

LGBTQIA+ RESOURCES 4 MINISTRY

www.visitaec.org/relationshipmin

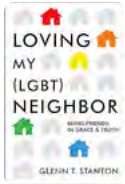


RELATIONSHIP MINISTRIES
ALLEGHENY EAST CONFERENCE
— A FAMILY OF MINISTRIES —

*T*he Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual community represents a diverse range of identities and expressions of gender and sexual orientation. It is essential in ministering to the community to have an informed perspective. These included resources are in no way an endorsement of any viewpoint on human sexuality, gender, or loving relationships. It is meant to provide a wide range of resources to assist PASTORS engaged in local church ministry to have exposure to a wide array of thoughts, ideas, and scriptural interpretations. The resources include perspectives on both liberal, conservative, Christian, secular, and Historical Adventist Viewpoints.

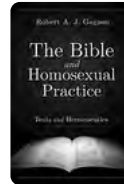
SUGGESTED READING

These books are simply listed randomly by title and represent a cross spectrum of thoughts and ideas.



Loving My (LGBT) Neighbor: Being Friends in Grace and Truth

By: Glenn Stanton



The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics

Robert A. J. Gagnon



Compassion without Compromise: How the Gospel Frees Us to Love Our Gay Friends Without Losing the Truth

Adam T. Barr , Ron Citlau , et al.



Straight Answers to the Gay Questions: Having Been There

Victor J. Adamson



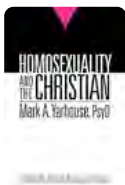
Born Again This Way: Coming out, coming to faith, and what comes next

By: Rachel Gilson



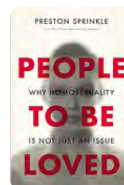
Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions About Jesus, the Bible, and Same-Sex Sexuality

By: Sam Allberry



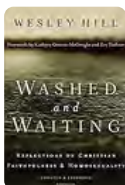
Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends

By: Mark A. Yarhouse



People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue

By: Preston Sprinkle



Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality

By: Wesley Hill, Kathryn Greene-McCreight and Eve Tushnet



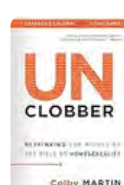
For the Bible Tells Me So: the Biblical-theological Necessity of LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Church

By: Katie Hays



Ex-gays?: A longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation

By: Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse



Unclobber: Rethinking our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality

By: Colby Martin



Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church's Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality

By: Greg Johnson



Rethinking Sexuality: God's Design and Why It Matters

By: Jill Slattery



My Jesus Loves Gays: Why Bible-Believing Christians Should Love and Accept LGBTQ People

By: Robert Williams



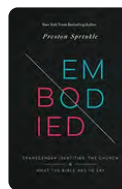
When Children Come Out: A Guide for Christian Parents

By: Mark Yarhouse and Olya Zaporozhets



What Does it Mean to be Welcoming? Navigating LGBT Questions in Your Church

By: Travis Collins



Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say

By: Preston Sprinkle



Us versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community

By: Andrew Marin



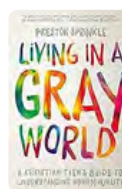
The Bible and LGBTQ Adventists: A Theological Conversation About Same-sex Marriage, Gender, and Identity

By: Alicia Johnston



Talking to Kids about Gender Identity: A Roadmap for Christian Compassion, Civility, and Conviction

By: Mark A. Yarhouse



Living in a Gray World: A Christian Teen's Guide to Understanding Homosexuality

By: Preston Sprinkle



Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been

By: Jackie Hill Perry



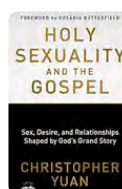
For the Bible Tells Me So: the Biblical-theological Necessity of LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Church

By: Katie Hays



Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church

By: Bridget Rivera




Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story

By: Christopher Yuan


RESOURCES




Seventh-day Adventist Official Statement on Sexual Behavior
Seventh-day Adventist Official Statement on Transgenderism
Seventh-day Adventist Official Statement on Homosexuality



An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and
Pastoral Care - Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position
Paper



A Christian Conversation Guide: Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces
for People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender - Human
Rights Campaign Foundation



Homosexuality, Scripture and the Church - Biblical Research Institute



Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones - Adventist Edition



Sexual Behavior

**OFFICIAL STATEMENTS
OCTOBER 12, 1987**

In His infinite love and wisdom God created mankind, both male and female, and in so doing based human society on the firm foundation of loving homes and families.

It is Satan's purpose, however, to pervert every good thing; and the perversion of the best inevitably leads to that which is worst. Under the influence of passion unrestrained by moral and religious principle, the association of the sexes has, to a deeply disturbing extent, degenerated into license and abuse which results in bondage. With the aid of many films, television, video, radio programs, and printed materials, the world is being steered on a course to new depths of shame and depravity. Not only is the basic structure of society being greatly damaged but also the breakdown of the family fosters other gross evils. The results in distorted lives of children and youth are distressing and evoke our pity, and the effects are not only disastrous but also cumulative.

These evils have become more open and constitute a serious and growing threat to the ideals and purposes of the Christian home. Sexual practices which are contrary to God's expressed will are adultery and premarital sex, as well as obsessive sexual behavior. Sexual abuse of spouses, sexual abuse of children, incest, homosexual practices (gay and lesbian), and bestiality are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan. As the intent of clear passages of Scripture (see Ex 20:14; Lev 18:22,23,29 and 20:13; Matthew 5:27,28; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Rom 1:20-32) is denied and as their warnings are rejected in exchange for human opinions, much uncertainty and

confusion prevail. This is what Satan desires. He has always attempted to cause people to forget that when God as Creator made Adam, He also created Eve to be Adam's female companion ("male and female he created them" Gen 1:24 NEB). In spite of the clear moral standards set forth in God's Word for relationships between man and woman, the world today is witnessing a resurgence of the perversions and depravity that marked ancient civilizations.

The degrading results of the obsession of this age with sex and the pursuit of sensual pleasure are clearly described in the Word of God. But Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and reestablish the right relationship of human beings with each other and with their Creator. Thus, though fallen in Adam and captive to sin, those who turn to Christ in repentance receive full pardon and choose the better way, the way to complete restoration. By means of the cross, the power of the Holy Spirit in the "inner man," and the nurturing ministry of the Church, all may be freed from the grip of perversions and sinful practices.

An acceptance of God's free grace inevitably leads the individual believer to the kind of life and conduct that "will add luster to the doctrine of our God and Saviour" (Titus 2:10 NEB). It will also lead the corporate church to firm and loving discipline of the member whose conduct misrepresents the Saviour and distorts and lowers the true standards of Christian life and behavior.

The Church recognizes the penetrating truth and powerful motivations of Paul's words to Titus: "For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind; and by it we are disciplined to renounce godless ways and worldly desires, and to live a life of temperance, honesty, and godliness in the present age, looking forward to the happy fulfilment of our hope when the splendor of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus will appear. He it is who sacrificed himself for us, to set us free from all wickedness and to make us a pure people marked out for his own, eager to do good."—Titus 2:11-14, NEB. (See also 2 Peter 3:11-14.)

This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Washington, D.C., October 12, 1987.

**One Humanity: A Human Relations Statement
Addressing Racism, Casteism, Tribalism, and
Ethnocentrism**

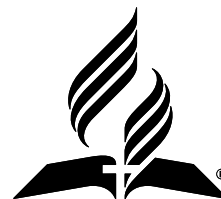
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OFFICIAL STATEMENTS SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

**Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life
and Its Implications for Abortion**

VOTED, To adopt the document, Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life and Its Implications for Abortion, which reads as follows: Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life and Its Implications for Abortion...

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OCTOBER 16, 2019



Statement on Transgenderism

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS APRIL 12, 2017

The increasing awareness of the needs and challenges that transgender men and women experience and the rise of transgender issues to social prominence worldwide raise important questions not only for those affected by the transgender phenomenon but also for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While the struggles and challenges of those identifying as transgender people have some elements in common with the struggles of all human beings, we recognize the uniqueness of their situation and the limitation of our knowledge in specific instances. Yet, we believe that Scripture provides principles for guidance and counsel to transgender people and the Church, transcending human conventions and culture.

THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON

In modern society, gender identity typically denotes “the public (and usually legally recognized) lived role as boy or girl, man or woman,” while sex refers “to the biological indicators of male and female.”¹ Gender identification usually aligns with a person’s biological sex at birth. However, misalignment may happen at the physical and/or mental-emotional levels.

On the physical level ambiguity in genitalia may result from anatomical and physiological abnormalities so that it cannot be clearly established whether a child is male or female. This ambiguity of anatomical sexual differentiation is often called hermaphroditism or intersexualism.²

On the mental-emotional level misalignment occurs with transgender people whose sexual anatomy is clearly male or female but who identify with the opposite gender of their biological sex. They may describe themselves as being trapped in a wrong body. Transgenderism, formerly clinically diagnosed as “gender identity disorder” and now termed “gender dysphoria,” may be understood as a general term to describe the variety of ways individuals interpret and express their gender identity differently from those who determine gender on the basis of biological sex.³ “Gender dysphoria is manifested in a variety of ways, including strong desires to be treated as the other gender or to be rid of one’s sex characteristics, or a strong conviction that one has feelings and reactions typical of the other gender.”⁴

Due to contemporary trends to reject the biblical gender binary (male and female) and replace it with a growing spectrum of gender types, certain choices triggered by the transgender condition have come to be regarded as normal and accepted in contemporary culture. However, the desire to change or live as a person of another gender may result in biblically inappropriate lifestyle choices. Gender dysphoria may, for instance, result in cross-dressing,⁵ sex reassignment surgery, and the desire to have a marital relationship with a person of the same biological sex. On the other hand, transgender people may suffer silently, living a celibate life or being married to a spouse of the opposite sex.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO SEXUALITY AND THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON

As the transgender phenomenon must be evaluated by Scripture, the following biblical principles and teachings may help the community of faith relate to people affected by gender dysphoria in a biblical and Christ-like way:

1. God created humanity as two persons who are respectively identified as male and female in terms of gender. The Bible inextricably ties gender to biological sex (Gen 1:27; 2:22-24) and does not make a distinction between the two. The Word of God affirms

complementarity as well as clear distinctions between male and female in creation. The Genesis creation account is foundational to all questions of human sexuality.

