

# Voices

The stories of lived experience - to open our eyes, challenge our minds and fuel our hearts for equality + inclusion + diversity



**Trigger warning:** contains references to depression, suicidal thoughts, death by suicide, trauma and conversion therapy.

If you or someone you know is struggling, **help and support is available right now.** Please see final page for more details.

## About David (he/him)

David is currently part of Oasis Church Waterloo in London, England – a Christian church that is welcoming and affirming of the rights and relationships of LGBTQ+ people.

David is part of the core team at Oasis that aims to build inclusive communities. They produce publications and run conferences to help support inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in education, faith communities and the workplace.

You can find out more information about Oasis Church Waterloo at [www.oasiswaterloo.org](http://www.oasiswaterloo.org) and about Oasis (the overarching organisation) at [www.oasisuk.org](http://www.oasisuk.org). There is a wonderful message and endorsement of their work from the legendary musician and songwriter Sir Elton John on Oasis' website.

## In David's words

LGBTQIA+ There are so many initials, but behind each initial is a person like you and me, a person with feelings. More than an initial can explain, encompass or comprehend; we are all unique and exceptional; we are all special.

## Background and Context

### Laws

In England laws were in place from at least 1533 that made it unlawful for men to engage in sexual acts with other men.

The death penalty applied until 1861. It was then punishable by a minimum of 10 years in prison and subsequently sentences were two years' hard labour.

The law was changed in 1967 and since then it has no longer been a criminal offence for men to engage in sexual acts with other men in private in England.

It has never been unlawful in England for women to engage in sexual acts with other women. (Apparently those debating the introduction of such laws in England feared they might inadvertently publicise and encourage such behaviour.)

### Armed Forces

Despite the change of law in the UK in 1967, there remained a ban on homosexuality (for all genders) in the UK Armed Forces until 2000.

Between 1967 and 2000, if anyone was found to be, or admitted to being, homosexual, they were required to leave the Forces. This was

I'm here to share my story of how my belief system and society, especially my time in the Royal Air Force and their homophobia, nearly killed me.

I was brought up in a Christian home (Salvation Army) and saw firsthand the joy that faith in Jesus can bring.

My experience of the Christian church was faith in a God who loves us and for this love to be shown in practical ways to others. Our Sundays were full of worship services, open-air meetings, and feeding the poor and homeless.

We were not rich and not poor; my dad was a postman who loved Jesus and loved me; my mother was a lovely woman who again loved Jesus and also always had time for others.

Many a time, I remember my mother giving her Sunday lunch to a "man of the road" that my dad had brought home. Of course, there were problems in the family; money was scarce, but love was not, food was basic, but cuddles were bountiful.

I knew from an early age that I was different. I was gay.

When I was 16, it was the 1970s and society was still saying being "Queer" was wrong. The church was also beginning to be a bit louder about it. I was a Christian and knew I couldn't tell my family or church leaders about my sexuality.

When I was 17, I joined the Royal Air Force as a musician and began leading a double life. In private I enjoyed relationships with men and in the Forces I hid the fact that I was homosexual.

I did tell a friend, a fellow officer, about being gay. He said it was "against the Bible" and that I needed to "repent and change my ways".

At 21, I was arrested by the Forces, investigated for six months, and finally dismissed in January 1975 from the Royal Air Force for being gay.

I often cried myself to sleep and cried to God to change my sexuality.

Whilst I was part of an Evangelical Baptist Church I shared with a leader (known as an "Elder") about my homosexuality.

regardless of whether they had engaged in homosexual sexual acts or remained celibate.

An independent review of the UK Government and the Forces has been set up to examine the effect of the pre-2000 ban. If you are a member of the LGBT community and served in the UK Armed Forces between 1967 to 2000, you can add your voice to the "Call for Evidence". Or, if you know someone that was, please check they know about it.

More information can be found about this at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/call-for-evidence/call-for-evidence>.

## Christianity

The "traditional" (sometimes known as "orthodox") position within the Christian faith has been that God intended humans to be heterosexual and that sexual diversity comes from the world not being as God intended.

Followers of the Christian faith have, traditionally, been expected not to have sexual relationships except within a heterosexual marriage.

Prior to the change of the law in 1967, there are reports that the Christian church in England held a compassionate approach towards "homosexual offenders" and provided refuge and safety for people.

Since at least the 1960s, attitudes towards homosexuality within English society have continued to be more progressive. The opposite, however, could be said to be true of the Christian church which (at least between the 1960s to 1990s) became less accepting and more vocal of the "traditional/orthodox" viewpoint.

