

HOLY
SEXUALITY
AND THE
GOSPEL



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Sex, Desire, and Relationships
Shaped by God's Grand Story

CHRISTOPHER
YUAN

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FOREWORD by ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD

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For Mom.

Thank you for being my childhood heroine,
for teaching me to be tenacious and never to
settle for mediocrity. Thank you in my adult
years for being a trailblazer, setting true north
on the perfect image of God, who is Christ.
This book on holiness is dedicated to you.

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Foreword

In 2011 Christopher Yuan coauthored with his mother, Angela Yuan, a striking, transparent memoir entitled *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope*. No memoir has impacted my life more personally.

When this book was published, Christian culture routinely (and robotically) talked about being “delivered out of homosexuality.” In stark contrast, *Out of a Far Country* revealed that Christopher, like all true followers of Jesus Christ, was converted—not out of homosexuality but out of unbelief. Only because the gospel of Jesus Christ changed Christopher from the inside out, making him a new man in Christ, was he able to do what all converts do: kill our idols, including the idol of a sexual sin that has called our names from our earliest memories. That powerful memoir revealed that living like a Christ follower is not a moralistic hack job. It is dying to self so that you can live for Christ. In the very end of this faithful book, Christopher introduced the concept of “holy sexuality,” a concept that changed the paradigm of what it means to live out God’s best for us.

But a memoir is provincial by definition and often leaves the reader with more questions than it offers answers. What is holy sexuality? Isn’t it better to be married than single (even though the Bible says just the opposite)? Isn’t it better to be heterosexual than homosexual (even though the Bible refuses to define personhood in Freudian terms)? Isn’t a Christian delivered out of homosexuality (even though the Bible makes clear that Christians will struggle against all manner of sin in this lifetime and that struggling with Christ’s power to mortify sin and repent of it

gives glory to God)? In *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, Dr. Yuan, in his characteristic warm, engaging, theologically sound, and utterly practical way, offers guidance on these and many other matters.

Since the fall of Adam, the human heart has set itself in defiance against God's authority. This defiance has taken different forms throughout the ages. In the not-so-distant past, we blamed the devil for our sinful sexual passions ("The devil made me do it"). With the onset of the theological negligence of neo-orthodoxy, we have created a generation of Christians who blame the Holy Spirit for their sinful desires ("God made me this way, and it's a proof of good fruit when I act in accordance with my heart's desires"). Thus, from the epoch of late modernity onward, the gospel is on a collision course with the idol of sexual freedom.

This is an issue not only for those who struggle with same-sex attractions or for those who love someone who identifies as LGBTQ. This is an issue for all of us. We all must wage holy war against the idols of our hearts. The idol of our historical epoch is this: your sexual desires define you, determine you, and should always delight you.

Dr. Yuan shows us how deeply dangerous this position is and where it will lead us. He shows how this unbiblical theology weakens our ability to love the Lord, trust his moral law, live in the vitality of the Holy Spirit, and apply the habits of grace needed in times of trial (including the trial of shaking the gates of heaven with prayer for loved ones whose desires of the flesh are clobbering them fast and furiously).

In this light, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* helps the reader navigate some of the new vocabulary of the day, introduced after the 2015 Supreme Court case (*Obergefell v. Hodges*) legalized same-sex marriage in all fifty states. He tackles head-on the hardest and most pressing questions: What is wrong with using therapy to "change" sexual orientation? Does sexual orientation reveal who I really am at my deepest core? If I still struggle against same-sex sexual desires, am I a gay Christian? How

do I love my adult children well who identify as gay and are giving me ultimatums about an upcoming wedding?

Dr. Yuan shows us how to think biblically and act with moral clarity. Christians must deal daily with the original sin that corrupts us, the actual sin that distracts and enlists us, and the indwelling sin that manipulates us. *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* shows how to use the tools that God has given us to give God glory in our confession and repentance. Christians must learn how to hate our sin without hating ourselves. *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* shows us how our union with Christ delivers Christ's risen power as we deny our deep desires for the sake of something better.

