

"Jeanette Howard has laboured in ministry dealing with sexuality for decades, and is well qualified to speak to the current issues and ministry challenges involved. To read *Dwelling in the Land* is to soak in reasoned, clear, biblically based principles, lessons learned from a woman who's been there, done that, and is doing it well."

Joe Dallas, author and pastoral counselor

Jeanette Howard is the Director of Bethany Life Ministries in the UK. While living in California back in the late 1980s Jeanette began to address a number of personal issues, including gender dysphoria, same-sex attraction, and familial relationship problems, bringing each area into the light and truth of the Bible. For many years Jeanette has spoken and ministered in this difficult area. She is author of *Out of Egypt* and *Into the Promised Land*.

By the same author

Out of Egypt

Into the Promised Land

Dwelling in the Land

Bringing Same-Sex Attraction Under the
Lordship of Christ

Jeanette Howard

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Dwelling in the Land is dedicated to my friend Tony Ives who sat on the Bethany Life Ministries Board of Trustees. It was his hard work and dedication that enabled the ministry to be built on a sure foundation and later obtain charitable status.

But he was so much more. Primarily, Tony was my friend who loved, supported, and encouraged me at all times and in so many ways. Both he and his wife Pam opened their house to me so often that the guest room was known as Jeanette's room! They let me treat their garden as my own and, over the years, Tony learned to see it as a colourful expression of our multi-faceted Father and enjoy it in all its seasonal beauty.

Much of the first draft of Dwelling was written whilst sitting in Jeanette's Room overlooking my garden. Thank you, my friend.

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Introduction

In today's world the subject of homosexuality is rarely out of the headlines. No longer fearful of social or financial backlash, sports and film stars seem to be leaping out of the closet with reckless abandon on a near daily basis. Far from being ostracized by society, these men and women are now positively embraced as standard-bearers of a new, enlightened, and totally accepting civilization that is non-judgmental and all-inclusive. Any stance or voice that challenges this juggernaut of positivity is decried, decreed homophobic, and dismissed as being a relic from a bygone age of bigotry and hate.

The worldview is one thing, but when I consider homosexuality in light of Scripture I can certainly empathize with Winnie-the-Pooh when he states: "When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it."¹

Although I personally find the biblical stance on active sexuality, of any gender combination, crystal clear, the Christian voice on the subject of homosexuality has rarely been more divided. Unfortunately, many of the discussions between the various factions appear to be little more than biblical hand grenades tossed at one another from the safety of a well-dug trench. Sadly, many of these dialogues often create more heat than light. However, even though I don't feel at all inclined or equipped to engage in such discussions, I certainly appreciate

1 A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1928.

the fact that there is a conversation to be had and, thankfully, is being had by men and women from every facet of Christianity. From what I have read, it is clear that many are diligently seeking to “work out[their] salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). And for that persistence I salute them.

As with my first two books, *Out of Egypt* and *Into the Promised Land*, this book, *Dwelling in the Land*, is a result of my continued journey into, and toward, the things of God. I know the loneliness of growing up feeling “different” from everybody else. I know what it is like to live as a sexually active unbelieving gay woman. I know the agonizing choices that have to be made as a young believer committed to choosing God’s ways over one’s own desires. And I know what it is like to remain single for thirty years, still having to keep a watchful eye on some of the attractions and thoughts toward other women. This book is all about discipleship and the long haul. With contributions from men and women who have also walked faithfully and with sexual integrity for many years, this book is written to encourage fellow pilgrims to keep journeying along the right path.

Precisely because there is such a variety of thought within Christianity, perhaps before you start reading the first chapter, it may be helpful if I make my position completely clear. I have written this book based on the following criteria:

- I believe that one consequence of the Fall has been damage to our relationships with both men and women in all capacities of life, including the area of sexuality.
- While I acknowledge that some Christians hold differing beliefs, the book is written from the premise that the biblical pattern for sexual relationships is established in Genesis 2:24 and reinforced throughout the Bible.

