

LEADING YOUR CHURCH *to be as* GAY-FRIENDLY *as* THE BIBLE TEACHES

A DISCUSSION GUIDE *for* CHURCHES

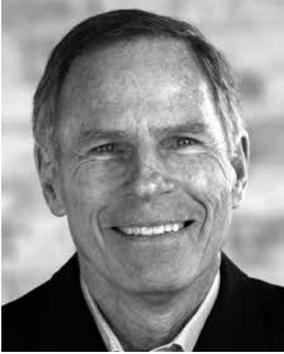


CHRISTIANS IN PURSUIT *of* GRACE

By CLARE DE GRAAF & LAURIE KRIEG

CHURCH LEADERSHIP EDITION

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who have struggled with homosexuality.

In 2014, Clare was asked by the leadership of his church to head a team to examine the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage and recommend ways to educate the church on this subject. That assignment is still in progress, but much of the material in this guide is based on drafts of his team's research and recommendations.¹



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Laurie Krieg and her husband, Matt, are the founders of Hole in my Heart Ministries—a blogging, speaking, and counseling non-profit dedicated to helping those struggling with sexual identity and addiction. Matt and Laurie Krieg married February 2009 after working through Laurie's same-sex attractions as a Christian woman. Although Laurie still wrestles with these attractions, she finds the journey easier by cultivating healthy relationships, and experiencing the absolutely transformative love of Jesus.

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Counseling and Teaching Services

Matt and Laurie are available to teach and counsel individuals and groups of men and women who want to know how to help their congregations, family members, spouses, or selves live and thrive with an identity based on Jesus' love. The focus of Matt and Laurie's teaching and counsel is based on the idea that we all have God-shaped holes in our hearts that can only be made whole through Him—no matter our specific sin struggles. To read Matt and Laurie's blog, or to learn more about their counseling and speaking opportunities, please visit himhministries.com.

1. The Elders of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, have not yet adopted these writings or recommendations. Therefore, these writings do not yet represent Calvary's position.

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NOTE: Because this material is continually being edited, it may be that not all ideas expressed in this study accurately reflect either Preston or Michael's views.

Leading Your Church to Be as Gay-Friendly as the Bible Teaches, Church Leadership Edition—DRAFT COPY; Last Revision: September 22, 2016

NOTE: This curriculum has not yet received its final editing, and therefore may contain inadvertent errors. We invite your comments, corrections, and suggestions (even about content) prior to its publication in early 2017.

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WHY THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE?

If LGBTQ men and women or their families leave our churches over theological differences, that should sadden us. But if they left because we are unkind to them, that would sadden Jesus.

The dual issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage will be *the issue* of the next decade for the church. It will split churches, denominations, and families. It already has. But we believe that a fresh approach to this issue provides courageous churches with a unique opportunity to eliminate a significant amount of that tension.

In our experience, most churches that believe the Bible does not permit same-sex sexual relations or marriage fall into one of three categories in their response:

1. *Churches that react* to pressures bearing down on them from both their church members and society. They do this primarily by warning and reminding people of what the Bible has to say on the subject, but offer very little practical guidance to help members respond with both conviction and grace.
2. *Churches that avoid* having open conversations about the issue because they are unsure how to approach this topic without offending someone.
3. *Churches that take the Bible seriously* when it comes to homosexuality but know they need to be far more proactive in preparing their members to engage in courageous, thoughtful, biblical conversations intended to build bridges, not walls.

It's to and for this last group of churches that we've prepared this discussion guide.

And within that group of churches that are leaning into the conversation courageously, we had these members in mind while writing:

1. Pastors and Church Leaders

Almost every pastor we've met has a personal position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. But what they generally do not have is an informed and united leadership team (elders, deacons, boards, staff, etc.) who know not only what they believe but why they believe it, and how those beliefs ought to shape church policy and culture. Without greater understanding and unity on these issues, your church will be forced to be *reactive* rather than *proactive*.

That's why we recommend that your church leadership team first complete all eight discussions in this guide before introducing the study to your membership. (In the Introduction you'll find a brief summary of what we believe the Bible teaches on this subject.)

2. Church Members

Once the leadership of your church is united on both the theology and the culture you wish to create in your church, our hope is that you'll use this discussion guide to begin educating your congregation, primarily through small groups. Our ultimate goal is that your church body would better understand how to love all flawed people, gay or straight, without compromising a traditional interpretation of Scripture.

3. Students and Young Adults

It's our hope the information in this discussion guide becomes a tool for the leaders of your student ministries to begin shaping students' biblical understanding on these issues, including sensing God's heart in these matters.

4. LGBTQ/SSA Men and Women and their Families

Our intent is that your church becomes a safe place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) people who are not yet Christians. We also hope that it will be a safe, accepting place for Christians who experience same-sex attractions (SSA) and desire to be sexually pure. And let's not forget the families of LGBTQ men and women, boys and girls, who also need our love and support.

We have an agenda

We call each chapter a *discussion* because we hope it will be just that: a fostering of honest discussions about one of the most misunderstood groups and issues in society and in the church. However, one of the potential dangers of simply having conversations is that in the end, no conclusions are drawn or positions taken. We simply have conversations.

Everyone hates hidden agendas. So here's ours: We hope to lay a solid foundation for the theological position that we believe best represents what the Bible teaches regarding sexual sin, purity, and marriage.

But the Bible also teaches us to love others the way we would like to be loved. Therefore, our second agenda is to help chart a course for how Christians can live with far more grace in this tension between truth and love without compromising either. The first step in this process begins with the truth that LGBTQ men and women are *people*; they are not an *issue* to be debated. They are people created in the image of God whom we are commanded to love.

Not all LGBTQ people are the same or believe the same things, as you'll soon find out. We all have biases, beliefs, misinformation, and personal experiences that have shaped our opinions about LGBTQ men and women, and they about us. In these discussions, we will address many of them.

With this audience in mind and our agenda before you, we offer these five outcomes that we hope this discussion guide will accomplish for your church:

1. Provide a framework for better understanding LGBTQ/SSA men and women.

Unfortunately, Christians are better known for what they are *against* than what they are *for*. The first three discussions in this guide will hopefully reframe how you and your church think about LGBTQ men and women—less as an issue to debate and more as people to be understood.

2. Educate your church.

Have you ever wondered how some Christians can read the same Bible you do but come away believing that God is fine with same-sex relationships and marriage? Discussion Four and Five will help you understand what they believe and why and provide you with a biblical response for each of their positions. Discussion Six, *Why Not Let LGBTQ Men and Women Marry?* provides additional guidance for having thoughtful, biblical discussions on this subject.

3. Provide a theological framework for what the Bible teaches about human sexuality.

In Discussion Seven, we provide a series of statements for your review and which you can edit as your leadership desires. When completed, this document can serve as your church's theological foundation and guide to address a myriad of marriage, cohabitation, and sexual issues, both heterosexual and LGBTQ/SSA in your church.

4. Change the culture of your church.

Once you've determined the theological framework for your church on these issues, it's our hope you'll write a *Church Covenant* (Discussion Eight). Think of it as a "how shall we then live?" document. It will help the members of your church move toward a better understanding of what it actually means to be *gay friendly*, and what you, their leaders, expect of them. Appendix B, *Six of the Most Important Things your Church Can do to be Proactive*, is a blueprint for the implementation of your church's strategy.

5. Protect your church.

A list of questions your leadership may need to ask and address now or in the future can be found in Appendix A, *Other Practical Issues for the Leadership of your Church to Consider*. We also highly recommend that the leaders of your church read *Church Guidelines for Same-Sex Issues*, from the Christian Legal Society. It will help protect your church from potential needless conflict and litigation.¹ Appendix C is a sample *Wedding Policy* you may find helpful.

1. Visit Christian Legal Society's "Church Guidance for Same-Sex Issues" at clsnet.org/document.doc?id=852.

Using discussion guides in your church

Church Leadership Edition—Free

The *Church Leadership Edition* of *Leading Your Church to be as Gay-Friendly as the Bible Teaches* is made available free of charge to the pastors and staff of your church as well as members of your governing body (elders, deacons, board, vestry, etc.). Your church has permission to make as many copies as needed for this group only.

Likewise, we grant permission to your leadership to edit Discussion Seven, *The Statement on Human Sexuality*, and Discussion Eight, *Our Church Covenant* (including the discussion questions at the end of each), so they reflect accurately the theology of your church and the culture you wish to create in your church. If you do edit either of these two documents, our only requirement is that you add the following statement at the end of each document:

These documents have been edited by our church leadership and therefore may no longer reflect accurately the theology or ideas of the authors or advisers of Leading Your Church to be as Gay-Friendly as the Bible Teaches.

Small Group Edition—\$3 per copy

The *Small Group Edition* of *Leading Your Church to be as Gay-Friendly as the Bible Teaches* has been prepared for use by any small group, adult Sunday school classes, or other appropriate groups in your church. It contains the first six discussions, but not the *Statement on Human Sexuality* or *Our Church Covenant*. It also does not have any of the appendices that appear in the *Church Leadership Edition*.

You can view, purchase, and download a master copy of the *Small Groups Edition* from himhministries.com or claredegraaf.com. It is not yet available in print form. The purchase price gives churches, ministries, or individuals the right to download, print, or photocopy only the number of copies actually purchased.

Recommended supplements to the *Small Group Edition*

1. If the leadership of your church approves a *Statement on Human Sexuality* or a Church Covenant, we recommend providing them as a supplement to the *Small Group Edition* study, along with their accompanying discussion questions, to all who are using the Small Group Edition. They will become Discussions Seven and Eight for your small groups.
2. If the leadership of your church disagrees with or wishes to clarify anything in the first six discussions, feel free to add your comments to the supplement, or prepare a separate cover letter and distribute them with the *Small Group Edition*.

We realize how complex these topics are and how divisive they have the potential to be, therefore, we have tried to make these materials as flexible as possible for each church to customize. Our hope is that when that process has been completed they will accurately reflect your church's culture, theology, and the need for some to stay within denominational guidelines.

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DISCUSSION ONE

AN INTRODUCTION

The title of this Discussion Guide, *Leading Your Church to be as “Gay Friendly” as the Bible Teaches*, manages to offend almost everyone at first.

Most LGBTQ men and women we’ve spoken with can’t imagine that the evangelical church *could ever* be gay friendly—and many evangelicals can’t imagine why we’d even *want* to make the church gay friendly. This is exactly why many of us are standing on opposite sides of the proverbial “same-sex debate canyon,” shouting at each other and getting nowhere. This guide is a blueprint for how you and your church can move beyond statements of belief and take the initiative in building understanding in your congregation, with the ultimate goal of building relational and spiritual bridges between all of us.

First, the “elephant in the title”

We understand the title of this discussion guide may appear to some to be an oxymoron. *How can a church be both biblical and gay friendly?* We intentionally chose the term “gay friendly” to be thought provoking. Many LGBTQ men and women—both the stereotypically *loud and proud* and those firmly committed to a same-sex identity and sexual practices—will not find our positions or our recommendations friendly at all. Some heterosexual, evangelical Christians will think the very idea of friendship with LGBTQ people is a sellout or an accommodation of sin. In these discussions, we hope to introduce you to men and women who are both evangelical *and* experience same-sex attractions who would love to engage more in their church if they encountered people who were kind and *friendly*.

We also chose the phrase “as the Bible teaches” intentionally, because Jesus said the greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39b). This includes people we may not understand or even like. Sadly, too often, gay men and women fit that description.

So, how can the words *church*, *Bible*, and *gay friendly* co-exist and still speak biblical truth about God’s one-man, one-woman design for marriage? We believe not only is it possible, but it is God’s command that we make our churches friendly to everyone, just as Jesus instructed. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). And, who are the sick? *All of us* (Romans 3:23). Romans 3:10 says, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” All of us, same-sex attracted or straight, rich or poor, black or white, are in need of a Savior, King, and Friend.

A word about words

Getting the words right can be complicated. *Is it LGBTQIA now? Are there more letters? What is “same-sex attraction”?* Because most straight Christians don’t know the language and don’t want to offend their neighbors (or children or friends), we often say nothing. However, when we say nothing we allow the loudest voices to speak for us—and those voices are not always kind and/or biblical—both inside and outside the church.

So, here is a quick lesson on the words we will use in this discussion guide and why we will use them. Our hope is that this knowledge will give you the confidence to reach out with wisdom and love.

When referring to the men and women who have taken on the identity of *gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning* (LGBTQ), we will primarily use the acronym *LGBTQ*. This is an acceptable term to this group. Yes, one sometimes hears more letters added to that, including *LGBTQIAP* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, pansexual), but we will (and you can) use *LGBTQ* safely.

We will primarily use the term *same-sex attracted* or *SSA* to describe men and women who experience a same-sex

attraction. This includes both Christians and non-Christians. We understand that using “same-sex attracted” as opposed to “gay” or “LGBTQ” to describe men and women who *experience* SSA can frustrate those who prefer to be called gay or LGBTQ. We have no desire to offend. We simply believe using the term gay or LGBTQ for *all* who experience same-sex attractions seems to overemphasize the identity rather than the experience of same-sex attraction (see the explanation of gay Christians below for more clarity).

We may also use the adjective *gay* to describe men and women who *identify* as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. But, we will *not* generally use the noun *homosexual* or *homosexuals* to describe LGBTQ men and women, as it is often viewed as an unkind. Preston Sprinkle, a respected Christian author on the subject of LGBTQ issues and the church, and author of Discussions Four and Five says:

*I'd recommend never using the word homosexual when referring to people. That is, don't use it as a noun, like, "Hey, look at that homosexual." You can say homosexual when referring to concepts or things rather than people ("homosexual relationship," "homosexual desires"). But almost every gay person I know does not like to be called "a homosexual."*¹

Heterosexual/straight

Finally, we will use the words *heterosexual* or *straight* as both an adjective and noun to describe men and women who do *not* experience same-sex attraction. We understand that choosing to use *heterosexual* to describe one group of people while not using *homosexual* to describe another seems inconsistent. However, we chose to use *heterosexual* for simplicity, to avoid having to use accurate but wordy phrases such as *those who do not experience same-sex attraction or gender confusion*.

Gay Christians

The following may help to clear up some confusion. Christian LGBTQ/SSA men and women can be roughly divided into three groups:

- 1. Gay or LGBTQ affirming Christians.**² Capital “G” Gay are men or women who self-identify as gay or LGBTQ, and by this they generally mean, “I am a serious follower of Jesus, but I also believe the Bible permits (affirms) same sex, sexual relationships, marriage, and gender fluidity.” This belief system is also known as *affirming*. About their beliefs, many Gay, affirming Christians may also say, “I am not ashamed of my sexual attractions. This is who I am. It’s not a condition that needs to be healed nor forgiven because it is “sinful.” In fact, any attempt by non-affirming Christians to think less of me or not affirm me and my decisions is the real sin.”

(In Discussion Four and Five, we will explore how affirming Christians justify their choices biblically.)

- 2. Gay, non-affirming Christians.**³ *Non-affirming* refers to men and women who do *not* believe the Bible permits same sex, sexual relations or marriage (even if it is monogamous, consensual, and loving). When someone describes themselves as a *gay, non-affirming Christian* (notice the lower-case “g”?) he or she would generally believe, “I experience same-sex attractions, but it is not God’s will for me to act on these attractions. However, I do believe the most honest way to describe my experience and persistent, unchanging attractions toward the same gender is to identify as a gay person.”

Writers Wesley Hill and Matt Jones are two serious non-affirming followers of Jesus who prefer to identify as *gay Christians*, but it is not their primary identity—which is “follower of Christ.” This is true of most men and women who identify as gay Christians.

NOTE: Straight Christians, often friends or family of an LGBTQ Christian, can hold to either *affirming*, or *non-affirming* positions as well. In other words, you don’t have to be *gay* to hold to an affirming or non-affirming position.

1. Sprinkle, Preston M. *Living in a Gray World: A Christian Teen’s Guide to Understanding Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. P. 24.

2. We, the authors, acknowledge that most gays make a clear distinction between themselves and those who are bisexual or transgender, (the “B” and “T” in LGBTQ). In other words, bisexual and transgender people are not strictly speaking, *gay*. We ask that you give us some grace to make some generalizations for teaching purposes.

3. ???

Additionally, very few Gay or gay Christians use the capital “G” or lower case “g” to describe themselves. This is simply a helpful tool, borrowed from Mark Yarhouse, to mentally help differentiate the two.⁴

3. Same-sex attracted (SSA), non-affirming Christians. These are men and women who, like *gay* Christians, are also attracted to their same gender but do not believe the Bible permits same-sex sexual relations or same-sex marriage. But here’s the primary difference between them: “To identify as an LGBTQ person, a gay (or Gay) Christian,” say many SSA Christians, “runs the risk of identifying myself too much by my sin struggles and temptations, rather than first and foremost by my identity as a child of God. *That* is who I truly am.”

Having presented these definitions, it should be said that there are no universal definitions used by all LGBTQ Christians, and many would take some issue with ours. In fact, some LGBTQ Christians adamantly disagree with the term “same-sex attracted”. They feel this way because it is often associated with what is called, “sexual orientation change therapy” (SOCE) or “reparative therapy,” which seeks to change the orientation of men and women attracted to the same gender. In their view, to use the term “same-sex attracted” as opposed to “gay” is to tell a gay person that their attractions (and therefore their *personhood*) need to be changed. It feels shameful. We use the term “same-sex attracted” in this guide not to shame anyone nor to give blanket approval to all therapy techniques, but we believe it to be the best term to encapsulate the experience without tying it to an identity.

Churches with a traditional interpretation of Scripture on these issues should feel quite comfortable theologically with both *non-affirming, gay Christians* and *same-sex attracted, non-affirming Christians* (categories 2 and 3 in the list above).

Author Laurie Krieg identifies as a Christian who experiences same-sex attraction and is non-affirming (the third option above.) Laurie is married to a man and has two children. Although she is attracted to her husband, she still also experiences same-sex attractions. However, she chooses not to use the term *gay Christian* to describe her experience, nor does she recommend it to others. She believes identifying as a *gay Christian* subtly shifts the emphasis of her identity in Christ to her sexual struggle. However, neither Laurie nor Clare DeGraaf believe it is sinful to identify as a *gay Christian*, especially if the term is used as an adjective to describe his or her experience, rather than as a core part of one’s identity.

All this nuanced language may be unimportant to heterosexual men and women. But it is hugely important to same-sex attracted men and women and to the Christian LGBTQ community. So, when someone begins describing themselves as “gay” and waits for your response, the best thing you can do is to ask them with genuine kindness to share their story. “You can answer any of this or none, but I’d love to know more: What was it like for you growing up with this attraction?” and, “What does being a gay Christian mean to you?” Trying to understand does not mean you have to agree with their choices. But listen first. We hope the information in this discussion will help you to better understand words matter, and that the person behind the language matters most.

Is there a *gay lifestyle*?

The word *lifestyle* will rarely be used in this discussion guide to describe how LGBTQ men and women live. Again, Preston Sprinkle: “Think about it. How would you feel if someone talked about the ‘straight lifestyle’ and then lumped you into a category with every other straight person who walks the planet?”⁵

The primary difference between a *straight lifestyle* and a *gay lifestyle* in the eyes of the straight world is the idea of promiscuous gay sex, along with an in-your-face, stereotypically flamboyant or butch attitude and dress. However, most gay men and women live normal, quiet, non-flamboyant lives. They eat, sleep, drink, and have gay and straight friends—and this is particularly true of Christians who experience SSA. So, let’s not stereotype. We would do well to drop the lifestyle lingo.

4. See Christian Psychologist Mark Yarhouse’s book, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends*, for a more thorough explanation of his three categories of Gay, gay, and same-sex attraction—especially chapter 6.

5. Ibid.

So, what does this mean for the church?

Wesley Hill is a serious follower of Jesus, a theologian who experiences same-sex attraction and identifies as a gay Christian. Wesley has committed himself to celibacy and his life to asking the church for greater understanding and compassion. He says more eloquently than we ever could why the church must care:

I am writing for those who have grown up feeling like resident aliens and have struggled to know why. I am writing for gay and lesbian Christians who fear what their parents might think when they discover the attractions that their sons or daughters have wrestled with for years. I'm writing for those gay and lesbian Christians who married heterosexuals in a last-ditch effort to change their sexual orientation but who find their homosexual desires just as strong today as they ever were before. I have in mind all the gay and lesbian Christians living behind closed doors, desperately wanting to share their deepest secret with the churches they attend but feeling unable to. I am writing for people in their late twenties or even thirties or forties and beyond who, for the first time in their lives, are experiencing the awakening of homosexual impulses and desires and are scared to death as to what they might mean and how to deal with them. I am writing for gay and lesbian persons who have experienced stinging rejections from Christians but who nevertheless are convinced that God wants them to try to live pure and faithful lives within the flawed and often hurtful community of the church. I am writing for homosexual persons who have tried—and are trying—to “become heterosexual” and are not succeeding and wonder, for the umpteenth time, what exactly it is that God wants them to do.

