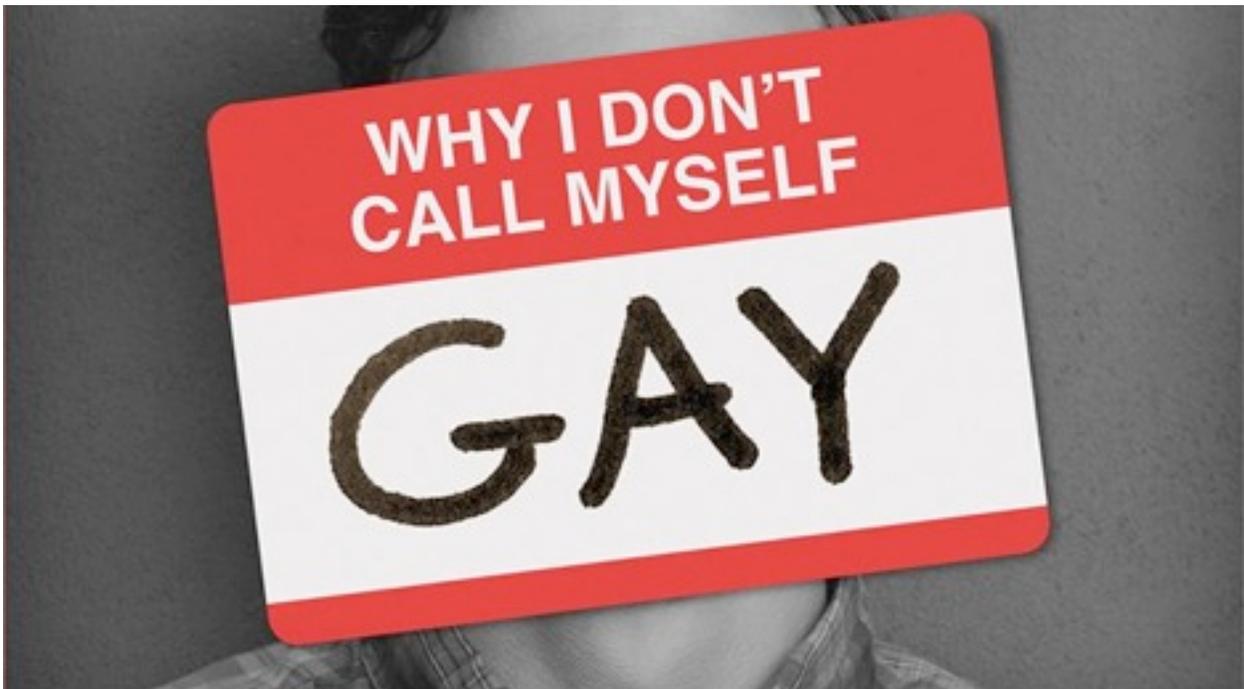


Why the label “gay” impoverishes and harms our view of the human person

“But one of the reasons I refuse to call myself ‘gay’,” says Daniel Mattson, author of *Why I Don’t Call Myself Gay*, “is that I have humility before God, my Maker. I accept my sexual identity as a man made for a woman.”

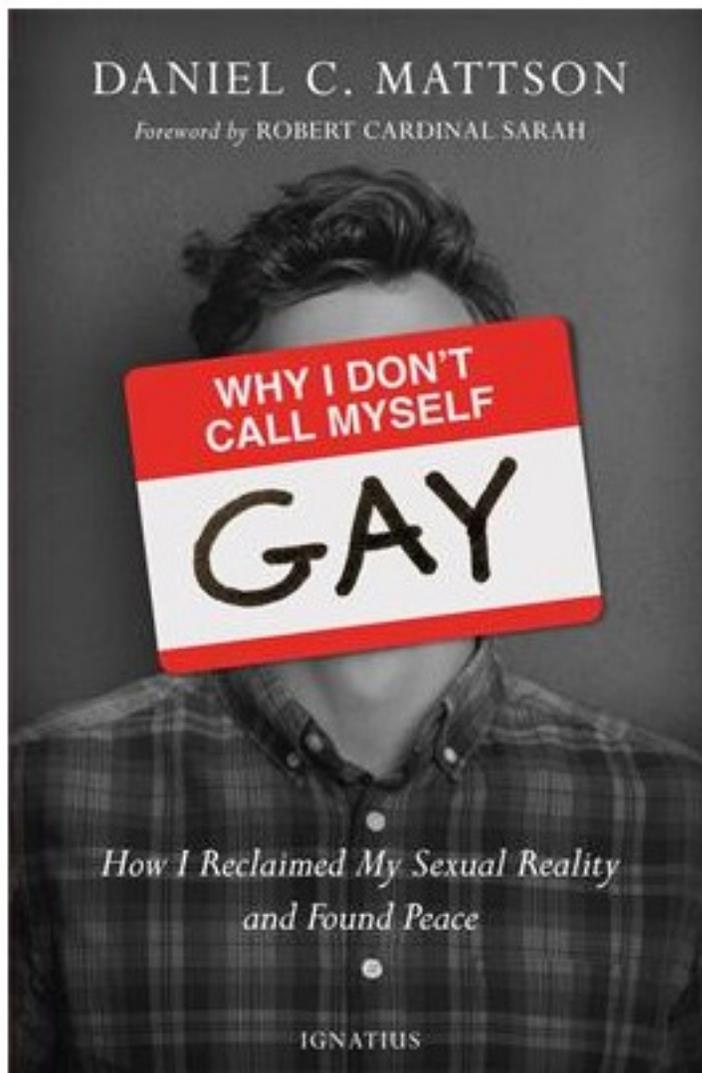
[June 13, 2017 Jim Graves Books, Features, Interview 1](#)