- This means that I believe that all sexual activity (irrespective of orientation, attraction, or past behaviour) outside the boundaries of heterosexual marriage is not within God's plan for mankind, no matter how monogamous, faith-filled, and Christian-based it may be.
- I do not believe that a sexual relationship is essential for a meaningful life, and so I encourage all single Christians, whatever their orientation or attraction, to pursue a celibate life in deference to biblical truth.
- I wholeheartedly believe that our identity is found in Christ alone and that every believer, irrespective of attraction or situation, can enjoy a full, contented life in Him.

If, at any point, what you read seems to have veered away from those points above, then that inference will be due to a flaw in my writing skills rather than a fundamental change in my belief system! Now that you are conversant with my point of reference, it seems timely to look back to the late 1980s when my voyage of discovery began and note some of the changes that have occurred within society and the church during these past thirty years.

Section 1



Where have we been? Where are we now? And what is happening in Christendom?



Chapter 1

Post Exodus

Exodus International Conference

Loyola University

Los Angeles

Sunday, June 26th 1988

This morning I was woken by a 4.8 earthquake. It started with a bang followed by a swaying of the bed and a rattling of the wardrobe: an interesting way to wake up and start the conference.

Although my journal entry was brief and failed to comment on anything else that happened that day, my attendance at that 1988 meeting impacted my life and choices for years to come. It was the eighth Exodus International Conference, hosted by Andy Comiskey and Desert Stream Ministries, a ministry then based in Anaheim, California, USA. Living just north of San Francisco and being part of the women's residential programme run by Love in Action meant that I and a number of others from the ministry were able to drive the 350 or so miles south and attend this week-long event.

Judging from the notes I took, the main speaker that year was Dr John White, the eminent evangelical psychiatrist and author of such books as *Eros Defiled*, *Eros Redeemed*, and *Parents in Pain*. I had read his book *The Cost of Commitment* some three years earlier. That had been instrumental in convincing me, a non-believing homosexually active woman, that following Christ was costly but ultimately worthwhile. There were other well-known Exodus speakers teaching that year, including Sy Rogers, Alan Medinger,

and of course Frank Worthen. Frank and his wife, Anita, had been influential in bringing me from the UK to the States in January of that year, and my time with the Love in Action ministry did much to deepen my relationship with the Lord.

FAQ: How long does it take to change from being a homosexual to being heterosexual?

Part of the ministry's brief at Love in Action was to visit churches, give presentations, and host a Q&A with the congregation. I was a young Christian, yet, despite all the relational difficulties and temptations I was facing, my hope was that eventually I would "come through" and be able to experience and enjoy love in a relationship acceptable to God. So when I heard Frank answer this frequently asked question with a gentle but confident "Five years seems to be the average time for someone to change", my heart soared.

All I needed to do, I concluded, was to pursue my relationship with Jesus and be obedient to all I read in the Bible. Then, as I thought and lived according to the Word and addressed certain issues in my life, I would gradually walk into and embrace a heterosexual identity, outlook, and attractions. It all seemed so logical and reasonable and godly. It was during this time in the States that I also had opportunity to sit in on several lectures given by the British research psychologist and theologian Dr Elizabeth Moberly as she expounded her theory concerning the root causes of homosexuality. Her book, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*,² had been published in 1983 and was embraced by the majority of those of us seeking to find a solution to our same-sex attraction (SSA).³

2 Elizabeth R. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1983.

3 Dr Moberly was one of the early proponents of the term known as "reparative therapy". She asserted that homosexual orientation does not derive from genetic, hormonal, or learned behaviour, but from a child's

In 1988 I was a young Christian who had hope for great change. Although my journal read like the script of a second-rate disaster movie, I was keen for Jesus to transform my life into something worthwhile. Despite lurching from one dependent relationship to the next, I was convinced, and encouraged to believe, that continual surrender to the ways of God would result in newness of life. *I still believe that to be true.* We are born again into the family of God, are citizens of another country, and live in a way that seeks to image Jesus Christ. But the newness of life that I had also hoped for and, in all honesty, back then in the 1980s had been led to believe *was probable rather than merely possible* – that of embracing a heterosexual mind set and way of life – never really materialized.