Sadly parts of the the Christian faith promoted (and continue to promote) "conversion therapy" as the "cure" for homosexuality. The aim of this so-called "therapy" is to enable a person to align with heterosexual and cisgender "norms".

Forms of this "therapy" range from being encouraged to ask God to take away homosexual desires (e.g. "pray away") to aversion treatments.

**"Conversion therapy" is now known to be dangerous and ineffective. It can cause significant, long-term psychological harm.**

**IF believe that "conversion therapy" is barbaric in all its forms and that it is spiritual and religious abuse.**

The Elder prayed for my homosexuality to go away and said I should have counselling.

The message was: I needed to pray and fast (go without food for periods of time), and I would be healed - or if I was not healed, it was due to my lack of faith. At the time I believed that being gay was wrong and that this was backed up by the Bible. It was like a civil war inside me. I began to have suicidal thoughts.

When I shared these thoughts with those in my faith community, the message remained the same – it was due to my lack of faith that I remained gay. So...more prayer, more tears and more failure. It was a vicious circle.

Then I met and fell in love with a woman. I wasn't trying to "go straight". I loved and admired her; I still do.

We met through involvement in a church in which I was leading the youth work at the time. I told her about having had previous relationships with men.

We were married for 13 years and had five lovely children (all boys). We separated over 21 years' ago and have remained friends. The divorce was not "due" to my homosexuality (of course, that had a significant role to play) but more due to a lack of communication (on my part) and the guilt and shame I held onto due to my sexuality.

In 1995, whilst overseeing children and youth work in the church I was part of, I was falsely accused of having an affair with a young man from the church. Although the accusation was unfounded, I was asked by the church to share about my "gay" past in a meeting of its members.

The young people in the meeting were brilliant (they stood up for me and encouraged me). But some church members walked out of the meeting.

The church asked me to resign from my leadership role and said I could no longer be involved in a teaching role or lead any of the worship music.

It was like I was a non-person in the church.

The ever-growing recognition of the ineffective and traumatising impact of conversion therapy may be part of the reason there is an increasing number of Christians who no longer hold to (all or parts of) the traditional/orthodox viewpoint on homosexuality and, instead, affirm the rights and relationships of LGBTQ+ people.



**David in the Royal Air Force in 1970**

My five children were aged 9 to 16 at the time and they were all badly impacted by what happened.

My eldest refused to attend church and ultimately lost his faith.

My middle son was 15 and already suffering from depression. His depression got worse and following a four month wait, he got an appointment to see a psychiatrist.

A few days before the appointment, he died by suicide. I was the one who found him.

Afterwards one of my sons told me he hated the church for what they had done to our family. My son, who lost his life, had told him how mad he was with Christians for what they had done to his family, but said that he still loved Jesus.

## Reflecting on the past 25+ years

My thinking about my homosexuality has changed. I was never "cured" of it and attempts to do so filled me with guilt, shame, self-hate and condemnation.

If crying and praying could have cured me of my homosexuality, I am sure 25 years of it would have helped.

Despite what I was taught through the church about my homosexuality being wrong, throughout the years I felt God was saying, "I accept you. Why can't you accept yourself?".

Final acceptance of being gay came from the intense generous love, inclusiveness and acceptance that I found in Jesus.

It was through my faith that I came to terms with my sexuality.

I now have a sense of freedom and no longer need "the church" or other people's acceptance. I am me and am happy with me.

Due to the way I was treated by "the church", I still feel fear and hurt and struggle with trusting "church".

**It is a shame that many LGBTQ+ people probably feel safer in a gay bar than in a church.** This is the consequence of faith-based rejection.

## To the LGBTQ+ community, I say:

The shame is not yours to wear.

It is for those that clothed you in that shame to take ownership of it.

For those institutions that nurtured the shame, it is their responsibility to take ownership of it and its consequences.

Those who shamed you for not being who they wanted you to be. The shame is theirs.

No matter how long you have worn and lived with the shame, it is never too late to disrobe.



David at London Pride in 2018

IF are hugely thankful to David for letting us publish this moving piece, our first "Voices" edition, and for all the work that David is doing in promoting equality, inclusion and diversity.

If you or someone you know is struggling with depression and/or suicidal thoughts, **help and support is available right now.**

In the UK\* you can:

- **Call:** Samaritans on 116 123 (24 hours a day, every day) (website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org))
- **Text:** "SHOUT" to 85258 at Shout Crisis Text Line (24 hours a day, every day) (website: [www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org))
- **Go:** (or take the person you are worried about) to your local Accident & Emergency department where there are mental health practitioners who can help (A&E is for urgent mental health support as well as physical health).

You can also call your GP for an emergency appointment or call NHS 111 out of hours service.

\*details up to date as at April 2023.