Daniel Mattson is a writer, speaker, and professional musician whose new book [*Why I Don’t Call Myself Gay: How I Reclaimed My Sexual Reality and Found Peace*](#) (Ignatius Press), is described as a “frank memoir” that is “part autobiography, part philosophy of life, and part a practical guide in living chastely...” Mattson was raised Catholic, but his family later converted to

evangelical Christianity. He experienced attractions to other boys at an early age and as a young man began a relationship with another man. He later embraced a life of chastity and returned to the Catholic Church. He has been a featured speaker for COURAGE, the Catholic Church's ministry to persons with same-sex attraction, and appeared in the award-winning documentary *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*. A professional orchestral trombone player, Mattson has performed and presented master classes around the world, including at the famed St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia.

He recently spoke with CWR about his book, his struggles with homosexuality, and his journey back into the Catholic Church.



CWR: What is this new book about, and why did you want to write it?

Daniel Mattson: I was one of the people featured in the COURAGE documentary, *[Desire of the Everlasting Hills](#)*. I am a reluctant public voice on the issue of homosexuality, but I did the documentary in response to St. Peter's call in 1 Peter 3:15: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope."

I tried practicing the world's view of sexuality. For a time, I considered myself "gay" and lived out that life. I rejected the Church's teaching as archaic, outdated and unreasonable. This book is a way I can share my story in greater detail than I was able to in the documentary. I discovered that labels such as "gay" impoverish our view of the human person.

This book is a memoir. The first part tells the story of my childhood, and leaving the Church behind. Part two is a reflection on my wrestling with reality. I came to see the importance of words. I think that the Church is wise in that it refuses to consider a person as "heterosexual" or "homosexual." These terms are reductionist. They pressure people, particularly our young people, into believing that your feelings define who you are.

I argue against the view of those who say you should "come out." Coming out is merely adopting the world's view of sexuality, and leads to frustration and confusion.

In part three, I talk about the Catholic catechism's teaching on homosexuality, that it is objectively and intrinsically disordered. But the word "disorder" does not mean a mental disorder, but an evaluation of the way man is: we are sexual creatures, with both soul and body, and our bodies are made for union of man and woman and ordered towards procreation.

What led me to the Church was her constant teaching about the nature of the human person as well as my own dissatisfaction with the world's view. This, in turn, led me to explore the correct use of words, which led me to the truth. Words are important in reflecting reality.

I also came to understand our need for disinterested friendship and disinterested love, the love that Christ has for us and that we should have for one another. The word "disinterested" may have a negative connotation, but it means that we love others with no conditions and no demands.

I talk about the temptations of friendship, and how to develop healthy friendships. As the Church teaches us, chastity blossoms in healthy friendships. I

touch on the inevitability of loneliness—or the gift of loneliness, as I call it—and how to live the chaste life.

Conversion for me is claiming my “belovedness” before God. I need to be humble before God, my Maker, and remember that I am not my own creation, but a creature of God.

In addition to humility, I discovered one of the most important things in living out a life of virtue is magnanimity, the desire to do great things in the service of God.

CWR: What was your childhood like?

