

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

SMALL GROUP EDITION

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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.

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.

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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, Small Group Edition—
DRAFT COPY

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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.

If your church leadership is encouraging you to educate yourself using this Discussion Guide, then you attend church 3. Your leaders know how important it is to get this right today.

We have an agenda

We call each chapter a “discussion” because we hope to foster honest discussions about one of the most misunderstood groups, and encourage healthy conversation regarding one of the most volatile issues 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.

We are not going to have a discussion for discussion’s sake. We have an agenda: We hope to lay a solid foundation for the theological position 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 in the tension of grace without compromising an iota of truth or love. The first step in such a process begins by simply seeing the truth that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) men and women are a people to be loved, not an issue to be debated. Yes, we will talk about the “issues” surrounding homosexuality that affect us, but we hope to do so with the real, human, made-in-God’s-image people in mind.

As we go through the pages of this discussion, it may surprise you to hear that not all LGBT people see or believe the same things about their sexuality or faith, just as if you are *straight* or *heterosexual* and reading this, you may not have the same beliefs about your sexuality or faith as your straight or heterosexual neighbor. We all approach one another with biases, beliefs, misinformation, and personal experiences that have shaped our opinions about one another. In these discussions, we hope to address many of these misconceptions.

Letting God be our teacher

Before you begin reading, we want to ask you to seek the Holy Spirit to teach you. Ask God for wisdom and discernment. We understand that even having conversations about homosexuality can be intimidating and bring up a lot of personal anxiety. Ask God to give you his eyes, heart, and attitude for these men and women created in his image. Also ask him to convict you of any non-Christ-like, homophobic (hatred

or fear of gay men and women) thoughts and stereotypes that may hinder your ability to hear from him. We believe that simply opening up your ears to hear God’s heart on this topic could not only change you, but could change your family and the tone of your church for the better.

“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” —James 3:17

As you move through each of these discussions, we hope that you and your church will grow more confident in what you believe, and more grace-filled in how you practically live that out.

Let’s get started!

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

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. 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,

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.

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. ???

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.

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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.

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.

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?