

**Friday, September 4, 2020**

**SERIES: GROWING and GOING**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**TITLE: Interview with Christopher Yuan: What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?**

NC: Today I am here with a special guest speaker, author and Professor at Moody Bible Institute, Dr. Christopher Yuan. Christopher, great to have you here today.

CY: Thanks for having me on, Pastor Nat.

NC: A few years ago, I actually found out about you. My mother, she's big into listening to Christian radio, and there was this one day, she goes, "Nat, I've been crying nonstop because of God's grace. I heard about this gentleman, who got saved through just an incredible set of circumstances. And now this guy's a professor. You would love him." And I'm always like, "Mom, whatever. I don't have time," but I listened. I made the time and I listened to your story, and it blew me away. So for those who are unfamiliar with your personal story, can you just give us a brief overview of how you came to faith in Christ? Because I would say, by far, it is not a typical path to becoming a Bible professor.

CY: Yes. I would say that's a good way to put it Nat - very atypical. And a big part of probably why your mother really connected with it, is because my parents, and particularly my mother, is a really integral part of my faith journey. Interestingly enough, both of them, my parents - my mom and my father - were not Christian. They came to the U.S. for graduate school. They were born in China, raised in Taiwan, and met in college in Taiwan, and then came here, to get their doctorate for graduate school. And my parents were not Christian, so we didn't own a Bible. We didn't go to church - none of that. And I wrestled with my sexuality from a young age, but I kept it hidden through high school, college, even the Marine Corps Reserves. And then in my early twenties, I no longer kept it a secret, and I came out of the closet, and I broke the news to my parents.

I'm from Chicago - so Midwest - and then I moved from Chicago to Louisville, where I was pursuing my doctorate in dentistry. My dad's a dentist. And so it kind of just seemed quite a natural fit. It's a great profession. And so after a year of dental school, I decided to go home and break the news to my parents. And I told my mom and dad, "I am gay" - My declaration. Well, my mother - kind of being your typical Asian mom - Tiger Mom - you know the situation - she gave me an ultimatum. And she said, "You must either choose the family or choose that" - she couldn't even say the words. Well, for me at that time, this was, you know, this was not a choice. I believed the lie: This is who I am. And I told my mom, "If you can't accept me, I have no other choice but to leave".

I left home, went back to Louisville, devastated my mom. In addition to that, the timing was awful. My parents' marriage was a wreck. They actually had begun the paperwork for divorce. And then the next day, she just decided she was going to do the unthinkable. She was going to end her life. [Wow.] Amazingly, God gave her life. And she had planned to go to Louisville, say goodbye to me for the last time, and just end it all. She went to see a minister of all things. Again, remember, we were not Christian. So I mean, everything is just more than serendipitous. It's God's sovereign hand over the situations, drawing us to Himself. She doesn't remember anything that this minister said, but he gave her a little pamphlet, and she took that little pamphlet and her purse - nothing else. She didn't pack, and boarded the train - one way Amtrak ticket to Louisville. She planned to say goodbye, but first, she read this little booklet, which shared with her the Gospel. She never heard it before. And she gave her life to Christ. So the way she says it is, she went to Louisville, expecting to end her life, and in reality, she did. One of her favorite verses is Galatians 2:20: For *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* So Christ living in them. And within a few months, my father also became a follower of Christ.

And you know, that prepared my parents for the rough years ahead, as I headed further and further away from God, and I just wanted nothing to do with God. I spent most of my free time in the gay clubs. You know, when I wasn't going to school, I was out partying and having fun - just, you know what all students who don't know Christ did - have fun. Life is short. So I spent most of my free time in the gay clubs. I went from relationship to relationship, seeking intimacy and happiness - which I found, but it still left me feeling unfulfilled and unsatisfied. So I began experimenting with drugs, and I always would need to be, I always need to clarify - not all gay men do drugs - not all gays and lesbians are promiscuous. Of course, some are; some are not. Regrettably, that is part of my story. And when I tell my story, I have to be totally honest and authentic about it, and tell the whole part. But I also want to remind watchers and listeners, that when you encounter the Lord Jesus Christ, he will impact every aspect of your life. [Amen].