This book is a tour de force of theological integrity and hope for sexual strugglers and for those who stand beside them. This book never sacrifices sound biblical theology for personal experience, but it also never dismisses the power and importance of personal experience. Every page drips with love for God, love for our neighbors, and love for the church. The love that you find here is vital, biblical love. It's the kind of love the world knows not. I refer here to the Love that came with sacrificial blood, unimaginable pain, heartless betrayal, and eternal joy for those who stand in the risen Christ alone.

Read this book. It will bring biblical clarity, practical theology, pastoral guidance, and personal testimony to bear on this truth of gospel life: that dying to self and living for Christ is hero's work, and with God's help, it is the only way forward for ourselves, our lost loved ones, and our hurting world.

The Bible is the most important book the world has for all generations. The Bible is our guide to faith and life. Nothing can compete with it or improve it. But in Dr. Christopher Yuan's *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, you are holding in your hands the most important humanly composed book about biblical sexuality and godly living for our times.

—Rosaria Butterfield

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Framing the Conversation with Theology

“I am gay” is a simple statement with a complex and multifaceted meaning. We all know someone who’s gay. You most likely picked up this book because you have a gay child, sibling, coworker, or dear friend.

As a follower of Christ, you recognize that John 3:16—“*For God so loved the world*”—includes this individual. Your love for him or her is not in question. Rather, the question is, What does this love look like?

Many books provide advice for showing compassion to those experiencing same-sex attractions. They offer different and sometimes conflicting approaches on how to do this. Do we help gays and lesbians embrace their sexuality and encourage a modern church “reformation” that affirms same-sex marriage? Do we help heal a torn church by advocating for unity between “affirming” and “nonaffirming” sides?

Do we help gay Christians cultivate deeply spiritual friendships while they accept a stark reality of lifelong celibacy? Do we help those with unwanted same-sex attractions fulfill their heterosexual potential and marry someone of the opposite sex? Or could the gospel be calling us *all* to something costlier and more magnificent than we’ve ever envisioned?

I believe the diverse approaches in these books all begin with a common intent: love. The difference is not just methodology, but it stems

from varying definitions of *love*. In fact, I believe many well-intentioned pastors who preach fire-and-brimstone sermons against the gay community *believe* they're doing it out of love—albeit a deeply misguided love and a lopsided view of the gospel.

With so many methods, which is the right one? Discerning the correct way to love is not a theoretical exercise. For me, it's deeply personal.

This Is My Song

In 1993 I announced to my parents that I was gay. This led to massive disruption in our family, to put it lightly. Ultimately, this moment became a catalyst that led each of us, one by one, to the Lord.

At the time, my unbelieving mom rejected me. But contrary to the stereotype, after she became a Christian, she knew she could do nothing other than love her gay son as God loved her.

However, with no more secrets, I felt unimpeded to fully embrace “who I was.” This new freedom quickly propelled me down a path of self-destruction that included promiscuity and illicit drug use. Certainly, not all gay men go down this road, but it was my reality. Ultimately, I was expelled from dental school in Louisville, moved to Atlanta, and became a supplier to drug dealers in more than a dozen states.

During this time God graciously worked in the lives of my father and mother and brought them both to a saving trust in Christ. My parents didn't realize the extent of my rebellion, but in the light of their new-found faith, they knew my biggest sin wasn't same-sex sexual behavior; my biggest sin was unbelief. What I needed more than anything else, through God's gift of grace, was faith to believe and follow Jesus.

My mother began to pray a bold prayer: “Lord, do whatever it takes to bring this prodigal son to you.” She didn't pray primarily for me to come home to Chicago or to stop my rebellious behavior. Her main re-

quest was that God would draw me to himself and that I would fall into his loving arms as his son, adopted and purchased by the blood of the Lamb.

The miracle in answer to her prayers came in an unexpected way: I was arrested for drug dealing. In jail, I experienced the darkest moments of my life when I received news that I was HIV positive. That night, as I lay in a prison cell bed, I noticed something scribbled on the metal bunk above me: “If you’re bored, read Jeremiah 29:11.” So I did and was intrigued by the promise I read there: “‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.’”

I read the Bible more and more. As I did, I realized I’d placed my identity in the wrong thing. The world tells those of us with same-sex attractions that our sexuality is the core of who we are. But God’s Word paints quite a different picture. Genesis 1:27 informs us that we are all created in the image of God. The apostle Paul says that in Christ “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Thus, my identity is not gay, ex-gay, or even straight. My *true* identity is in Jesus Christ alone.