Having the right goal

Many will claim that a change in sexual orientation was never the goal of Exodus International and its affiliate ministries. Whether it was one of the organization's implicit goals or not, I can assure you that back in the 1980s the *expectation* of change was certainly fostered and encouraged. Dating and marriage were seen as very realistic goals and every wedding was celebrated as another example of healing and wholeness. If any

relationship with the same-sex parent early in life. Acknowledging that homosexual development is complex and multi-faceted, Moberly believed that there was a constant factor: a deficit in the relationship with the same-sex parent and a drive to make up for this deficit through same-sex relationships. Disruption in the attachment process, cites Moberly, can seriously hinder normal psychological and sexual development, and it is the drive to repair that damage, albeit subconsciously, that fuels the homosexual relationship. Therefore, Moberly concludes, learning to relate to members of one's own gender in a healthy non-dependent and non-defensive detachment way is key to addressing the homosexual drive. Further reading on this subject is readily available via the internet. Dr Moberly has now retired from conducting research on this subject and currently works in the field of cancer research.

of us did entertain questions over the suitability of some of the couples marrying, we certainly never voiced them in anything louder than a faint whisper. After all, we concluded, this was a continuum we were all walking along, and any difficulties that may arise could be addressed within the framework of marriage.

Thirty years on, we may well be accused of naivety by some people. But, at that time, it was certainly my genuine belief that I would gradually progress along the continuum from being fully homosexual in outlook to a much broader vision that not only valued, welcomed, and increasingly engaged with men, but also opened the door to heterosexual marriage. And this change would take place, I believed, as I kept addressing the problems I had with gender dysphoria – a strong feeling of not being the gender that I physically appeared to be, the attitudinal difficulties I held towards men and women, and my many other relational issues.

I am immensely grateful for the emphasis that was placed on Scripture during my time with Love in Action and during the subsequent years. That fostered a great love for, and full appreciation of, my need for God's Word in my life.

Dealing with "failure"

"Failure" to progress along that real or imagined line of healing is what has led many men and women to eventually give up the effort and return, often with a very heavy heart, to a life of homosexual behaviour. A number admitted to me that after ten or fifteen years of trying to change, they are simply worn out by the effort. And, while acknowledging that they don't believe that this is God's ideal for them, they have entered into a faithful, long-term relationship with a member of their own gender who also loves the Lord.

I neither condemn nor condone their actions; I simply understand. It is often too much to bear to not only feel you have failed in your life as a sinner, but to also feel as though you have failed in your efforts to change and conform to Christian “normality”.

Does anyone travel the full length of this spectrum and reach the Holy Grail of heterosexual orientation that is sought by so many? There is no easy answer to this very important question. Over the years a number of Christian men and women have claimed a 100 per cent change in their desires and no longer experience any form of same-sex attraction. A larger number of people would profess to a significant change in SSA and have gone on to marry and enjoy a full and robust marriage. Some mention that they experience occasional periods of attraction towards their own gender, but openness with their spouse and a level of accountability with friends soon helps those times pass.

Other men and women I know experience the ebb and flow of attraction towards their own gender but, like other Christian singles committed to Christ, choose not to indulge in thoughts or act upon those temptations.

A turning point

There are certain moments in one’s life that can be classified as defining moments: births, marriages, and the death of loved ones all fall into that category. In March 1999 I experienced one of those moments and it came as a revelation. In January of 1985 I had accepted the gift of salvation from our Lord Jesus Christ. I knew that part of my new life in Christ meant that I had to lay down my homosexual behaviour and live a life in keeping with the traditional biblical teaching that any form of sexual activity outside the boundaries of heterosexual marriage was sinful.

Based on that belief, and through several amazing God-incidences, I found myself, in January 1988, sitting in my first meeting at Love in Action, San Rafael, California, and hearing testimony that God can change the sexual identity and attractions of homosexually orientated men and women. By March 1999, some fourteen years after my conversion and cessation of homosexual activity, and some eleven years after first applying myself to orientation change, I had to accept the reality of my situation: for all of my desire and effort and application, I would still, if left to my own devices, be attracted to and fall in love with a woman.

This is not to deny that much of my life had changed for the good and that this change was not only in relation to God, but also in my relationships with both men and women. Over the years, and with great help, I had addressed many damaged areas in my life around the subject of gender and sexual identity issues. I was also fully aware of the many other areas that God was in the process of addressing that are common to all Christian men and women. But the one part that seemed untouched by God's presence in my life was the area of emotional and sexual attraction. No amount of biblical meditation or "taking every thought captive" or convincing myself what was meant by being a "new creation" in Christ accessed this dark recess. Piling Scripture, right behaviour, and good works on top of these real feelings and attractions did not mean that they went away. But it did mean that I had unknowingly isolated myself from this internal reality.