So I began experimenting with drugs, but like my classmates, I was poor. And if I was going to do drugs, I needed to find a way to support my habit. And I did that by selling drugs. I sold to friends, classmates, even a professor, because I actually thought - this is the funny thing - I actually thought I could live this double life: a graduate student by day and a promiscuous drug dealer by night. But three months before I was to receive my doctorate, the administration of the school expelled me. So my mom and dad flew from Chicago to Louisville. And you know, in my mind, I'm thinking, "Great, they're coming. They're going to fight for me. They're going to stand up for me. They're going to tell that school - 'You know, what to do, you know, whatever', you know, and they're going to threaten a lawsuit". And I would graduate - just, I had three more months. I would graduate in three months, and get my doctorate. [Hmm.] Well, to my surprise, as we sat there in the Dean's office, my mother looked at the Dean and said, "It's not important that Christopher becomes a dentist. What's more important is that Christopher becomes a Christ follower". [Hmm]. She said that, you know, they're going to support whatever decision the school made. Well, Nat, just imagine, how infuriated I was. That's not the plan! You know, my mom knew that nothing was more important than me following Jesus - more important than finishing an education, more important than even career. Remember, this is a Chinese mom saying this. [Right]. And she, I mean, it was so counter-culture, counter- herself, to do this, but she knew that nothing was more important than me following Jesus. [Wow.]

Well, I was devastated. I was so angry. I just stormed out of that office. And I moved further away from Chicago - to the bright lights, big city of Atlanta, Georgia. And there, I quickly took over the drug scene in the gay community in Atlanta. And I became actually a supplier to other dealers in over a dozen states. In addition, it was nothing for me to have multiple anonymous sexual encounters each and every day.

Because according to the world, I had it all - money, fame, drugs, and sex. I had exchanged the truth of God for a lie. And I began worshiping and serving the creature, rather than the Creator, because in my world, I had become god. [Hmm].

So my parents had no clue that I was doing drugs. They didn't - they had no – they'd never even seen drugs; they didn't know what a guy looked like that was high. But they knew my biggest need was to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. So they tried to reach out to me with the love of Christ. They came to visit me one time in Atlanta, actually. And I kicked them out - after the second day I had enough.

And you know, the funny thing is, they were not telling me I was living in sin. I knew what they believed. They weren't preaching at me. They weren't, you know, bashing me over the head with a Bible - any of that - they weren't reading me Bible verses. But just the fact that God had so radically transformed their lives that they radiated Christ - that was offensive to me and I told them to leave. And we hear the narrative today, that Christian, Bible-believing, evangelical, Gospel-centered parents cannot love their gay children. You have to actually shut off that ancient, outdated, old fashioned teaching, to actually love your gay children. That's what you hear from the culture. [Hmm]. I had the exact opposite experience. My parents were not Christian and they rejected me. It wasn't until they became followers of Christ, that they could do nothing other than to love me, as God loved them while they were weak - while they were still sinners - and while they were, and while we are, enemies - that's how God loved them and they loved me in that same way.

Well, I kicked them out, but before my dad left, he wanted to give me something. He wanted to give me his very first Bible; it had notes in the margins, it was all dog-eared. And I told my dad, "I don't want your Bible". Like, I didn't want him to think that I actually might read it. He left it on my kitchen counter anyway and walked out the door. And as soon as they left, I took my dad's Bible and I threw it in the trash can. [Wow.] I wanted nothing, absolutely nothing to do with the Bible. I wanted nothing to do with God, with their new found religion. And after that visit, it was more than obvious to my parents that I was totally unreachable. Completely hopeless. [Hmm]. But my mom and dad committed not to focus upon the hopelessness, but upon the promises of God. [Wow]. And along with literally over a hundred prayer warriors from their church, from their Bible study fellowship group, they cried out to God for me. My mom began to pray a bold and scary prayer. [Hmm] "God, do whatever it takes - whatever it takes to bring this Prodigal Son to you." That's a scary prayer for a mom. That's a scary prayer for a Chinese mom to make. In her desperation, she fasted every Monday for seven years. She knew that it was going to take a miracle, a total miracle, to bring this Prodigal Son to the Father. And a miracle is exactly what God did.

This miracle came with a bang on my door. So I opened up my door, and on my front doorstep were 12 federal drug enforcement agents, Atlanta police, and two big German Shepherd dogs. I just received a large shipment of drugs - not my largest - but they confiscated all my money and my drugs. And I was charged with the equivalent of 9.1 tons of marijuana. [Wow]. With that

amount, I was facing 10 years to life in federal prison. I'd started with a bright future, amongst society's finest in academia. And I found myself in the ditch - amongst society's despised, in Atlanta City Detention Center.

