (SSA) believe God is cruel, "Why would He make me with these desires and then tell me I can't fulfill them?" Some believe God has nothing to do with it and has no say. Some are asking good questions about gender and sexuality and wondering if God has anything to say.

SOME ARE ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUALITY AND WONDERING IF GOD HAS ANYTHING TO SAY.



Attitude of “The Church”

There are three keys for engaging the issue. First, followers of Jesus, of all people, should be characterized by love and *care*. Understand that no one chooses to have SSA feelings. So, let's show compassion and be eager to help them wrestle biblically with what to do with these feelings.

Second, let's be humble as we hold to what God says. I need to be committed to what God's Word says *and* acknowledge that I don't understand everything about the dissonance between their gender and their desires.

Third, community and relationship are essential. It has to be a Body-of-Christ, community-of-faith issue, loving the struggler well, if there is ever going to be submission of sexuality to God much less transformation of desire.

Back to Basics

Foundational questions in any discussion of sexuality or gender identity are, “Did God create mankind male and female or not? Does He have the right to ‘dictate’ sexual norms and boundaries? Does God know what He is talking about when it comes to my sexuality?” If any of these can be answered affirmatively, then we are ready to talk about what the Bible has to say.

What does the Bible say? When the laws for same-sex marriage changed, I encouraged our congregation to be sure we were ready to dialogue about what God says. There are six key biblical passages. Three are in the Old Testament: Genesis 2:22, Leviticus 18:20-24, and Leviticus 20:12. Three

are in the New Testament: Romans 1:25-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1 Timothy 1:8-10.

There have been some dramatic re-interpretations of some of these passages, in particular using them to approve of homosexual, monogamous, committed relationships. (Matthew Vines and Justin Lee are two well-publicized examples.) But, orthodox teaching over the centuries has been consistent on what these passages mean and there is no consistent hermeneutic that allows for any of the passages to affirm homosexuality, monogamous or otherwise. (John Dickson, johndickson.org, is especially helpful on this.)

Old Struggle, New Cultural Climate

The change in the definition of marriage and the creation of new gender labels feels like a “new” issue. But, remember, First Century believers were sharing Jesus in the midst of a culture that affirmed homosexuality and experienced sexual scandals in the imperial palace that make the 21st century seem tame by comparison. Struggles in sexuality and purity are not new, but the seismic shifts in the American culture over the past 20 years make it feel like a sudden change.

Questions about sexual identity are not new. We used to talk about a girl as a tomboy. Guys were artsy rather than athletic. Now, everything is in sexual terms. Most adolescents experience a period of sorting out their personality, identity, and sexuality. What has changed is they now feel the pressure to lock in an

identity earlier and earlier and to go public with it.

Slow down.

One mother wrote of her daughter's experience. At 12, the girl asked to have her breasts removed and start testosterone injections to transition to be a boy. The mother managed to delay such surgery, and by the time the daughter was 16, she had resolved at least some of her issues and decided she was female after all. The mother described the peer pressure the daughter felt from the “trendy trans-ideology” that was compelling her daughter to transition.

Stay on the Path of Faith

Anyone struggling with SSA has a watershed decision to make. Should I chuck my faith and leave God out of the discussion while I sort through my feelings and come out the other side of this defining process? Or, should I stay on the path of faith while wrestling with my emotions before God?

We should pray for the latter. It is important that there be a believing friend to walk along the path of faith during the process. God can use you as that friend.

Three Strands of Sexual Identity

I am very thankful for the work, writing, and attitude of Dr. Mark Yarhouse. It has shaped my counseling on SSA and gender issues. (See recommended resources list.) In *Homosexuality and the Christian*, he explains the three strands of sexual identity. The first strand is our attractions. “I am attracted to someone of my gender.” The second



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BUT, AS BELIEVERS, WE KNOW WE ARE ALL BROKEN. SOME BROKEN ONE WAY, SOME ANOTHER.



strand is homosexual orientation or behavior. “I will act on my desires with homosexual acts.” The third strand is identity. “I am gay.” The LGBTQ advocate would argue that there is only one strand. So, “These are my attractions” equals “I must act on them” equals “This is my identity.”