And I hope there are others who will “overhear” what I write who struggle long and hard with persistent, unwanted desires or other afflictions that are similar in some ways to those of gay and lesbian Christians—chemical dependencies, eating disorders, mental and emotional disturbances of various kinds. The Christian's struggle with homosexuality is unique in many ways but not completely so. The dynamics of human sinfulness and divine mercy and grace are the same for all of us, regardless of the particular temptations or weaknesses we face.⁶

Think about it: What serious follower of Jesus wouldn't want to be as gay friendly as the Bible teaches?

Someone else is watching

But Jesus isn't the only one who has noticed our unloving behavior. Your children and perhaps your grandchildren are watching as well. Anyone who spends time around younger Christians will tell you that most of them are ready to accept same-sex relationships and marriage as God's design. They believe that if Christians do not affirm loving, monogamous, same-sex relationships, we are being unloving and unfair.

Do you think your own college-age children or grandchildren are an exception? They may be reluctant to reveal to you their own beliefs on the subject, but text or email them right now and ask them this question: “What percentage of the kids at your school, or in your youth group, believe same-sex marriage should be a personal decision?”

We can change our approach without changing our beliefs, and if we don't, we may risk our children's faith and the welfare of our churches. Perhaps without being conscious of it, many younger Christians are using the homosexuality debate to *put the authority of God, the Bible, and the Church on trial*. Here's their reasoning:

We get that the Bible appears to prohibit same-sex sex. However, since we also know God is a God of love, the writers of the Bible either didn't get those teachings from God, or else God gave those commands thousands of years ago to address some homosexual abuses at the time and they have no relevance today. A loving God would never deny the right of two people of any gender to marry if they are prepared to commit to a loving, life-long, monogamous relationship. It's embarrassing and unfair for Christians in the 21st century to call that kind of relationship a sin.

We don't blame God. We simply distrust the traditional church which thought the Bible approved slavery and anti-Semitism, as well as denying women equal rights with men in the church. This is the new civil rights issue of the 21st century. The church needs to wake up to the new reality: same-sex marriage is here to stay, and what consenting adults do behind closed doors is none of our business.

For today's young people, *how the church treats LGBTQ/SSA men and women has become their litmus test of our love for others.*

And we must admit, there's an element of truth in that. As Christians, we tend to be far more tolerant of our own sin than the sin of others. And nowhere is that more true than in our attitude toward LGBTQ individuals.

6. With minor edits from, Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. P. 18, 19.

Whether we're willing to admit it or not, most heterosexual Christians are, to some degree, homophobic, or at the very least uncomfortable with or judgmental of LGBTQ men and women. We say, "hate the sin but love the sinner," but the reality is, many Christians don't like either one. (By the way, the *hate the sin but love the sinner* bumper-sticker slogan is viewed by those who experience SSA as unkind and is counterproductive to any meaningful dialogue with them.)

If we want to obey Jesus as well as win the admiration of younger Christians, we will have to repent of any un-Christlike attitudes toward gay men and women in general and offer far more compassion to those who are tempted by it and struggling to overcome that temptation. If Jesus said in Mark 12:31 that the second greatest command is *love your neighbor as yourself*, then as a church, we have to confess that we have not loved the LGBTQ community all that well.

What we, the authors, believe

In this guide, we hope to reframe the discussion without compromising a single traditional interpretation of Scripture. But, just to put your mind at ease, here's a very brief summary of what we, the authors, believe on this subject:

- All humans, both heterosexuals and LGBTQ men and women, have been tainted by the Fall, and sin has corrupted God's original intent for human sexuality. The way we are today is not the way he made us. It's what we have become because of sin.
- All sex outside of marriage is sin, and we do not believe the Bible allows same-sex marriage.
- In this discussion guide, when we refer to same-sex marriage, we are considering it only as a legal entity, not as a biblical possibility.
- While some versions of the Bible use the term *homosexual*, the Bible does not condemn the condition (the attraction), it only prohibits fantasizing about it (lust) and practicing it physically. (See Leviticus 18, 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and Matthew 5.)
- Contrary to some public opinion, there is little biblical evidence that God considers same-sex sex worse than many other prohibited sexual sins.
- We consider born-again gay or SSA men and women who desire to be sexually pure to be our brothers or sisters in Christ. We encourage the church to fully embrace them as such.
- Born-again SSA Christians who do not choose celibacy and instead choose to be married to or have a sexual relationship with a person of the same sex, should be treated by the church like any heterosexual Christian who is violating any of the biblical commands for human sexual relationships.
- We believe God's design for gender is determined by their biological sex, but we also recognize that confusion over gender identity is a real struggle for some men and women. They will need support from mental health professionals and their faith community to find ways to manage the emotional and societal stress related to gender.

We are not naïve; if your church agrees with our biblically conservative positions, we don't expect gay men and women to flock to your church any time soon. We also know that you may have some members who think you are going "soft on sin" and might leave. And in that case, you might wonder: What's the point of engaging this topic? The point is to obey Jesus' teachings by tearing down any barriers between the gospel and the LGBTQ men and women in your community. Additionally, as Wesley Hill described, there is a high probability that you already have same-sex attracted men and women in your church, men and women who are scared to death to be vulnerable and many of whom are trying to be pure. We ought to be cheering them on, not driving them away. As Rosaria Butterfield, an author and teacher on this subject, says, let's not make the cross of Christ heavier for them.⁷

"The church should embody Christ's love for all, yet LGBTQ people are fleeing our churches in search of love."
—Dr. Preston Sprinkle

7. Butterfield, Rosaria. "Hope for Holland." Lecture. Hope College, Holland, MI. Sept. 5, 2015.

Parents, teach your children well

We hope that this discussion series, in addition to helping improve the church's relationship with SSA men and women, will become a tool to help you to talk with your children or grandchildren. We believe that one reason many younger Christians feel sympathetic to LGBTQ men and women is because Christian parents often feel uncomfortable talking about homosexuality, or else have voiced outright opposition to all LGBTQ men and women, which as we stated above, is a form of homophobia. As you move through this discussion guide, begin praying about how you can be more proactive in helping your children and others in the church better understand God's perspective on all the issues surrounding human sexuality. If we don't do it, someone else will step into that role.

For example, we, the authors, believe we ought to be listening what young SSA and straight men and women have been telling us. The following is a summary of what we, the authors, have heard in conversations we have had with non-affirming Christians who experience SSA:

The church needs to be talking to kids—as early as middle school—about this subject. Rather than simply regurgitating what the Bible says, your church needs to prepare them for both the “biblical” and the unbiblical arguments they will hear at Christian and non-Christian colleges. Without a doubt, there they will hear that God is fine with same-sex sexual relationships and marriage. If the church avoids openly and intentionally talking about these men and women, and their struggles, by the time your young people graduate they will have bought into the idea that not only is God okay with it, but that Christians who are not in support of gay marriage aren't true Christians at all. The result will be the erosion of the confidence this next generation has in their church leaders, and in the reliability and authority of the Bible to govern the moral and spiritual decisions we make.⁸

We believe the greatest threat to the Church universal and to local churches today is the slow erosion of confidence believers hold both in the Bible and in God's authority and his right to govern our lives through it. This applies equally to straight Christians who refuse to live under the authority of God's Word on matters of marriage, divorce, and sexual purity, and to Christians who experience same-sex attractions.

Our disclaimer

Many LGBTQ Christians will find some of our definitions, arguments, and observations too simplistic and perhaps even inaccurate (such as lumping transgender people into the LGBTQ camp or using the term “same-sex attracted” rather than “gay”). Theologians will find our positions accurate, but lacking the depth found in other books on the subject. All these charges are true and quite intentional.

This discussion guide is essentially *Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church 101*. Our target audience is Christians who have never really studied how homosexuality and Christianity interact biblically, nor how LGBTQ Christians think and feel. It was also written to introduce Christians to a new way of having a more grace-filled and biblical worldview on this subject. But it is only a framework; and not a fully developed, all-encompassing book on all things LGBTQ. Throughout this discussion guide, we will suggest a number of fine books if you wish to explore any of these topics deeper.

Getting started

Most books and studies on this topic begin with making a biblical case for marriage and presenting the biblical arguments against same-sex behaviors and same-sex marriage (both of which we'll cover in subsequent discussions). In our opinion, they are preaching to the proverbial choir. Most Christians think they have a pretty good idea what the Bible teaches on the subject. We're going to begin in a somewhat different way: By asking, “Are there LGBTQ/SSA men and women with whom we can partner and serve without compromising our biblical position?” It may surprise you that the answer is yes. We will address that in Discussion Two.

8. A 2014 Public Religion Institute survey found that one-third of Millennials are leaving the church, and the reason one-third of those leaving are making an exit is because of how the church speaks about and treats LGBTQ men and women. See publicreligion.org/2014/03/leaving-religion-LGBTQ-issues/#.VzsJkGPi8dc for more information.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you personally know a SSA/LGBTQ man or woman? How, and in what context?
2. How have SSA/LGBTQ men and women been perceived by your church? What has your church done well? Where is there opportunity for learning/growth?
3. What thoughts did you have when you read Wesley Hill's description of the fears of LGBTQ men and women being exposed or shamed?
4. Do you think you could have SSA men, women, or young adults in your church who are trying to be sexually pure but are afraid to tell you about their attractions? Why might they be afraid to tell anyone?
5. If you have teenage or young adult children, what do you think their attitude is about the church's treatment of LGBTQ people? Have you asked them? What do you think is driving those ideas?
6. What do you think of the authors' assertion that the primary threat to the Church today is the erosion of confidence in the Bible and God's authority to govern our lives through it? Do you think this is a charge that applies equally to both heterosexual Christians and SSA Christians?
7. What is your greatest personal concern about homosexuality in relationship to your church? Is it that your church might go "soft on sin," or that it might be too harsh on homosexuality and on LGBTQ men and women?
8. Do you believe simply having a same-sex attraction is a serious sin? Why or why not? What's the difference between having an attraction toward someone of the same gender, and, if you are married, having an attraction or temptation toward someone of the opposite gender who is not your spouse?

NOTES:

DISCUSSION TWO

NOT ALL LGBTQ/SSA MEN AND WOMEN ARE ALIKE

It surprises many traditional evangelicals that the term “same-sex attracted” or “gay Christian” isn’t an oxymoron. There are people who believe that you’re either a Christian, or same-sex attracted, but you can’t be both! That’s a myth we’ll deal with in this discussion.

Something we said in Discussion One: *An Introduction* about the terms we will use in this book bears repeating: While many versions of the Bible use the word *homosexual*, today that term has a lot of baggage, and implies both a life of sin and a person who has adopted a gay identity (even though in fact neither may be true). Therefore, in this discussion, we will most often refer to Christians who are attracted to a person of the same gender as same-sex attracted or SSA. “Same-sex attraction” is a descriptive term that gives us the freedom to describe a person’s temptations without labeling them with an identity or making assumptions about their sexual activities. When we use the term LGBTQ or gay, we are referring most frequently to non-Christians (but they can be Christians) who have taken on the identity of a lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, or questioning person.

How many men and women experience SSA?

Dr. Mark Yarhouse is recognized as one of the foremost Christian researchers and psychologists in the field of sexual orientation. He says the following about the percentage of men and women who experience same-sex attraction:

A percentage of teens will experience same-sex attraction (4-7% of teens and maybe 6-8% of adults) and some will experience strong, persistent attractions in such a way that they would say they have re-oriented to the same sex (about 1-3%). Most with this orientation will end up adopting a Gay identity, but not all of them (and most of the SSA students we surveyed at Christian colleges did not adopt a Gay identity at the time we surveyed them). Most of those who do identify with same-sex orientation engage in some same-sex behavior as an expression of their identity. But again, not all of them do.¹

A study by the Williams Institute at UCLA says 3.5 % of adults in the United States self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 0.3% identify as transgender. The percentage of men and women who engage in same-sex behavior is 8.2%, and 11% of Americans have at least some level of same-sex attraction.² Whatever the actual numbers are, neither those numbers nor the activities of SSA individuals change the reality that these men and women are image bearers of God, are important to him, and therefore must be important to us.

Changing your worldview on SSA individuals

Not all SSA individuals are the same, just as not all heterosexuals are the same. Your church most likely has heterosexual men and women who desire sexual purity. Some are married. Some are not. You may also have heterosexual adulterers, singles having sex before marriage, men and women struggling with lust, and men and women addicted to pornography or erotica—all of it completely hidden from the church. When these sins are revealed, the church treats each of these categories of heterosexual sins differently. We don’t cut those men and women off from fellowship just because they have made sinful choices. Those who repent but continue to struggle receive our support, prayers, and are counseled and forgiven.

Likewise, the church’s approach to responding appropriately to LGBTQ/SSA individuals must also be tailored differently for various categories of those who experience SSA:

1. Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. Ebook section 2023.

2. Gates, Gary J. *How Many People Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender?* Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2011. The Williams Institute. UCLA, Apr. 2011. Web. williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBTQ-Apr-2011.pdf

1. LGBTQ non-Christians

Our primary goals for LGBTQ men and women who are not yet Christians should be to love them unconditionally and introduce them to Jesus—*not* to correct their behavior! Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside of the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those on the outside.”

The Scriptures tell us that, without being born again, nonbelievers *cannot* render to God pleasing behavior without the Spirit. “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14. Why is it then that we’d expect non-Christian LGBTQ people to understand and live by the truths of Scripture when they don’t have the indwelling Spirit that would enable them to understand the Scriptures?

Without salvation through Jesus Christ, sexual behavior is the least of an unbeliever’s problems. We must love them into the Kingdom first, and then allow the Holy Spirit and Scriptures to guide them into all truth. We need to welcome these men and women into our church alongside every other spiritually lost person, then trust that God will lead them through a process of sanctification, just as he has each of us in the church.

It’s reasonable to assume that LGBTQ non-Christians may not have much interest in coming to your church. If this is the case, perhaps the place to begin is by inviting them into your home and begin building redemptive relationships with them. Love your gay boss, be generous toward your lesbian co-worker, invite Bob and Frank over for a barbecue. Forget trying to get these friends to your church for now; just love your neighbor.

No matter how you show them hospitality, the point is to ask yourself how you view LGBTQ men and women. Do you see this group as *the enemy*, or as spiritually lost individuals like you and I once were? There should be no doubt that Jesus would be hanging out with LGBTQ men and women, just as he did with sinners of every type, and therefore would expect his followers to do the same.

Additionally, a good litmus test to see if your church is ready to receive LGBTQ individuals is to ask whether a gay couple could attend your service and feel comfortable. (That’s a good litmus test, in fact, to consider for any group not already accepted in your church.) Would the couple see grace or judgment in the eyes of their pew-mates? It’s possible that, like most churches, your church has some work to do.

2. SSA Christians who are single and celibate, or are in a heterosexual marriage, or are pursuing a heterosexual marriage.

Christians ought to embrace every unmarried, celibate, gay or SSA Christian as a brother or sister in Christ. This includes SSA Christians who have failed, have confessed and repented of their sin, and desire to live sexually pure lives. Can we agree that drunkenness is a sin? Do we not also agree we ought to forgive and cheer on the alcoholic who stumbles occasionally? Looking at heterosexual pornography is a sin, but serious Christians stand by those who struggle with it—often for life. What about those who are greedy? Or those who put anything before God (idolatry)?

We also need to recognize that most Christians with a same-sex attraction will likely continue to struggle with it in some capacity, just as all Christians struggle with certain sin temptations in some capacity. However, because we as a church appear to have greater patience with the more familiar, acceptable sins, we are driving away those who experience same-sex attraction or identify as LGBTQ, as well as setting a poor example to non-Christians outside of the LGBTQ community.

One of the reasons is this widely held myth: *If Christians who are attracted to the same sex had enough faith, this attraction could be “prayed away.” It’s only their unwillingness to change that keeps them from temptation and freedom.* We ought to strongly encourage Christians tempted with same-sex lusts to cry out to God to deliver them from those desires, but we should encourage it with the same fervor as those struggling with heterosexual lusts. Additionally, the church ought to offer help to anyone wanting a loving counselor, true to the Bible, to come alongside them to gain freedom from sinful sexual behavior and to help them navigate toward their true identity in Christ. (Later, we will discuss the pros and cons of *reparative therapy*, which is an attempt to change a persistent homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation.)

Some people possess a same-sex attraction that is simply a part of their psychological makeup. They can refrain from acting on it, but it’s unlikely that they will ever completely lose it any more than you, if you are heterosexual, will lose your temptation toward heterosexual lusts, or if you are a recovering alcoholic, completely lose your desire for alcohol.

The truth is, a permanent, total change in orientation is highly unlikely.³ However, even if we fail to lose any or all of these natural tendencies to sin, we *all* need to acknowledge sin as sin, repent, and take up our crosses again and follow Jesus—whether or not our desire to sin ever disappears (Matthew 16:24).

Mixed-orientation marriages (MOM)

There is a subset of SSA Christians who may already be in your church. These are fellow believers who wrestle with same-sex attraction and yet are pursuing an opposite-gendered marriage or are already married to a heterosexual spouse. This is often called a *mixed-orientation marriage*, and it is far more common than the church recognizes. Many young Christians hide their same-sex attraction from their girlfriends or boyfriends and enter marriage still hiding their secret, hoping marriage and family will “fix” them.⁴ There are also couples who enter marriage fully aware of the challenges, and agree to pursue holiness and oneness in marriage despite the tendency of one of them toward same-sex attraction.

We ought to encourage married and dating SSA individuals to “come out” confidentially to a Christ-centered and mature counselor, spiritual leader, mentor, or pastor, and, eventually, their spouse/girlfriend/boyfriend (if this has not already been done). Tenderness and compassion should be taken when approaching these marriages or dating relationships. One or both parties are often plagued by shame, and navigating the unique trials these couples face can be difficult. If and when an individual decides to share their struggle with SSA to the church or some smaller group within it, the church ought to accept them without judgment as fellow Christians who struggle with sexual temptation.

A mixed-orientation marriage is not for the faint-hearted. They are also not a “fix” for SSA. Mixed-orientation marriages face challenges that not all couples are fully prepared to accept or live with, but it is a fulfilling, biblical option for some.

3. Individuals who have not experienced a lifelong same-sex attraction, but have fallen into same-sex behaviors or relationships.

This third group consists of both Christians and non-Christians who may not have experienced same-sex attractions their entire lives, but who for a variety of reasons have allowed themselves to participate in same-sex behaviors. Some, particularly students, are simply experimenting with this form of sexual expression because it is trendy and cool. Others, desperately looking for love, learn to overcome their initial fear, misgivings, and even revulsion with same-sex intercourse in order to be loved and accepted by another human being. (Some in this group may have attractions to both genders and therefore identify as *bisexual*.)

In any case, the longer these behaviors continue, the more likely it is that these individuals will begin to self-identify as LGBTQ, and in time may grow to solely feel attraction toward those of the same gender. However, that does not always mean they were born with a same-sex attraction.

Within this third group, the church ought to address each of the following subgroups differently:

- For non-Christians: Love them into the Kingdom by introducing them to Jesus, like we would *any* non-Christian. Sin management should not be our first focus.
- For Christians who are heterosexual in identity but are now experimenting with same-sex sexuality: They must be reminded that those behaviors are sinful and be counseled on how to resist their temptations.
- For Christians who have given their hearts and bodies to someone of the same sex and perhaps even now self-identify as LGBTQ: We will attempt to guide them into understanding that this is not who they are. Rather, that they have mistakenly and sinfully identified as such because of sin. Our goal should be to have them gain a new, biblical understanding of the nature of their sin, repent of it, and pursue the goal of returning to holy sexuality as expressed either in celibacy or in the context of monogamous marriage with someone of the opposite sex (even if some measure of SSA persists).