Ultimately, upon my release from jail, I committed to studying and submitting to biblical and theological truth. I enrolled in Bible college and later seminary. Over time, God has given back the years the locusts had taken away (see Joel 2:25). My parents and I now travel around the world as a two-generational ministry, communicating God’s grace and God’s truth on biblical sexuality.

Meaning to Method

Through my journey from agnostic gay man to evangelical Bible professor, I’ve come to realize that the differences in how people respond to gay and same-sex-attracted individuals are rooted in *meaning*. From

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ancient times, humanity has been pursuing meaning. And out of meaning flow actions.

Our divergent approaches on how to love the gay community—stemming from competing interpretations of meaning—can be overwhelming and confusing. Clarity comes not by trying to decide which approach is more compassionate but by observing which approach is grounded in the correct version of truth—God's truth. With good intentions, we may rush into doing “what's right,” but if we don't begin with *right thinking*, there's a good chance we could be doing what's wrong.

Both compassion and wisdom are virtues. But compassion without wisdom can be careless, even reckless. Wisdom without compassion is useless, even pharisaical. True compassion flows from wisdom, and true wisdom results in compassion—there should be no dichotomy. The real Christian life is built on godly wisdom.

We're often encouraged in our society to embrace relevance and pragmatism at the expense of truth. But correct practice flows from correct truth. We must resist the natural impulse to disjoin practice from truth or truth from practice.

Certainly, there's great importance in exploring the ethics of same-sex relationships, and many scholars have written about the key Old and New Testament passages prohibiting same-sex sexual practice. This work is vital, and several books have done it well.¹

However, we limit ourselves if we think that “right knowing” simply means studying a handful of biblical texts relevant to the topic at hand. This would be missing the forest for the trees. A robust theology cannot be built on what we're *not* allowed to do, for the Christian life is much more than the avoidance of sinful behavior. If scriptural prohibitions are the only lens through which we see things, then we may well miss the gospel.

My goal for this book is to provide both theological reflection on sexuality and practical action points for those of us trying to share Christ with our gay loved ones through the lens of God’s grand story—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. You may be thinking, *I’m no theologian!* but the Greek word *theologia* literally means “knowledge of God.” Do you have any knowledge of God? If so, you’re a theologian!

Kevin Zuber, a professor of mine in Bible college, deeply impacted me when he challenged the class to think about theology as a verb. Christians are supposed to *do* theology. Theology *done* well engages heart, mind, and hands. Anemic theology breeds apathy, but good theology compels action.

Even still, you may be thinking, *What I need right now is not theology but practical advice on how to better minister to my gay loved ones and friends.* Yet how can we know what God wants for our gay friends without ample knowledge of God? Thoughts precede action.

Good theology, right action. Bad theology, wrong action.

Breaking Bad Paradigms

In 2011 I coauthored a book with my mother, Angela, entitled *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son’s Journey to God, a Broken Mother’s Search for Hope*.² Toward the end of our memoir, I briefly introduced the concept of *holy sexuality*.

The impetus for this new phrase stemmed from my frustration with the heterosexual-bisexual-homosexual paradigm, particularly its incongruence with biblical and theological truth. I knew that at some point I needed to flesh out this important biblical definition of *holy sexuality*.

Over the years, I came to understand that the goal of holy sexuality is not just for those who experience attractions toward people of the same

sex; holy sexuality is for everyone. This understanding of sexuality is tethered to God's grand story—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This full-orbed, coherent theological framework helps us better and more fully comprehend human sexuality in light of God's revealed truth.

Will you join me on a journey as we investigate a theology of sexuality? As we go, be prepared to think biblically, theologically, and critically; to challenge some of our old human-made paradigms not grounded in Scripture; and, in some situations, to change and realign to God's truth.

As always, don't resist the Holy Spirit as he convicts us of wrong thinking and even as he grants us the gracious gift of repentance. Get ready for us to deepen our knowledge of God and his grand story, which will then rightly shape our understanding of human sexuality.

Are you ready?