2. From a biblical perspective, the human being is a psychosomatic unity. For example, Scripture repeatedly calls the entire human being a soul (Gen 2:7; Jer 13:17; 52:28-30; Ezek 18:4; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 15:45), a body (Eph 5:28; Rom 12:1-2; Rev 18:13), flesh (1 Pet 1:24), and spirit (2 Tim 4:22; 1 John 4:1-3). Thus, the Bible does not endorse dualism in the sense of a separation between one's body and one's sense of sexuality. In addition, an immortal part of humans is not envisioned in Scripture because God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim 6:14-16) and will bestow it on those who believe in Him at the first resurrection (1 Cor 15:51-54). Thus, a human being is also meant to be an undivided sexual entity, and sexual identity cannot be independent from one's body. According to Scripture, our gender identity, as designed by God, is determined by our biological sex at birth (Gen 1:27; 5:1-2; Ps 139:13-14; Mark 10:6).
3. Scripture acknowledges, however, that due to the Fall (Gen 3:6-19) the whole human being — that is, our mental, physical, and spiritual faculties — are affected by sin (Jer 17:9; Rom 3:9; 7:14-23; 8:20-23; Gal 5:17) and need to be renewed by God (Rom 12:2). Our emotions, feelings, and perceptions are not fully reliable indicators of God's designs, ideals, and truth (Prov 14:12; 16:25). We need guidance from God through Scripture to determine what is in our best interest and live according to His will (2 Tim 3:16).
4. The fact that some individuals claim a gender identity incompatible with their biological sex reveals a serious dichotomy. This brokenness or distress, whether felt or not, is an expression of the damaging effects of sin on humans and may have a variety of causes. Although gender dysphoria is not intrinsically sinful, it may result in sinful choices. It is another indicator that, on a personal level, humans are involved in the great controversy.
5. As long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to the biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Bible clearly and

consistently identifies any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage as sin (Matt 5:28, 31-32; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Heb 13:4). Alternative sexual lifestyles are sinful distortions of God's good gift of sexuality (Rom 1:21-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10).

6. Because the Bible regards humans as wholistic entities and does not differentiate between biological sex and gender identity, the Church strongly cautions transgender people against sex reassignment surgery and against marriage, if they have undergone such a procedure. From the biblical wholistic viewpoint of human nature, a full transition from one gender to another and the attainment of an integrated sexual identity cannot be expected in the case of sex reassignment surgery.
7. The Bible commands followers of Christ to love everyone. Created in the image of God, they must be treated with dignity and respect. This includes transgender people. Acts of ridicule, abuse, or bullying towards transgender people are incompatible with the biblical commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).
8. The Church as the community of Jesus Christ is meant to be a refuge and place of hope, care, and understanding to all who are perplexed, suffering, struggling, and lonely, for "a bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench" (Matt 12:20). All people are invited to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church and enjoy the fellowship of its believers. Those who are members can fully participate in church life as long as they embrace the message, mission, and values of the Church.
9. The Bible proclaims the good news that sexual sins committed by heterosexuals, homosexuals, transgender people, or others can be forgiven, and lives can be transformed through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11).
10. Those who experience incongruity between their biological sex and gender identity are encouraged to follow biblical principles in dealing with their distress. They are invited to reflect on God's original plan of purity and sexual fidelity. Belonging to God, all are called to honor Him with their bodies and their lifestyle

choices (1 Cor 6:19). With all believers, transgender people are encouraged to wait on God and are offered the fullness of divine compassion, peace, and grace in anticipation of Christ's soon return when all true followers of Christ will be completely restored to God's ideal.

1. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (DSM-5TM), edited by the American Psychiatric Association (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 451.[↩]
2. Those born with ambiguous genitalia may or may not benefit from corrective surgical treatment.[↩]
3. See DSM-5TM, 451-459.[↩]
4. This sentence is part of a succinct summary of gender dysphoria provided to introduce DSM-5TM that was published in 2013 (accessed April 11, 2017).[↩]
5. Cross-dressing, also referred to as transvestite behavior, is prohibited in Deuteronomy 22:5.[↩]

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One Humanity: A Human Relations Statement Addressing Racism, Casteism, Tribalism, and Ethnocentrism

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OFFICIAL STATEMENTS SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

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OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OCTOBER 16, 2019

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12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring, MD
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Homosexuality

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

OCTOBER 17, 2012

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev 18:5-23, 26; Lev 20:7-21; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and 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?" So they are no longer two, but one'" (Matt 19:5, NIV). For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Jesus affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices. As His disciples, Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the Lord's instruction and example, living a life of Christ-like compassion and faithfulness.

This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, October 3, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Revised by the General Conference Executive Committee, October 17, 2012.

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An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper

Marriage was divinely instituted in the Garden of Eden at Creation, and it is a special gift to humanity from a loving God from before the Fall. The design of our Creator for marriage was to satisfy the deepest human needs and longings for love, intimacy, joy, care, and appreciation. “The Bible opens and closes with marriage. Genesis presents marriage as the first institution ... while the last chapters of Revelation use marriage as a metaphor to portray the relationship between Christ and His people. Significantly, marriage is uniquely positioned at the end of the creation week to underscore God’s ideal for the human race.”¹

Unfortunately, the sacredness, beauty and relevancy of marriage is diminished as never before in contemporary culture, society, and law, because the growing influence of a secular sexual ideology and practice have undermined biblical standards of sexual morality and family relations. Premarital sex, marital unfaithfulness, spousal abuse, promiscuity, pornography, cohabitation, and the “liberated” lifestyle of many married people have brought the institution of marriage into a deep crisis. Thus, God’s ideal for humanity has been perverted.

In addition, various alternate sexualities, including homosexuality, bisexuality, and the variety of transgender identities have become increasingly mainstream. Over the years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has responded to society’s rapidly changing sexual landscape with a number of official statements and relevant publications.² These have re-affirmed God’s plan for sexual relations as being reserved for the relationship between one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage, a covenant that should not be terminated except for the death or unfaithfulness of one of the partners.

God calls His followers to an abundant and holy life. “God did not call us to impurity but holiness” (1Thess 4:7; Heb 14:14).³ Jesus Christ died for sinners that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV). God’s glory is to embrace sinners and to invite them to follow Him. He desires each person to reflect His character by “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13 NIV). His message to broken and fragile people is always redemptive. He summons us to holiness (1 Thess 4:3), so that our lives may flourish (John 10:10) and we may bring glory to Him in all spheres of life (1 Cor 10:31) including marriage and sexuality. Thus Scripture teaches us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that He lives in us (Col 1:16). He wants to be the Lord of our lives, marriages, and sexuality.

We, the Seminary faculty, bring this document before you not because we think that only homosexual practice is offensive to God and not heterosexual immorality, but because the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage has become a special focus of public attention in recent

¹ Willie and Elaine Oliver, “An Introduction: The Beauty of Marriage,” in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects* (ed, Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza; Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 1.

² See official Church statements on marriage, homosexuality, and same-sex unions at <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/>.

³ Unless otherwise noted, biblical citations are from the NRSV.

years. In response to the growing societal pressure for the Church to normalize homosexual behavior in terms of membership, leadership, employment, curriculum standards, and other areas, the Seminary faculty believes that it has a duty to clearly set forth the teachings of Scripture regarding these matters and provide a biblical perspective on this recent debate. Therefore, although much could be said on a range of issues relating to sexuality, this statement is limited to the issue of homosexual practice. It does not purport to answer all questions related to this challenging issue but seeks to lay out a biblically based position while demonstrating a respectful and caring attitude toward gay and lesbian persons⁴ in order to help guide the Church's response to this delicate topic.

The intent of this document, which we humbly submit for thoughtful and prayerful study, is not to judge but to clearly set forth what Scripture teaches concerning homosexual practices and offer guidelines on how to interact with persons of same-sex orientation. Therefore, we urge the reader to pay careful attention to the pastoral section of this document. It must be remembered that we are all part of fallen humanity and that Christ came to die for all. It is the aim of this document to point each disciple of Christ to Him, the Source of all salvation, and to encourage every person to pray to God for guidance on how to deal with his or her specific struggles with sin.

What the Bible Teaches Concerning Sexuality and Marriage

The opening chapter of the Bible portrays in lofty grandeur the creation of humankind (*ha'adam*):

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Gen 1:26–27).

The sexual distinction between male and female is a key feature of humanity. This is explicit in the phrase: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Building on this divine design, Genesis presents the ideal of human sexuality as consisting of marriage between a man and a woman. Thus in the first chapter of Genesis "heterosexuality is at once proclaimed to be the order of creation."⁵ Genesis 2:24 underlines a succinct theology of marriage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (ESV). The "therefore" [Hebrew: *'al-ken*] connecting the creation of woman (v. 23) to the joining of marriage (v. 29) indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the ideal pattern for all human sexual relationships.