3. See: Throckmorton, Warren. “The Jones and Yarhouse Study: What Does It Mean?” Patheos. Patheos, 27 Oct. 2011. Web. www.patheos.com/blogs/warrenthrockmorton/2011/10/27/the-jones-and-yarhouse-study-what-does-it-mean/. See also: Belgau, Ron. “Honesty about ‘Orientation Change.’” Spiritual Friendship. WordPress, 01 Feb. 2014. Web. spiritualfriendship.org/2014/02/01/honesty-about-orientation-change/

4. For an overview of the key characteristics and dynamics of mixed-orientation marriages, see Jill L. Kays & Mark A. Yarhouse, “Resilient Factors in Mixed Orientation Marriages: State of the Current Research,” *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 38, (2010): 334-343.

4. Transgender, Bisexual and Questioning Christians

Transgender. Christians ought to have great sympathy for transgender people. And it's important to understand that being transgender is not the same thing as having a same-sex attraction. Transgender individuals experience a conflict between the gender they were born with physically and the gender they most identify with emotionally, mentally, and sexually.

Mark Yarhouse, a respected Christian researcher on the subject, says, "Gender dysphoria and transgender issues are not about having sex or an attraction to the same sex; they are about an experiential mismatch between one's psychology and one's biology."⁵

The reason transgender people are often characterized as being homosexual is because they are often attracted to someone of the same biological sex. However, this is only because they mentally, emotionally, and sexually identify as someone of the opposite sex. Yes, this can be confusing, even to some transgender men and women.

Furthermore, transgender individuals do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act, which causes some Christians great discomfort. They may dress in a way that seems to contradict their gender. The truth is, most transgender individuals genuinely feel very confused about their identity—particularly as children and adolescents. However, this gender confusion is not a choice they make. Therefore, we do not believe that simply experiencing any form of gender confusion is, in and of itself, sin. However, neither do we believe that this blurred self-perception is God's intent for humans; rather, it has its roots in the Fall.

We urge any Christian transgender person to meet with a grace-filled, wise pastor or Christian counselor before attempting by surgery or hormones to alter their bodies to conform to their mental sexual identity.

Bisexual. Bisexuality is defined as the romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction toward people of both sexes. Men and women who identify as bisexual see it as the lens through which they view the world—it is both a romantic/sexual orientation *and* often an identity statement. So, even if he or she is married to or dating someone of the opposite gender, they do not see themselves as straight, but as *bisexual*. The same would be true if he or she were married to or dating someone of the same gender; they do not become *gay* or *lesbian*, they remain bisexual.

While having attractions to both genders may not be a personal choice, a person's behavior is. Our church holds to the position that a bisexual person may remain single and celibate, or else marry (and therefore only have intercourse with) someone of the opposite sex physically from themselves. Doing so does not eliminate their same-sex attractions, but it does meet biblical standards.

Questioning, Queer (Q) and Non-conforming. We know it's hard to imagine, but there is a growing number of primarily younger men and women who are *questioning* whether they feel male or female themselves, or have any consistent attractions toward other genders. There are others who are going back to what was once was a derogatory term, but now prefer to be called queer meaning "different" or "other," and not transgender or straight. Both those who call themselves questioning and queer are the "Q" in the acronym LGBTQ.

There is yet another group of individuals who are considered *non-conforming*. These individuals simply do not *conform* to other peoples' ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act, based on their sex assigned at birth.

At this point, it would be easy to either throw up your hands in confusion or to get angry. But this is the world we live in. We're not asking you to fully understand or even accept it. What we are asking is that you begin educating yourself and begin preparing your heart to love these men and women (often boys and girls who are very confused themselves), and their families.

If you think that all the attention the church is spending to address these issues is a waste of time or is an attempt to dignify and accept non-biblical attitudes and actions, just sit down with a parent of an LGBTQ child or young adult and ask how that experience has been for them. If any member of our church hurts, we should all hurt, even without a complete understanding.

5. Affirming LGBTQ Christians who believe the Bible does not prohibit same-sex marriage or lifelong, monogamous, loving relationships.

It's important to remember that *affirming* LGBTQ Christians do not think they are being disobedient to Scriptures.

5. Yarhouse, Mark. "Understanding the Transgender Phenomenon." Christianity Today. 08 June 2015. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/july-august/understanding-transgender-gender-dysphoria.html

They simply believe that the church has misinterpreted the Bible, and that we are only now beginning to understand what the Bible was trying to tell us all along. (More about this in Discussion Four.) Paul, inspired by the Spirit, knew this questioning would happen: “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear,” he says in 2 Timothy 4:3.

Christians have been leaving churches over theological differences since Pentecost. For affirming Christians to leave your church for theological reasons, while regrettable, is their choice to make. What is not acceptable and even sinful on our part is if they were driven away because they were treated unkindly or unfairly.

However, if an affirming LGBTQ Christian chooses to remain in the church, but they begin or continues in a same-sex, sexual relationship, the church ought to treat them just as they would any heterosexual engaging in a sexual sin prohibited in Scripture.

Church discipline is almost always thought to be unkind and unfair by those who come under it (Hebrews 12:11) But in all cases, our consciences must be clear before God that the leaders of the church conducted themselves fairly and gently--extending as much grace as the Bible instructs.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. —Galatians 6:1-2

The opportunity before us

In this discussion guide, we try to make the case that some LGBTQ men and women ought to be fully accepted and integrated into the body of your church, given appropriate opportunities to serve, and invited as genuine friends into our homes. It's not only the right thing to do (and what Jesus would do), but younger Christians will begin to notice the change. It will begin to soften their hearts toward the church and help them revise their perception of the church's homophobia. Above all, we believe this is the will of God for the Church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what way(s) is it helpful for you to see homosexuality as a struggle as opposed to an identity?
2. How has thinking about LGBTQ/SSA individuals in the groups we identify in this chapter changed your thinking on homosexuality?
3. If an LGBTQ couple came to your church next Sunday, how do you think most people in your congregation would receive them?
4. How would you treat that same couple differently based on this discussion?
5. How do you feel about a same-sex attracted individual being in a mixed-orientation marriage? If that individual has been sexually pure in their marriage, do you think their spouse has biblical grounds for divorce? What if they knew about their spouse's SSA prior to marriage? What if they didn't? Would you encourage them to stay married?
6. Why is it the church will stand by an alcoholic who occasionally “falls off the wagon” and asks forgiveness, but finds it difficult to offer compassion to a still-struggling SSA individual who falls into temptation, and confesses and repents of it? Is there a difference between the two?
7. Discuss in your group how confusing and difficult it must be to have a body completely different from your mental and sexual identity.
8. If your son or daughter came out to you as being LGBTQ, how would that be received by your church and friends? Would you personally feel a level of shame? How would you feel if you found out your son was sleeping with or living with his girlfriend—or your daughter with her boyfriend? Would you feel the same emotions? Would your friends react differently? Why?

RECOMMENDED READING:

We strongly encourage every pastor, leader, and Bible teacher in your church to read *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church*, by Ed Shaw. In this beautifully written, theologically conservative book, Shaw does what we've not seen any other writer do as well: He manages to place us inside the mind and into the life of a same-sex attracted man who has pledged himself to purity. Shaw still wrestles with SSA. Through this lens, he will help you understand just what an SSA person needs from your church. Shaw's book is the first book we'd give a Christian experiencing SSA. It could offer hope.

NOTES:

DISCUSSION THREE

WHAT MOST SSA CHRISTIANS WOULD LIKE YOU TO KNOW

The vast majority of SSA men and women did not ask for this attraction and temptation, and almost all wish early in their life that they didn't have it. We, the church, need to hear their heart—remembering, however, that **empathy does not mean acceptance of an identity**.

In this discussion, we will try to offer some insight into the emotional, spiritual, and relational struggles common to many SSA individuals by relating the story of an SSA man (actually, a compilation of many stories SSA individuals were gracious and vulnerable enough to share with us). As you read this man's story, ask the Holy Spirit to teach and convict you.

I would never have chosen same-sex attraction for myself.

When I was little, I sensed there was something different about me, but I didn't know anything about same-sex attraction in elementary school. Most of the time when boys talked about girls, it was crude and sexual, but I just didn't have much interest. I simply thought some boys enjoyed cars, others liked sports. Interest in girls was like that: a hobby.

By the time I was in middle school, I knew something was different about me. There was an obvious chemistry between the boys and girls that I just didn't feel. Instead, I found myself gravitating toward other boys, even older boys who I found fascinating and exciting. It wasn't really sexual lust, but I sensed a connection to them in ways I couldn't really explain.

It was slowly dawning on me that I was experiencing something called homosexuality. Wesley Hill described his journey similarly to how I would describe mine. "I have memories of lying in bed, staring at the ceiling in the dark, mulling it over, forming the word homosexual silently on my lips. It was an awareness that sneaks up on you one day, out of the blue. And there it was. I was gay!"¹

Everyone joked about gay men and women—even my parents and closest friends. I believed early on that being gay was a terrible thing to be. I held a secret I knew I had to keep, or everyone in my family and all my friends would freak out. I felt like there was nobody I could trust. There was no way I could go to my parents and ask to speak to a counselor, and I did not have the money to do it on my own. So, I lived in constant fear I'd be found out and shunned.

On top of this fear, I believed that God himself hated gay people as much as my parents and friends apparently did. The story I heard in Sunday school about Sodom and Gomorrah, along with the warnings of Paul that no homosexuals will ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven, scared me. The images I saw on TV of Christians picketing gatherings of LGBTQ men and women with signs like "Fags are going to hell," only reinforced the idea that I was spiritually lost. I had the unshakable feeling that I was damaged goods, and therefore, unavoidably and irreparably displeasing to God.

I prayed for years to be delivered from this temptation.

I listened to the many heterosexual Christians who think believers with a same-sex attraction can just "pray the gay away." I went online and read articles and blogs from heterosexual Christian leaders who were attributing my failure to lose my same-sex attraction to a lack of faith or willpower. This only increased my feeling of "otherness" and my need to stay silent.

I hear of Christians who are sick and who pray for healing, but never receive it. There are serious Christians who need to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings because they have not completely lost their desire for alcohol. It was frustrating to me because I knew Christians would never extend that same level of grace to me in my struggle.

I begged God for years to heal me—to take away this desire and to forgive my thoughts. But nothing changed. I felt abandoned by God. I felt that I had somehow failed him. I was in a relational and spiritual no man's land. I didn't feel safe or comfortable anywhere.

1. Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. P. 18, 19.

I wished I could have had even one safe, Christian adult in whom I could confide.

My youth pastor was a wonderful guy, whose “sex talks” boiled down to just say no and save it for marriage. I figured same-sex marriage was not an option for me, according to biblical teaching, so that left me with only one option: celibacy. Christianity’s “good news” was anything but good news to me. If my church was right, as a Christian with an attraction to other men, I was locked out of sexual expression for the rest of my life through no fault of my own. And no teenager on earth thinks celibacy is possible, anyway—the hormonal pull is too strong.

Because I desperately wanted my youth pastor to respect me, I never had the courage to tell him of my struggle and ask for his advice. Had I heard even one talk from him about how I could thrive with this struggle or how to refute the same-sex-affirming theology I would later hear in college, it might have helped. Also, if anyone had stood up and said, “If you’re experiencing same-sex attractions, you can contact me anytime, with complete confidentiality,” I might have accepted that invitation. But my church’s answer was none of the above.

I finally found Christians who accepted me just as I was.

I didn’t know anyone “safe,” so I stayed undercover until I went off to college (ironically, a Christian college). There, I read about an LGBTQ group meeting on campus. In my sophomore year, I finally got up the courage to attend, pretending I was a straight guy who just wanted to better understand people “with this problem.”

But instead, I heard thoughtful, honest conversations and confessions of bright, masculine guys and pretty girls who talked openly about who they were—gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. There was no fear and no shame. This is who they were, and they were Christians!

Week after week I learned about how homophobic Christians have misinterpreted the verses prohibiting same-sex sex incorrectly for 2,000 years. God didn’t hate gay men and women who loved him, after all. The kind of homosexuality he hated was the pagan temple homosexual prostitution, pedophiles, and men who dominated and used other weaker men. That was the sin. It was not a sin to be in a loving, committed, consensual same-sex relationship. A loving God would never prohibit that kind of relationship, or keep anyone out of heaven for it.

I cried with relief. God could be my God! Here were men and women with whom I could be open and transparent. I still had lots of concerns about how my family and friends at home would respond if I came out, but month after month I was gaining confidence that this is the way God made me. My desires were not wrong. So how could they be a sin?

I still hadn’t told the guys in my dorm yet. But one night Paul, a thoughtful, kind student, asked this question in a Bible study I attended, “Does anyone personally know an LGBTQ person?” Only two said they did, including Paul, but they talked so compassionately about them that a week later, I found the courage to confide in Paul that I, too, was gay. For me it was the best of all possible experiences. My friend was kind and not judgmental. We ended up meeting for coffee every few weeks just to discuss our sexual struggles—his heterosexual and mine homosexual.

As time went on, word got out about me (not from Paul), and although I felt some students avoiding me, mostly I was treated with respect by both students and staff. I got into some passionate debates about same-sex marriage (which, at the time, I believed God accepted). And as time went on, I found myself attracted to another guy in the LGBTQ group, and we had sex. It wasn’t that the sex was so great, but to be loved—truly loved, accepted, and understood by another human being, besides your family, without judgment, was an unbelievable relief.

I still hadn’t come out yet to my family, but as I met and had conversations with my group, I slowly gained the confidence to email my parents the week before Thanksgiving in my junior year. “Dear Mom and Dad, I’m sure this is going to shock you and I’m sorry for that. I’m gay but I’m still a Christian. I hope you’ll accept me for who I am. We can talk at Thanksgiving. Love, Brad.”

I don’t see any future for me in my church.

When I got home that Thanksgiving, you’d have thought I had AIDS or had converted to Islam. My mother cried, and my dad was angry and ashamed. They had set up an appointment with their pastor to lead me in a prayer of repentance. They looked into counselors I could see and had already made an appointment with one to “fix me.” Of course, they told none of their friends—they were too ashamed. They were hoping that with some counseling and confession and fervent prayer this would all go away. I’m sure they didn’t mean to, but they may as well have hung a sign with the word SHAME around my neck.

By then, I had been thoroughly indoctrinated into a theology that was affirming of my attractions. I had a loving community at school. I was no longer ashamed or lonely. I was actually angry at my church and my parents for being so ignorant and homophobic and for making me feel guilty for something I believed was blessed by God.

When I came home again for Christmas, some of my high school and youth group friends reacted similarly. When I asked to hang out with them, they were suddenly too busy to meet for a coffee or a beer. Our church is small, and when I went to worship, many people couldn't look me in the eye. Conversations were awkward. I was pleasantly surprised by a few people who went out of their way to be kind. But I knew there was no longer a place for me at my church, or possibly any evangelical church for that matter. I felt like a spiritual leper. I sensed some mothers holding their small children just a little bit closer when I passed. I assumed it was because most Christians believe gay men and women are pedophiles. It felt like there was no way my church as a whole would ever accept me, or let me use my spiritual gifts.

So I ended up at a liberal church that was open and accepting of anyone. The theology was light, and very little of their teaching came straight from the Bible, and they spoke of Jesus' love but rarely of his commands regarding sin. But, I felt I had no choice. I was driven from my church in a hundred different ways and into the arms of an inclusive church where I could serve, worship, and feel accepted. There was a part of me that missed the depth of teaching and the old familiarity of my former church. But that season of my life, I concluded, was over.

I eventually came under conviction that I was wrong, but I still don't feel accepted.

A few years ago, I began to read books by serious Christian men and women who were also attracted to individuals of the same sex but were celibate and thriving in both their faith and their life. Their research led them to believe that God hadn't created them for same-sex relationships. God didn't make them that way. Instead, they concluded that they experienced same-sex attractions because of the fall (when sin entered the world). Sin contaminated every person—those who experience same-sex attractions or those who don't. We are all sinners.

Additionally, I learned that there was a common desire for all humans to have holistic intimacy in mind, body, and spirit. But nothing outside of the divine can provide that holistic intimacy—not heterosexual marriage, not alcohol addiction, not success in our careers, not pornography—none of those things and nothing else, sinful or not, can satisfy the longings of our heart. My desire for homosexual intimacy could not satisfy. I learned that the only way I could be made whole was by fully committing myself to intimacy with the One who truly completes me.

I concluded that the gift of celibacy and embracing my need for intimacy with God gave me more freedom to love Him and to minister to others who are also, like me, broken and dependent on God to meet their needs. Slowly, my heart began to melt. I wanted to be in the will of God. I cried out to him, confessed my blatant sin, and asked him to forgive me. As I grew to trust the love of God, I learned that it was safe to ask him to change my attractions—and to still trust him whether or not my attractions ever changed. He hasn't changed them yet, but even if I have to wait until heaven, then by the grace of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, I desire to live a holy life.

Eventually, I went back to my old church and told them what God had done in me. I was excited and thought they would be too. They were—to a point. But then they asked me if I still had some same sex attraction, and I answered honestly. Something about the look in their eyes told me I was still damaged goods to them. I still did not belong. I knew that no matter how spiritually mature and committed to sexual purity I was, I would never be allowed to serve as an elder, deacon, or committee member. Parking lot attendant, maybe.

I'm feeling pretty lonely now. I decided to leave my gay friends behind. They were too much of a temptation. But not many appeared to be comfortable with me at my family's church, either. They just don't know what to do with a man or woman who still has a problem with same-sex attractions. They don't seem to take issue with single men living with their girlfriends, or with men or women who divorce for unbiblical reasons and then remarry. When those things happen, it's awkward—but those who do such things are not treated as if they have an incurable disease. If my church is any indication of evangelical Christians in general, marrying a woman and having a family is impossible because neither she nor her family would truly accept me. So where does that leave me?

I feel as though I'm back in no man's land.

If your child comes out to you

The young man in this story described the trauma of coming out to his parents as a gay man. “My mother cried, and my dad was angry and ashamed,” he said. Sadly, this response is very common, and every gay person’s worst nightmare. Christian parents have said they would have preferred cancer or even death for their gay kids instead of a same-sex attraction. But beyond the words, the expression on their parents’ faces are seared in their memory. “The worst is the look of horror on my parents’ faces,” some LGBTQ men and women have told the authors. “I’ll never forget that moment.”

As a parent or pastor, you can’t imagine yourself reacting to your child or a child of a church member in this way. But even great Christian parents and otherwise wonderful pastors who are caught off guard when someone comes out are reacting this way. So how do you prepare yourself to be blind-sided? Here are four important ways you can prepare yourself for a coming out conversation:

1. Start praying now.

No one ever gets to the end of his or her life and says, “Boy, I wish I hadn’t wasted so much time praying for my kids.” Every prayer is money in the bank for your children and their future. Pray about their sexuality (not necessarily for straight sexuality but holy sexuality), their purpose, and their love for Jesus. If you have been praying for your child and find yourself in a sexuality discussion, your heart will soften toward them, (hopefully) you will naturally begin praying again, and the Holy Spirit will be present to help guide you as the Counselor in the moment.

2. Listen with love.

Without a doubt, it took your child a very long time to get up the nerve to tell you about their same-sex attraction (or gender confusion, etc.). Their anxiety levels will be sky high during that first conversation, and they will be looking for any sign of rejection. Your first reaction is critical. “I didn’t realize at the time how important my initial response to my son was,” said Ann Mobley, a mom of a gay son, and author of *If I Tell You I’m Gay, Will You Still Love Me?* “I went up to him, put my arms around him and drew him close to me. I said, ‘Son, you’re my son. I love you and nothing’s gonna change that.’ And I think that set the tone for his feeling he could be open and honest with me.”²

Your child has heard the horror stories. No matter how good of a relationship you have, your son or daughter probably assumes you will reject them. To avoid rejecting them unintentionally, put away the pressure to say the right words, and go for the simplest and truest: “I love you, and I will always love you. I do not see you any differently.” And listen some more.

And practice “the look.” Your face communicates as much as your words. So literally practice a tender, attentive expression in the mirror, so that if you hear the news, you will not put an unnecessary barrier between you and your child. Please, do not allow your face to devastate a person who needs your love now more than ever.

3. Ask gentle, sincere questions.

Your mind may be reeling with thoughts like, “Is this my fault? How did this begin? How can I fix this?” However, it is important to remember that this conversation is not about you. It’s about laying a foundation of love for a future relationship. The only questions you should verbalize are ones that genuinely seek to understand. “Feel free to answer any or none of this, but could you share with me more about your journey so far?” And, “How did you realize this? What has it been like for you to live in this house all these years living in fear and shame? That must have been so hard. How do you feel now?”