The decade had begun with the 1991 publication of *Out of Egypt: Leaving Lesbianism Behind*, citing my journey away from lesbianism, which prompted several years of a crazy ministry schedule around the world. From 1994, I began to experience depression and was admitted to the local psychiatric hospital

early the next year; that was the first of three lengthy stays spread over the subsequent five years. I don't know what great thoughts you had as one millennium finished and another dawned. But in the year 2000, I had to face the truth that even though my behaviour was modified and I chose not to "think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" as exhorted by the apostle Paul in Romans 13:14, my attractions and desires, if left unchecked, were still toward women and not toward men. I think Arthur Pink, an early twentieth-century English evangelist and scholar best describes my potential:

Let all divine restraint be removed, and every man is capable of becoming, would become, a Cain, a Pharaoh, a Judas. How then is the sinner to move heavenwards? By an act of his own will? Not so. A power outside himself must grasp hold of him and lift him every inch of the way. The sinner is free, but free in one direction only – free to fall, free to sin. As the Word expresses it: "For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness" (Romans 6:20). The sinner is free to do as he pleases, always as he pleases (except as he is restrained by God), but his pleasure is to sin.⁴

Disappointment and freedom

The realization of this truth provoked two responses. The first was, unsurprisingly, one of disappointment as I had spent the best part of fourteen years trying to change my orientation.

The other response that manifested, however, took me quite by surprise. I felt unburdened by expectation and fully free to be myself! Did that new sense of freedom give me permission to go and find a gay Christian lady with whom I could live in

4 A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, (Start Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition, 2012), p. 108.

a monogamous, faith-based relationship? Absolutely not! The freedom to be myself remained firmly within the constraints of traditional biblical teaching: that all sexual expression outside the realms of heterosexual marriage is sin. The freedom that I experienced back in the early part of the twenty-first century was to be released from the constraints of expectations placed upon me by myself, by well-meaning others, and by a Christian world-view that cannot cope with untidy and unresolved topics.

Statement of truth

The truth is that I haven't travelled from one end of the continuum to the other. I have not exchanged a homosexual identity for a heterosexual identity, and I haven't even *tried* to "change" for the past fourteen years. The relief has been exhilarating and has freed me to grow and mature as a concrete individual and not as an abstract identity.

I know that God cares about *me*.

I know that He cares passionately that I know I am loved and accepted by Him.

I know that He cares fervently that I love Him above all other things and that I extend our shared love toward other people.

I know that He cares that I live within His guidelines for my own good and for His glory.

Summer 2013

I can't recall the last Exodus International conference I attended, but I can be certain that there had been at least fifteen years between that and my arrival at Concordia University, Irvine, California, for, as it transpired, the last ever Exodus Freedom conference as it was now called. I hadn't followed this ministry's journey at all during those fifteen years and knew

nothing of the path that it had taken or was intending to take.⁵ All I now knew was that the national umbrella ministry which had covered dozens of local ministries in its referral network no longer embraced the “reparative therapy” route or the goal of heterosexual marriage as the ultimate indicator of healing at the end of that path. Instead, it seemed to emphasize the way of discipleship as they walked alongside SSA men and women. This stance resonated with me, so I was pleased to accept the invitation to be one of their keynote speakers that year.

About two weeks before the meeting I was told that Exodus International (the old Exodus North America) would announce its impending closure at the conference. What word could I give to encourage those who may well be stunned, shocked, and perhaps even feel abandoned at this declaration? What hope could I offer these men and women, many of whom had travelled from Asia and Europe, that God is for them and with them as they journey along this path of holy obedience? Settling on Joshua 1:7 as my key text I began preparing a teaching around the theme “Be Strong and Courageous”.

Summer 2014

One year on and I have just returned from speaking at a conference hosted by the Hope for Wholeness Network (HFW),⁶ a ministry based in South Carolina, USA. Taking up the baton

5 It was only as I was researching for this chapter that I learned of the structural and name changes that had taken place during that time frame. The “old” Exodus International that I once knew had become Exodus Global Alliance and the 2013 conference that I attended was actually hosted by the once-named Exodus North America team.