The reference to "a man [*'ish*] . . . and . . . his wife [*'ishto*]" indicates that a marriage between a man and a woman is the Edenic model for all time. This unique heterosexual marital form involving the sexual union of a man and a woman constitutes the divine paradigm, the

⁴ This document does not use terms like LGBT or LGBTQ or LGBTQIA, because they are very broad in their scopes, and this study is limited to the issues related to homosexuality.

⁵ Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (1991): 309.

“Creation order,” for humanity from the beginning. This paradigm means that marriage cannot consist of the sexual union between a man and another man or a woman and another woman. This Creation pattern of marriage between a man and a woman remains the norm throughout Scripture. Any deviation from this heterosexual norm is portrayed by the biblical writers as a distortion of the Creation norm (Rom 1:24–27). The importance of male/female relationship in raising children and organizing society is attested in almost all societies and cultures.⁶

Furthermore, marriage between a man and a woman is one of two institutions created by God for humanity before the entrance of sin. The other institution is the Sabbath established by God at the close of the Creation week (Gen 2:1–3).⁷ The Bible reveals that both institutions, created by God and protected in His law (Exod 20:1–17), will come under special attack (Dan 7:25; Mal 4:5–6; 2 Pet 2–3; Rev 12:17; 14:6–8).⁸ The Sabbath teaches the importance of cultivating relationships with God and one another, and marriage between a man and a woman lays a foundation for developing the holy image of God in healthy family relationships. The Bible reveals the universality of the heterosexual norm by holding non-Israelite nations accountable for violations of this teaching (Gen 18–19; Lev 18:24–30; Ezek 16:53–59; Jude 7).

Homosexual Practice versus Homosexual Orientation

In this statement we differentiate between homosexuality as an orientation (propensity, inclination, condition, disposition) and homosexual practice, although we do not enter the debate over whether or how much of the orientation is inherited or acquired, since no Scripture passages directly address this point. All human beings after the Fall of Adam and Eve “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). They are born with sinful natures and a bent toward evil. Our nature is marred and corrupted by sin from birth; it is damaged with inherited and cultivated tendencies toward sexual (and other kinds of) lust in both either heterosexual or homosexual persons. Yet, because of the atoning blood of Christ, those redeemed are not condemned and can receive victory over those tendencies and inclinations (see Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; Rom 3:9–18; 7:13–24; 8:1–8; Eph 2:1–3; 1 John 1:8; 2:16; Rev 3:5).

Scripture condemns heterosexual immorality no less than homosexual practice and warns against any harboring of lustful thoughts and desires for such practices. While homosexuality is a distortion of the Edenic ideal, “there is no condemnation” for homosexually oriented persons as

⁶ Nicholas P. Miller, “Should Adventists Care About Protecting Traditional Marriage?” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy Gane, Nicholas Miller, and Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 214–216.

⁷ Ellen G. White also makes this parallel between marriage and the Sabbath, Eden’s twin institutions, indicating that we should advocate for them until the end of time. “Then [in Eden] marriage and Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity . . . He enunciated the law of marriage for all the children of Adam to the close of time” (AH 340). “Marriage was from the creation constituted by God a divine ordinance. The marriage institution was made in Eden. The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden . . . Then let this, God’s institution of marriage, stand before you as firm as the Sabbath . . .” (TSB 159).

⁸ Ellen White declared that Romans 1:18–32, which details a descent into sensuality ending especially in homosexual behavior, as especially applicable to the last days. “A terrible picture of the condition of the world has been presented before me. Immorality abounds everywhere. Licentiousness is the special sin of this age. Never did vice lift its deformed head with such boldness as now. The people seem to be benumbed, and the lovers of virtue and true goodness are nearly discouraged by its boldness, strength and prevalence. I was referred to Romans 1:18–32, as a true description of the world previous to the second appearing of Christ” (CG 440).

long as they “are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) and do not harbor or act upon their orientation and propensities. The same principle applies to those who struggle with heterosexual immorality (see Matt 5:27–28; Rom 6:1–23; 8:1–4; Col 3:1–10; James 1:14–15). Even as some individuals may experience a miraculous deliverance from sinful heterosexual and homosexual urges, others may have to wrestle with such tendencies all their lives (see Gal 5:16–25).⁹ One is not culpable for these involuntary tendencies, but for acting upon them either in imagination or actual practice.¹⁰

In Matthew 19:12 Jesus refers to three specific categories of people: (1) eunuchs by birth; (2) eunuchs made by man; (3) eunuchs by personal choice. While this passage does not explicitly refer to homosexuality, it does reveal that the Bible recognizes that some sexual departure from the norm can be inherited, acquired, or chosen. In addition it demonstrates that Christ acknowledges that some persons choose sexual abstinence for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Homosexual Practice in the Old Testament

Homosexual Practice in Narratives of the Pentateuch (Genesis 19) and the Former Prophets (Judges 19)

The story of Lot and Sodom (Gen 19:1–11) is well known and is often considered a classic reference to the practice of homosexuality. It is suggested by some defenders of homosexual practice that the word *yada*‘ “to know” used in v. 5 does not refer to sexual activity, but simply means “get acquainted with.” However, in v. 8 the verb *yada*‘ is used in connection with Lot’s daughters and unmistakably refers to sexual intercourse. Modern interpreters acknowledge that contemplated homosexual activity along with issues of inhospitality (or xenophobia) is described in Genesis 19, but they also insist that the sexual issue is that of rape or violence.

Beyond the significance of the word *yada*‘, one must also recognize that in the overall movement of the narrative, this incident is used to characterize the depth of depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus, “[W]hat makes this instance of inhospitality so dastardly, what makes the name ‘Sodom’ a byword for inhumanity to visiting outsiders in later Jewish and Christian circles, is the specific form in which the inhospitality manifests itself: homosexual rape.”¹¹

But the larger context of the later prophetic passages that refer to this narrative clearly indicates a sexual interpretation and a condemnation of homosexual practice and not simply homosexual rape (Ezek 16:43, 50; cf. Jude 6–7; 2 Pet 2:4, 6–8; these passages are examined in some detail below). One sees the same distaste for rape in the reprehensible actions in the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19. That “text of terror” at the end of the book of

⁹ See the documentation, e.g., in Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 117–151; idem, “Ex-Gays? An Extended Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation,” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2012), 367–392; and the discussion below.

¹⁰ For a similar distinction made between practice and orientation, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 37–38; cf. Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 164–165; and Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 119–125.

¹¹ Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 75–76.

Judges, portrays men of Gibeah, “base fellows,” making homosexual advances against a Levite who was a guest in a friend’s house. The narrator makes clear the contemporary perspective on this activity by recording the words of the master of the house to the would-be homosexual assailants: “No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly [*hip ‘il of ra ‘a*]. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile [*nebalah*] thing. . . . but against this man do not do such a vile [*nebalah*] thing” (Judg 19:23–24).

The author of Judges gives his own summary of the outrage contemplated (homosexual rape) and committed (the rape of the concubine) at Gibeah in the words of those who were contemporaries of the event: “Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out” (Judg 19:30). The narrator also brackets this whole narrative complex (which comprises Judg 19–21) with a signal that the events depict a nation gone tragically awry. Judges 19–21 begins with the comment, “In those days, when there was no king in Israel” (Judg 19:1); and the concluding comment is even more to the point, about a nation who did not even consider the truths of God’s will: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg 21:25).

Homosexual Practice in Pentateuchal Legislation: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The Mosaic Law strongly condemns all homosexual activity. In addition to the prohibition of male cult prostitutes (*qedeshim*) in Deuteronomy 23:17 (MT 18),¹² the basic legislation proscribing homosexual practice is found in Leviticus 18:22: “You shall not lie with a male [*zakar*] as with a woman; it is an abomination.” Some modern translations (e.g., KJV and NIV) render *zakar* as “man” or “mankind,” which could imply only an adult male, or the entire human species, but the meaning of this term is clearly “male,”¹³ denoting all members of this gender regardless of age. Thus the use of this term is a prohibition of all male to male sexual relations.

Unlike ancient laws outside of the Bible relating to homosexual activity, *both* parties here are penalized, thus clearly including consensual male-male intercourse, not just homosexual rape: “The absoluteness of the prohibition is unlike anything else found in the ancient Near East or Greece—contexts that made accommodations depending on active role, consent, age or social

¹² Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 91–105.

¹³ Despite some recent suggestions that the Bible is ambivalent or unclear as to what constitute the specific identifying features of a male, the Hebrew Scriptures explicitly identify a male as one who has external male genitalia. See, e.g., Gen 17:10–11, where God Himself defines the marker of a male: “Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” See also the numerous passages in the Former Prophets where most modern versions correctly translate “male” but the KJV accurately captures the literal Hebrew phraseology: one “who pisseth against the wall” (alluding to the urination of the male penis): 1 Sam 25:22, 34; 1 Kgs 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8; cf. 2 Kgs 18:27; Isa 36:12. Note that this phrase occurs as part of the “Word of the Lord” in three of these passages: 1 Kgs 14:10; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8. There is no doubt in divine speech as to what is the identifying marker of being a male.

status of the passive partner (alien, slave, foreigner), and/or cultic association.”¹⁴ “The language is devastatingly untechnical, leaving no room for ambiguity.”¹⁵

The Hebrew clause *lo’ tishkab* “you shall not lie” is a negative particle followed by the *qal* imperfect, expressing a permanent negative command. The phrase *mishkebeh ’isha* “the lying of a woman” is clearly a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. the male equivalent of this passage in Judg 21:11–12). Thus this passage is a permanent prohibition of all sexual intercourse of a man with another male (*zakar*). This would also prohibit pedophilia or pederasty since the term *zakar* refers to any male, and not just a grown man.