It is not up to you to preach in this first conversation—or perhaps the first few conversations. “Yes, parents have a role to teach their children the way of Christ,” say the authors on the helpful site LivingOut.org.³ “But the way to do that at this stage is to show them the love of Christ.” If you are a non-affirming Christian parent, chances are your kids already know what you believe; reminding them of your stance on sexuality in this tenuous first talk is not necessary. Reminding them you love them when they may feel an incredible amount of shame and fear is absolutely necessary.

2. Mobley, Ann. Interview. “When Your Child Struggles with Their Sexual Identity Part 1.” (2016, August 29). Retrieved from www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/when-your-child-struggles-with-their-sexual-identity-pt1?_ga=1.250912710.1718924582.1472044229

3. For more great tips, read “How should I respond if my child comes out to me?” at www.livingout.org/resources/how-should-i-respond-if-my-child-comes-out-to-me

4. If in doubt, switch it out.

If while talking you are having a hard time seeing your son or daughter as an equal sinner to you, switch their sin mentally to one you can more easily process. Did your son reveal he is in a relationship with another man? What if he told you he was struggling with heterosexual pornography or was having sex with his girlfriend? Would your reaction be the same? If homosexual struggles are too hard to process while maintaining a look of kindness toward your son, then mentally change it to a different sin struggle so you can talk to him with gentleness. After all, there is no sin that Jesus had to die for more than others. Homosexual sin did not nail Jesus to the cross more than heterosexual sin. “For the wages of sin [all sin] is death” (Romans 6:23).

You may be reading this and have already had this conversation with your son or daughter. Perhaps it did not go well because of your reaction, and the fissure in your relationship is already an abyss. If so, remember that it is never too late to say, “I’m so sorry. I did not do that well. Will you please forgive me? I want to try again.” And then pray some more for God to heal what has been broken. He is the Redeemer who cares about your kids more than you do.

If you don’t have an SSA child, but you know a same-sex attracted Christian

If you know someone whose story is like the man’s in this chapter and they were rejected by his parents or church, perhaps the Holy Spirit is calling you to step in as his spiritual family and as a representative of the body of Christ and be his new family. In the course of writing this discussion guide, Preston Sprinkle reminded us in an email of the hard reality almost all SSA Christians face:

Clare and Laurie, I frequently get emails from people telling me about yet another celibate gay Christian friend who recently become affirming. Their reasons are almost always not theological, but relational or the lack thereof. They just can’t handle it. They can’t handle being alone and isolated. The ones that are flourishing are always those who have a rich, vibrant, authentic community of believers who have become their family.

Today, many Christians will smile and be friendly toward them at church, but that’s not true friendship. True friends invite their friends over to watch a ball game on TV, call them for coffee, share meals with their family—they do life together. Many have been abandoned by their biological families and they need new ones. But they’re not finding them. They’re dropping like flies. And it breaks my heart.

Whether you are a parent who needs to reopen the relational door to your LGBTQ/SSA son or daughter, or a representation of a parent as a member of the body of Christ, the time is now to do more than be kind or tolerant toward same-sex attracted people; it’s time to be more like Jesus toward same-sex attracted people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How has reading this story changed how you think about the SSA experience?
2. Imagine your son or daughter coming out as gay—what would your reaction have been before reading this story? What about now?
3. Reality check: Based on the way you’ve referred to SSA individuals in the past, would one of your children feel safe telling you they have this temptation? If you think they wouldn’t, how can you begin taking steps today to send them a message that you are a safer person?
4. How would you feel about having a born-again SSA individual, committed to celibacy, teaching a Bible study in your church?
5. If you found out your daughter was having sex with her boyfriend, you would probably feel angry and sad. But if you found out she was having sex with another young woman, would you feel differently? Do you think those feelings are cultural or biblical? In other words, do you believe the Bible teaches that same-sex sex is a greater sin than heterosexual sexual sin? What is your proof?
6. Comment on this statement: “We Christians tend to vilify the sins we’re least likely to commit.” If that’s true, how does that play into our feelings about SSA individuals?

7. Based on what you've learned so far, can you think of a few things your church's youth leaders ought to do differently to help young people who experience same-sex attractions?
8. Would you feel comfortable if your church helped your high school-aged child, who experiences SSA and wants help, by providing professional Christ-centered counseling, without your knowledge? (If your permission was required, do you think your child would still ask for help?)
9. Have you and your wife or husband discussed exactly how you'd like to respond to a son, daughter, or close friend coming out as LGBTQ or SSA? In other words, do you have a plan?
10. Where or from whom did you learn the things you believe about LGBTQ people?

NOTES:

DISCUSSION FOUR

HOW AFFIRMING CHRISTIANS INTERPRET THE BIBLE DIFFERENTLY

by Dr. Preston Sprinkle¹

If we were having this discussion 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago, it would have sounded odd that affirming Christians are making biblical arguments for their view. Back then, there were two general positions: One that used the Bible and another that didn't. Most Christians thought that if you simply read the Bible, you'd clearly see that the Bible condemns homosexual behavior. End of story. No debate.

Regardless of whether you think the Bible is clear on this issue (I actually think it is), there are a growing number of Bible-believing, even conservative, Christians who now hold to an affirming view of homosexuality. The debate is no longer about what the Bible *says*; it's about what the Bible *means*.

Now here's the thing. Even if you are 100% convinced that the Bible condemns homosexual behavior, it's still very important for you to know, wrestle with, and even consider the affirming arguments. After all, *disagreement* isn't the same as *refutation*. And you can't *refute* an argument you don't understand.

There's a second important reason to have at least a basic understanding of these arguments. Affirming Christians often say that non-affirming Christians are close-minded to new ideas and new evidence. (A charge, by the way, that your teenage children or grandchildren are inclined to believe as well.) And, unfortunately, there's some truth to this. We Christians haven't always done the best job at genuinely listening to and understanding other views. But we need to. We need to show that we don't just hold to a view because it's all we've ever known. We hold to it because we've considered other views and found the view we hold to be the biblical

In this discussion, we'll seek to understand some of the main biblical reasons why some Christians affirm the sanctity of consensual, monogamous, same-sex relations. In Discussion Five, we'll consider some other popular arguments for this position. Most of the biblical arguments have to do with the biblical prohibitions against homosexual behavior found in Leviticus 18:2 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10. (We will call them The Big Five.)² We'll start with the Old Testament then move on to the New Testament.

Old Testament Prohibitions

The Old Testament doesn't say a whole lot about same-sex behavior. But there are two laws in Leviticus that clearly condemn it: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13:

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." —Lev 18:22

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." —Lev 20:13

Both verses condemn male same-sex sexual behavior.³ So how do affirming Christians get around these two prohibitions of homosexual sex?

1. Discussions Four and Five were written by Dr. Preston Sprinkle. Preston has written several books and articles on sexuality and gender, including the recent *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is not just an Issue*.

2. They are often called *The Big Six*, because Genesis 19:1-10 is often included. However, as you'll see below, I don't think this passage is as relevant as some think.

3. Female same-sex relations aren't mentioned in this text, or anywhere in the Old Testament. The only place they are mentioned is in Rom 1:26. The Old Testament never mentions or prohibits women from having sex with women. In fact, it's only mentioned once in the entire Bible: Romans 1:26. Female same-sex relations are rarely (perhaps never) mentioned outside the Old Testament during this time either. The first clear reference we have of lesbian relations comes in the writings of the 7th–6th century BC poet Sappho. So the Old Testament is not alone in its silence about female homoeroticism.

REASON 1: Old Testament Laws Are No Longer Binding on Christians

Some affirming Christians point out that these commands are in Leviticus—the Old Testament law—and that Christians are no longer under the Old Testament law. Sure, it was wrong for *Israel* to engage in same-sex behavior. But it was also wrong for Israel to eat pork, trim their beards, and gather sticks on Saturday. Christians, however, don't need to abide by these laws. They were for *Israel*. And they've been fulfilled and done away with in Christ.

While this affirming argument can still be found on Google, most thoughtful affirming Christians don't use it any more. It's not a very good argument, and here's why: Think about it. *Just because some laws in the Old Testament are no longer binding on Christians doesn't mean that no laws are.* There are many Old Testament laws that are still binding on Christians, including several laws right here in Leviticus: Incest (Leviticus 18:6-18; 20:11-14, 17, 19-21), adultery (Leviticus 18:20; 20:10), child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5), bestiality (Leviticus 18:23; 20:15-16), theft (19:11), lying (19:11), taking the Lord's name in vain (19:20), oppressing your neighbor (19:13), and many others—all right here in the same context as the same-sex laws.

Just because *some* laws aren't binding on Christians doesn't mean *no* laws are.

In fact, if you read Leviticus 18 you'll see that this chapter deals almost exclusively with sexual immorality and 90% of those laws are prohibitions against sinful sexual acts committed by heterosexual people. And all the laws about sexual immorality are carried over into the New Testament—including the prohibitions about same-sex sexual behavior.⁴ If Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are no longer applicable for Christians, you'd need to argue that adultery, incest, and bestiality are also no longer binding on Christians. Plus, if you look at what the New Testament says about homosexual behavior, you'll see that its writers thought that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 still held authority over Christians.⁵

REASON 2: The Old Testament Was Patriarchal

Another way in which affirming Christians deal with the prohibitions in Leviticus is to point out that sexuality at that time was profoundly patriarchal. To say that sexuality was patriarchal means that men were more valued than women, and women were seen as little more than sexual receivers and baby makers.

But what does all this have to do with the same-sex prohibitions in Leviticus? Well, some affirming Christians argue that the *reason* why men were forbidden from having sex with other men is because such an act would *treat another man as a mere woman*. In male same-sex intercourse, one man must act "like a woman" in the sexual act—receiving rather than giving. In a patriarchal culture, where women were viewed as property and much less valuable than men, such an act would be disgraceful.

There's some truth to this argument and it should be mulled over and considered. It's also growing in popularity, which means that your 16-year-old son might be more familiar with it than you are.

So was a low view of woman driving the same-sex prohibition? And if so, should we follow this command that's inherently demeaning toward women?

There are two things to consider. First, while the Old Testament world was deeply misogynistic (i.e. it devalued women), the Old Testament itself is not. Now, to be honest, there are many laws and statements that seem to uphold men as more valuable as women, but when considered against the backdrop of the rest of the ancient world, the Old Testament is quite liberating toward women. Several women are held up as heroes of the faith and more courageous than men (Rahab, Ruth, Deborah, Abigail, etc.). Plus, the creation account of Genesis 1-2 makes the claim—and it was radical for that time—that women equally possess the image of God (Genesis 1), a status that most people believed was reserved only for kings.

Perhaps romantic love between women didn't exist in the Old Testament world, or, more likely, they were kept secret. Either way, it would be unnecessary for Leviticus to prohibit something that wasn't being practiced or was simply unknown.

4. The only possible exception is Leviticus 18:19 which says that a man shouldn't have sex with his wife while she is menstruating. Some people say that this law is no longer binding, but I've never actually seen a good argument that shows why it's totally okay for a husband to have sex while his wife is menstruating. But there's nothing in the Bible that tells Christians that after Jesus' resurrection, they can go ahead and make love to their wives while they're menstruating.

5. In fact, Paul describes and prohibits homosexual behavior by using a Greek word (*arsenokoites*, in 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:9) that appears to have been created directly from the Greek translation of Lev 20:13. Therefore, we have evidence from the New Testament that the same-sex laws of Leviticus were still binding on Christians.

So, while the ancient world was misogynistic, it doesn't seem that the Old Testament itself reflects the same degree of patriarchy.⁶

Second, and most importantly, there's nothing in the actual text of Scripture (in Leviticus or elsewhere) which shows that the *reason* why men wouldn't have sex with each other is *because* they shouldn't act like "mere" women. Go read through Leviticus 18 and 20 for yourself. Or read through the entire book of Leviticus. There's nothing in the actual text of Scripture which says that men shouldn't have sex with other men *because* this would treat another man as a lowly, baby-making, kitchen-bound woman. The commands in Leviticus simply state in absolute and unqualified terms: Men shouldn't have sex with other men. Affirming Christians who pump these commands full of patriarchal assumptions assume things about the text that's not clearly there.

REASON 3: Same-Sex Prohibitions Were Really about Domination and Exploitation

Another point sometimes raised by affirming Christians is that consensual, monogamous, same-sex relations didn't exist in the ancient world. Sure, it was common for masters to have sex with their male slaves, older men to have sex with younger teenage boys, or victims of war to be raped by their male conquerors. But these are acts of *sexual exploitation*, not consensual love.

So are the prohibitions in Leviticus only talking about *exploitative* same-sex acts (e.g. a master raping his male slave)? Or do they ban *consensual* same-sex acts as well?

The answer is both. Of course exploitative acts are forbidden. The Bible would never sanction a master raping his slave, or any other act of sexual violence. *But there's nothing in the biblical text that limits the prohibition to such acts of sexual exploitation.* Again, don't just believe me. Go back and carefully read the prohibitions. Do they mention masters or slaves or prostitutes or rape or older men having sex with teenage boys? The language of Leviticus simply says that men (not just masters, or older men, or victors of war) shouldn't lie sexually with another male (not just slaves, or younger boys, or war victims). There's nothing in the text or around the text that limits the prohibition to acts of exploitation.

Some affirming Christians say that the biblical text doesn't need to specifically mention exploitation since *every same sex relationship in the ancient world was exploitative*. But this simply isn't true either. For what it's worth, we know very little about the sexual practices of same-sex relations in the ancient world. But the evidence we do have is somewhat diverse. Sure, we have evidence of exploitative same-sex relations, but we also have evidence of consensual relations as well.⁷ So we can't just assume that all relationships back then were abusive. Some were, but some weren't. And Leviticus doesn't limit its same-sex prohibitions to abusive acts. All types of male same-sex behavior are condemned.

In short, if you *look at the text and study its historical context*, there's no evidence that Leviticus was only prohibiting certain types of same-sex behavior.

REASON 4: The Sin of Sodom Was Not Really Homosexuality at All

Before we leave the Old Testament, we need to mention the story of Sodom (Genesis 19). As you may recall, a couple of angels show up to Lot's house in the city of Sodom and the men of the city mistake the angels for men. After trying to have sex with the two angels, the men of the city are struck with blindness as divine punishment for their evil attempt.

Some Christians point to this passage as clear evidence that God condemns homosexual behavior. However, it's important to notice that what's happening in Genesis 19 is *not* consensual same-sex love; it's *attempted sexual violence*—like an ancient version of modern-day prison rape. If a man in prison rapes another man, it's usually not because the perpetrator was gay. It's an act of domination and power. Likewise, the men of Sodom were trying to gang-rape Lot's guests. If we're going to examine the text fairly, in this case, *exploitation is* the issue. The men of Sodom were not courting Lot's guests, bringing them flowers and asking them out for a romantic stroll under the moonlight. Consensual same-sex love is not the focus; sexual violence is.

6. See Paul Copan's book *Is God a Moral Monster* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). He does a great job looking at the seemingly harsh treatment of women in the Old Testament against the background of the ancient world.

7. See Preston Sprinkle, "Same-Sex Relations," in *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Postbiblical Antiquity, Vol. IV* (ed. Edwin Yamauchi and Marvin Wilson; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2017).

Now it's true that *if* the men of Sodom had gone ahead and raped the two men (or angels), they still would have violated Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. But it's important to stay focused on the main point and the main sin. Consensual same-sex love is nowhere to be found in Genesis 19, and yet consensual same-sex love is the pressing ethical question facing the church. To use the Sodom story as evidence that God prohibits consensual same-sex love is probably not the best use of this text. And, for what it's worth, whenever the Bible refers back to the sin of Sodom, it never mentions homosexual behavior.⁸

Because many of us grew up believing the sin of Sodom was homosexuality, it would be helpful for you to re-read that story and wrestle with whether it has relevance for modern day consensual same-sex relations. I personally think that affirming Christians have a better handle on the Sodom story than some non-affirming Christians do. Consensual same-sex relations are not in view. The point is, we should be extra cautious in racing to certain passages to find support for our view. We need to step back and think through how we're interpreting the Bible and how we're applying it to this discussion.

New Testament Prohibitions

Three passages in the New Testament prohibit same-sex behavior. The most important is Romans 1:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. —Romans 1:26-27

The other two times homosexual behavior is mentioned is in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. —1 Corinthians 6:9-10

[U]nderstanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. —1 Timothy 1:9-10

These passages seem rather clear. So how do affirming Christians interpret them? Again, it's important to make sure we actually listen to and try to understand these arguments. Listening doesn't mean *agreeing*. But you can't disagree until you actually understand what it is you're disagreeing with.

REASON 5: It's Exploitation—again!

One of the most popular affirming interpretations for these New Testament passages is the same "exploitation argument" we saw in the Old Testament. Again, some say that the only type of same-sex relations that existed in the ancient world—including the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament—was exploitative. Rape, prostitution, and pederasty, which refers to older men having sexual relations with teenage boys.

Our two-fold response to this argument is same one we gave above. In short, *look at the text and study its context*.

As with the Leviticus passages, there's nothing in these New Testament passages that mentions masters or slaves or prostitutes or rape or older men having sex with boys. In fact, there are several different Greek words for "pederasty" and none of them are used in these passages.⁹ None of them actually occur in the New Testament. Of course, the biblical writers would have condemned pederasty, but they didn't *only* condemn pederasty. All types of male-male sexual relations were considered to be outside of God's will and design.

8. See Isa 1:10-17; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Matt 10:5-10. Some think that Jude 7, which mentions the men of Sodom going after "strange flesh" (*sarkos heteras*), supports the traditional interpretation. But in the context, "strange flesh" refers not to people of the same sex, but to angels—the ones whom the Sodomites were seeking to rape. The phrase "strange flesh" actually means "other flesh" and ironically contains the Greek word *heteras* from which we get *heterosexual*. If homosexual relations were what Jude meant, it would have made much more sense for him to say "same flesh" not "other flesh."

9. The Greek word *paiderastes* was widely used to refer to "the love of boys," as was *paidophthoros* ("corruptor of boys") or *paidophthoreo* ("seducer of boys"). Another pair of Greek words, *erastes* and *eromenos*, were often used to describe the older man (*erastes*) and his boy-lover (*eromenos*). Again, none of these words are used when the New Testament prohibits same-sex relations.

What's fascinating is that several affirming scholars actually agree with this point. For instance, the late Louis Crompton, a self-identified gay man, was a brilliant scholar who wrote a 500-page book called *Homosexuality and Civilization*.¹⁰ In it, he says:

*According to [one] interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.*¹¹

Bill Loader is the world's foremost scholar on sexuality in ancient Christianity and Judaism, and he's an affirming Christian. He's published thousands of pages in eight books on the topic. Still, *he rejects the argument that the only same-sex relationships in the ancient world were exploitative*. Loader says that Paul's words in Romans 1:26-27 "included, but [was] by no means limited to exploitative pederasty," "sexual abuse of male slaves," or "same-sex acts ... performed within idolatrous ritual contexts."¹² And again: "It is inconceivable that [Paul] would approve of any same-sex acts if, as we must assume, he affirmed the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as fellow Jews of his time understood them."¹³

The idea that New Testament writers were *only* prohibiting exploitative same-sex relations is neither biblically nor historically accurate.

REASON 6: Paul Condemns Having Sex Against One's Own Nature

This argument is based on Romans 1:26-27, where Paul says, "For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are *contrary to nature*." Some affirming Christians argue that God is only condemning heterosexuals who have abandoned their *natural desire* for the opposite gender and pursue sexual relations with the same gender. In other words, the "nature" Paul's referring to is their natural sexual orientation. Straight people shouldn't have gay sex.

This interpretation, however, doesn't follow what Paul is actually saying. He does not say "contrary to *their* nature," but "contrary to nature" (the Greek *para physin*). Paul is not saying some people left behind their innate heterosexual urges to pursue homosexual partners for whom they felt no innate desire. Rather, he's saying that some people have gone against the Creator's design (opposite sex relations) to pursue sexual relations with members of their same sex.