6 The Hope for Wholeness Network brings together likeminded ministries, churches, counsellors, public speakers, and other organizations that stand boldly and graciously on the truth of Scripture with regard to homosexuality. This network also hosts a yearly conference that is open to all who are affected by or interested in this subject. More information on all the network offers can be found at www.hopeforwholeness.org.

that had been laid down by Exodus North America, the theme of the HFW conference was “Hope Rising”. I was not privy to the thought process behind the choice of conference name, but I would not be surprised if part of the reason behind the title was to remind an individual that even though ministries and people may come and go, the promise of a new life in Christ Jesus remains eternal.

I reconnected with people from the previous year, renewed friendships from some fifteen years ago, plus met with men and women who were attending a conference such as this for the very first time. What I found so refreshing was that it didn’t matter what subject was being addressed by the general session teacher, Jesus was lifted high and given His rightful place as the focus of our attention. As a result, many were given the gift of hope.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Hope is an essential element that helps us to press forward and keep living in congruence with the moral mandates God has given us as Christians. But in recent years, many messages have detracted from a genuine hope in Christ for those of us with SSA, by bringing confusion or even injecting despair.

Mixed messages

There was a time when the Christian church largely spoke with one voice on the subject of homosexuality. Only sexual activity within the realm of heterosexual marriage (what other sort was there?) was acceptable, and all other single Christians, whatever

their orientation or attraction, were to remain celibate. How times have changed and now it is hard to find a consensus of opinion within a denomination, let alone contained in the body of Christ as a whole. On the subject of homosexuality it is, at times, hard to distinguish the Christian voice from that of the world as, in a desire not to offend, God's love is watered down into something so insipid it ends up being unpalatable to all.

In May 2014 the Reverend Mark Woods, a former editor of the *Baptist Times* in the UK, wrote an article reflecting on the difficulties the Baptist Union of Great Britain was experiencing as it tried to balance its traditional view on sexual expression while allowing each fellowship the freedom of self-determination. In an attempt to placate all sides of the debate, a statement was issued following the Baptist Assembly held in West Bromwich, England, thus prompting the article from Woods. He wrote:

Of course, there are unresolved tensions in all this. Ministers are in principle allowed to conduct a same-sex marriage for someone else, but would be guilty of "conduct unbecoming" if they did it themselves. (The absurd situation might arise where a Baptist minister wanted to marry someone of the same gender in a service conducted by another Baptist minister; one would be disciplined, the other not. Seriously, it's bound to happen.)⁷

The Baptist denomination is not alone in offering mixed messages to its congregation. The United Methodist Church in America continues to dance around the subject and

7 Mark Woods, "How British Baptists have sort of allowed gay marriages but still aren't that keen on the idea", *Christian Today*, 20 May 2014 (<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/how.british.baptists.have.sort.of.allowed.gay.marriages.but.still.arent.all.that.keen.on.the.idea/37560.htm>).

displays amazingly nimble footwork as it side-steps certain denominational rules in order to placate the progressive element within Methodism. A recent statement from the traditional wing of the Methodist church⁸ implies the dance is drawing to a close and a formal split in the United Methodist Church is inevitable.

The Church of England continues to duck and weave in an attempt to placate all points of view on the subject and succeeds only in intensifying the sense of frustration experienced by all irrespective of their position. The church's official line to the clergy is essentially, *you can share a home, a bank account, and even a bed, provided you do not express your love and commitment to one another in an act that is considered to be of a sexual nature*. It's like taking an alcoholic to a pub, giving him a pint of beer to hold, and making him promise not to take a sip for the duration of the visit. The rest of the clergy should try living according to those rules in their own heterosexual marriages. The Church of England is on a fruitless journey in seeking to combine the standards of this world with God's standard. And if they truly believed what they read, then they would know the futility of their endeavour. Jesus Himself prayed:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

John 17:15–17

What has this increasingly liberal approach to sexual expression done for the gospel? Has it drawn myriads of sexually active single people flocking into church, hammering

8 "Regarding United Methodism's Future", *Good News*, 22 May 2014 (<http://goodnewsmag.org/2014/05/regarding-united-methodisms-future/>).

on the door, demanding a relationship with this all-loving God? What has this liberal approach done for discipleship? It seems that society's standards infiltrate and dictate church policy and determine the decision making of an average Christian far more than the Bible and 2,000 years of church history. As long as the church insists on fraying the edges of God's "bottom line", the lost will not be saved and the saved will not be encouraged to walk in the freedom that comes through faith.