We would never allow for or approve of that in heterosexuality. Pick any one of the #MeToo offenders of the past year and imagine them arguing, “But I was attracted to her, so I had no choice but to act on my desires and have sex with her. My identity is locked in as a womanizer.” What? In the hetero world, we say attractions do not have to be acted on, and they certainly don’t define your identity. In fact, as followers of Jesus, we are to fight feelings that are attractions outside God’s good creational intent (a Dickson phrase). We don’t act on attractions or desires that God has warned us to control. We fight for purity.

If Emotions Are Inviolable

Be true to who you are. Be authentic. Follow your heart. Each of these expressions, at its core, is assuming that one’s desires and passions, emotions and attractions, can be trusted and that they will lead to what’s good.

Oh, if only our hearts could be trusted. But, as believers, we know we are all broken. Some broken one way, some another. SSA is just one form of brokenness, God’s design and intent at creation marred by sin. Brokenness, but no more dastardly or harmful than my brokenness.

We live in a day that affirms all feelings as equally valid and equally

worthy to be pursued and acted upon.

So, is it fair to expect a SSA person to deny themselves sexually and not act on their desires? I asked one gay friend, “When will you stop giving yourself a pass?” He was deciding whether to try to save his marriage or not. He looked at me confused and asked what I meant.

“You act like your sexual temptation is in a special category and therefore gets a pass,” I responded. “Says who? If I am tempted toward another woman, you expect me to turn away and deny the temptation. But, because you are tempted to another guy, I’m supposed to see that temptation as unfightable?”

He had never considered that he, as a SSA struggler, should fight his temptations just like any person with hetero temptations. My point was to separate the first and second strands of identity for him. His attractions did not have to be acted upon. Emotions and attractions are not inviolable. They haven’t been since Eden.

Names to Know and Stories to Hear

The LGBTQ community tells its stories. Followers of Jesus need to tell stories of God’s work in lives. I urge those struggling with gender and SSA to seek out the stories of followers of Jesus like Rosario Champagne Butterfield, Christopher Yuan, Jackie Hill Perry, Sam Allberry, or Linda Seiler. They are dramatic and powerful. Has God changed their desires? Sometimes yes, sometimes not yet. But, in each of these stories a choice has been made to submit

sexuality to God. And isn’t that what God has called for in each of His followers, whether SSA, LGBTQ, or heterosexual?

Bruce Barlow is lead pastor at the Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church. He has led workshops at Momentum Youth Conference on dealing with same-sex attractions.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Homosexuality and the Christian. Yarhouse, Mark (2010). Bethany House.

Understanding Sexual Identity. Yarhouse, Mark (2013). Zondervan.

“What’s The Difference?” by John Piper. Precursor to his book on marriage, “This Momentary Marriage.” (desiringgod.org/books/whats-the-difference)

Is God Anti-Gay? Allberry, Sam (2013). The Good Book Company.

God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines. Ed. by Al Mohler (2014). SBTS Press. (sbts.edu/press/god-and-the-gay-christian-a-response-to-matthew-vines/)

“How Should We Respond? An exhortation to the church on loving the homosexual.” Dallas, Joe. Thriving Values, Focus on the Family (focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/sexuality/homosexuality-theology-and-the-church/how-should-we-respond-an-exhortation-to-the-church-on-loving-the-homosexual)

RELATING IN LOVE

by Jonathan Hiller

I am learning that God's primary concern is not in the details of my ever-fluctuating emotions. God is concerned with my response to them.

I acknowledged my same-sex orientation in the middle of ninth grade.