In fact, the phrase "contrary to nature" was often used by ancient philosophers and moral teachers who believed that same-sex sexual relations were wrong. And there's no evidence that they were believed to be wrong simply *because* such relations went against one's own personal sexual orientation. Rather, these writers—including Paul—believed they were wrong because same-sex relations goes against the way humans have been created, even if some people *want* to have sex with someone of the same gender. 2

In short, Paul's phrase "contrary to nature" essentially means "contrary to the way God has designed humans."

REASON 7: The Real Problem was Excessive Lust

A similar affirming argument says that the reason why same-sex relations were condemned is because Paul considered them to be the result of excessive lust. That is, straight men got bored with having sex with women, and out of their lust, explored new and kinky territory with other men.

So, the previous argument focuses on the *types* of same-sex relations. This argument focuses on the *reasons why* men were having sex with other males. Both arguments are trying to distinguish between same-sex relations back then and same-sex relations today.

If you look at Romans 1, you could see where they get this. Paul says that men "were consumed with passion for one another" (Romans 1:27), which sure sounds like lust. But pay close attention to what Paul is writing. Is lust the *reason why* these relations were wrong?

10. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

11. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

12. *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Judaism and Christianity in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Era; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 325.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

No, Paul doesn't say this. If you look at the broader context, Paul's point is that men departed from their Creator's design by having sex with other males. Of course there's passion and desire involved. That kind of goes hand in hand with any sex act—gay or straight! (Could any couple have sex and *not* be "consumed with passion for one another?") But the passion or lust is not the *reason* why Paul says homosexual sex is wrong.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Due to the theological nature of Discussions 4 and 5, we would recommend going through the following questions with a pastor or someone trained to talk about the theological nuances of homosexuality.

1. Which of these biblical arguments surprised you the most and why?
2. Before reading this discussion, which of these arguments have you heard and did not feel prepared to answer?
3. Do you think the Sodom story (Gen 19) is relevant for thinking about consensual, same-sex relations? Why, or why not?
4. What other biblical arguments have you heard that weren't addressed in this discussion? (Keep in mind that we'll tackle more general arguments in the next discussion.)
5. Discuss how you might share your beliefs on what the Bible says regarding homosexuality with someone who is affirming (approving of the identity and practice of homosexuality) using at least one of the arguments listed.

NOTES:

DISCUSSION FIVE

EIGHT POPULAR REASONS GIVEN FOR THE AFFIRMING VIEW

by Dr. Preston Sprinkle

The issues we'll cover in this Discussion, while always related to the Bible for Christians, deal with larger themes, as opposed to chapter and verse exposition. These are the types of arguments many younger Christians are embracing because each of them has an element of truth, which makes them believable without more critical examination. So, let's step back and consider a few of the more popular arguments for the affirming view.

REASON 1: Understanding Same-Sex Laws along a Trajectory Ethic

This one has arguably become *the* leading argument by thoughtful affirming Christians. In many ways, it's an attempt to get around the counterarguments I've given to the previous affirming arguments.

A trajectory ethic assumes that the Bible doesn't always give us a complete or fully developed position on all ethical matters. Take slavery, for example. The Bible never comes out and condemns slavery as an institution. However, we can see some rumblings of the institution being challenged, especially in the New Testament. That is, we can identify a *trajectory in the Bible that doesn't quite condemn slavery but is moving toward this goal*.

Some argue the same thing with women in the Bible. The Old Testament appears to be patriarchal, but the New Testament is moving toward full equality and liberation. Some argue, therefore, that the biblical trajectory is headed toward the full inclusion of women into all areas of ministry and leadership. Since the Bible gives us an incomplete ethic, so the argument goes, we still see a residue of patriarchy in passages where Paul tells women to keep silent in church (1 Corinthians 14) and forbids them from holding leadership and teaching positions (1 Timothy 2). Follow the trajectory towards its logical conclusion, and these patriarchal commands fade away.

Let's just assume a trajectory ethic for slavery and women. The question is: Can we also identify the same trajectory for same-sex relations? Does the Bible begin to move away from prohibiting homosexual behavior and sanctioning it? Is there anything in the Bible where we see gay marriage being included as part of God's design.

Many affirming Christians say, "Yes!" But there's really no evidence for this. From Genesis to Revelation, there are almost no changes to God's vision for sexuality and marriage. I say "almost" because there are some. Polygamy, for instance, is allowed in the Old Testament but we see the New Testament moving away from it. Divorce too was allowed in the Old Testament, but Jesus himself tightened up on those laws in the New. Think about this. *When the Bible augments its vision for marriage and sexuality, it moves toward a stricter ethic not a more expanded one*. We see movement toward the Genesis 1-2 ideal of one man and one woman, bound together in an inseparable one-flesh union.

If you interact with someone on this issue and they bring up the trajectory ethic, humbly ask them to show you where they are getting this in Scripture? Don't be snooty or snarky or arrogant, of course. Genuinely ask them to build a case accurately where they see signs in Scripture of God moving toward accepting same-sex behavior.

The fact is, whenever same-sex behavior is mentioned, it's always considered to be sexual immorality. And sexual immorality is always condemned in Scripture.

REASON 2: Christians Have Often Been on the Wrong Side of History Before

I often hear people point out that for hundreds of years, the church believed slavery was okay. We only recently realized that slavery is a horrible evil. Is not the current debate about same-sex relations the same thing? Non-affirming Christians are like our slave-owning forefathers. One day, we'll realize that we were on the wrong side of history.

It does boggle my mind that so many confessing Christians actually held slaves, were blatantly racist, and viewed women as less valuable as men. Are non-affirming Christians doing the same thing with gay people?

The analogy sounds powerful, but it ultimately breaks down. The sexuality discussion is about whether same-sex *behavior* is considered to be sexual immorality. It doesn't question the inherent value and worth of a human being, even though some will say it does. The slavery discussion, however, is all about whether some humans should be treated as property rather than God's image bearers. To compare the two is like comparing apples and astronauts.

Plus, let's look at the history of slavery and same-sex relations. For the last 2,000 years, the church has always and unanimously viewed same-sex sexual relations as immoral. But the same is not true of slavery. Throughout church history, various leaders opposed slavery. Leaders like William the Conqueror (1027-1087), Saint Wulfstan (1009-1095), Anselm (1033-1109), Pope Paul III (1468-1549), and even the great theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) all said slavery was sin. Sociologist Rodney Stark says, "The problem wasn't that the leadership was silent. It was that almost nobody listened."¹ And this doesn't even include the fact that Christians led the way in ending slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Christians are far from perfect; it's why we need a perfect Savior. On the other hand, it's not as if the entire body of Christ for 2,000 years was pro-slavery. But the church has held a uniform belief about same-sex relations until the late 20th century.

REASON 3: I Was "Born this Way," How Could it Be Wrong?

This argument is still very popular on blogs and pop media, even though scholars realize that it's not scientifically accurate. Some affirming Christians argue that gay people are "born gay" and therefore they should be allowed to express their love within the context of a consensual, monogamous relationship. Put differently, since God made some people gay, they should be permitted to engage in same-sex relations.

There are several things wrong with this line of reasoning. First, it misunderstands God's involvement in human birth. While God is Creator and He gives life to the womb, every human since Adam is born into a fallen world where things "aren't the way they're supposed to be."² People are born with all sorts of biological, mental, and emotional traits that aren't naturally aligned with God's will. Just because some people are naturally angry, jealous, lustful, or prone to alcohol or drug abuse is not an excuse the Bible accepts for acting out of these natural desires. Simply because a person experiences a desire doesn't mean they should or can act on it—no matter how strong or seemingly "fixed" that desire is.

So even if some people were born with a fixed same-sex orientation, this wouldn't in itself mean they should engage in same-sex behavior. Even Justin Lee, founder of gaychristian.net doesn't buy into this argument. He says:

Just because an attraction or drive is biological doesn't mean it's okay to act on... We all have inborn tendencies to sin in any number of ways. If gay people's same-sex attractions were inborn, that wouldn't necessarily mean it's okay to act on them, and if we all agreed that gay sex is sinful, that wouldn't necessarily mean that same-sex attractions aren't inborn. "Is it a sin?" and "Does it have biological roots?" are two completely separate questions.³

And Justin is an affirming gay Christian. Even he believes that the "born this way" argument isn't a good way to construct a Christian sexual ethic.

But are people "born gay?" Without getting caught in the weeds of research, the best scientists who have studied the question of orientation say that it's not that simple. There's most likely a complex blend of nature (biology) and nurture (environmental influences) that shapes same-sex desires. According to the American Psychological Association says,

[N]o findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles.⁴

1. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/julyweb-only/7-14-53.0.html

2. This is the title of Cornelius Plantinga's excellent book on sin: *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

3. Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (Jericho Books, 62).

4. www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx

A recent, major study on sexual orientation by Johns Hopkins University comes to similar conclusions.⁵ Keep in mind, these aren't conservative Christians trying hard to prove the "born this way" argument wrong. These are just scientists doing good scientific research.

So whether the cause of same-sex attraction is nature or nurture (or both), the Bible still prohibits same-sex sexual behavior.

REASON 4: Shouldn't Christians Just Love Everyone?

Many people say that the non-affirming view is inherently unloving. It's unloving, they say, to deny a person's right to pursue the romantic relationship they desire. After all, a same-sex relationship isn't harming anyone. Why do Christians care about what two people do in the bedroom? And didn't Jesus teach his followers to love people—all people—especially those who have been marginalized?

Before wrestling with this argument, we must all check our hearts and ask: Have we been unloving toward gay people? Have you told a gay joke, laughed at a gay joke, looked down upon a gay person, or ignored someone who's wrestling with same-sex attraction? There are many ways in which straight Christians have not been loving toward gay people. When we hear the "What about Love?" argument, we need to first repent from any unloving thing we've said or done.

As for the argument itself, it rightly prioritizes love but wrongly defines it. Jesus tells us to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12), and that last part is important. When Jesus loved his disciples, he didn't always (or usually) affirm their behavior or desires. It's worldly love, not Christian love, that says: if you love me you'll affirm everything I desire to do and believe about myself to be true. When Jesus loved people, He loved them toward holiness not away from it. And this includes sexual holiness—as defined by Scripture.

Christian ethics can't be reduced to the secular code of do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone. It's true, most sins end up hurting other people. But some don't. If I bow down to an idol in the secrecy of my basement, I'm not hurting anyone. If my wife and I didn't have kids, and we happened to "fall out of love with each other," we wouldn't hurt anyone by getting a divorce. But the Bible never uses the do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone logic for determining what is right and wrong.

As we love people, we must love them as Jesus love them—toward holiness not away from it.

Some people describe this as "love the sinner, hate the sin." I actually don't like this phrase. It comes off as bit too self-righteous—as if we are standing over here in all our holiness and loving all those other sinners over there. At least, that's how the phrase sounds when gay people hear it.

Instead of love the sinner and hate the sin, how about love the sinner, hate your own sin, and let's pursue Christ together! That's the texture of Christian love.

REASON 5: The Bible Hardly Talks about Homosexuality

It's true that Scripture only mentions same-sex relations less than a dozen times. And for "verse counters," this must mean that it's not all that important. After all, the Bible mentions greed and the misuse of money in more than 2,000 passages! Why aren't we more concerned about the abuse of wealth than we are homosexuality?

Certainly, we should care deeply about how we use our money. But we have to be careful not to determine the importance of something based on adding up all the verses that address it. There are several sins that the Bible rarely mentions, but this doesn't mean they aren't important.⁶ We can't just add up verses to determine how important a sin is. That's not the way biblical ethics work. Some sins are mentioned much more frequently in the Bible because those are the sins that God's people struggled with the most. Counting verses is not a good indicator of how much God cares about a particular issue.

5. www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/number-50-fall-2016

6. For instance, bestiality and incest aren't mentioned very often, but this doesn't mean they aren't that bad. I use these examples with hesitation, since they are sometimes compared to homosexuality—as if they are the same kinds of sins. I would recommend using much caution if you refer to incest and bestiality in the same sentence (or conversation!) as homosexuality so as to avoid unintended association.

Plus, the Bible frequently addresses sexual immorality in general, and the Judeo-Christian view of sex has always considered same-sex relations to be sexually immoral. So even if we went the verse-counting route, we'd still have a fair amount of verses to go on. But rather than adding up verses, let's work hard to understand and obey the verses we do have.

REASON 6: Jesus Never Mentioned Homosexuality

This is true. Jesus never explicitly mentions homosexuality. And some people have understood this silence to mean he either doesn't care about it or he probably would have affirmed same-sex relations. But this is reading way too much into Jesus's silence. Here's why:

First, Jesus was a Jew, and first-century Judaism was the context of his life and teaching. The topics debated with other Jews were always ones that were disputed within Judaism (like divorce or how to keep the Sabbath). But same-sex relations were never disputed within Judaism. Every Jew in and around Jesus's day believed that same-sex relations were against God's will. And this is probably why Jesus never mentions it. It wasn't relevant for his specific, Jewish context.

Second, Jesus actually does mention "sexual immorality," for example, in Matthew 15:19 where he says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts--murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Again, every Jew in Jesus's day considered same-sex relations to be immoral based on the sexual laws in Leviticus 18. Even though Jesus doesn't directly mention homosexual behavior, he does so indirectly.

Third, when Jesus *does* depart from a traditional Jewish sexual ethic, he doesn't expand that ethic but tightens it in. For instance, divorce was debated within Judaism. Some Jews were strict while other Jews were more lenient. When we look at Jesus's view of divorce, he held to a stricter view. Same with adultery. Many Jews believed that you haven't committed adultery unless you actually slept with another person's spouse. But Jesus tightens in the Jewish ethic: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Again, when Jesus *does* depart from a Jewish sexual ethic, he moves toward a stricter ethic not a more lenient one. Based on what Jesus *does* say about sexual ethics, there's no evidence that he would have affirming same-sex relations if the question came up.

In sum, Jesus's silence on homosexuality cannot be taken as indifference or affirmation. We must interpret Jesus within his first century Jewish (not our 21st century Western) context.

REASON 7: Isn't This Just an Agree to Disagree Issue?

This argument isn't so much an argument for the affirming view, but it's often given by people who question whether non-affirming Christians should even care about this issue at all. Is it really a big enough issue for Christians to fight about and divide over? Can't we all just agree to disagree—like the timing of the rapture—and not let this divide us?

Disunity is a serious issue. Christians should be concerned about it and should work toward unity. But calling sin righteousness is also a serious issue. Sexual immorality is a very serious issue. Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus shrug his shoulders at sexual sin and say: Well, there are different viewpoints on this issue, so let's not make a big deal about it. Whenever same-sex relations are mentioned, they are treated as serious deviations from God's will (Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

The Bible does talk about some ethical questions as "agree to disagree" issues. Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-9 mention some so-called grey areas that Christians can disagree on, but sexual sins aren't one of them. Whenever sexual sins are mentioned, they are profoundly serious and nonnegotiable. I'm not saying that Christians should just assume that the traditional view is correct. I believe every Christian should consider the reasons for each view and weigh them against Scripture. But I also think that Christians should rightly handle God's word on sexual sins. We can't afford to throw up our arms and plead the fifth. Real lives are at stake. We have a duty to push people towards the holiness of Christ, for the good and joy of all people.

I don't think the question of sexuality is an agree to disagree issue. Our God, who created us as sexual beings, has revealed to us His guidance on sexual morality. It's up to us to obey it.

REASON 8: But Christians Don't Care about Gluttony and Divorce but want Ever Same-Sex Law is Enforced Vigorously

The last argument we'll address isn't really an argument. It's more of a "Yeah, but..." type response. It doesn't give any evidence for affirming same-sex relations; it simply points out that non-affirming Christians brush over other sins—like gluttony and divorce—so why should they care about same-sex relations?

Yes, it's true, some Christians (certainly not all) have been lax in their view of gluttony and have ignored the wide-spread problem of unbiblical divorces and remarriages. There's no excuse for this. We shouldn't respond in turn with another "yeah, but..." We should acknowledge it. Own it. And repent from it. In fact, I would go so far to say that one of the blessings of the LGBTQ conversation is that it's forced the church to reflect on its own sins and ask the question: "How can we be more holy in our marital and sexual lives?"

That said, there's no logical or ethical or biblical reason why laxity in one area (gluttony or divorce) should encourage laxity in another (same-sex behavior). I can't imagine Jesus looking at the church's gluttony and divorce rate and saying, "Well, since you all have really dropped the ball by overeating and divorcing your spouses, I think it's only fair that you lighten up a bit more on my Father's sexual ethic."

With the divorce question in particular, we should acknowledge that not every divorce is against God's will. Jesus allows for divorce if there's been sexual infidelity (Matt 5) and Paul says that if an unbelieving spouse leaves, the believing spouse is no longer bound to that marriage (1 Cor 7). While divorce is never encouraged, the Bible does make some allowances. But the same cannot be said of same-sex sexual behavior. There's nothing in the Bible that views some types of same-sex behavior as permissible.

In short, we should respond to the What about Gluttony and Divorce response by taking the gluttonous log out of our own eyes, so that we can help others who are struggling with sexual (including same-sex) temptations.

Summary

As we reflect on the last two discussions, there are two wrong ways to read them. One, is to use them to go out and win an argument. We can never lose sight of the fact that we're talking about real people with real lives. The biggest problem facing the church is not that it can't win an argument, but that it doesn't know how to love gay people well. At the same time, there is an ethical debate going on inside the church about same-sex behavior. And it's important for Christians to know why some people believe the things they do. Indeed, it's crucial for us all to know *why* we believe what we believe, not just *that* we believe it.

Another wrong way to read these chapters is to think that we've thoroughly dismantled the affirming position. I've only given you, in summary form, some of the main arguments; I haven't given an exhaustive treatment of the affirming view. You need to know that most affirming Christians have read a ton of books and articles on issues related to sexuality and gender. They often come to their view *after* doing a lot of research. If you try to debate with them, you're likely to get your clock cleaned.

So, I'd recommend that when you're presented with these arguments and positions that you are, "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). Try to understand why this person has taken the position they have. They may have a gay friend or relative who's been hurt by Christians. And of course, it's possible your friend is personally struggling with this temptation and is trying to convince themselves of these arguments.

Listen. Ask questions. Then tell them you'd like to pray and do some of your own research and get back to them. This is not only an honoring response, it's a wise one. It allows the Holy Spirit to teach you what to say and how to say it when you next meet.

I would highly encourage you to keep working through these questions and doing more research on your own. Not *so that* you can win an argument. But *so that* you know why you believe what you believe.

What I want us all to walk away with is this: The historic, traditional Christian sexual ethic is not just traditional. It is indeed biblical. And we have good, credible reasons for holding onto this traditional ethic, even in the face of some modern pressures. Stay true to the Bible, but do so graciously.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Due to the theological nature of Discussions 4 and 5, we would recommend going through the following questions with a pastor or someone trained to talk about the theological nuances of homosexuality.

1. Which of these popular arguments surprised you the most and why?
2. Which of these arguments have you heard before and did not feel prepared to answer?
3. Do you disagree with any of our responses to the affirming arguments? If so, explain your disagreement.
4. What other popular arguments have you heard that weren't addressed in this discussion?
5. Discuss how you might share your beliefs on what the Bible says regarding homosexuality with someone who is affirming (approving of the identity and practice of homosexuality) using at least one of the arguments listed.
6. Do you believe it is helpful to try to understand the "other side's" point of view? Or are you fearful that empathy will be interpreted as acceptance? Discuss ideas for gracefully making sure an affirming person knows you love them, but doesn't get the impression that by your kindness you've accepted this argument.
7. Share what words, facial expression, tones of voice, and posture may hinder or help your communicating both grace and truth.

FURTHER READING:

For a more thorough response to some of the affirming arguments mentioned in Discussions Four and Five, please see the following books:

Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (The Good Book Company, 2013).

Kevin DeYoung, *What the Bible Really Teaches about Homosexuality* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015)

Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015)

For a book that contains scholarly arguments for both affirming and non-affirming views, see:

Preston Sprinkle (ed.) *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016)

NOTES:

DISCUSSION SIX

“WHY NOT LET LGBTQ MEN AND WOMEN MARRY?”

With the legalization of same-sex marriage in June of 2015 by the Supreme Court, you might think this discussion is irrelevant. However, just because same-sex marriage is now the law of the land, that doesn't change the reasons Christians should oppose it and be able to explain to our children why we do. Abortion was legalized almost half a century ago, but most Christians still oppose it on biblical grounds and try to discourage it whenever possible.