Although the proscription in Leviticus 18 explicitly mentions only male homosexual relations, this prohibition applies also to lesbian relationships. The masculine singular in Hebrew often expresses gender inclusive situations, as for example, in the prohibitions of the seventh and tenth commandments of the Decalogue. And so, it is reasonable to conclude that the legislation in Leviticus 18 prohibits corresponding sexual offenses by females even when it addresses only men.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 reveal the underlying characterization of homosexual practice from the divine perspective: God considers it *to’ebah* “abomination.” This is the term used twice (in the singular) specifically for homosexual practices, as noted above, and four more times in Leviticus 18 (in the plural) to summarize all of the sexually-related sins (including homosexuality) mentioned in this chapter (vv. 26, 27, 29, 30). These are the only occurrences of the term in the book of Leviticus. The basic meaning of *to’ebah* is an “abominable, detestable, offensive thing.” The fact that among the list of specific prohibitions of sexual acts in Leviticus 18, the word *to’ebah* is only mentioned with regard to homosexual intercourse, indicates the degree of offensiveness associated with homosexual activity. Indeed, in the entire Pentateuch the only forbidden sexual act to which the word *to’ebah* is specifically attached is homosexual intercourse. This, however, should not be taken to mean that God deals with the heterosexual immoralities mentioned in this chapter with any less severity.

Some have maintained that the term *to’ebah* only refers to Jewish ceremonial impurity, and therefore is linked to those practices of the heathen nations—ritual impurity and cultic prostitution—which would ceremonially defile the sanctuary. Particularly with regard to homosexual practice, it has been argued that this practice is condemned only because of its association with the idolatrous fertility cults and not because it is considered evil per se. Expressed in different terms, it is suggested that the condemnation of homosexual practice as “abomination” is based solely upon Israel’s particular cultic/ritual concerns and not upon universally applicable moral/ethical considerations. However, the wide-ranging usage of this term *to’ebah* in the Torah and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible reveals that its meaning goes far beyond ritual-cultic contexts and most often (if not exclusively) refers to a moral and not just ritual offense.¹⁶

It is true that the Levitical injunctions against homosexual practice are placed within the wider setting of the Canaanite abominations. But the deduction of some recent studies—“connected with pagan practice, therefore forbidden”—does not properly interpret the Scriptural

¹⁴ Robert A. J. Gagnon, “The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Key Issues,” in Dan O. Via and Robert A. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 63–64.

¹⁵ Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIVAC 3; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 321.

¹⁶ See the careful analysis of the usages of this term in the Hebrew Bible in Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 117–120.

context. The “pagan practice” argument is actually turned on its head when one realizes that since much of Israel’s cultic ritual *coincides* with pagan practice (sacrifices, feasts, blood rites, etc.), therefore where an objection is raised to a given pagan rite some reason *other* than its association with a pagan practice must be sought. The context of Leviticus 18 and 20 provides just such a reason. In Leviticus 18:24–30 and 20:22–23, God indicates that the sexual distortions described in previous verses (including homosexual practice) are defiling *in their very nature* and not just because they violate Israel’s cultic ritual. These sexual distortions generate moral impurity that is distinct from ritual impurity.¹⁷ Because of such practices among the Canaanites—who did not have Israel’s cultic ritual—“the land became defiled; . . . and the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Lev 18:25). Just as the land vomited out the Canaanites, so God warns that it will vomit out Israel if she engages in such abomination (vv. 27–28). This punishment is summarized in Leviticus 18:20: “For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people.” Once again, it is important to remember that “these abominations” include immoralities of both a homosexual and a heterosexual nature.

That the legislation of Leviticus 18 comprises universal moral law, and not just ritual law pertaining only to Israel, is also evident from the fact that these laws are explicitly applied to the “stranger” or “resident alien” (*ger*) as well as to the native Israelite (v. 26). This applicability to the “stranger” becomes a decisive factor for the early NT Church in determining which laws beyond the Ten Commandments should be regarded as obligatory for Gentile Christians. In Acts 15:28–29, the four categories of prohibitions imposed upon Gentile Christians are precisely the same four, *in the same order*, as those listed in Leviticus 17–18 which are applicable to the stranger, with the final prohibition, *porneia*, summarizing the illicit sexual activities described in Leviticus 18.¹⁸ Clearly the NT covenant community saw this reference to the “stranger” as an indication of the trans-temporal and trans-cultural nature of these laws, including the law prohibiting homosexual activity. (More on this below in our examination of the NT evidence.)

The rationale of the prohibitions in Leviticus 18—including homosexual practice—rests upon the foundational principles of Creation order in Genesis 1:27–28: the creation of all humanity in the image of God as “male and female”; the call for a man and his wife to become “one flesh,” and the command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” “These principles describe the order and structure of humanity in two relationships: to God and to society. All the laws of Leviticus 18 may be understood as violations of these principles.”¹⁹ The heterosexual or

¹⁷ On this distinction, see Roy Gane, “Some Attempted Alternatives to Timeless Biblical Condemnation of Homosexual Acts,” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues* (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 165-6, 172.

¹⁸ For details, see Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)* (Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 4; Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000), 377.

It is also very interesting to observe that the Scripture reading in the Synagogue on the Day of Atonement (in the afternoon) is taken from Lev 17–18; Amos 9, and the book of Jonah. These three portions of the Hebrew Bible have Gentiles in mind. The first two readings (Leviticus and Amos) are definitely reflected in Acts 15, and the church’s openness to non-Jews demonstrates familiarity and alignment with the main thought of the book of Jonah—the desire and compassion of God to save everyone.

¹⁹ Wold, *Out of Order*, 130. See also Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 136: “All the laws in Lev 18:6–23; 20:2–21 legislate against forms of sexual behavior that disrupt the created order set into motion by the God of Israel.”

homosexual activities proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20 are portrayed as “abominations” because they violate the divine order of gender set forth in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.

This connection with the Creation order is implicit in the refrain of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: “with a male as with a woman.” Such phraseology intertextually links with both Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. The refrain in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 “is the best indication we have of what the primary concern was; namely, behaving toward another man as if he were a woman by making him the object of male sexual desires. That is an abomination, an abhorrent violation of divinely sanctioned boundaries—in this case, gender boundaries established at creation.”²⁰ The prohibition of homosexual relations is not an issue of gender status (male honor or hierarchy), as some would claim, but concerns “a distortion of gender itself, as created and ordered by God.”²¹ Brevard S. Childs perceptively captures this biblical rationale, and the implication for today:

The recent attempt of some theologians to find a biblical opening, if not warrant, for the practice of homosexuality stands in striking disharmony with the Old Testament’s understanding of the relation of male and female. The theological issue goes far beyond the citing of occasional texts which condemn the practice (Lev 20:13). . . . The Old Testament views homosexuality as a distortion of creation which falls into the shadows outside the blessing.²²

Homosexual Practice in the Latter Prophets: Ezekiel 16 and 18

Ezekiel 16:48–50 alludes to the attempted homosexual activity of the men of Sodom recorded in Genesis 19 and compares this incident to the condition of Ezekiel’s Judean contemporaries. Some have argued that this prophetic passage has in view only the display of inhospitality, and not homosexual practice, in its mention of the sins of Sodom, but as with the case of the outrage at Gibeah, it is not a matter of “either-or” but “both-and.” Ezekiel does indeed highlight Sodom’s non-sexual offenses: “She and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (Ezek 16:49). But those who argue solely for non-sexual sins at issue here fail to read this passage in its wider context. In the very next verse (v. 50), mention is made of the “abomination” (ESV; *to ‘ebah*, singular) committed by Sodom, and this word

²⁰ Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice* 135–136. Cf. David T. Steward, “Ancient Sexual Laws: Text and Intertext of Biblical Holiness Code and Hittite Laws” (PhD. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 378, who concludes regarding all the laws of Leviticus 18: “All these possible sexual violations hark back to the beginning, to the era when God set in motion the ongoing re-creation of humankind.”

²¹ Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 142.

²² Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 194. Beyond the two main pointers toward universality and permanent normativity within the Levitical texts which we have already emphasized—the absolute, all-encompassing language and the grounding of the legislation in the Creation order—there are several other biblical indicators that the Levitical legislation concerning homosexual practice is trans-temporal and trans-cultural. First, the legislation proscribing homosexual activity is grouped with prohibitions of other sex acts that transcend the culture and setting of ancient Israel: incest, adultery, and bestiality. Second, homosexual intercourse is a “first-tier sexual offense,” grouped together with other sexual offenses that are punishable by death sentence (Lev 20:10–16). Third, the language of purity used to describe the sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20, far from relegating these laws to the status of non-rational, pre-ethical, or mere ritual, actually buttresses the morality of the laws. “The conjunction of purity and prohibition often buttresses a moral judgment by focusing on the inherently degrading character of the act for participants and its destabilizing effects for the community” (Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 66).

“abomination” (*to ‘ebah*, singular) is the exact term used to describe homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Those who regard the sin of Sodom as non-sexual argue that the word “abomination” (*to ‘ebah*) in v. 50 simply refers to the social injustice described in v. 49. However, a careful look at this passage²³ reveals that the term *to ‘ebah* “abomination” (singular) in v. 50 speaks of an additional offense beyond the social injustice of v. 49, and the reference to *to ‘abot* “abominations” (plural) in v. 51 is a summary statement of all four sins of Sodom described in vv. 49–50. The parallel passage which confirms this interpretation is a similar list of vices in Ezekiel 18:10–13, where Ezekiel again uses *to ‘ebah* (singular) followed by *to ‘ebot* (plural). In this latter passage it is unmistakable that the use of the singular *to ‘ebah* “abomination” refers to an additional act separate and distinct from the oppression of the poor and the needy, and the plural *to ‘ebot* “abominations” is a summary referring to “all these abominations” (v. 13) of the previous list.