The clues had been present years before, of course. I distinctly remember my interest in the YMCA men's locker room after 5th-grade swimming lessons, my driving curiosity regarding the older male body contrasting even then with my indifference toward the female figure. I remember being exposed to pornography on the internet later in middle school, and how easy it was to justify my interests with half-truths: "Guys see each other naked all of the time. This isn't that big of a deal." I remember sitting down with my dad in the midst of middle school and talking about dating, my relationships with girls, family ground rules, and so on, without the ability to relate that to my own experience. I still fully expected to wake up one day, look at a woman and feel... something different. But that day never came.

Going to Gateway Grace Community Church was a normal, weekly occurrence, spurred on by parents who loved me, loved each other, and loved the Lord enough to follow him into full-time ministry. I understood God's plan of salvation and believed in Jesus at age four, with as much sincerity as a toddler could muster. I did school with my mom by day and played with my dad regularly. I lived the idyllic Christian childhood. And my goal was to be the best little Christian I could be.

But I misunderstood God's aim. God did not want me to be a "good Christian;" he wanted me to know Him.



WHAT I CRAVED MORE THAN ANYTHING AT THAT MOMENT WAS TO KNOW THAT I WAS UNDERSTOOD. MY LIFE WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT.



And so, in God's sovereignty, during my ninth-grade year, I recognized that the only significant sexual draw that I had ever experienced was towards men. Confusion settled inside of me, as well as deep loneliness. I had no context for Christians being attracted to the same sex. Honestly, I did not believe it to be possible. Christians had happy marriages and built middle-class families with church-attending children. Sexuality was a hotly politicized, outside issue, to which the proper biblical response was praying in pity and voting red. Being attracted to the same sex was not an option. My parents had never talked about it as a possibility. My church had never taught it as a choice. How could it be? I wanted to do the right thing, and I was familiar enough with Scripture and God's design for sex to know my desires were in some way "wrong."

I was left in isolation. I was left feeling betrayed.

Several months of denial turned into months of (seemingly) unanswered prayer for change, which led to even more months of distracting myself to ignore it. I only wanted to be the model child. But high school opened me up not only to unanswered relational desires but my brokenness.

I was broken.

Early in my sophomore year, God shifted my life trajectory through His mercy, ten verses of Scripture, and a short conversation with my mother.

"Mom, how have you seen God talk to you?"

"He's talked to me through the Bible, mostly."

And so, in my room, I asked God to say something.

In my room, with my Bible open, God answered.

What I craved more than anything at that moment was to know that I was understood. My life was not an accident. My feelings were not purposeless. Things would get better.

God showed me all of those things. And more importantly, he showed me that he was present. That night I decided that Jesus was worth following, whatever that might cost me.

I am now a student at Liberty University majoring in Social Work, minoring in Biblical Studies, and hoping to build God's kingdom by helping people overseas.

In the past year, I began to blog about my story, which has led to more fruitful conversations about sexuality and the gospel than I would have ever dreamed. In the midst of all this, I am learning that God's primary concern is not in the details of my ever-fluctuating emotions. God is concerned with my response to them.

Since sharing my story, I have encountered many well-meaning believers with misguided presuppositions, some more damaging than others. It is fatiguing to know that there are bodies of believers that will never let me near

their children's ministries, eyeing me with distrust no matter the state of my purity. It is exhausting to consistently clarify my desire for platonic physical touch out of fear that another man may think he's turning me on with a hug. It's discouraging to have the world assume my faith is a phase while the church holds my commitment in question unless I marry. Perhaps I will marry one day, and perhaps I will not. My sanctification waits on the Holy Spirit, not a helpmeet.

I have been greatly encouraged as the church begins to recognize sexuality as an insider issue. There are men and women in my life who have brought me closer to holiness, inspired me in worship, and shown me that they, too, are willing to make sacrifices in the pursuit of eternity. To my parents, and the parents of any child working through their sexuality, thank you for praying. As I look at my life, my story, and the complicated interplay of attraction and intuition that God has used to shape me, I end up with one recurring question: "How then do I relate to people?"