The silent congregation

And yet, despite all the publicity and headlines advocating a reinterpretation of the Scripture, the majority of Christians who address issues of same-sex attraction *have not yielded* to the call to modernize (i.e., compromise) their thinking and embrace the life of a homosexually active Christian. Neither do they choose to live under the burden of having to have a heterosexual mindset in order to prove the power of Christ's life in them. This majority do not shout from the rooftops nor demand the right to be heard, and they are not vocally militant in their beliefs. These men and women go about serving in their local congregation, loving the Lord, and probably remaining silent about their personal issues for fear of being misunderstood if they admit to such struggles. Often the only voices they hear or articles they read advocate a joyful embracing of their gay identity within their faith, or a gut-wrenching condemnation of them along with the activity, or an enthusiastic call to change. All three positions can evoke a strong vocal response in their fellow parishioners, so is it any wonder the poor man or woman chooses to remain silent and live with their secret?

These silent men and women need to give voice to their lifestyle. As believers they have not chosen to become or to

remain as gay-identified, but have fully embraced the task of bringing everything under the Lordship of Jesus and taken on the distinctiveness and freedom that comes from being Christ-identified. They may have experienced little to no change in same-sex attraction during the course of their Christian journey, but continue to remain faithful to biblical teaching despite the disappointment.

If you can recognize yourself in that last description then I want you to know that *you are not alone*. As I exhorted the men and women at that final Exodus conference in June 2013, I encourage you now, dear reader, to *take courage* as you learn to dwell in the land that you have been given. This is related to the Hebrew word *Chazaq* (pronounced “khä zak”). This word can mean any of the following phrases:

- to strengthen
- to overcome
- to be strong and to become strong
- to be courageous
- to be firm and to grow firm
- to be resolute.

In Eugene Peterson’s translation of the Bible, *The Message*, Joshua 1:1–19 captures the concept of *Chazaq*.

After the death of Moses the servant of God, God spoke to Joshua, Moses’ assistant:

Moses my servant is dead. Get going. Cross this Jordan River, you and all the people. Cross to the country I’m giving to the People of Israel. I’m giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on – just as I promised Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon

east to the Great River, the Euphrates River – all the Hittite country – and then west to the Great Sea. It's all yours. All your life, no one will be able to hold out against you. In the same way I was with Moses, I'll be with you. I won't give up on you; I won't leave you. Strength! Courage! [Chazaq!] You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul. Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don't get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you're going. And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed. Haven't I commanded you? Strength! Courage! [Chazaq!] Don't be timid; don't get discouraged. God, your God, is with you every step you take.⁹

The Bible is full of encouragement for those who seek to follow God, and Jesus Himself was one of the best cheerleaders around! He encouraged people to step up to the challenge with a word that is translated into Greek as *tharséō* – “be of good courage, be of good cheer”. This word is only used eight times in the New Testament and on seven of those occasions it is used by Jesus Himself:

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace **and** confidence. In the world you have tribulation **and** trials **and** distress **and** frustration; but be

9 Hebrew inclusion is mine.

of good cheer (*tharséō*) [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]

John 16:33, AMP¹⁰

This was not a word carelessly tossed around by the Lord, but was reserved for those who really need the *rhema* word – the “now” word – to press on. Jesus used *tharséō* to encourage the woman who had suffered with a twelve-year bleed, for her faith-filled persistence. He encouraged the paralytic to do something he had never done before and walk, and He encouraged the experienced sailors and fishermen to be confident in Him even in the midst of a storm. Look again at what Jesus says about overcoming this world and its difficulties in the Amplified Bible paraphrase of John 16:33: “I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.”