Daniel Mattson: I grew up in Lansing, Michigan. I was the youngest of four boys. I was baptized Catholic, and had first Communion. But when I was 11 or 12, my family became evangelical Protestants. My whole family eventually came back to the Catholic Church, however, and one of my brothers, in fact, is a Catholic priest.

My first recollection of being attracted to the same sex goes back to the first grade. And I continued wrestling with what that means throughout adolescence. However, as an Evangelical, I believed that sex should only be between a man and a woman in marriage.

I prayed to God to take these same sex attractions away, and prayed for a woman with whom I could share my life. None of these prayers seemed to be answered, though. I thought God forgot about me.

I went to college, studied music and became a professional trombone player. I had no attraction to women, and I was addicted to pornography. I was angry and decided to turn my back on God. I found a man with whom I thought I wanted to share my life. I put a stake in the ground and said, “I am a ‘gay’ man.” However, God brought a woman into my life to whom I was attracted. I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world. It made me angry all the more. I wasn’t supposed to be attracted to women anymore: I was “gay”!

So, in my experience, it is a mistake to put people into boxes as “gay” or “straight,” and not be open to the possibility that these attractions may change on their own. I am not attracted to many women, but there are some. A person can have many attractions in his life, but only some he should act upon.

Throughout the history of the world people have recognized that it is not uncommon for people to have attractions to both sexes, but only in the past 150 years have those attractions meant that you’re a certain sort of person.

So I thought this woman was the person God wanted me to marry, but we ended up not getting married. So, getting back to my book, it is a meditation on suffering and wrestling with God, and doing God's will in the face of suffering. All suffering must be united to Christ's suffering on the cross, and is an invitation to love others.

CWR: Where do you think your same sex attraction comes from?

Daniel Mattson: I write about my own experience. I don't believe I was born with it, but can see clearly the path I took that led me to it. I had an unfortunate encounter with a neighborhood boy when I was age 6 to 9, which I believe began me on the course. I experienced rejection from girls. My dad was gruff, and scared me at the time. My mom was very involved in my life, in ways I now feel was unhealthy.

I envied other boys and became sexually attracted to the features I admired in them. These experiences eventually became transformed into pornographic fantasies.

Some people say that same sex attraction is just as natural as opposite sex attraction. But I say no, I can see where it came from in my life, it came from wounds. It's unfortunate that the world says that I am not supposed to view my life in that way, that same sex attraction is healthy and a normal variation of sexual desire, and that wounds are not wounds at all.

I'm not advocating that people try to change their sexual attractions, but for me, I can see my same sex attraction come from wounds in my life and choices I made. As St. Gregory of Nyssa said, in some respects we become our own mothers and fathers by the choices we make.

When I chose to indulge in my desires I was putting the plow to the ground to grow my own attractions to men.

CWR: What did your family think about your living the "gay" lifestyle?

Daniel Mattson: I was sneaky. I never told them. I knew they wouldn't approve. They didn't know I had a boyfriend; they thought I was living a chaste life.

They knew I was attracted to men. I told them when I was around age 28. In my case it was a mistake to say that if you tell your parents you're "gay" they'll throw you out of the house: mine would not support me living the "gay" lifestyle, but were very loving to me.

I recall a conversation I had with my priest-brother before he became a priest. The first time I actually “did the deed” with a guy, I was filled with tremendous guilt. I called my brother—my family was very close—and he was very compassionate and understanding. He didn’t reject me or throw the Bible at me. He saw me as his brother, saw that I had hurt myself and wanted to help me. He tried to bring me back home to the Church, but I wasn’t ready for that.

I went out to find a boyfriend because I didn’t want to be a “slutty guy.” I never told my brother I had a boyfriend, but he knew I was experimenting.

I was angry with my family and their religious beliefs at this time and I treated them horribly. They loved me in return and patiently prayed me into the Church.

CWR: How did they come back to the Catholic Church?

Daniel Mattson: When I was a musician, but before I returned to the Catholic Church, I played for the midnight Mass at the cathedral in Lansing. I invited my mother to the service, who hadn’t been to a Catholic church in many years. She was struck by the beauty, and hungered for the Eucharist again. My father journeyed along with her, and then my three brothers. But the seed was planted because of a Mass at which I was playing, even though I wasn’t yet a Catholic.

My brother and his wife decided to study Catholicism, and spent 400 hours reading, and were persuaded that the Catholic Church was the true church. My other brother and his wife have a similar story.