The answer, in Christ, is always "with love."

Jonathan Hiller is a member of Gateway Grace Community Church, a Charis Fellowship congregation in Parkesburg, Pa. (Scott Feather, pastor). A student Liberty University, he is studying social work and biblical studies and would like to do clinical work overseas after graduation. He blogs at jonathanhillerblog.wordpress.com.



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THREE CONGREGATIONS ADDED AT CONFERENCE

Access2018, the national conference of the Charis Fellowship (Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches) ended Thursday afternoon, July 26, 2018, with a lively business meeting which saw the addition of three new churches to the fellowship and the adoption of three position statements to be added to the fourth cluster of the Commitment to Common Identity.

Churches added to the Fellowship are:

- Three Creeks Church, Gahanna, Ohio, *Joel Trainer, pastor.*
- Legacy Church, Kendallville, Ind., *Daniel Cosentino, pastor.*
- Grace Fellowship, Brunswick, Md., *Scott Avey, pastor.*

Phil Sparling, the pastor of Grace Community Church, Auburn, Calif., was elected executive director for a three-year term beginning after Access2109 (national conference), which will be held at his church. In addition, Tom Avey and Doug Courter were ratified as secretary and treasurer, respectively, of the Fellowship.

Three men were added to the Fellowship Council, the board that guides the Fellowship. They are:

- *Rex Rodgers*, Ripon, Calif., representing Region A, which includes Arctic, Hawaii, Mountain Plains, NorCal, Pacific-Northwest, Southern California Arizona, Iowa Midlands, and Heartland districts.
- *Jonathan Wiley*, Columbus, Ohio, representing Region B, which includes Northcentral Ohio, Northeastern Ohio, Northwest Ohio, Tri-States, Allegheny and Western Pennsylvania districts.
- *Rich Schmieders*, Fort Myers, Fla., representing Region C, which includes Blue Ridge, Chesapeake, Mid Atlantic, Northern Atlantic, Florida, and Southern districts.

Four position statements were recommended for consideration, including statements on Affirmation of Life, Ordinances, Marriage and Sexuality, and Eldership. These are to be included in the fourth cluster of the Commitment to Common Identity, which was adopted by the Fellowship in 2016 as the official identity statement.

The statements on Affirmation of Life, Marriage and Sexuality, and Eldership were approved. A position statement on Ordinances was tabled for further discussion. (See charisfellowship.us/page/126 for complete information on the vote.)

Resolutions presented by the Social Concerns committee were presented. They addressed issues on civility in government and in professional and personal life, immigration, protection of human life, definition of Marriage, gender identity, religious freedom, and law enforcement in society. (See charisfellowship.us/page/resolutions2018 for a complete listing of the resolutions.)

During the business meeting, Sandy Barrett was honored for 20 years of service to the Fellowship. She retired as operations coordinator following the conference.

Clancy Cruise, executive director of the Fellowship presided over the meeting, which came at the end of two and one-half days of fellowship, outstanding speakers, and opportunities to connect in various subject-matter cohorts. The event was again hosted by Grace Community Church, Fremont, Ohio (Kevin Pinkerton, pastor), which hosted the national conference in 2017.

For a complete report, see graceconnect.us/three-churches-added-to-fellowship-at-access-conference/



(from top to bottom) The national conference of the Charis Fellowship (Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches) kicked off on Monday night, July 23, with a relaxing ferry ride across Lake Erie to dinner at the Boardwalk Restaurant in Put-in-Bay, Ohio.

Mark Artrip and Dave Pacheco provided pre-session entertainment each day.

Phil Sparling, pastor of Auburn Grace Church, Auburn, Calif., reflects on keeping scripture in ministry. Phil will begin serving as executive director of the Charis Fellowship in 2019.

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