We've heard it asked many times, "Why do you Christians care what goes on behind closed doors between two consenting adults? Who cares? Why not let gay men and women marry?" In this discussion we'll try to answer some of the most commonly asked questions by both non-Christians and affirming Christians, and suggest some alternatives to marriage.

But before we do, we need to remind ourselves that many of those who favor same-sex marriage, whether they are LGBTQ or heterosexual, Christians or non-Christians see it strictly as a civil right. They don't understand that we believe our position to be God's position as revealed through Scripture, not simply our opinion.

Q. *The Bible doesn't prohibit same-sex marriage, so why should Christians?*

A. While it's true that the Scriptures do not prohibit same-sex marriage outright, marriage is always described in the Bible as being between a man and a woman. The first chapter of the Bible says, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Differentiation of the human race into two complementary sexes ("male and female") is the first fact mentioned in connection with being made "in the image of God."

Genesis 2 describes in more detail the process summarized in 1:27. Here, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). The word "helper" is *ezer kenegdo*, which means "helper" and "like and against me." This implies someone who is like Adam (a human), but against or opposite him (a complementary female).

Genesis then applies the example of Adam and Eve to all marriages: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This "one flesh" sexual union was thus established as the pattern for marriage generally, which Jesus himself reaffirmed when he cited Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as the normative pattern that God expects all marriages to follow, as expressed in Matthew 19:5: "And [Jesus] said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'" Paul reiterates this teaching yet a third time in Ephesians 5:31.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the Bible assumes the logic of sexual intercourse implied in Genesis: a sexual bond between a man and a woman requires two (and only two) different sexual halves ("a man" and "his wife") being brought together into a sexual whole ("one flesh").

Finally, to justify same-sex marriage strictly because the Bible doesn't specifically prohibit it is problematic because it gives equal weight to an argument from silence against hundreds of examples of married people in the Bible who were married only to a person of the opposite sex. It also ignores the fact that the Bible always speaks of same-sex intercourse in negative terms. And since sex and marriage go hand-in-hand, the prohibition of same-sex sex rules out marriage.

Q. *But if gay men and women marry, doesn't that solve the moral issue for Christians?*

A. The idea behind this argument is that if the biblical objection to homosexual relationships is solely based on the biblical prohibition of sex outside of marriage, why don't we solve it by allowing gay men and women to marry? If they do, the moral objection to same-sex sex goes away, just as it does when heterosexuals marry. Problem solved!

If having sex outside of marriage were the only biblical objection, then that *would* solve the problem. But it's not. To

endorse same-sex marriage is to endorse same-sex behavior. Sexual union is implicit and even honored in marriage. When we accept same-sex marriage, by implication and over time, the sin of homosexual sexual behavior will be legitimized by us, our children, and future generations.

Q. The Bible opposes divorce, and yet the church has accepted that as a fact of life. Why not accept gay marriage in the same way?

A. Divorce and same-sex sexual union share this in common: Both are forgivable sins for those who repent. However, neither in Scripture nor in the church has divorce ever been celebrated as a part of “the glorious diversity of the body of Christ,” as gay marriage is being touted. Divorce is and has always been viewed as an example of sin in a fallen world. This is why we don’t have divorce ceremonies in the church, in which we bless it. We recognize divorce as a sad tragedy and not the intention of God.

Q. But why should we get so worked up over what goes on behind closed doors or in same-sex marriages by people who are not Christians?

A. The legalization of same-sex marriage has repercussions way beyond what two adults do behind closed doors. Here are a few reasons:

Children:

- *Same-sex couples always deny their children either a father or a mother.* It’s both conventional and biblical wisdom that the optimal environment for raising a child is one in which the child’s mother and father are married and living with each other.¹ However, if a gay couple adopts, their children will have the influence of only one gender living in that home.
- It is true, many children today are being raised in one-parent homes, but that’s by default not by design (divorce, unwanted pregnancies, death, etc). It’s not that gay married couples cannot be good parents, they just cannot provide what a traditional marriage was designed by God to do—provide both male and female role models.

Q. What about the separation of church and state?

A. Those who favor the separation between church and state believe Christians are attempting to impose their views on everyone by opposing same-sex marriage. Ironically, however, they have no reservations about imposing their worldview on Christians and others. Here are just a few examples:

Education:

- “GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Sex Education Network) is a national organization advocating that public schools teach the normalization of diverse expressions of sexuality. “GLSEN calls upon public policy makers to remove any prohibitive laws that forbid or discourage in-school discussions of sexual orientation or gender/expression.”² We are already seeing rapid changes in school policies regarding transgenderism and bathroom use by either sex.
- Sex education in Massachusetts’ schools, as well as school districts in other states, have already been expanded to include classroom discussions on masturbation and oral and anal sex in an effort to end taboos on gay and straight sexual behaviors.³
- Students in many states are being taught that a homosexual family is normal. Recommended reading in many states are books like *Heather has Two Mommies* and *Daddy’s Roommate*.
- Christian teachers in public schools are often required to teach that homosexual relationships are normal—even if it violates their own religious beliefs.

The point is that there are serious mandatory efforts underway to teach your children and grandchildren things that are antithetical to a biblical worldview and to the values of their parents or the church. Unfortunately, many of the sex

1. Flanagan, Caitlin. “Is There Hope for the American Marriage?” *Time Magazine*, July 02, 2009.

2. “Values Statements.” GLSEN. GLSEN, 2003-2016. www.glsen.org/values

3. See Smith, Tovia. “NPR Interview.” NPR Interview. 2004. www.massresistance.org/docs/a8a/general/NPR_091304.htm. See also: Schoenberg, Shira. “Massachusetts Senate Passes ‘age Appropriate’ Sex Education Bill Pushed by Planned Parenthood.” *Masslive.com*. November 19, 2015. www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/11/massachusetts_senate_passes_ag.html. See also: Jan, Tracy. “Gay Rights Advocates and Health Educators to Push for More Inclusive Sex Education - The Boston Globe.” *BostonGlobe.com*. Boston Globe, 8 Sept. 2015. www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2015/09/08/gay-rights-advocates-and-health-educators-push-for-more-inclusive-sex-education/Z2gbYzVF2FonnHAdZrluXO/story.html

education classes normalizing heterosexual sex outside of marriage in the 80s and 90s laid the groundwork for reducing sex to a health issue rather than a moral or spiritual one.

Freedom of religion?

- Many Christians in the country know what happened to the photographer in New Mexico who refused to photograph a gay wedding. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court's ruling that it was a violation of one's civil rights to deny anyone services based on their sexual orientation. LGBTQ activists are not content with allowing committed Christians to behave privately as they wish. They will not rest until everyone accepts all same-sex behavior as normal and acceptable.

Q. Do you really expect gay men and women to be lonely and celibate all their life?

A. It can be incredibly lonely to live alone your entire life. Many heterosexual people are already doing that simply because they choose it, or haven't found 'the one.' Most people want to be married and have children and grandchildren. But it's also true that many people find marriage to be difficult—hence the high divorce rate. Married people must balance their personal freedom and time with the responsibilities of caring for their spouse and children. Marriage is both a blessing and a sacrifice.

Yes, same-sex attracted men and women should remain celibate if they are not married to someone of the opposite gender or have no desire to marry someone of the opposite gender. God expects all unmarried believers to remain celibate all their life—both same-sex attracted and straight. This isn't an exclusive requirement for LGBTQ men and women alone.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul goes out of his way to make the case for all Christians to remain unmarried if they are able. Almost the whole chapter is devoted to the advantages of being single. He begins with this statement, "Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband." And then goes on to say, "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do." In verses 32 and 33 he says, "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife."

For two thousand years, unmarried Christians have lived productive, spiritual, and fulfilled lives without marriage or sex. Not only can it be done, it has been done, and done well!

Henri Nouwen, a deeply devoted Christian, philosopher, and author struggled with same-sex attraction all of his life, yet was committed to celibacy. This enabled him to devote the last decade of his life to living in community at L'Arche Daybreak, in Toronto, caring for mentally disabled adults. Nouwen once wrote, "The way out of our loss and hurt is in and through. When Jesus said, "For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13), He affirmed that only those who can face their wounded condition can be available for healing and enter a new way of living."⁴

Q. Does the Bible allow any options to address the loneliness of celibacy?

A. The following are some unconventional ideas put forward by Christians to resolve the pain of loneliness. If you are like many Christians, your initial reaction to these ideas may be shocking. While your church may not necessarily endorse all these ideas, there does not appear to be any biblical prohibition against them.

1. A same-sex attracted Christian could marry a heterosexual person of the opposite sex and have a family

I, Laurie, one of the authors, am one such person. I exclusively experience same-sex attractions, but am growing in love and attraction for my husband. I am not in love with all men; I am in love with my husband, Matt. As I run more toward Jesus to fill the core needs of my heart, and fall more in love with Him, I find my same-sex attractions decrease, and wanting to live my life with greater connection to Matt.⁵

The authors know of another celibate, same-sex attracted person who felt called to be a pastor. This man graduated from a conservative seminary and began a friendship with a heterosexual woman. As the friendship deepened, the

4. Nouwen, Henri J. M., and Timothy K. Jones. *Turn My Mourning into Dancing: Moving through Hard times with Hope*. Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2001. P. 7.

5. To read more about Laurie and Matt's journey, read their blog at himhministries.com.

man admitted to this woman that he was same-sex attracted, but said his desire was to marry, have a family, and serve the church. He admitted that their sex life would undoubtedly never be what either might desire, but he loved her and was committed to live as her faithful loving husband all of his life. After much prayer and in consultation with her pastor, she agreed to marry him. They now have children, and he is still a pastor of his church.

We find no biblical reasons to prohibit a marriage like this and find it to be an elegant solution to the problem of loneliness, even though, sadly, mixed-orientation marriages often fail for a variety of reasons. They are clearly not a “cure” for homosexuality. Same-sex attraction might always be a temptation in these marriages. However, sexual temptation and fulfillment are problematic in many straight marriages as well.

2. Create spiritual friendship communities

In his book entitled *Spiritual Friendship*, Wesley Hill, a man who experiences same-sex attractions, describes a number of ways he and others have addressed this issue. One idea is that men and women who are committed to celibacy could live in community in a large home, with one person per room, holding each other accountable to sexual purity—all the while enjoying the camaraderie of both male and female friends.

The bottom line is this: The church will have to stretch conventional thinking to assist a growing number of single adults—both heterosexual and homosexual—to live lives of purpose and purity. None of these ideas are easy. Marriage is not easy. All human relationships are potentially dangerous, difficult, and flawed. However, none of these ideas violate any teaching of Scripture, but in fact, actually capture the ideal of a caring, loving community.

Q. What if I’m invited to a same-sex wedding?

A. Option 1 (adapted from Joe Dallas’s book, *When Homosexuality Hits Home*):

I do not believe it’s right for a Christian to attend a same-sex wedding ceremony. I realize that there are Christ-centered, sincere believers, who also believe homosexuality to be wrong, who thoroughly disagree with me about attending a wedding.

A same-sex wedding is a ceremony and celebration solemnizing something that in God’s sight cannot and should not be called a marriage. Yes, the betrothed couple probably know you are a Bible-believing Christian who doesn’t condone homosexuality. But they invited you anyway, hoping that, in spite of what you believe, you’ll put that aside for the sake of their joy and celebrate with them. Thus, a “sorry, cannot attend” RSVP will almost certainly be hurtful, and may end the relationship. While I don’t recommend attending, I do recommend continuing the relationship.

Attendance at a same-sex wedding or any wedding cannot be seen as anything other than a silent endorsement. This violates Paul’s clear instruction in Ephesians 5:11 which says, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” He also advised Timothy to “neither be partaker of other men’s sins” (1 Timothy 5:22, KJV).

Broadening that principle to other behaviors, if my friend were an alcoholic, I’d still be a friend. But if he asked me to “partake” and to have a drink with him, I’d decline because I’d not want to send mixed messages that I approve of that decision by participating with him.

The question of attendance at a same-sex wedding boils down to this: Is it possible to attend and not signal, on some level, my approval by my attendance? I don’t think so. That’s my dilemma.⁶

Option 2 (adapted from John Wesley Reid’s blog, “Should I attend my gay friend’s wedding?”):

Some may oppose attendance at a same-sex wedding because they believe it’s a declaration of the attendee’s approval. While I’m charitable to this position, I am not sold on the logic. I will attend my friend’s wedding because they invited me. If my friend considers me close enough to merit an invitation to their wedding, then they will already know my position on gay marriage. In one sense, it’s flattering that they would invite me, considering that my opposition is an offense to their lifestyle, yet they still love me enough to invite me.

I will attend because I love them. And by “love them” I don’t mean I’m willing only to criticize their lifestyle, and then pray for them. By “love them” I mean I desire to walk with them, do life with them, and grow with them while praying vigorously for them to understand their sin—as I would anyone.

My love for them does not compromise my hate for sin—indeed my hate for sin compels me to love them more just as Christ loved me despite my sin.

6. Edited from: Dallas, Joe. *When Homosexuality Hits Home*. Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 2004.

I'm not going to wear black and sit stone-faced.

And I'm not going to take every opportunity when meeting someone to explain away my decision with a, "Yes, I'm a friend of Joe's, BUT I'm not at all in support of his decision."

I'm going to sign the guest book.

I'm going to bring a gift.

I'm going to dance.

I'm going to love and pray for them.⁷

Option 3 (from Preston Sprinkle's book, *Living in the Gray*):

"Can I attend a gay wedding?" I get asked this question more than any other question related to homosexuality. You can probably see why it's tough to answer, but let's lay out the dilemma so that we're all on the same page.

On the one hand, if you refuse to attend the wedding of your gay friend (or family member), this could come off as unloving, self-righteous, and judgmental. Perhaps you're trying to lead your friend to Christ (assuming they're not a Christian already). If you don't attend, they may view this as a denial of the love you say you have for them.

On the other hand, if you attend the wedding, will your friend and others think that you now approve of homosexual relations? Aren't you endorsing gay marriage by attending the wedding?

What do you think? There seems to be truth in both responses. While I don't think there's a clear right or wrong answer to the question, here are some things to consider.

The first thing to consider is whether the couple claims to be Christian. If they don't then I don't think it would be a problem to attend their wedding. Remember Paul's words, "What have I to do with judging outsiders?" (1 Corinthians 5:12 ESV). Since we shouldn't expect unbelievers to act like believers, I don't think it would be wrong to attend a gay wedding if they are unbelievers. Or, if you refuse to attend, then you should be consistent and not attend any weddings between unbelievers.

But if they do claim to be Christians, then here are a few more things to consider.

Make sure you are consistent in which weddings you attend. If you don't attend the gay wedding, then you also should not attend any Christian wedding that is unbiblical. For instance, marriages between a believer and an unbeliever. Scripture doesn't allow believers to marry unbelievers. Or you shouldn't attend a marriage when one of the partners has been through an unbiblical divorce.

It's pretty hypocritical to attend certain weddings that aren't sanctioned by Scripture yet not attend other weddings that aren't also sanctioned by Scripture.⁸

Our Recommendation:

We (the authors) lean towards options 1 and 3. Joe Dallas's thoughts are true to the Bible, and Sprinkle's encourage a biblical self-examination and consistency in whichever decision a person makes. Some issues in the Christian life are black and white—this is not one of them. A wedding day is an incredibly important day in anyone's life, and the people who have invited you may be very dear to you. God grant you the courage to say yes or no to wedding attendance, whichever you deem appropriate, as you believe God is leading you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In your opinion, which of the arguments against same-sex marriage are the strongest? Why?
2. In your opinion, which of the arguments against same-sex marriage are the weakest? Why?
3. Was there any new information you learned which affirmed your convictions?

7. Edited from: Reid, John Wesley. "Should I Attend My Gay Friend's Wedding? John Wesley Reid." John Reid Blogs. 2015. johnreidblogs.com/2015/03/16/should-i-attend-my-gay-friends-wedding/

8. Sprinkle, Preston M. *Living in a Gray World: A Christian Teen's Guide to Understanding Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. P. 124-126. (Preston goes on to talk more about "What does this convey to those getting married?" We recommend reading the whole section.)

4. If you have children, would they say you “celebrate singleness?” Or does your desire for grandchildren send conflicting messages—that singleness and celibacy are fine for those with SSA, but the ideal should be marriage with children?
5. What do you think of the ideas regarding unconventional living arrangements for SSA Christians?
6. Based on your own convictions, would you attend a same-sex marriage ceremony? Why or why not? What if the wedding was for a son or daughter?
7. Do you think it’s possible to take a stand against same-sex marriage and not be labeled a homophobic, judgmental Christian? If not, can you live with that charge without holding onto anger or shame?
8. Have you ever invited a celibate, SSA Christian into your home just because you care about them? Why or why not?

FINAL THOUGHTS:

This is the end of the *Small Group Edition of Leading Your Church to be as Gay-Friendly as the Bible Teaches*. Although these are our final thoughts, this discussion is far from over. As a result of reading and talking through the discussions, our prayer is that you and your church will be better equipped to navigate grace, truth, and love better with your LGBT/SSA children, friends, and neighbors. As a last encouragement, we want to exhort you to be proactive. Take these ideas to your family and friends. Become the biblical, graceful thought leader on LGBT issues within your circles of influence. For further reading, we recommend the following resources as next steps:

People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not just an Issue by Preston Sprinkle, Zondervan, 2015

Same-Sex Attraction and the Church by Ed Shaw, InterVarsity Press Books, 2015

Other recommended books include:

Compassion Without Compromise by Adam Barr and Ron Citlau

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert by Rosaria Butterfield

What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality by Kevin DeYoung

Messy Grace by Caleb Kaltenbach

Homosexuality and the Christian by Mark Yarhouse

Out of a Far Country by Christopher Yuan

Recommended Web sites include:

Harvest USA at harvestusa.org

Hole in my Heart Ministries at himhministries.com

Lead them Home at leadthemhome.org

Living Out at livingout.org

The Gospel Coalition’s “50 Web sites for equipping the church on homosexuality and same sex marriage” at thegospelcoalition.org/article/50-resources-for-equipping-the-church-on-homosexuality-and-same-sex-marriage

NOTES:

DISCUSSION SEVEN:

WHAT WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY: A SAMPLE

The following statements are presented to give you a prototype for a theological framework for deciding what your church's position will be regarding sexual sin in general, and for responding to challenges against a historical Christian view of marriage. We suggest that they be reviewed carefully by the leadership of your church and eventually adopted in part or whole as your church's own *Statement on Human Sexuality*. (Therefore, the position put forward below may not yet accurately reflect the beliefs of the leaders of your church.)

Sample Statement on Human Sexuality:

An Introduction and Context

The sexual ethics of American culture have never been more confused and contorted. Divorce is rampant, sex before marriage is almost universally accepted as a reality, cohabitation before or instead of marriage has become normal, new technologies have made pornography immediately accessible, the once inconceivable notion of same-sex marriage is now recognized by law, and gender has become fluid. The need for a clear voice from our church on all these matters is critical—both for the health of our church community and to serve as a faithful witness to the world.

The following Statement sets forth a Christian vision of human sexuality as a good gift from our God. T

In it, we will affirm marriage, singleness, celibacy, sexuality, and gender as we believe God intended them, as well as address a variety of sexual attractions, behaviors, and relationships that the Bible prohibits. We will focus primarily on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. And later, in our *Church Covenant*, we will address what believing these things will mean for our churches and what the pastors and leaders expect of our members.

We Believe

1. What we believe regarding human sexuality and marriage flows from our commitment to God and his will as expressed in the Bible. On the most important matters of human sexuality, God has not asked our opinion. Therefore, even if our motives are loving and kind, Christians do not have the option to disregard its teachings. (Dt. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-38; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Dt.32:45-47; Matt. 4:4).
2. God created human beings as male and female (Gen. 1:27). The complementary anatomical and relational nature of the human race as "male and female" reflects the created order given by God when he created human beings "in his image" (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1, 3; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jms. 3:9; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:10). While our created differences as male and female have often been used to oppress women, we believe in the full equality of women and men as image bearers of God our Creator.
3. Scripture grants two life-enhancing options for sexual behavior: monogamous marital relations between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-24; Matt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-8; Heb. 13:4) and sexual celibacy (1 Cor. 7:1, 8; Matt. 19:12). Either is a gift from God and is given as he wills for his glory and the good of those who receive and rejoice in his gift to them.

