

3.3 And God Looked at Everything He had Made – It Was Very Good

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Introduction

I am a man who loves a woman from the bottom of his heart, and at the same time I am more attracted to men. It took me decades of my life to formulate this sentence, especially the second part. And it's good that I've been able to call myself what I am for a few years now: a bisexual man with homosexual tendencies.

I've been falling in love with boys ever since I was at primary school. However, I didn't know this until my late 40s—or wasn't even allowed to think about it. My devout mind would not even countenance this subject.

My Background

Born in 1959 into a pietistic and pious Free Church family, I grew up with the dogma that any orientation other than heterosexuality is an abomination to the Lord God, a sin that cannot be forgiven. For decades, I therefore suppressed the whole issue.

This was reinforced by §175 of the German Criminal Code (StGB), which made all homosexual acts punishable until the early 1970s and was only finally abolished in 1994. Unfortunately, however, the “175” still impacts on the collective social memory today.

Family Ties

My parents were quite old when I was born; my father turned 50 a few weeks before my birth, and my mother was a few years younger. My siblings, who were already adults at the time, enrolled me in school in 1966, as our parents were on a three-month silver wedding anniversary trip to the USA.

We were close as a family. However, in hindsight, I came to understand that it was an unhealthy, codependent family dynamic, and I had to slowly and painfully distance myself from it over a long period of time. We didn't talk about conflicts, personal problems and negative feelings. Instead, we neatly put "the cloak of love" over them.

I began to realise painfully hard in therapy that my mother's behaviour could be seen as controlling and manipulative. As our father consistently lived out his rather phlegmatic nature, the two of them complemented each other perfectly in this respect: Mum planned and Dad did (what was necessary).

It was important that family life looked good, pious, and conformed to the norm, adhering to the motto, "What it looks like on the inside is nobody's business!" So the family presented itself as a community led by my father and living for God. Internally, on the other hand, my mother was the real leader.

As a small child, this was confusing for me because I learned that although men acted as if they were the doers and the strong ones, it was obviously only the women within the family who dictated how things should be done. This shaped my understanding of the roles of men and women for the first time.

Both my siblings left home at the end of the 1960s and got married a few years later. This freed up the role of my mother's *confidante*. Until then, the siblings, especially my sister, had held this position. Much later, in her last will and testament, our mother wrote that our father had never fulfilled this companion role.

So, at the age of ten, I was given the—from my current perspective, dubious—"honour" of being her *confidante*, with my mother sharing all of her innermost thoughts with me.

From then on, she consulted me on each and every family decision, shared her doubts and asked me for advice on questions of all kinds, teaching me to take responsibility for the family. Until I was about eleven years old, these topics were usually discussed on school-free Saturday mornings while cuddling in my mother's bed. Later, they became our "bedside chats" and, as I got older, these also took place on weekday nights—or indeed, whenever something "popped up" in my mother's mind. So basically, they took place pretty much every other day. I'm sure she was never even remotely aware that this was a form of emotional abuse.

This kind of "promotion" to mum's confidante again resulted in great insecurities regarding my concept of manhood. Nevertheless from then on, I realized that I was mum's "little man".

According to the rules in our family, my value was supposed to come solely from what I did outside the home. But now that I was becoming deeply involved in family matters, I began to question my role. Even though I was "just" a man, did I really have a place or a voice in the family? I had always believed that was a woman's domain. So how was I supposed to act, think, or exist as a man-in-the-making? Who was I, really—and what did I represent?

Friends

Only girls lived in our wider neighbourhood, and I enjoyed playing with them a lot. We were close-knit as a group. I had no shortage of female friends. As I was able to adapt well and empathise with other people, I quickly learned to understand the way my playmates thought and to integrate this into my inner world and my reactions. As a teenager and young adult, this made me the "womanizer" on the one hand but also the "softie" on the other.

However, I always secretly wished for a male friend, someone who was like me, with whom I could share what moved me, somebody who understood my thoughts and feelings. But such a person was not within reach for a very long time.

I did have a group of boys my own age in our church, but even there I was more of an outsider because I didn't like to take part in the boys' games. Being with the girls was much easier for me here, too. There were a few boys with whom I would have liked to have had more contact. But unfortunately, it was never mutual.

My musical talent meant that I was appreciated in some places, but lasting friendships with other boys didn't develop in this environment either.