Standing on the edge of something new

Forty years before God’s statement in the first chapter of the book of Joshua, we find Joshua, Caleb, and ten other men were sent into Canaan to spy out the land that the Lord had promised them. Although admitting that Canaan was fruitful and even returning with concrete evidence of its fertility, ten of the men were overwhelmed by the presenting difficulties. They successfully convinced their fellow travellers that the cost of taking the land was too high. For the next forty years, that faithless generation of Hebrews wandered around the wilderness until they had all died out, save Joshua and Caleb. And it was them, along with a new generation of Hebrews, who were to take up God’s call.

¹⁰ Greek inclusion is mine.

Today I believe that the Christian church is standing on the edge of something new. In the last decade, ongoing discussions around civil partnerships, same-sex marriage, and gay adoptions have ensured that the subject of homosexuality has remained firmly in the public eye. During this time, the Christian voice has proved consistently inconsistent, resulting in confusion among the faithful. But I also believe that this is a time for Christian men and women who experience, to whatever degree, homosexual attraction to stand up and be pioneers within the faith. Daring to live openly as biblically obedient sons and daughters despite internal temptation and external pressure speaks to those within and without the church.

Present imperative

When Jesus used the term *tharséō*, He was commanding the disciples to remain *confident in Him and to their call*, even though they would experience trials and setbacks. Is Jesus commanding you, like the paralysed man, to do something you've never done before? Are you hearing the commandment not to fear, even though everything seems bent on dragging you down? Have you done everything you can to change your attractions and now, like the woman who touched the hem of His garment, do you hear Jesus command you to take Him at His word and move on?

Both the word *chazaq* that God speaks to Joshua and the word *tharséō* that Jesus uses are in the present imperative tense, meaning that they are exhorting someone to act *now*. Neither word can be mistaken for a suggestion or recommendation, nor is there scope for discussion but simply for obedience by Joshua and the New Testament characters. You are to be strong and courageous, the Bible writes, and you are to continue being strong and courageous.

Obedience

Obedience is one of the foundational pillars of discipleship and that requires us to face and deal with difficult and painful personal issues rather than withdrawing from them. In obeying God's commands, we need boldness to step out from the crowd, secular or Christian, and walk purposely in time to the beat of *His* drum. And in order to be bold and take courageous steps, we need confidence in the One who not only calls us but who walks with us and who sustains us along this journey of discipleship. As we begin journeying through this book, may I encourage you:

- *to not* conform to your old sinful patterns of thoughts and behaviours
- *to not* conform to world-views offered by a secular society or a theologically liberal church
- *to not* conform to expectations placed upon you:
 - by well-meaning friends who encourage you to step off the highway of holiness so that you can “be happy”
 - by well-meaning churches and denominations that just want you to hide away behind gender-affirming clothes, haircut, and behaviour (perhaps meant more for their own comfort than for yours)
 - by well-meaning Christian ministries and associations that want a neat and packaged believer who demonstrates healing and wholeness through certain behavioural guidelines.

Kingdom living

Pioneers are called to live lives entrenched in God's Kingdom. Kingdom living is scary and there are giants, both Christian and non-Christian, in the land! But Kingdom living is also fruitful.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

Deuteronomy 8:7–9

Kingdom living is appealing. I find that I don't really care what other people think of me, as my focus is to please just one person, my heavenly Father. It is to Him alone I will have to answer the questions of what I have done with the gift of salvation and how I invested the talents He gave me. It will be He who determines whether I loved well or not. This book, *Dwelling*, is for those of us who choose to persist, even when the reality of our individual lives has not matched the hopes, the dreams, or the expectations that once spurred us on. We are privileged people, because in order for us to remain faithful followers of Christ we must continue to let the Holy Spirit search us, know us, dismantle, and repair us. Christ is our foundation, our cornerstone, and our capstone; it is in Christ alone we stand, dwell, and find rest. Whether your earthly life is or is not living up to the dreams and expectations you once held, it is good to know that this life *is not it*.

By an act of faith, Abraham said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place that would become his home. When he left he had no idea where he was going. By an act of faith he lived in the country promised him, lived as a stranger camping in tents. Isaac and Jacob did the same, living under the same promise. Abraham did it by keeping his eye on an unseen city with real, eternal foundations – the City designed and built by God.

Hebrews 11:8–10, *The Message*