So I tried calling my friends, you know, those people that always say, "Whenever you need something, just give me a call," - those friends that really got me more into trouble than anything else. Well, what I didn't know was I had a praying mother at home, and she knew years ago that as long as I had those type of friends around, I would find no need for God and no need for my parents. Remember, she loves bold prayers. Well, she prayed specifically years ago, that somehow, some way God would cause all of those friends to desert me. And on that day, not one friend answered my collect call. So I was down to the bottom of the list - Home - and I was just dreading making that phone call, just thinking of the earful that I was going to get on the other line. But my mother's first words were, "Are you okay?" No condemnation, no berating words - just words of unconditional love and grace. [Wow.] I'm just reminded of what Paul says in Romans Chapter two, verse four, that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance - not God's anger, not God's wrath. But it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. And on that miserable, awful day, God was pouring out His grace and drawing me to Himself, through the words of my mother.

A few days after, I was walking around the cell block, and I passed by this garbage can. And as I looked at this trash, I'm like, this is my life. I'm from an upper middle class suburb of Chicago. My father has two doctorates, and I was just a few months away from receiving my own doctorate. I had it made, but now I found myself among common criminals - trash. I was about to pass by this garbage can, but something on top of the trash caught my eye - I bent over, picked it up, and it was a Gideon's New Testament. I took that New Testament back to my cell, opened up that Good Book for the first time. I read through the entire Gospel of Mark that night, but I was not thinking, "This is the answer to my problems". Actually, I simply thought, "I've got a ton of time on my hands and I better pass it somehow". But as we know, what we have in our Bible is not just ink on paper. But what we have, is the very breath of God, and it is living, and powerful, and sharper than any double edged sword - able to cut through the hardest of hearts - exposing my sin, my rebellion, and it wasn't a pre-sight. And I thought, things couldn't get any worse.

I was wrong. A couple of weeks later, I was called to the nurse's office and I was handcuffed. And as I sat down, I knew something wasn't right. She was uncomfortably struggling with the words. And so she wrote something on a piece of paper, slid it across the desk to me. I looked down and I saw three letters and a symbol - It read H I V positive. A few days later, I was laying in my prison cell, and I looked up at the cold metal bunk above me, and somebody had scribbled something. And it read, "If you're bored, read Jeremiah 29 :11: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* I mean, it could have been any verse in the whole Bible, but God used these words, penned by a prophet thousands of years ago, to a rebellious nation Israel, to tell me that if God could have a plan for Israel in exile, rebellious Israel in exile, He could even have a plan for me. I had no idea where that plan was going to take me, but God gave me enough faith, enough strength, to get through that one day, the next and the next. My transformation was gradual. God was convicting me of my dependencies, obviously drugs, but within a few months, God delivered me from that addiction.

But you know, there was something Nat, that I wanted to cling onto, and that was my sexuality. So I went to a chaplain and I asked him his opinion. And to my surprise, this chaplain actually told me the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. He even gave me a book explaining that view. So with much curiosity, I took that book, in the hopes of finding biblical justification for homosexuality. I had that book in one hand, the Bible in the other, and from a purely human perspective, I had every reason in the world to accept what that book is claiming - to justify the way I had been living. [Hmm]. But God's indwelling, Holy Spirit convicted me that those assertions from that book were a clear distortion of God and His Word. I couldn't even finish that book. And I gave it back to the chaplain, which meant I turned to the Bible alone. [Hmm]. And I went through every verse, every chapter, every page of Scripture, looking for justification. I couldn't find any. [Wow].

So I was at a turning point, and the decision had to be made: either abandon God and His Word, live as a gay man, by pursuing a monogamous same sex relationship, by allowing my attraction - this is important - by allowing my sexual attractions to dictate not only who I was, but also how I lived. Or abandon pursuing a monogamous same sex relationship, by freeing myself from my sexuality, and live as a follower of Jesus Christ. My decision was clear and obvious. I followed Jesus. [Wow].

As the days, and the weeks, and the months, of abstinence passed, I realized that my sexuality should not be the core of who I am. I told myself before - God loves me unconditionally. That's true. But don't we as sinners, don't we like to add to God's truth? I added - so therefore, He doesn't want me to change - similar to people, when they say, "God loves me just the way I am, so leave me alone." But after reading the Bible several times, I learned that unconditional love is not the same thing as unconditional approval of my behavior. My identity should not be defined by my sexuality. My identity shouldn't be grounded in my desires. My identity is not gay, is not ex-gay, is not even heterosexual for that matter, because my identity as a child of the living God must be in Jesus Christ alone. [Hmm]. God says, *Be Holy for I am Holy*.