When I started secondary school at the age of ten, my life fundamentally changed. The new school I was now attending was an all-boys secondary school. There were 40 pupils in my class. But here, too, I was the outsider, having never learnt to defend myself against any kind of exclusion. And so I had to deal with some of the worst insults you could receive in this environment right from the start:

"Are you gay?"

"Are you a 175er?" (according to §175 of the German Criminal Code)

"Are you a faggot?!"

As a sheltered child from a Baptist family, I had to struggle to find out what exactly these terms meant. I already had a vague idea, but of course it was never discussed in the family, let alone in the church. Just being insulted in this way caused an indescribable fear in me, as there was no way I wanted to be rejected by God. The idea that there might be some truth in what the other boys were calling me was buzzing around in the back of my mind. After all, I was obviously different from most of them. From that time on, the fear that I could simply be excluded by God because of my feelings, slowly but surely began to grow inside of me. However, talking about it was not an option, neither in my family nor in church nor elsewhere.

Teenage Struggles

When I was about 12 years old, I found hidden porn magazines in the house while dusting, which I looked at—secretly, of course. For sure, everything that was forbidden was very appealing to me. They were clearly

straight magazines. The fact that I always tended to look at the men right from the start was “natural” because a boy had to compare himself with other men, didn’t he?

I never had the opportunity to look at a naked male “live.” Although I went to an all-boys class, nudity when changing or even showering together after sports was an absolute no-go. And in my pious family, it was an unspoken taboo to even show yourself naked anyway. Just looking at yourself in the mirror was *wrong*.

The question of homosexuality came up again when I was a teenager, around the age of 14 or 15, because I was still only looking at men in the hidden porn magazines. Of course, it was clear that I couldn’t be attracted to men, because that was disallowed by the church and the Bible, so that couldn’t be happening.... Hence my pious self-declaration that “comparison” was important on the way to my identity as a “real” man was reinforced.

After graduating from high school, I began studying music. This was the first time that I was confronted with “real” homosexual people. As I was still looking for a friend to confide in, it was very nice for me that fellow students invited me out, where we had good conversations, and they enjoyed spending time with me. For me, these were simply pleasant, friendly encounters—until I discovered that the various young men found me desirable and were clearly courting me.

Without question, there was only one thing for me to do—to break off all contact immediately so as not to be led astray from the “right” path, and to remain in God. After all, I had learned that it is a thorn in the Lord’s side, for a man to be with a man! And it was clear to me that “they” could only be after that! This, of course, was an impossibility.

Married and with Family

Due to this fundamental fear of being rejected by God, which was always hovering in the background, I decided at the end of my teenage years that only a relationship with a woman could be an option for me. When I met my current wife a little later, a good 45 years ago, it was clear: “I choose

this woman as the love of my life” and I married her a few years later. The promise that I very consciously made to her before God and man at that time—*Until death do us part*—applied to me without reservation.

As our relationship grew, so did our love for each other, and even after more than 40 years of marriage, nothing has changed. We are very happy in every aspect of our lives and we live in harmony together. We now have three grown-up children of whom we are very proud. And we are also grandparents and enjoy being this so very much.

Fear-Driven Life

But for many decades, this fear that there was something in me that was not “right” continued to smoulder inside of me, namely, my affinity with men. Even in my mid-40s, I struggled to name it, due to my devout background, a background that still told me that such feelings were not right before God. I just wouldn’t have been able to name it until then.

In my family and church through the years, I only ever heard about heterosexual orientation. I categorized anything in me that was even vaguely non-heterosexual—especially later as a well-trained evangelical counsellor—as a “search for male identity”, “comparing myself to men” or “longing for a close male companion,” etc., so that I didn’t have to constantly hover on the precipice of hell.

This period was not only exhausting but also represented an incredible inner ordeal. After all, I was a responsible husband, family man and church worker. But I also lived with the dark secret that I watched—as often as possible, but for sure in secret—the soft porn that was now on private television and increasingly accessible on the gradually evolving internet. And of course I only watched men.

On the one hand, I experienced God blessing me in my tasks, bringing success and allowing others to experience God as a loving Father through me. At the same time, I was constantly expecting the big blast, that something in my family or church would burst open, or that even God would expose me. And that I would inevitably end up in hell...