Our definition of a biblical marriage

Marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society, established by God as a one-flesh, covenantal union between a man and a woman from different families that is life-long (until separated by death), exclusive (monogamous and faithful), and generative in nature (designed for bearing and rearing children).

This is still true whether a couple is able or intends to have children. Procreation was one of God's original intentions for marriage but may not be a requirement in the present age. Additionally, there are circumstances under which we recognize a biblical divorce, which allows for remarriage, but that was not God's original intent either.

1. In Scripture, monogamous, heterosexual marriage bears a significance that goes beyond the regulation of sexual behavior, the bearing and raising of children, the formation of families, and the recognition of certain economic and legal rights—all of which are important. Marriage between a woman and a man is emphatically declared in Scripture to create a “one flesh” union (Gen. 2:23-24; Matt. 19:5), which exemplifies the mystery of the union and relationship between Christ and his body, the Church (Eph. 5:22-33).
2. Although most people do choose to get married, the Bible (especially in the New Testament), celebrates singleness. Jesus, Paul, and many early Christian leaders were both single and celibate. Singleness gives greater freedom for service, is desirable, and should be celebrated and honored in the church (Matt. 19:10-12, 1 Cor. 7:1, 8, 25-30).
3. All humans have a sinful nature. This doesn't mean that everything humans do is sin, but it does mean that sin has affected all aspects of human nature *including our sexuality* (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23; 5:12). Therefore, all people—straight and LGBTQ—have a broken sexuality which is manifested in different ways and in need of the healing grace of Christ.” Whether the prohibited heterosexual or same-sex attractions and temptations men and women experience are the product of their life experiences, their biological or psychological influence, or the influence of demons or another source—no matter the origin, they are not what God intended. They are the result of the Fall and sin's corruption of creation. Therefore, while we try to understand those circumstances, these prohibited behaviors are still sin. God did not make us this way. It's what we've become as a result of sin.
4. Temptation (including sexual temptation) may not be a sin—if it is a brief and fleeting thought, almost immediately dismissed and not seriously contemplated. Even multiple temptations are not a sin. Jesus was tempted three times, and “in every way,” and did not sin (Matthew 4:1-11, Hebrews 4:15).

Same-sex *attractions/temptations* in themselves are not sin. Leviticus 18, 20, and 1 Corinthians 6 all refer to the sexual *act* (not the person) as sinful. However, someone who is attracted to the same gender is not allowed to engage in it either physically (sexually), according to these passages, or mentally, according to Jesus in Matthew 5.

Indeed, God does prohibit the serious contemplation of sin, and the Bible warns us against dwelling on it because it often leads to the actual act (James 1:13-15). For instance, although the Bible does not call temptation sin, it prohibits not only adultery, but the desire for adultery (Matthew 5:27,28). Therefore, while same-sex attraction alone is not a sin, dwelling on homosexual thoughts, engaging in lustful fantasies, and ultimately acting on same-sex behaviors are all sins. Living holy lives in spite of ongoing temptations must be the goal of all Christians.

5. The good news of the Gospel is that all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who gives us both the desire and the power to resist temptation. Therefore, saying, “I'm powerless to overcome my sin,” is a lie from the deceiver (Romans 8:9-11, Eph. 4:30, 1 Timothy 2:25, 26, James 4:7, 1 John 2:4, 1 John 4:13, 18).
6. Cohabitation of two unmarried people, whether by an SSA or a heterosexual couple, may not be a sin if there is sexual abstinence, but it may be unwise for these reasons:
 - Cohabitation increases the risk of falling into sexual sin and therefore is very unwise. Even if a couple is committed to sexual abstinence, living together significantly increases the temptation and likelihood of sexual promiscuity of all varieties. “Flee from sexual immorality,” 1 Corinthians 6:18 says.
 - Cohabitation of men and women attracted to one another hinders a couple's witness for Christ. The Bible calls us to be holy and set apart. Even if a couple is committed to sexual abstinence, most people will assume they are having sex and as a result, they will be a poor witness (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:9).

For these reasons we urge cohabitating, heterosexual couples to either choose marriage or live separately. Cohabitating individuals may continue as members, but it is not likely that they will be allowed to teach or lead in our church.

7. The Scriptures have much to say about sexual behavior, from the beautiful affirmations of the Song of Songs to the prohibitions found throughout the Bible (e.g., Rom. 13:13-14; 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 6:9-10, 15-18; Gal. 5:16-21; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). Jesus himself warned against all sexual immorality (*porneia*), which includes all sexual practices prohibited in the Torah (Mark 7:21). The Apostle Paul affirms that among believers “there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.” (This includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality as found in Eph. 5:3, 1 Timothy 1:9, 10.)

References to same-sex behavior in the Bible are *always* expressed in negative terms. All same sex, sexual behavior, whether it is consensual or not, is specifically condemned as sin in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Gen. 19:4-11; Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13; Judges 19:22-25; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11).

Homosexual behavior and other prohibited sexual behaviors, along with the experience of same-sex attraction, are not God’s intent for human sexuality as revealed at creation and throughout Scripture. We can assume from Scripture that it was God’s intention that men be attracted to women and women to men. Additionally, there are no examples in Scripture of any other human sexual attraction of which God approves other than opposite-gendered attraction. So, even if it sounds politically incorrect, any other sexual desire, whether intentional or not, is not God’s original intent for humans (Romans 1:26, 27, Gen. 1:27-28, 2:18-25, Mat. 19:4-6).

8. We have this warning from God in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10: “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

God, through Paul, is not referring to those who struggle with committing various sins, repent of them, seek forgiveness, make a serious effort to resist temptation, and call on the Holy Spirit to help them in these areas. Instead, God is warning those who have given up the struggle, who no longer call it sin, and have given themselves over to and embraced, accepted, or celebrated these behaviors. God warns that in so doing, individuals prove themselves not to be children of God, thereby disqualifying themselves from inheriting the Kingdom of God.

9. In Scripture, God has made it clear that he values and guards the moral and spiritual health of the community above that of the individual. This was true both in Israel (in the Old Testament) and in the Church (in the New Testament). Therefore, an individual’s right to disobey God in order to “be happy” never trumps the declared will of God for his people (Deut. 19:20, 1 Sam. 2:25, Acts 5:9-11).

10. As followers of Jesus, we are to find our primary identity in Christ, and not in our sexuality or any other distinctions. Christians have rarely identified themselves as *Baptist Christians* or *heterosexual Christians*. We are first and foremost *Christians* who may be Baptists, or who are straight. Therefore, we encourage but do not require Christians who experience same-sex attractions (SSA) to not use the term *gay Christian*. To do so can have the appearance of having a dual allegiance of identity (Eph. 2:19, Gal. 3:26-28, Phil. 3:20).
11. Having read, understood, and considered the best affirming interpretations of Scripture, we have concluded that they do not present a more faithful or compelling Christian vision for human sexuality than the historic Christian view.
12. The church is to be a new community that resembles a family of brothers and sisters united in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, displaying deep relationships of love (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Rom. 12:10; 1 Tim. 5:1-2). Celibacy and singleness—whether by heterosexuals or same-sex attracted men and women—are to be celebrated and affirmed within the church family.
13. The theology of self-denial is based on Christ’s description of what it means to follow him and take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23,24). Any teaching that elevates personal sexual expression and sense of fulfillment over clear Scriptural commands fails to account for Christ’s demand that each of us joyfully suffer the consequences of self-denial and obedience.

Further, Paul’s and Peter’s desire and plea for Christians was to suffer rather than compromise their faith (Luke 9:23, Phil. 3, 1 Peter 3:14-15, Hebrews 11:24-26). Therefore, as we interpret that for our church today, our positions on human sexuality may be very unpopular with some people, both homosexual and heterosexual men and women. It is quite likely that as individuals and as a church we may suffer for holding to them and living by them.

NOTE: You may want to include your church’s position on divorce and remarriage in this *Statement*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these biblical positions did you find most helpful in your understanding of these issues?
2. What teachings or positions were new to you?
3. Are there any of these positions that you question or challenge? Why?
4. Would the young people in your church or your own children say that you “celebrate singleness?” Why or why not?
5. Do you agree that it’s not a sin to be tempted sexually if it doesn’t lead to fantasizing, lust, or the physical act? Why or why not?
6. Do you have any thoughts on cohabitation different from those discussed in this chapter?
7. Does your church exercise discipline for sexual sin? Do you think it does so fairly? Why is excommunication for unrepentant Christians so rarely done today? Is that good or bad?
8. Can you understand why SSA Christians feel that the church appears to consider homosexuality a far worse sin than heterosexual fornication or adultery? Discuss why they might have that perception.

NOTES:

DISCUSSION EIGHT

OUR CHURCH COVENANT—CHANGING THE CULTURE IN YOUR CHURCH

The following are a series of statements we recommend you and your church leaders discuss, pray about, adopt, and make available to the entire congregation. The resulting church covenant will become the map for helping your church become an even more empathetic and loving fellowship to those who experience same-sex attractions without compromising what the Bible teaches. (Unless the leadership of your church has specifically endorsed all these statements, this proposed covenant may not yet accurately reflect your church leadership's viewpoint. In that case, they are being presented here for your evaluation and discussion.)

Sample Church Covenant:

An Introduction and Context

Our churches' *Statement on Human Sexuality* describes what we believe. This Church Covenant describes our aspirations for how we hope Christians who experience same-sex attraction or struggle with gender identity *feel* at our church, and how *we behave* toward them. The leadership of our church is committed to changing the culture within our church to be more empathetic and understanding of those who are navigating same-sex attraction, as well as their families.

If Jesus said the second greatest commandment is "to love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31), as a whole church, we must confess we have not always done that to certain people groups (such as the LGBTQ community).

Jesus was criticized by the religious establishment for associating with those who were perceived as "untouchables." The untouchables of Jesus' day were the people whom religious Jews would never befriend (Luke 15:1-2). To imitate Jesus, we must risk what Jesus risked—our reputation. Our goal is to help our church understand these sexual issues biblically and respond gracefully in order to make Jesus' command to love a reality in our church.

We Believe and Promise...

- A. We welcome anyone who is not yet a Christian, regardless of marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity, to worship with us. You are welcome here! If for any reason you are not received with kindness and dignity, please contact any elder or pastor.
- B. Every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, because each of us bears the image of God. Men and women who experience same-sex attractions (SSA) or are struggling with gender identity deserve this dignity and respect no less than anyone else. We, as Christians, should demonstrate this in our thoughts, speech, and behavior. Words and humor that demean SSA/LGBTQ men and women have no place in our church or the Christian community. Such demeaning words are a sin, and church members are expected to speak out and address this sin whenever it occurs.
- C. We covenant to be a friend of any Christian who experiences SSA. We affirm and echo these thoughts from two gifted Christian writers:

My friend asks me how we help a young person (or old person) struggling with homosexual desires. My answer is to come to the table together. Stand side by side. Share real life together in real time. We do the same thing we would do with any other sister or brother, any other image bearer, and any other soul. We open our hearts and our homes. We open the Word. We answer the phone at midnight... In other words, we listen and we create real and regular friendship.¹

1. Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne. *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ*. Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2015. P. 140.

I have hope because it seems like there are more and more churches where “it’s okay to not be okay...” When you find a group of believers like this, they won’t expect you to be perfect. They will give you room to work out the struggles between you and God. They don’t view themselves as God’s moral security team but instead are more than happy to walk alongside you in the journey. If it gets confusing sometimes when they try to show both grace and truth, well, that’s the way it goes. You’ll have to live in the tension, just like they will.²

- D.** We oppose any mistreatment of those who identify themselves as LGBTQ, whether they are Christians or non-Christians. However, we do not accept that simply holding our biblically based views on same-sex behaviors and marriage is, in and of itself, either homophobic or unloving. God simply does not give us the freedom to accept behaviors he has prohibited.
- E.** We confess that even Christians who attempt to follow biblical mandates on sex and marriage are not immune to expressing our own sexuality in sinful ways, for “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory” (Rom. 3:23). Some heterosexual Christians have committed adultery, have had sex before marriage, cohabitate, sexually abuse women and children, view pornography, divorce for unbiblical reasons, and lust. All these behaviors and attitudes are sin, and if they are known to the church leadership, will be dealt with according to our church’s *Constitution and Policies*.³ However, the fact that immorality exists even in our church and may go unpunished cannot be an individual Christian’s excuse for their own personal immorality. If our church fails to take consistent, timely disciplinary action, please gently remind us, and we will do our best to address it wisely (1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1).
- F.** Many heterosexuals, Christian or not, have a visceral revulsion to same-sex behavior that they do not have toward heterosexual immorality. There may be many reasons for that. However, unless we ask the Holy Spirit to help us, our attitude will be a barrier to making our church a safe place for LGBTQ/SSA men and women. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us grieve all sin equally. However, changing our demeanor does not mean our beliefs have changed.
- G.** We believe a Christian’s primary identity should be in Christ. Therefore, we prefer, but don’t insist, that LGBTQ church members refer to themselves as Christians who experience a same-sex attraction or struggle with gender identity, rather than referring to themselves as a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ) Christian.
- H.** As open and accepting as we hope to be, we do not view a committed heterosexual relationship within marriage as the moral or spiritual equivalent of a committed same-sex relationship—married or not. Some heterosexual acts are sinful, but all same-sex sexual acts are sinful, according to Scripture, even if done in a lawful marriage.
- I.** We are committed to making our church a safe place for transgender and gender non-conforming men and women. As a church, we are less concerned about the potential risks posed by a transgender person than we are from a heterosexual predator, “peeping Tom,” or pedophile using the confusion over gender identity to cause sexual harm or invade the privacy of others. We take seriously this teaching, “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Corinthians 10:24).
- As a church, we will make every effort to accommodate the needs of transgender individuals, while respecting the privacy and safety of all our church members and visitors. Due to the ever-changing laws and recommendations surrounding this issue, please see one of our pastors if you believe the needs of a transgender person are not being met at our church.
- Similar to the experience of SSA, we do not believe Christians need to resolve their gender confusion in order to be in a right relationship with God. A transgender person’s experience may continue throughout their life, even as they grow in their faith. Transgender people are strongly urged to seek out one of our pastors for a referral to a counselor in general alignment with the teachings of this church before any attempt to surgically or hormonally resolve this tension.
- J.** Any church member or visitor who struggles with same-sex attraction (or any other area of temptation) is encouraged to contact any Christ-centered and mature spiritual leader, mentor, or pastor in our church. You will be treated

2. Kaltenbach, Caleb. *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others without Sacrificing Conviction*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2015. P. 152.

3. We, the authors, do not have this policy in this document. Your church may or may not have such a policy. If it does, please use the proper name of that policy here.

respectfully and confidentially. We will offer you biblical counseling or refer you to a counselor/mentor, and we will assist financially to provide that counseling if needed. (Please note that this offer is made to those who struggle with any area of sin.)⁴

- K.** In our church there may be an individual married to someone of the opposite sex and who is also experiencing same-sex attraction. These are often called *mixed-orientation marriages*. We consider those marriages to be biblical, and we'll encourage, but not require, the heterosexual spouse to stay married. Additionally, we encourage the person navigating this SSA tension to contact a Christ-centered and mature counselor, spiritual leader, mentor, or pastor in our church to receive help with what can be a difficult journey.
- L.** We also recognize that there may be people in our church who, although they may have not felt a sexual attraction to their same sex previously, for a variety of reasons have fallen into same-sex behaviors. We are committed to helping them see that having same-sex attractions or even acting on those attractions does not require adopting a homosexual orientation or identity.
- M.** It is commonly believed that if Christians with SSA would only have enough faith, this attraction could be "prayed away." While we know that God, through prayer, and by the use of sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), has reduced the SSA or increased the heterosexual attraction of some Christians, the best evidence leads to the conclusion that, just as not every heterosexual Christian who prays for physical or emotional healing is cured, neither do all SSA Christians experience a partial or complete change in orientation through SOCE and/or prayer. Therefore, our church neither recommends SOCE nor discourages it, but urges caution and good godly counsel before embarking on this therapy. For more information on SOCE, see *Additional Information* at the end of this discussion.
- N.** For the sake of unity, church members who teach or lead others, and who express views contrary to those in our *Statement of Human Sexuality* may be asked to step down from those positions.
- O.** Our church is committed to the safety of all our children. However, almost nowhere is there a wider range of professional opinions than on the question of whether gay men and women are more likely to sexually abuse children. On these three things almost all agree: One, the vast majority of gay men and women would never dream of violating children. Two, almost all pedophiles are men. Three, most sexual abuse against girls is committed by heterosexual men, both in and outside of the church and are most often close friends or family members.⁵
For more on pedophilia, see *Additional Information* at the end of this discussion.
Obviously, no known pedophile or sex offender will be allowed to volunteer in our church in any ministry involving minor children. Our church conducts criminal background checks on all volunteers working with children—both heterosexual and SSA men and women. The church has in place other policies that give us confidence our children are safe. However, no system or policy is 100 percent effective. The best protection against sexual abuse is parents talking to their children and inviting them to report any attempt at a sexual advance by a peer, adolescent, or adult.⁶
Additionally, all volunteers are interviewed, observed, and supervised to assess their emotional, relational and spiritual maturity and judgment. Our church reserves the right to decline the volunteer services of anyone the leadership considers unsuitable for the task or who may pose a potential risk to children.
- P.** The primary principle at stake in the same-sex marriage controversy or about the Bible's prohibition on all sex outside of marriage, heterosexual or homosexual, is not about sex or marriage. It is about the trustworthiness of the Bible and the authority of God to govern our lives through it. If Christians dismiss the verses prohibiting sexual behavior outside of marriage, then what else about which God has said, "you shall not," is no longer true or authoritative today? Our church takes seriously Jesus' reply to Satan, "It is written..." (Matt. 4:4, 1 Tim. 4:1-5, 2 Tim 3:16, 17) Therefore, our *Statement on Human Sexuality* represents our summary of what our church believes the Bible teaches about sexuality.

4. Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015.

5. "Statistics on Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse." Statistics on Perpetrators of CSA. 2012. victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/statistics-on-perpetrators-of-csa. See also "Child Sexual Abuse Statistics" on the same site.

6. "Experts recommend that in order to prevent child abuse of all forms, churches should conduct more than background checks. For example, Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE) recommends that personal safety lessons should be taught to the children, pastors should occasionally talk about the sin of sexual abuse from the pulpit (emphasizing the perpetrator as the only sinner—not the child), and do a more complete, comprehensive background check that includes a review of child protection records, newspaper stories about the worker, employment history, and speaking with persons who have knowledge of the worker. Visit www.netgrace.org/common-questions/#question-1 for more information.

Additional Information

Sex Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE)

There are serious questions about the effectiveness of reparative therapy (also known as sexual orientation change efforts, SOCE) among respected Christian and secular mental health experts.⁷ While some SSA individuals have experienced a lessening of their SSA and/or an increase in heterosexual attraction using these techniques, the self-reported percentage who have experienced change as a result of faith-based therapy is small.⁸ Within this group, the change in sexual attraction or orientation is on a continuum, with some change in attraction, identity, and behavior being far more common than a dramatic switch from full homosexual orientation to full heterosexual orientation.

When change efforts are unsuccessful, tremendous guilt sometimes occurs within the SSA individual. Also, parents and friends hoping for change may feel anger when they believe that the SSA individual just isn't trying hard enough. Despite these risks, some SSA individuals find that the effort to change is worth it, especially when they are personally motivated to change.

Pedophilia

It's helpful to remember that pedophilia and SSA are not the same thing. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), *Pedophilia* is a sexual attraction to prepubescent children (roughly eleven years and younger) by someone sixteen years and older, and is considered an official mental disorder when a person acts on these attractions with a child or is distressed by them.⁹

There is a significant difference between adults who experience attractions toward children (e.g. a five-year-old) and an adult who experiences an attraction toward teenagers who have reached puberty. While both are sins, they are different types of sins. For example, a nineteen-year-old man who has consensual sex with a fifteen-year-old girl commits a sex crime, but that does not make him a pedophile. But if that same man has sex with a nine-year-old, whether a boy or girl, he is considered to be a pedophile.