This usage of *to ‘ebah* in Ezekiel 18 provides a strong intertextual linkage with the precise grammatical usage of this term in singular and plural in Leviticus 18. In Leviticus 18 there is a list of various forbidden sexual relations (vv. 6–23), and the summary (vv. 26, 27, 29, 30) characterizes these as “abominations” (*to ‘ebot*, plural), while homosexual intercourse is singled out for special mention within this list as an “abomination” (*to ‘ebah*, singular) in 18:22 (cf. 20:13). The point is the same in both Leviticus 18 and Ezekiel 18: All of the preceding acts are “abominations,” but there is one specific act that is labeled “abomination” above the others: homosexual intercourse.

It may also be noted that the other two occurrences of *to ‘ebah* in the singular in Ezekiel (22:11; 33:26), like all the occurrences (both singular and plural) of *to ‘ebah* in Leviticus, refer to sexual sins. In sum, “the evidence indicates that the singular *tó ‘ēbâ* in Ezek 16:50 refers to the (attempted) commission of atrocious sexual immorality at Sodom, probably the homosexual intercourse proscribed in Lev 18:22; 20:13.”²⁴

In addition to the linkage between the term “abomination” in Ezekiel and homosexual practice proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20, one cannot ignore the dominant overtone of sexual immorality throughout Ezekiel 16 which lends further support to the interpretation that for Ezekiel Sodom’s sin included sexual immorality. Whatever the specific revolting sexual activity, God declares of Judah, “Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things; therefore, I have returned your deeds upon your head, . . . Have you not committed lewdness [*zimmah*] beyond all your abominations” (Ezek 16:43)? The word *zimmah* “lewdness, wickedness, depravity” in this passage is the very term used in Leviticus and also often in Ezekiel to refer to “premeditated sexual sins.”²⁵ As with the situation at Gibeah, the xenophobic inhospitality of the Sodomites was reflected in homosexual activity, the latter being referred to as abomination [*to ‘ebah*] and lewdness [*zimmah*].

²³ Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 80–85; cf. the brief synthesis in idem, “Key Issues,” 57–58.

²⁴ Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 83–84.

²⁵ See Lev 18:17; 20:14; Judg 20:6; Ezek 16:27, 58; 22:9; 23:27, 29, 35, 44, 48; 24:13. Wold, *Out of Order*, 88, points out how the term “is applied to deliberate sin, and sometimes stands parallel to words for lust and harlotry in Ezekiel.”

Homosexual Practice and the New Testament

Homosexual Practice According to Jesus' Teachings and the Jerusalem Council

Jesus affirms the creation ideal of marriage between a man and a woman by quoting from Genesis 1:27 and 2:23: "But from the beginning of the creation, God made them *male* and *female*. For this reason a *man* shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his *wife*, and the two [man and woman] shall become one flesh" (Mark 10:6–8; cf. Matt 19:5, emphasis supplied). Jesus' emphasis on the fact that "God made" this arrangement "from the beginning of creation," shows His acceptance of the prescriptive nature of the Creation texts, and affirms that heterosexual relations as divinely ordained in Genesis 1 and 2 remain normative in NT times.

Jesus' pronouncements against *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21), when viewed against the OT background, include same-sex intercourse as well as other heterosexual practices (Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29). The nature of *porneia* (without qualifiers) as used by Jesus and the various NT writers has been the subject of considerable debate, but the OT provides the key to its identification. Especially significant is its usage (again without qualifiers) in Acts 15:28–29, where, as we saw, intertextual allusions to Leviticus 17 and 18 are unmistakable.

Acts 15 lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians given by the Jerusalem Council: "That you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality [*porneia*]" (v. 29). Particularly striking is that this is the same list, *in the same order*, as the four major legal prohibitions explicitly stated to be applicable to the stranger/alien as well as to native Israelites in Leviticus 17 and 18. These OT chapters forbid: (1) sacrificing to demons/idols (Lev 17:7–9); (2) eating blood (Lev 17:10–12); (3) eating anything that has not been immediately drained of its blood (Lev 17:13–16); and (4) various immoral sexual practices (Lev 18). In this clear case of intertextuality, the Jerusalem Council undoubtedly concluded that what should be prohibited to Gentile Christians were those very practices forbidden to the uncircumcised alien in Leviticus 17 and 18.

The parallel of the fourth prohibition in each passage is unambiguous: what Acts 15 labels *porneia* are those immoral sexual practices included in Leviticus 18. These activities may be summarized in general as illicit sexual intercourse including incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality. Various scholars have recognized this intertextual connection.²⁶ The correlation between Acts 15 and Leviticus 17 and 18 provides a solid foundation for determining what the early Church understood by the term *porneia*. "No first-century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* (sexual immoralities) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20, particularly incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, and bestiality."²⁷ Thus Jesus' denunciation of *porneia* includes all forms of sexual immorality including homosexual practice.

²⁶ See especially H. Reisser, "*porneuō*," in *NIDNTT* (1975), 1:497–501; F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "πόρνη, πόρνος, πόρνεία, πόρνεύω, έκπορνεύω," *TDNT*, 6:579–595; and Terrance Callan, "The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 284–297.

²⁷ Gagnon, "Key Issues," 72.

Homosexual Practice and the Pauline Epistles

The apostle Paul specifically denounces homosexual lust and practice in three passages: Romans 1:24–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; and 1 Timothy 1:10. Each of these passages must be interpreted according to the OT context to which it alludes.

Paul’s entire discussion in Romans 1 reveals that the OT Scriptures are his source of ultimate authority for normative social behavior. It has been argued that Romans 1:24–27 only speaks of “exploitive forms of homoerotic behavior: pederasty (love of boys), sex with slaves, prostitution, and/or homoeroticism in the context of idolatrous cults, so we cannot know what Paul would have thought about committed adult relationships.”²⁸

Others have set forth a misogyny argument, claiming that Paul was opposed to same-sex intercourse because he feared that homoerotic unions would upset the hierarchical dominance of men over women.²⁹ Still others have argued that Paul had no concept of a homosexual orientation—a relatively fixed and congenitally based disposition—so we cannot know what Paul would have thought about same-sex intercourse between two people exclusively oriented toward the same sex.³⁰

However, against all of these positions, Romans 1:18–27 contains strong intertextual echoes with the creation account in Genesis 1:26–30. In the Genesis passage, God begins by making “humans” in God’s “likeness” and “image”—“male” and “female”—and then proceeds to give them dominion over the “birds,” the “cattle,” and “creeping” things. In sum, Adam and Eve were to worship God, in whose image they are made, and to have dominion over the animals.

In Romans, an inversion of this pattern is revealed. Paul begins by referencing the “creation of the world,” and the power and divinity of God seen through “what has been made,” but then reflects how the story has changed. Humans now remake the glory of God into an “image” and “likeness” of “corruptible man,” as well as of “birds,” “animals,” and “creeping” things. The human then ends up worshipping these very creatures that humans were meant to have dominion over, and abandons the natural use of the “male” and the “female.” The inversion is complete, instead of having dominion over the beasts, humans now worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator.” They remake the image of God, in which both male and female were fashioned, into an intensification of either masculinity or femininity (Rom 1:20–25).³¹

²⁸ This is the position, for example, of Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), passim, and Dale B. Martin, “*Arsenokoites* and *Malakos*, Meanings and Consequences,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (ed. Robert Brawley; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), 117–136), as summarized by Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 74. For further discussion, see idem, *Homosexual Practice*, 347–361.

²⁹ This is the view of, e.g., Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), passim, and David E. Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the Plain Sense of Scripture* (ed. David Balch; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 197–241, as summarized by Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 75. For extended critique, see idem, *Homosexual Practice*, 361–380.

³⁰ This is the position, for example, of Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 103–113.

³¹ See Richard B. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), 386; Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 77–78. There is also evidence that Rom 1:18–32 is intertextually alluding to the OT Sodom

Paul's concern in this passage is with the image of God according to Genesis Creation order, which humans have corrupted with idolatry and ensuing heterosexual and homosexual immoralities. Paul is distressed, because these departures from original design cannot reflect God's glory.

Romans includes language declaring that the relationships at issue are characterized by mutuality, rather than exploitation. The phrase "men . . . burned in their desire toward one another [*allēlous*]" uses the Greek term *allēlous*, which indicates a mutuality, a shared experience of desire. Moreover, the reference to "women exchange[ing] the natural function for that which is unnatural," also reveals a concern with elements beyond exploitation or dominance. Lesbian relationships were especially known in ancient times for their lack of hierarchy, domination, or prostitution.³² Paul speaks of those who "exchanged natural [*physikēn*] intercourse for unnatural [*para physin*]" (Rom 1:26). But the word "natural" (*physikos*) here does not refer to what is natural to the person who practices it. Rather, it means what is according to the nature of things as God created it, and "unnatural" is that which is "against nature" as God ordained it from the beginning as the immediate context speaks of God's "creation of the world" (Rom. 1:20, 26). Indeed, even in the larger Greco-Roman world, homosexual conduct of any sort was understood as being against nature.³³ It is only the modern conception of "nature" that means whatever the human desires. Paul, conversely, held that human nature, being fallen and sinful, would be expected to have desires against God's created order, commandments, and plans for humanity (cf. Rom 5:15–20; 7:7–23). However, Paul also teaches that an escape from "the body of death" and a new victorious life are given through the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 7:24; 8:1).³⁴

Further, in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul mentions the *malakoi* (lit. "soft men"), which likely alludes to men who are lain with as a man lies with a woman (see Lev 18:22 and 20:13).³⁵ First Corinthians 6:9 also refers to the *arsenokoitai* "men lying with males," and this term appears again in Paul's vice list of 1 Timothy 1:10. Against those who see a Greco-Roman background behind Paul's condemnation (and thus limit this term to something less than all same-sex intercourse), it cannot be overemphasized that this term never appears in the secular Greek of Paul's day, but only in Jewish-Christian literature. The compound term points to the background of the LXX translators in their rendering of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, as they combined the words male (*arsēn*) and lying (*koitē*), corresponding to the Hebrew terms *zakar* (male) and *mishkab* (lying), to denote "homosexual intercourse." The undeniable intertextual

tradition. See esp. Philip F. Esler, "The Sodom Tradition in Romans 1:18-32," *BTB* 34 (2004): 4–16.

³² Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2012), 112–114.

³³ E.g., "Pleasure in mating is due to nature when male unites with female, but against nature when male unites with male or female with female." Plato, *Laws* 636c.

³⁴ "Were nature to be defined in the first instance by proclivities and impulses, Paul would have had to declare "natural" the sinful life since Paul understood sin to be an innate impulse, running through the members of the human body, passed on by an ancestor (Adam), and never entirely within human control (see Rom. 5:12–20; 7:7–23). Linking the existence of congenitally (or at least biologically) influenced impulses to morality is thus fatally flawed." Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations," 119.

³⁵ For support of this interpretation, and critique of alternative views, see esp. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 382–383; and Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 306–312.

link between Paul’s use of *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10) and Leviticus 18 and 20, indicates that Paul is primarily referring to the OT Levitical background which forbids all same-sex intercourse and not just issues of exploitation or orientation.

Homosexual Practice and the General Epistles: Jude 6–7; 2 Peter 2:4, 6–8

Two passages in the General Epistles refer to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and condemn these two cities for sexual sin and not just for xenophobic inhospitality or failure to provide social justice. Jude warns that “certain intruders have stolen in” to the Church, “who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness [*aselgeia*]” (v. 4). Jude gives three examples of groups of sinners in the OT times who did not escape divine judgment, and the third and climactic example is that of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their surrounding cities, who “indulged in sexual immorality [*ekporneusasai*] and pursued unnatural lust [*sarkos heteras*]” (v. 7). The reference to “unnatural lust” alludes to homosexual practice in Sodom and Jude’s overall description certainly portrays the sins of these cities as sexual in nature and not just related to matters of hospitality and social justice.³⁶

The second epistle of Peter likewise warns of false teachers who would arise in the Church, just as false prophets arose in ancient Israel (2 Pet 2:1–3). Peter, like Jude, utilizes three OT examples of groups of sinners who did not escape divine judgment, reserving his third and climactic example for the experience of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 6–10). Peter uses similar language as did Jude to describe the wickedness of these cities, specifically singling out their sexual sins. Peter speaks of Lot who was “greatly distressed by the licentiousness [*aselgeia*] of the lawless” (v. 7) and “was tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless deeds [*anomois ergois*] that he saw and heard” (v. 8). In applying these OT examples to the current situation in the first-century Church, Peter especially singles out the sexually-related sins, “especially those who indulge their flesh in depraved lust [*tous opisō sarkos en epithumia miasmou poreuomenous*]” (v. 10), a fitting description of the attempted homosexual rape in Genesis 19 as well as the sexual immorality of Peter’s day. Both Peter and Jude thus connect the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah with sexual immorality and not just xenophobic inhospitality or social injustice, in harmony with what we have seen in the OT material.

Summary of Biblical Teachings on Homosexual Practice

Our examination of the relevant passages throughout the Bible, the authoritative norm for Christian life and teaching, has revealed the following three points. First, Scripture teaches a uniform and explicit condemnation of homosexual practice. Not only is there unequivocal condemnation of homosexual practice throughout the OT and NT, but numerous lines of evidence connected to the Levitical legislation and NT references to this legislation (Acts 15) point to the universal (trans-cultural) and permanent (trans-temporal) nature of the prohibitions against all types of homosexual activity. Ekkehardt Mueller states: “The study of the Pauline passages dealing with homosexuality shows that homosexuality is not limited to violent and

³⁶ See especially the discussion in James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000), 221–222, who summarizes parallels with extra-biblical intertestamental Jewish literature.

promiscuous activity; nor is it restricted to pederasty. All homosexual activity is against the Creation order and against divine law and is, therefore, a sin that needs to be repented of, forgiven, and given up.”³⁷

After surveying the evidence of both OT and NT, NT scholar Richard Hays summarizes well the biblical witness concerning homosexual practice:

Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. . . . The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal. . . . Scripture offers no loopholes or exception clauses that might allow for the acceptance of homosexual practices under some circumstances. Despite the efforts of some recent interpreters to explain away the evidence, the Bible remains unambiguous and univocal in its condemnation of homosexual conduct.³⁸

It should be emphasized, however, that the biblical materials condemn homosexual *practice*, but there is no castigation of innate homosexual *orientation* per se.

Second, Scripture condemns all forms of sexual immorality, whether homosexual or heterosexual. The anthropology set forth in the Hebrew Bible assumes that after the Fall all humans have a sinful nature or proclivity. To be sure, the implication of the seventh commandment and tenth commandment is that even the thoughts are to be kept pure, and sexual temptations arising from the fallen nature/orientation are to be resisted—both heterosexual and homosexual (e.g., Matt 5:27–30). Thus one sees that in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Paul clusters homosexual activities together with other immoral individuals: “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 (ESV).” Then he adds, “none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.” At the same time, Paul teaches the possibility that homosexuals can also experience renewal like the rest of the group. He writes, “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). For those who struggle with heterosexual and homosexual immorality, divine power is available through Christ to enable us to live above sinful tendencies and nature.

Third, Scripture upholds the loving marriage between a man and a woman as the only context in which sexual intercourse may be practiced. Although the OT allows polygamy and divorce, and the NT, divorce under extreme circumstances (Mat 5:32; 1 Cor 7:15), these are concessions and never part of God’s Edenic ideal (Mark 10:5). In the case of homosexual practice, Scripture allows no such concessions.

³⁷ Ekkehardt Mueller, *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 29.

³⁸ Richard B. Hays, “The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality,” in *Staying the Course: Supporting the Church’s Position on Homosexuality* (ed. Maxie D. Dunnam and H. Newton Malony; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 73, 78. Cf. idem, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (ed. Jeffrey S. Siker; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 3–17.

A Pastoral Approach to Distortions of the Edenic Ideal of Marriage in Light of the Grace of God

Throughout the Bible, God unequivocally upholds the Creation plan for male and female (Gen 1:26) and the ideal of marriage between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:8). Divine judgment is pronounced against those who depart from this norm and that includes homosexual practice. These judgments are expressed against peoples and nations that do not have access to the oracles of God, and thus should be viewed as part of God's guidance for humanity generally and not just for the covenant community (Gen 18–19; Lev 18:24–30; Ezek 16:53–59; Jude 7). This means that Christians have a responsibility to underline in their witnessing the protection and promotion of the divinely instituted importance of heterosexual marriage and of motherhood and fatherhood to the raising and development of children.³⁹ Such efforts should be made in the spirit of love and care for all members of the community, but we should resist, in the spirit of Christ, calls to give up on traditional marriage, which was instituted at Creation, as a vital pillar of social organization.⁴⁰

At the same time, the grace of God is revealed in the OT portrayals of these sexual and family distortions. Homosexual practice is presented as part of the Canaanite abominations condemned in Leviticus 18 and 20. Yet, these Canaanites, with their abominable practices, were given 400 years of probation (Gen 15:16), with many opportunities to learn of the true God and the universal standards of morality and holiness, and many did join God's covenant people. Witness also the grace of God to Sodom: Abraham was divinely directed to rescue Lot and the inhabitants of Sodom from the hands of the four invading kings (Gen 14) and possibly some of these rescued individuals were part of the crowd that attempted the homosexual rape at Lot's house (Gen 19). Furthermore, God would have spared the whole city, including the homosexual practitioners if there had been even ten righteous persons in Sodom (Gen 18:32).

According to Ezekiel 16, Judah had multiplied abominations more than Sodom (v. 51), including the abomination of homosexual practice. Just two chapters after the allegory of Ezekiel

³⁹ The Adventist Church has already recognized in a formal statement the propriety of church members and institutions acting to protect the civil institution of traditional marriage in a careful and compassionate manner. "While Seventh-day Adventist institutions and members may appropriately advocate for preserving the unique and God-given institution of heterosexual marriage in their societies and legal codes, it is the position of the Church to treat those practicing homosexual or alternative sexual behaviors with the redemptive love taught and lived by Jesus." From "Responding to Changing Cultural Attitudes Regarding Homosexual and Other Alternative Sexual Practices" voted Spring Meeting 2014. Cited on September 30, 2015. Online: <https://www.adventist.org/en/%20information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/responding-to-changing-cultural-attitudes-regarding-homosexual-and-other-alternative-sexual-practice/>.

⁴⁰ Ellen White recognized the civil importance of marriage when she approvingly quoted historian Sir Francis Scott's observation regarding the assault on marriage undertaken in the French Revolution: "Intimately connected with these laws affecting religion, was that which reduced the union of marriage—the most sacred engagement which human beings can form, and the permanence of which leads most strongly to the consolidation of society—to the state of a mere civil contract of a transitory character, which any two persons might engage in and cast loose at pleasure. If fiends had set themselves to discover a mode of most effectually destroying whatever is venerable, graceful, or permanent in domestic life . . . they could not have invented a more effectual plan than the degradation of marriage" (GC 270). Ellen White's involvement in temperance reform and the advocacy of laws against alcohol can be seen as a model and template for public engagement by Adventists in the marriage question. Her remarks regarding the marriage and Sabbath, two institutions from before the existence of sin in the world, indicate we should advocate for them until the end of time.