The shame I felt regarding this “double life” was also immense. I kept feeling this longing for something that—as I’d been taught for decades—wasn’t allowed in God’s eyes. I tried to push the feeling down, ignore it—but eventually, it would come back. And while all of that was going on inside me, I had to look in the eyes of the people I loved and pretend everything was fine. I couldn’t say a word. It felt like I was stuck in a downward spiral, getting pulled further and further in.

Looking back, it’s still a miracle that I didn’t succumb to a mental illness like depression or psychosis over such a long period of time under such stress.

Steps to Freedom

When I finally sought Christian therapeutic counselling and advice for various problems in my early forties, it gradually emerged that I have homosexual feelings. This realization was both helpful and frightening. My 40-year-impression that it was an unforgivable sin, to even have homosexual thoughts, was so deeply rooted that I was not yet able to admit anything else. And then, out of nowhere, something like this surfaced.

In a vigorous learning process lasting several years, I was able to release my homosexual feelings more and more. However, if I had openly described myself as homosexual or bisexual during the first period of therapy, my place on God’s supposed “hit list” would have been absolutely certain due to the religious rhetoric I had been taught and deeply internalized for so long. Given such thoughts were “sinful” according to my understanding of the Bible, I could not meet with God as a beloved son. And so I had to continue to live with this conflict, which I still couldn’t resolve at that time.

The fact that I was able to get through this phase reasonably well was mainly thanks to my wife’s love for me. She carried me along, encouraged me, supported me, and just by being there, opened up avenues for me to consider new theological ideas.

Changes in the Church

This “being accepted by/rejected by God” dilemma continued inside of me at first. On the outside, i.e. in my family, job and church, I pretended to be a different person than I was in private. I looked confident. I knew how to act on stage or speak to large groups like the congregation. I ran seminars about personal growth and pastoral topics, led worship, and directed choirs. My career was going well. But underneath it all, the fear of being found out was always there, quietly burning. This conflict shaped my life for many years and cost me a lot of energy, which—in hindsight—I could have used much more profitably for my family, God and church, or in my job.

It wasn't until around 2012 that things started to shift. In our church leadership we began to talk seriously and openly about homosexuality over a span of several years, trying to find our way forward as a church. Through those conversations—and by God's grace—my spiritual and theological understanding of queerness changed in a deep and meaningful way. I was now able to recognize that even non-heterosexual feelings do not exclude a person from God, the loving Father of all. They too have their place and may, can, and should be lived out.

This journey was painful for me. It brought up so many questions that turned my old beliefs and emotions upside down:

- a) Had my faith been wrong all those years?
- b) What would my life look like if this vision had come to me forty or fifty years earlier?
- c) Had the way I was shaped robbed me of the chance to live as a joyful, bisexual Christian—maybe even married to a man?

I struggled and fought for answers—with God and with the diverse voices and parts of me. I know today that I didn't believe “wrongly” because I had a different, narrower, and certainly not very healthy image of God. But this cannot be labelled as right or wrong. Nevertheless, I had to question myself and my faith completely.

Whether my life would have turned out differently if I'd noticed my theological blind spots earlier is something I'll never truly know. Maybe I'd be living in a same-sex relationship now—but maybe not.

What I do know is that I made a very conscious and loving decision to marry my wife. That choice is—and always will be—something I'm deeply committed to. I'm a man of consistency, and loyalty means everything to me. So the idea of leaving my happy marriage has never once crossed my mind. That, to me, is a tremendous gift. I can also say with full honesty that I wouldn't have made it through this long, painful journey of discovering my identity without the unwavering support of my wife.

Despite everything, I still sometimes wonder if I've missed out on something. There are moments when I feel the desire to experience sexuality with a man. But I don't—and won't—make peace with that in my conscience. Thankfully, I'm hopelessly monogamous.

And the truth is, I don't feel like I'm missing anything in my sexuality with my wife. In the meantime, I can read homoerotic literature without guilt. It helps me not to be consumed by longings. I rarely watch gay porn, but when I do, I know that my heavenly Dad doesn't shame me. I'm still loved, accepted, and treasured—as the son He created, including my sexual orientation.

Today, I find it tragic that people can be plunged into such existential crises as I experienced through a literal understanding of the Bible. And compared to other people, my path has certainly been much easier in many places. Nevertheless, I would have liked to have discovered God's loving view of all of His creation—including me—much earlier.

“And God saw everything that he had made: it was very good.”
Genesis 1:31

This chapter reflects the personal experiences, memories and interpretations of the author. Names and identifying details have been changed or omitted for privacy.