My priest-brother’s conversion followed my parents; even while a Protestant in high school he had dreams of becoming a monk in the footsteps of Thomas Merton. He entered the seminary soon after returning to the Catholic Church. Today, he’s pastor of the Church of the Resurrection in Lansing, Michigan, and joined me in presenting a session at the last COURAGE conference I attended in Phoenix.

I was the last holdout. I came back after attending a COURAGE conference at Villanova. While intellectually I could honor and respect the Catholic Church, it was the joy and enthusiasm of the men and women of COURAGE that really drew me in, as well as the peace they exuded in their lives.

CWR: How did you get involved in COURAGE, and how has it helped you?

Daniel Mattson: My godparents had been involved with COURAGE for 30 years, having had a son with same sex attraction. They wanted to bring me to a COURAGE conference, although I was initially resistant to everything Catholic. In Grand Rapids, where I live today, I participate in a regular COURAGE group which is committed to living out Church teaching. It's been great gift of soldiering on together, as no one can walk this journey of chastity alone. We're truly brothers and sisters, spurring each other on, helping someone up who falls and getting him on his way again.

CWR: You recently spoke at a COURAGE conference in Phoenix. What did you say?

Daniel Mattson: I told them that when I was a young man, I could not imagine being happy as a single, middle-aged man. But I am. I have come to realize that living out my sexual desires is like the forbidden fruit. It is tempting and looks like it will satisfy, but it will never fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. In the realm of sexuality, only the virtue of chastity can lead to fulfillment. And for me, fulfillment comes by not acting on my desires.

The men and women of COURAGE are far happier now than the way we were before. Hebrews 11:25 references the "fleeting pleasure of sin"; people in "gay" relationships generally think they are better off than they were before. But as so many of my friends in the COURAGE apostolate have said about their own time living a "gay" life, we were as happy as we knew how to be. Only in the Church can we find true happiness and fulfillment.

We have to start proclaiming and being confident that the Good News we have concerning chastity is part of the Good News of the Church. The Church says to those with same-sex attraction that you are welcome, but you cannot act on those desires. That is an invitation to a deeper sense of fulfillment.

CWR: Chastity will help us to be happy...

Daniel Mattson: The chaste man is the man who sees reality, and lives in accordance with reality. All virtues do that, but chastity in particular helps us to see ourselves as we really are. I am a man, made for union with a woman. The reality of our bodies reveals that sex is ordered to procreation, and also the unity of man and woman in marriage.

Sexuality typically leads to children, so it needs to be tied to a marriage that is life-long. To use sex outside of marriage is to go away from the path of human fulfillment that God ordained for our lives.

CWR: Vice President Mike Pence said in a 2002 interview that he did not go out socially alone with women and some mocked him for this point of view.

Daniel Mattson: I don't understand the mockery, especially considering how not long ago we had a president who did not honor his wife or marriage. I admire Mike Pence for his commitment to chastity, even if some do not think it needs to be that extreme, but he loves his wife and does what he does as a way to honor and cherish his wife. He's seen how men in positions of power have fallen and the havoc it's created in their lives; he is building a wall around his marriage in an effort to protect it. I think the world would be a better place with more men like him.

CWR: The LGBT community is adding more letters all the time to express different attractions and identities. Is this getting a little ridiculous?

Daniel Mattson: The idea of there being "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals" had never before been conceived when these terms were made up in 1862. From those words, you had to make people to fit those words. New words continue to be invented, and it does reach a level of absurdity. We're following the course of Descartes, I think therefore I am, and Nietzsche, I will myself to be this way. We have to see things clearly as they are and give them their right names; we're experiencing a new Tower of Babel: come, let us make a name for ourselves. You may consider yourself "gay" or "bisexual" or "pansexual" or something else; what you're really doing is taking on the name of God and declaring "I am what I am." This litany of sexual identities is a form of idolatry and a rebellion against God.

CWR: What are you doing now?

Daniel Mattson: I'm single ... I don't call myself "gay" ... and I want to be open to God's will. I don't have a wife, and I don't pine or pray for that. I pray for God's will to be done. I've reached a point where I'm pretty happy and content in the single life, and I view it as a way to give back to other people.

I've come to realize that sexuality in a man is directed toward fatherhood. As a single man, I can be a spiritual father to many people and be available to them at any time of the day. But one of the reasons I refuse to call myself "gay" is that I have humility before God, my Maker. I accept my sexual identity as a man made for a woman. So, that may mean God could, down the road, call me to marry a woman. I want to be open and docile to His will. I don't want to be married, but I suspect if I were to marry, it would be God calling me to grow deeper into a selfless, self-sacrificial love.