16, God bares his heart, revealing his gracious attitude toward Judah: “‘Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Turn, then, and live’” (Ezek 18:31–32). According to Ezekiel 37, God promises a spiritual resurrection from the dead for people who return from Babylonian exile, and in this context, he also promises power to keep his statutes. He even takes responsibility for Israel’s obedience: “I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezek 36:27). Over every distorted practice and abhorrent abomination, to which we as humans are susceptible. God’s forgiving and empowering grace still prevails and gives power for a new life.

Also, after condemning homosexual practices in Romans 1:26–27, Paul states in Romans 2:1: “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” Thomas Schmidt has provided wise admonition for us today: “We must express our disapproval of homosexual practice in the context of our own sexual fallenness.”⁴¹

We must emulate the blended justice and grace of God as we continue to uphold the Scriptural vision of holiness and morality. When applying redemptive discipline we must emphasize God’s provision of forgiveness and His promised empowerment to bring about behavioral change in the lives of those who struggle against homosexual, or any other kinds of immoral sexual practices. In sum, we must show the face of God depicted in the Bible, who is “infinitely knowing, intimately caring, invincibly loving.”⁴²

While being faithful to biblical teaching about homosexuality, we must also seek earnestly to understand and empathize with the struggles and challenges that face those who struggle with sexual immorality. This applies equally to gay and lesbian persons. In order to understand them, we must seek them out and listen carefully to their stories. Many have been deeply hurt emotionally by their heterosexual brothers and sisters.⁴³ We must also be sensitive to the reality of high rates of homelessness and suicide among gay youth. Jesus mingled with and ministered to all who were outcasts (Matt 9:11; Luke 5:30; 15:2). As Christians who are called to love as Jesus loved, we too must be concerned with the real needs of gay youth. Many homosexuals have been bullied, beaten, or even killed in various parts of the world. Gay persons have not felt welcome in some churches and have often been the victims of gossip and crude jokes. Some have been expelled from our Christian schools when they revealed their attraction to the same sex. Most, if not all, have heard sermons that condemn homosexuals as persons, failing to distinguish between persistent same-sex attraction (what some call a gay orientation) and the practice of homosexuality. All persons, including practicing homosexuals, should be made to feel welcome to attend our churches, where they can hear the Gospel. Individuals who surrender such sexual practices and commit to lives of biblical purity should be welcomed into membership and church office. All should receive spiritual care from the Church (Gal 6:1).

⁴¹ Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* 172. Schmidt (169–175) has provided a very balanced position on the appropriate stance of today’s Church and Synagogue toward homosexuality, a position that upholds both the biblical standard and divine grace.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 175. See also, Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, passim.

⁴³ The negative experiences of gays and lesbians described in this whole section are well documented in the research of René D. Drumm. For details see her dissertation entitled “Becoming Gay and Lesbian: Identity Construction Among Seventh-Day Adventist Homosexuals” (PhD diss., Texas Woman's University, 1998).

We stand against any antipathy toward homosexuals as well as any cultural biases that fuel a lack of Christ-like love toward them. These kinds of attitudes need to be repented of and the Church needs to provide more intentional ministries directed toward gay and lesbian persons (Matt 9:13; John 3:17). We should be aware of how easily we might fall into self-righteous judgmentalism. Such examination might lead us to a greater sensitivity to the following questions that many gay and lesbian persons wrestle with:

1. "Did God make me this way and if so, why?"
While a discussion of the etiology of homosexuality is beyond the scope of this statement, most researchers state that many factors contribute to same-sex attraction and homosexual orientation.⁴⁴ Some persons describe their attraction to the same sex as being among their earliest memories and contend that they would not have chosen the painful experience of being gay or lesbian. Simplistic answers to the "why" question should be avoided but we should be clear that all evil in this world is a consequence of the Fall into sin (Rom 3:20, 25).
2. "If God made me this way, can He change me?"
Much contemporary literature denies the possibility that gay and lesbian persons can be changed, and even claims that change attempts are harmful.⁴⁵ Other important studies show that there are some reliable testimonies of such change among those that seek for faith-based counseling.⁴⁶ However, does change mean that all same-sex attraction disappears? Some who are now in monogamous heterosexual marriages report that they still experience homosexual attractions, but that they choose not to act on them.⁴⁷ Others have pled with God to change them and have submitted to therapy with the goal of change but have not been changed.⁴⁸ They have accepted their same-sex attraction as a continuing reality, but have chosen a life of renewal and purity in Christ. Working through this process, whatever the result, can be extremely difficult. As Christians, love would dictate that we are supportive, within the framework of biblical standards, of people as they work to sort out this matter in their lives and that we affirm their identity as persons for whom Christ died.
3. "If I accept myself as a gay or lesbian person, do I have a place in the Church?"
We are a Church made up of sinners saved by grace with love as its foundation (Matt 22:36–40) and such love should be shown equally to all members. Those who struggle with temptation to same-sex sin should be treated the same way as members

⁴⁴ Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, *Our Sexuality* (12th ed.; Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2014), 254–257.

⁴⁵ American Psychological Association, "Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality" (April 4, 2005).

⁴⁶ Jones and Yarhouse. "Ex-Gays?" 367–392.

⁴⁷ Winston King, "'Born that Way' and Redeemed by Love," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church*. (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 485–495.

⁴⁸ Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer, directors and producers, "Seventh-Gay Adventists," documentary film (Filmmakers Library, 2012).

who struggle with temptation to other forms of sexual sin (Matt 18:4; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31; 19:10). We strongly affirm that such persons have a place in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Those who experience persistent same-sex attraction, but who are committed to lives of sexual purity and abstinence, should be given the opportunity to participate in all church activities including leadership positions in the Church.

There are two main misconceptions about gay and lesbian persons that need to be unpacked:

1. “They are sinners, therefore, they must not love God.”
In reality, some gay and lesbian persons passionately love God. According to statistician George Barna, a good number of gays “consider themselves to be Christian, and claim to have some type of meaningful personal commitment to Jesus Christ.”⁴⁹ They may have vibrant spiritual lives, have wrestled with God about their sexual identity, and have drawn close to Him despite their struggles. We should reflect the compassion of Jesus Christ who never condemned a struggling person but helped everyone to live a life of holiness (John 8:1–11).
2. “They don’t want to be part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”
Although it is true that many SDA gay and lesbian persons have been hurt by the Church and that some have chosen to leave as a result, many love the Church and want to be a part of its fabric. Many have grown up in the Church, participated in Pathfinders, and attended Adventist schools, and the beliefs and culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are a part of them. They want and need a home in which they can be welcomed, accepted, and led further in their discipleship to Jesus Christ, finding their identity in Him, rather than in the gay subculture.

Love demands that we continue to learn about homosexuality and that we compassionately reflect God’s love for those that identify as gay persons. Love also demands that we support them when we see them being treated unfairly. “The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly” (Ps 103:6). As the Church continues to wrestle with this issue, we want to do so in good faith exhibited in practical action.

We cannot ignore the needs of families who are faced with the reality of a spouse, child, or other relative who is same-sex attracted. Family members find themselves conflicted between their love for their family member and their Scriptural beliefs. They don’t know what to do to provide the best help. The Church should be always ready to help those who experience deep emotions such as pain, guilt, and shame, and be prepared to sincerely talk to them about their struggles (Gal 6:2).

Additional Remarks with Biblical and Ellen G. White Quotations

⁴⁹ The Barna Group, “Spiritual Profile of Homosexual Adults Provides Surprising Insights” (June 20, 2009). Cited September 20, 2015. Online: <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/282-spiritual-profile-of-homosexual-adults-provides-surprising-insights>.

What distinguishes Christians is the quality of love they extend, without partiality, to everyone they meet and especially to those who are rejected and mistreated. “Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God” (DA 503).

However sincere love may appear, it is not love if it stands silently watching a blind man walk toward a precipice. Love runs! Love shouts a warning! Love leads him safely away from peril. Just so “All should feel that they are their brother's keeper, that they are in a great degree responsible for the souls of those around them” (1T 368).

The tenderest regard must be evident in those who seek to minister to individuals who are entangled in any kind of sin. “Brothers and sisters, if a person gets trapped by wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should help that person turn away from doing wrong. Do it in a gentle way” (Galatians 6:1 God’s Word Translation).

Jesus understands the inherited predispositions, the in-utero environment, the developmental processes, the birth experiences, and the subsequent environmental influences that shape the life of every person that comes into the world. “The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son” (SC 100).

That being so, God’s sons and daughters are to treat their brothers and sisters and all people with the same loving respect and concern for their well-being that Jesus exemplified when He was on earth. This means that, as they are prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit, they must come close to each person in order to understand well the life story of that individual and to speak words given to them by the Comforter.

Inspired by the example of the Friend of sinful humanity (SC 119), His followers must make the Church a winsome, welcoming place where His love is extended to all and where everyone can learn to observe all things that He commanded His disciples to do (Matt 29:20).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus magnified and clarified heaven’s counsel that was designed to promote and protect the well-being of earth’s children. Included were His teachings about guarding one’s mind against sexual impropriety. The same kind of encouragement to live lives of purity must be given to young and older people with same-sex, bi-sex, and opposite-sex, sexual attraction.

Regardless of what the temptations may be, when people recognize that they are being tempted to perform sexual acts that are inconsistent with Scriptural teachings, they need to claim Heaven’s empowerment to resist those temptations. “Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it” (1 Cor 10:13 New Living Translation).