Additional research indicates that most adult men who are attracted to adult men are not *also* attracted to children. There is a significant difference between these attractions. Likewise, the best research also indicates the even fewer adult women who are attracted to other adult women are also attracted to children.¹⁰ In any case, male or female, heterosexual or straight, to engage in sexual activity with minors is both a sin and a crime, and this church is committed to placing all precautions in place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What misgivings do you have about an open invitation to SSA/LGBTQ individuals to attend your church? How do you think they'd be treated if they attended this weekend?
2. How have the words you or I or others in our church may have used and the stories we've told about SSA people contributed to the impression many of today's young people have that most Christians are homophobic?
3. How might confessing to your children that you have come to a new understanding about SSA individuals and their struggle help your children open up and discuss their own views on the subject?
4. Before reading this discussion guide, did you believe that most Christians attracted to the same sex could be "cured" or change their sexual orientation if they were serious about repenting and being obedient? Have you ever prayed for healing (physical or emotional) or for freedom from some addiction—and not been healed? What's the difference?

7. Beckstead, A. L. "Can we Change Sexual Orientation?" Archives of Sexual Behavior 41.1 (2012): 121-34. ProQuest. Web. 7 Mar. 2016.

8. Jones, Stanton L., and Mark A. Yarhouse. "A Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously Mediated Sexual Orientation Change." Journal of sex & marital therapy 37.5 (2011): 404. Web.

9. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5. Washington, D.C: American Psychiatric Association.

10. Herek, Gregory M., Ph.D. "Facts About Homosexuality and Child Molestation." Facts About Homosexuality and Child Molestation. 2013. psc.dss.ucdavis.edu/faculty_sites/rainbow/HTML/facts_molestation.html

5. Before reading this discussion guide, did you assume most LGBTQ/SSA men and women were also pedophiles? Why? What questions do you still have about this issue?
6. Having completed this discussion guide, would you recommend its ideas to your church? Which would you not?
7. What one or two ideas or new information helped you the most in gaining a better understanding of the same-sex marriage conversation?
8. In what ways do you think you will be more empathetic with SSA people without compromising your biblical beliefs?
9. If a born-again, spiritually mature member of your church experienced SSA and was committed to sexual purity, would your congregation allow him or her to serve in leadership (elder, deacon, committee chair, etc.)? Why or why not?
10. Discuss the difference morally and spiritually between cosmetic plastic surgery for vanity and resolving gender confusion surgically.
11. Do you believe the church ought to try to accommodate the needs of transgender people? Why or why not? What might be the unintended consequences of trying to accommodate them? What message does it send to transgender people if our church makes no attempt to accommodate them?
12. Declaring ourselves to be open to LGBTQ visitors is a far cry from being welcoming and friendly to a LGBTQ person or couple. Do you feel you are now prepared to do that? Why or why not?

NOTES:

OTHER PRACTICAL MATTERS FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF YOUR CHURCH TO CONSIDER

The leaders of churches exploring the use of this material should discuss and pray about the following questions. You may want to include your conclusions in your *Statement on Human Sexuality* or your Church Covenant or another policy.

1. At what levels will you allow affirming or non-affirming, Christian LGBTQ/SSA men and women to serve and lead in your church? What if they are same-sex attracted and seeking purity versus *affirming*, LGBTQ Christians? Fairness is a high value for Christians with SSA. Please treat them just as you would other types of imperfect-but-struggling Christians in your church. For example, if you know a man struggles with heterosexual pornography but is committed to Jesus, repentance, and submission of his desires to the Lord, can he serve and lead? What if another man, equally spiritually mature and equally committed to Jesus, repentance, and submission of his desires to the Lord, was struggling with homosexual pornography? Will these men (or women), based on the difference in their temptations, be treated differently with regard to serving and leading?
2. What is your plan for extending the Gospel message to those in the LGBTQ community?
3. If a married person confesses to having same-sex attractions, should you keep that information from their spouse, or should you inform them? If a heterosexual spouse wants a divorce due to the discovery of a spouse with SSA, what would your position be?
4. If an LGBTQ person comes to faith after they have had a same-sex marriage, will you require them to repent and divorce, or will you allow them to confess that sin and continue in the marriage? What if there are children involved?
5. You may want to review your church's position on transgender men and women, specifically the attempt by some to surgically or hormonally change their physical bodies to correspond with their gender identity.

While we (the authors) affirm God's intent for men and women to live out the gender determined by their biological sex, we also recognize that some need support from mental health professionals and their faith community to find ways to manage significant, ongoing distress related to feeling like the other gender (Gen.1:27). Whatever your approach to serving transgender persons in your church, we urge you to place a high priority on building safe relationships with them. For an accessible, professional, and biblically informed resource on how to understand, counsel, and support transgender persons in your community or church, please read *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* by Mark Yarhouse. We recommend that a pastor or several church leaders study this issue thoroughly before advising any transgender person or their parents.

Due to the ever-changing legal issues surrounding bathroom and locker room laws, the authors recommend you review the latest information at Liberty Counsel (www.lc.org) or the Christian Legal Society (www.clsnet.org).

6. If minors in student ministries confide to a leader that they are attracted to someone of the same sex, do you have an obligation to inform their parents? Likewise, would your church provide Christ-centered counseling for minors (under age eighteen) without informing their parents? We're not suggesting sending minor children to professional counseling outside your church. However, you may have trained professionals in your church who are willing to meet with a child and a pastor/youth leader to give unpaid counsel.

We, the authors, based on what we've been told by professionals and also on our own firsthand experiences, believe that middle- and high-school students are much freer and better able to confess struggles with SSA and other sensitive issues to youth leaders (and to seek church counsel) when they know there is a protective layer of confidentiality and privacy. Therefore, your church may consider adding the following language to parental consent and liability waivers or to the information given to all middle- or high-school parents:

In an effort to encourage your child and others in our youth ministry to confide in a youth leader or pastor about sexual, drug, or alcohol behaviors, or other temptations they are experiencing, and in order to help them to the best of our ability, we are informing you that our standard ministry practice is to treat the admission of these kinds of behaviors or temptations by your child as confidential. This confidentiality does not extend to serious suicidal thoughts, sexual, or physical abuse, or felony acts being contemplated—other than illegal drug or alcohol possession. Our church is required by law to report any abuse against minors, sexual or physical, to the police or other civil authorities.

The pastors, youth leaders, or mental-health-care professional volunteers from our church will provide your child with advice and materials to address their issue. We will also strongly encourage them to inform you of their struggle, and will offer our assistance to meet with you, their parents, so that you can walk with them through these temptations and obtain professional, biblical counseling for them.

I have been informed of the standard confidentiality/privacy practices of (name of church) Youth Ministry. Leaders and pastors at (name of the church) may discuss a sin or behavioral issue with my (our) child, and give them biblical advice/counsel without informing me (us) beforehand.

Child's Name _____

Father/Guardian's Signature

Mother/Guardian's Signature

Date

Date

REMINDER: The authors are not attorneys; each church should consult an attorney before initiating any parental consent waiver program.

APPENDIX B

SIX OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOUR CHURCH CAN DO TO BE PROACTIVE

In reaction to the Supreme Court ruling, almost every evangelical church in America has completed or is working on a statement about same-sex marriage and homosexuality. Most of these statements simply define that church's biblical position on homosexuality—what they believe. Rarely is there a comprehensive plan to make churches as gay or SSA friendly as the Bible teaches—*how* they ought to live out what they say they believe.)

Here are six important things your church can do to be more proactive:

1. Write a statement on human sexuality.

Use in part or in whole what we have provided in Discussion Seven. No matter what you choose to keep from that discussion, every church ought to examine the Scriptures and clearly articulate what they believe the Bible teaches on these issues. That statement ought also to address heterosexual sin, which is undoubtedly a far more prevalent temptation in your church than same-sex lusts, actions, or any form of gender confusion.

2. Write a church covenant.

A church covenant is a series of declarations of intent that defines how your church intends to live out what your statement on human sexuality has declared to be true. This covenant will become the blueprint for changing the culture in your church.

If you choose to develop a covenant, we recommend you begin by evaluating the ideas and declarations in Discussion Eight in this discussion guide to determine which of these statements you desire be included in your own church covenant.

3. Appoint a task force.

Church leaders should appoint a small group of spiritually mature, respected influencers to coordinate your church's response and to remain on that task force until all recommendations approved by the leadership have been implemented. The primary mission of the task force will be to develop a plan to educate your congregation so that they can articulate not only what your church believes on this subject, but also how your members ought to respond with both truth and gentleness. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

We recommend that this task force go through this Discussion Guide and at least one of following resources, and thoroughly educates themselves on this subject:

- a. *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality* by Kevin DeYoung, Crossway, 2015
- b. *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church* by Ed Shaw, InterVarsity Press Books, 2015
- c. *When Homosexuality Hits Home* by Joe Dallas, Harvest House Publishers, 2015
- d. *A People to be Loved* by Preston Sprinkle, Zondervan, 2015
- e. *Torn* by Justin Lee, Jericho Books, 2012 (This is an important book by an affirming Christian, and the president of gayChristian.net. While you will disagree with many of Justin's ideas, it will introduce you to the worldview of an affirming Christian. It will also give your task force credibility with affirming Christians having read it.)

i. Other Recommended Books:

Compassion Without Compromise by Adam Barr and Ron Citlau
The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert by Rosaria Butterfield

Washed and Waiting by Wesley Hill

Messy Grace by Caleb Kaltenbach

Homosexuality and the Christian by Mark Yarhouse

Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture by Mark Yarhouse

Out of a Far Country by Christopher Yuan

- ii. Additionally, we urge all task force and leadership staff to go to www.gaychristians.net and acquaint themselves with gay-affirming arguments on the largest gay Christian website in the world.
- iii. It be helpful to read Wesley Hill, Matt Jones, Eve Tushnet and other Christians who experience same-sex attractions and are celibate at www.spiritualfriendship.org.
- iv. The Gospel Coalition has a helpful list of articles on their site titled “50 Resources for Equipping the Church on Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage.” Visit it here: www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/50-resources-for-equipping-the-church-on-homosexuality-and-same-sex-marriage

4. Educate your church.

Church leadership

Strongly encourage all pastoral staff, elders, deacons, and other leaders in your church to read, discuss and teach from this Discussion Guide and from some of the resources recommended by the task force.

Small groups

We recommend encouraging the use of the Small Group Edition of this study in your church. You may also consider using all eight discussions in this *Leadership Edition* to lead a small group or class. *Compassion Without Compromise* by Barr/Citlau is another fine small group study. On their website is a free study guide with a short video for each chapter.¹ Finally, we recommend the *Culture Shock* curriculum from Chip Ingram. Chip has two video sessions and a workbook entitled, *What Do You Say To a Gay Friend?* Both resources are excellent.²

Regardless of which study you select, we highly recommend that you choose someone to lead any discussion or teaching who has some familiarity with this topic. Questions will be raised by the group that the typical Bible teacher may not be able to answer. Ideally your task force would appoint and make available to any groups within your church one or two members who have the gift of teaching, have a fairly in-depth understanding of the material covered in this Discussion Guide.

The congregation

Not everyone in your church will participate in a small group adult Sunday school discussion on this topic. For those who do not, and to let your members know changing the culture of your church is a priority for the leadership, we strongly recommend a sermon series on this subject followed by a small group discussion.

Your church may also consider sponsoring a special Wednesday or Sunday evening series on these topics where people can discuss and process what is being taught.

Youth

The selected Task Force should select a middle-school and high-school curriculum that directly addresses all forms of sexuality; that curriculum should be taught every two years (at a minimum). The goal of this teaching is to do more than educate about the theology of sexuality. It should prepare all your students before they head off to college or into the workplace to represent truth and expose false teaching with confidence and grace. It should also provide an open invitation for any student struggling with same-sex attraction, gender identity, or heterosexual lusts to confide in a trained advisor volunteer in your group.

NOTE: The authors hope to produce a Student Edition of this Discussion Guide early 2017. In the meantime, you have a few options: You could use the Small Group Edition of this study for students. Or, you could produce one of your own using much of the information in the Small Group Edition, but edited using language and illustrations that work better for students. You have the permission of the authors to do so without cost. However, please put the following statement at the top of your own student edition: *This material has been edited with permission from our church, and may no longer reflect the opinions of the authors.*

1. Visit www.compassionwithoutcompromise.com for more information.

2. Visit www.livingontheedge.org/ for more information.

Additionally, Preston Sprinkle has written *Living in a Gray World: A Christian Teen Guide's to Understanding Homosexuality*. Reading through it with small groups of students and pairing it with some helpful study questions could be a valuable way to both teach and talk about these issues.

5. Make it safe for people experiencing SSA to get the help they need.

- We encourage you to foster an environment in your church that makes it safe for people to confess their struggle with any sin. To accomplish this, you will need to institute a culture of empathy in your entire congregation, a culture that responds to the SSA individual similarly to how it would respond to someone who admits a struggle with alcohol, drugs, pornography, or sex outside of a heterosexual marriage. Empathy is not approval of their behavior. It's the understanding that every Christian wrestles with behaviors that God has prohibited and has been given the ability to resist that sin by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Assign at least one woman and one man to the middle- and high-school ministry who are knowledgeable and sensitive enough to meet with students struggling with LGBTQ issues. Introduce these people to all your students at least once a year (and provide their contact information) as a safe, confidential resource that students are encouraged to contact.
- Identify a pastor or trained layperson with whom adults in your church can meet to confidentially discuss their journey with same-sex attraction. Make this person and their contact information widely known.
- Identify a local Christian therapist who is trained to walk alongside SSA men and women biblically and kindly. One way to ensure the person offering advice to those you care about aligns with your perspective of the LGBTQ/SSA conversation is to interview him or her, and/or give them a copy of your Statement on Human Sexuality or your Church Covenant, and ask if he or she agrees with your theology. Once approved, make that person's contact information known.

6. Take reasonable steps to protect your children and your church.

We recommend a small group made up of a pastor, your Director of Children's Ministry, an attorney and ideally a psychiatrist, or psychologist, review best practices for child safety, including policies regarding screening and oversight of volunteers in children's ministry.³

Our recommendations for protecting students and children from sexual abuse⁴:

- Acquaint all your children and student ministry leaders with how to recognize warning signs and protect oneself from sexual abuse. Below, you'll find a link to a blog at Family Talk Today titled *How to Protect Your Kids from Sexual Abuse*.⁵
- Criminal background checks should be mandatory for all church employees and children's volunteers. This should be done in all churches. In fact, we would not attend a church that did not do this as a matter of policy. However, these background checks identify only those who have been convicted.
- Establish a "Two-Person Policy" for everyone—no matter his or her struggle. Simply stated, this practice never permits one adult to be alone with a minor child. This applies to nursery, Sunday School, Bible studies, retreats, or mission trips. Mentoring may be an exception if the mentor and student meet in a public place.
- All volunteers working with children through high school should be interviewed by a pastor or qualified staff person to determine their emotional and spiritual maturity. The leader should inform the volunteer of all policies in writing for protecting children.
- For children and young adults twelve years of age and older, we recommend that student ministry leaders annually make an announcement to this effect: "Your bodies belong to God and yourself. If anyone, including a family member, family friend, a church volunteer, or a pastor here at church ever touch you inappropriately or suggest any sexual activity of any kind with you, please report it immediately both to any pastor in the church and to your parents."

3. Here are two articles two opposing views you may want to read: from the Family Research Council, downloads.frc.org/EF/EF08L46.pdf, and from a UC Davis professor, psc.dss.ucdavis.edu/faculty_sites//rainbow/HTML/facts_molestation.html

4. Most sexual abuse is committed by heterosexual men, not LGBTQ men. Nevertheless, great care should be taken to protect the children of your church from any predator.

5. Farrel, Bill and Pam. "How to Protect Your Kids from Sexual Abuse." Family Talk Sirius XM 131. September 13, 2013. www.familytalktoday.com/parenting/11698791/

Building awareness annually of the possibility of sexual abuse, as with this announcement, may scare potential abusers. More importantly, you've sent a clear signal that even the suggestion of immoral sexual activity is wrong and that it should be reported.

Additional materials and ideas helpful for your church to protect against possible litigation:

- Appendix C: Sample Wedding Policy
- We also highly recommend that leaders of your church read *Church Guidelines for Same-Sex Issues* from the Christian Legal Society, as well as the resources available from the Liberty Counsel. It will help protect your church from potential needless conflict and litigation.⁶

NOTE: Neither Clare De Graaf and Laurie Krieg are attorneys. Churches should consult with their own attorney for guidance on all of these issues.

6. This can be found on Christian Legal Society's page as a PDF here: clsnet.org/document.doc?id=863

A SAMPLE WEDDING POLICY

Your church should feel free to adapt the following sample *Wedding Policy* for your use:

Introduction

___CHURCH NAME___ celebrates every time two believers decide to enter into a marriage relationship. But because there is disagreement in society regarding whom God allows to be married, there are some pre-conditions for those who wish to be married at ___CHURCH NAME___, as well as for those who desire to be married by one of our Pastors at another church or facility. The elders at our church, based on our Statement of Doctrine, which is based on what we believe to be the Bible's teaching, have approved the following as ___CHURCH NAME___'s policy on weddings.

___CHURCH NAME___ Statement on Marriage [Sample]

Marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society, established by God as a one-flesh, covenantal union between a man and a woman. It is lifelong (until separated by death¹), exclusive (monogamous and faithful), generative in nature (designed for bearing and rearing children²), and is to reflect the relationship between Christ and his Church.

Only marriages as defined by the ___CHURCH NAME___ Statement on Marriage may be conducted on our church property or officiated by our pastoral staff. Only marriages so defined will be recognized as true Christian marriages by our church for the purpose of membership or ministry.

Our position on marriage is based on our Doctrinal Statement. Therefore, we regard any expectations, restrictions, or definitions we apply in our church concerning Christian living, marriage, membership and discipline of members to be the exercise of our rights under the freedom of religion and free speech clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Those beliefs translate into the following practices at ___CHURCH NAME___:

A Christian Who Desires to be Married to Someone Who is Not a Christian

Our church believes that the Bible requires that believers marry only another believer (2 Cor. 6:14, 1 Cor. 7:39). As a result, our pastors will not officiate a wedding between a believer and a non-believer, and our church reserves the sole right to make the determination of who is or is not a believer, based on the recommendation of our pastoral staff.

Cohabiting Christians

The Bible, according to the best understanding of our church, teaches that an unmarried couple should not live together prior to marriage. Because of this understanding of God's design for holy and healthy living, we will work with a cohabiting, engaged couple to explore the best ways to move toward God's intentions during the engagement process. However, our church does not permit the marriage of cohabiting Christians who do not follow the instructions of the pastoral staff.

1. At (___CHURCH NAME___), there are circumstances under which we recognize a biblical divorce, which allows for re-marriage, but we believe that was not God's original intent.

2. This is still true whether a couple is able or intends to have children. Procreation was one of God's original intentions for marriage. (Gen. 1:27, 28)

Previous Marriage(s) and Divorce(s)

In situations where there has been a previous marriage for one or both parties of the engaged couple, care will be taken to understand the circumstances of the divorce with a view to ascertaining if a remarriage is biblically permissible. If one or both of the engaged individuals have been previously married, please refer to our policy, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Membership of Divorced Persons and Service of Divorced Persons*.³

Affirmations/Membership

Our church will only conduct marriages if at least one of the people being married is a member of CHURCH NAME, or one or more are the children of active members. However, both the groom and the bride must agree to affirm the CHURCH NAME *Statement of Doctrine* as their own biblical beliefs, declare that they meet the moral qualifications found in this Wedding Policy, and voluntarily disclose anything that might disqualify them from marriage under this policy.

Preparing for Marriage

All engaged couples are required to attend the program NAME THE PROGRAM or complete pre-marital or remarriage counseling. Information from your premarital or remarriage counseling must be shared with the pastor who marries you. Our pastors reserve the right to refuse to marry any engaged couple if information comes to be known that violates any provision of the CHURCH NAME *Statement of Doctrine* or this policy.

Our church has additional requirements for hosting a wedding at our facility, which are covered under other policies or descriptions of services and are available at our church.

I (we) have read this CHURCH NAME Wedding Policy and I (we) have read the CHURCH NAME *Statement of Doctrine*. I (we) not only agree with the Statement of Doctrine but pledge that we meet the requirements for a Christian marriage as stated in this Wedding Policy.⁴

Groom:

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Bride:

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Approved for Marriage [Pastoral Staff]:

Subject to the provisions of this Wedding Policy

Name _____

Signature _____

Title _____ Date _____

3. We, the authors, do not have such a policy in this document. Your church may have one. If it does, please use the proper name of that policy here.

4. We, the authors, are not attorneys, and we strongly urge you to get outside legal counsel before approving this or any *Wedding Policy*.