I thought in the past that if I were to become a Christian, that I would have to become a heterosexual. And what did that mean? Well, that meant the more sexually attracted - I would have lots and lots of women - the more of a Christian man I would be. But I realized that even if I had opposite sex attractions, I would still need to flee temptation. I would still need to resist sin. So actually, heterosexuality, as we define it, as the world defines it, as Freud defines it, isn't actually the right goal - correct direction, but it's not precise enough. And if you think about it, God, does not command us: *Be heterosexual, for I am heterosexual*, but neither does He say - *Be homosexual, for I am homosexual*. Instead, God says, *Be Holy, for I am Holy*. Therefore, the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality - that's not the goal - but the opposite of homosexuality is holiness.

As a matter of fact, the opposite of every sin struggle is holiness. I don't need to focus upon whether I'm struggling, or whether I'm tempted, but I need to focus upon the living a life of holiness, and living a life of purity, because change is not the absence of temptations, but change is the Spirit-wrought ability to be holy, even in the midst of temptations. Because the ultimate issue is not whether I'm struggling, or not whether I'm tempted - the ultimate issue is that I yearn after God, in total surrender and complete obedience. [Wow].

Well, as I began to live this life of surrendered obedience, God began to reveal His plan for my life. And He called me to full time vocational ministry, while I was in prison of all places. I realized I needed to learn more about the Bible. So I called them collect - my parents - told them, I think God's calling me into ministry. And I asked them to mail me an application to the only Bible college I had ever heard of at that time, called Moody Bible Institute. But then there was silence on the other line, because I think they both dropped their phones. [Laughter] And they mailed the application in to me in prison. I was so excited to fill it out, until I got to the last page, where I realized I needed references – from, these had to be people who knew me as a Christian for at least one year. Well, I had some slim pickings in prison; I was able to persuade a prison chaplain, a prison guard and another prison inmate to write my references to Moody.

So amazingly, Moody actually accepted me. I was released from prison in July of 2001, started the very next month in August. So think about my classmates when I answered their question, “What did you do this summer?” I graduated from Moody 2005, went on to my Masters in Exegesis and then got my Doctorate of Ministry 2014. And then 2011 was when I had the incredible blessing and honor to coauthor a book with my mom, called *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope*. It's pretty cool. She wrote Chapter one, I wrote Chapter two. She wrote chapters, so they're alternating narratives, interwoven chapters, because we wanted to tell you from our own voice - same situation told from two totally different perspectives - and then how that God in His power and His grace brought us all back together.

NC: Christopher, I know that there are people who are listening and watching today, [Of course], who they're saying, that's my kid. [Yeah]. That's my kid. They're the Prodigal. Now, they're gay, or they're transgender, and I don't know what to do. Like I want to love them unconditionally, but I can't condone what they're doing. How can they do this? What are the practical ways for them to love them, to show them Christ, but also not to endorse that lifestyle? Help them out.

CY: You know, I think one of the first things that we need to realize is - what is of ultimate importance - is that we believe that there is a God, and that Jesus Christ is His Son, and that we are sinners. And that is why we need Jesus Christ to be our Savior. I mean, do they know that, have they heard us articulate clearly the Gospel? Because what we need to recognize, is our children's rebellion, turning from God. And I'm going to broaden out to more than just sexuality. The core issue is not the drugs or the sexuality. That's a peripheral issue. The core issue is actually a lack of faith. The core issue is that they have walked away from God, or they're even believing this false Gospel. And that's just a whole other layer of complexity. But another thing that I really want to encourage parents is this: this misunderstanding that they are the ones to blame for their child's rebellion. It's not your fault. Recognize that your children are sinners, and don't view that, you know, maybe your son or daughter who identifies as gay, is somehow worse than your other son or daughter who's not following Christ. Again, the main thing is surrendering fully to Christ, and that can help as a mother or father to pray correctly for what it is exactly that we want God to do in their lives, to surrender to Christ.

NC: I can feel that our listeners right now just like lose a thousand pounds off their back. [Amen. Hallelujah]. Yeah. You know, as a parent, we have three small boys, and there's a lot of pressure, and we're doing as much as we can to lead by example, and to love them unconditionally, and show them, you know, respect and all these things. But at the end of the

day, we have no control over what they do ultimately, and what they decide to do with their future. And we have to hand them over to God, [Amen.] and allow God to do the work. And when I say that, it's like, man, that sounds so, so simple and straightforward, and easy, because He's God, but yet that's not what we want to do, as creatures who want to play god, so often. [Yes]. But Christopher, your story again, is just incredible, and a testimony of God's grace, and what God does every day. It's an everyday miracle. Again, Christopher, thank you so much for spending time with us today.

CY: Oh, thanks for having me on Nat.