Recognizing that sin blinds the eyes and confuses the understanding, Jesus found it necessary, when all other attempts had failed, to issue sharp rebukes to the hard-hearted scribes and Pharisees in the hopes that they would turn from their stubborn sinfulness (Matt 23: 13–37).

There are times when the Church must also raise its prophetic voice against sins of every kind that lead to eternal destruction. “Shout out loud. Do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people that they have refused to obey me. Tell the family of Jacob how much they have sinned” (Isa 58:1 New International Reader’s Version). “Don't you know that people

who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom. That is what some of you used to be! But you were washed clean, you were made holy to God, and you were made right with God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:9–11, Common English Bible).

When the Church denounces sin both within the Church and in secular society, it must do so with caution and humility. "Christ sometimes reprov'd with severity, and in some cases it may be necessary for us to do so; but we should consider that while Christ knew the exact condition of the ones he rebuked, and just the amount of reproof they could bear, and what was necessary to correct their course of wrong, he also knew just how to pity the erring, comfort the unfortunate, and encourage the weak. He knew just how to keep souls from despondency and to inspire them with hope, because he was acquainted with the exact motives and peculiar trials of every mind. He could not make a mistake. But *we* may misjudge motives; *we* may be deceived by appearances; we may think we are doing right to reprove wrong, and go too far, censure too severely, and wound where we wished to heal; or we may exercise sympathy unwisely, and counteract, in our ignorance, reproof that is merited and timely. *Our* judgment may be wrong; but Jesus was too wise to err. He reprov'd with pity, and loved with a divine love those whom He rebuked" (4T 66; emphases original).

"The Saviour never suppressed the truth, but He uttered it always in love. In His intercourse with others, He exercised the greatest tact, and He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight. He bore Himself with divine dignity; yet He bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, souls whom it was His mission to save" (GW 117).

"Every one that will submit to be ransomed, Jesus will rescue from the pit of corruption, and from the briars of sin. . . . The soul, bruised and wounded and ready to perish, he encircles in his arms of love, and joyfully bears it to the haven of safety" (GCB, December 1, 1895).

"Whenever there is a soul converted and brought to Jesus Christ, a thrill of joy is felt in heaven. A soul is saved, a precious soul snatched from Satan's grasp. . . . The lost is found, the dead in trespasses and sins is alive" (RH, March 21, 1893). "All heaven rejoices over the weak, faulty human soul that gives itself to Jesus, and in his strength lives a life of purity" (ST, October 22, 1896).

The Call to Holiness

The intent of this document is to call everyone, whether heterosexual, homosexual, married, or single, to conform to God's ideal of holiness. At the heart of this call to holiness lies the call to sexual purity. In our age of casual sex and all types of promiscuity and immorality, it is easy to think of sexual intercourse as a matter of private decisions and preferences. But this is not how Scripture thinks about sex. Paul plainly teaches that our bodies are individually temples of the

Holy Spirit and that we are not our own but bought with a price. Therefore we must glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:19–20; 10:31). Because our bodies belong to God, we may not do with them as we please. Rather, we must be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom 8:29). This call to holiness is extended to all of Christ’s followers. It is the contention of this document that such holiness is possible only when we use our bodies in conformity with God’s creation ideal for which we were created as male and female. We prayerfully release this document in the hope that through its service many who struggle with their sexuality will come to embrace the divine ideal of holiness and sexual purity as their Christian calling. May our gracious God give us His Spirit (Ezek 36:25–27; Rom 8:4, 14), who provides victory over sin and power to live in harmony with His will through our Lord Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

HOMOSEXUALITY, SCRIPTURE, AND THE CHURCH

Ekkehardt Mueller



RELEASE

06

HOMOSEXUALITY, SCRIPTURE, AND THE CHURCH

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Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church

Introduction

Homosexuality has become an extremely controversial topic in many countries around the world, impacting societies and several Christian communities. The basic question is, How should Christians relate to persons who practice homosexuality? Some denominations are in danger of splitting, or have already split, over this question.¹

I. Defining Homosexuality

Homosexuality has been understood to mean different things, but it is usually described as “sexual desire directed toward members of one’s own sex.”² It can also designate a “person, male or female, who experiences in adult life a steady and nearly exclusive erotic attraction to members of the same sex, and who is indifferent to sexual relations with the opposite sex.”³ Such a definition fits the “constitutional homosexuals,” or “inverts,” whose homosexuality is said to be permanent. There are also cases of teenagers whose sexual identity has not yet fully developed or adults who are bored with heterosexuality and are willing to experiment with members of the same sex. They are called “contingent homosexuals.” “Situational homosexuals” are those who, lacking heterosexual encounters, “resort to homosexual outlets.”⁴

Normally, “inverts” claim that their homosexuality is preordained, natural, and irreversible.⁵ The distinction between homosexual orientation

¹ See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 202; and Craig L. Nesson, *Many Members, One Body: Committed Same-Gender Relationships and the Mission of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

² R. E. O. White, “Homosexuality,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 528.

³ E. A. Malloy, *Homosexuality and the Christian Way of Life* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981), 11.

⁴ Ronald M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, 1988), 2.

⁵ See Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville:

and homosexual acts is usually rejected by the homosexual community⁶ Yet homosexual orientation is recognized by the church and requires a life of celibacy, while homosexual practice is rejected. Homosexual acts can find expression in pederasty, the involvement with children of the same sex; rape and violence; prostitution and promiscuity, to name a few, or in a life committed to one partner of the same sex. The latter is claimed to be in harmony with Scripture.

II. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's Statements on Homosexuality

Within Christianity three major positions are held with regard to homosexuality: (1) only marital heterosexuality is acceptable for Christians; (2) homosexuality, also called covenant homosexuality, is acceptable for Christians, if the two partners have equal status, are consenting adults, and if the relationship is permanent and monogamous; and (3) casual adult homosexuality, i.e., homosexuality in any form is acceptable for any member of society.⁷ The Seventh-day Adventist Church has chosen the first option and has officially stated:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother

Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 79; Aubyn Fulton, "Response; Science and Sexual Orientation," in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*, edited by David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, and David R. Larson (Roseville: Adventist Forum, 2008), part 2 – 47.

⁶ Springett, 4.

⁷ Cf. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 28.

and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev 20:7-21; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: “‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and 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?” So they are no longer two, but one’” (Matt 19:46, NIV). For these reasons Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.⁸

Another official statement, voted on March 9, 2004, reaffirms Christian marriage in the context of the debate over same sex unions.⁹

Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same Sex Unions—A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage. Over the past several decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has felt it necessary to clearly state in various ways its position in regards to marriage, the family, and human sexuality. These subjects are at the heart of many pressing issues facing society. That which for centuries has been considered to be basic Christian morality in the marriage setting is now increasingly called into question, not only in secular

⁸ “Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality,” http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat46.html. This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

⁹ “Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions – A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage,” http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat53.html. This document was voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee, March 9, 2004.

society but within Christian churches themselves.

The institutions of family and marriage are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart. An increasing number of nations are now debating the topic of “same sex unions,” thus making it a world issue. The public discussion has engendered strong emotions. In light of these developments, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is clearly restating its position.

We reaffirm, without hesitation, our longstanding position. As expressed in the Church’s Fundamental Beliefs, “marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.”¹⁰ Though “sin has perverted God’s ideals for marriage and family,” “the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship,” and thus “families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships” (An Affirmation of Family, 1990).¹¹ God instituted “marriage, a covenant based union of two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.” “The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is . . . the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression.” “Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal” (An Affirmation of Marriage, 1996).¹²

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disorder and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by sin coming into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen human nature, “we also believe that by God’s grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God’s Word” (Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality, 1999).¹³

¹⁰ Seventh-day Adventists Believe—A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, Doctrine 22 on “Marriage and the Family.”

¹¹ Public Statement, An Affirmation of Family, released July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session, Indianapolis, Indiana.

¹² Statement voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996.

¹³ Statement voted by the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999.

We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. However, it is very clear that God's Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle; neither has the Christian Church throughout her 2000 year history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical teaching is still valid today, because it is anchored in the very nature of humanity and God's plan at creation for marriage.

This more recent document reaffirms the earlier ones.¹⁴ Based on Scripture, the Seventh-day Adventist Church opposes any homosexual activity and does not accept homosexual partnerships, even when supported through legislation. The challenge the church faces is whether or not its interpretation of the biblical texts dealing with homosexuality can be maintained. Today these texts are being interpreted in different ways. Why is this so?

III. The Problem of the Diversity of Interpretations

Interpreting the Bible depends to some extent on certain presuppositions. The way people view Scripture, culture, science, tradition, and human nature influences their approach to the Bible.

1. Various Presuppositions

The prevalent view among thinkers in Western societies is that there is no absolute truth, that there is no divine revelation, and that revisions and reformulation of older beliefs are necessary in order for them to fit prevalent culture.¹⁵ The Bible is considered to be culturally conditioned, that is, it has spoken only to certain situations in the past but must be reinterpreted today.¹⁶ It is held that "our modern world view includes

¹⁴ Doctrine 22 has become number 23 after a new fundamental belief was added in 2005. See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th edition (Silver Spring: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 17.

¹⁵ See Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 160-164. Walter Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, edited by Walter Wink (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 47, holds: "Where the Bible mentions homosexual behavior at all, it clearly condemns it. I freely grant that. The issue is precisely whether that biblical judgment is correct." Cf. Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo Square Press, 2000), 131.

¹⁶ Cf. Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 35, 42; Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 69, 70; Webb, 161.

advances and discoveries unknown to ancient peoples, making biblical pronouncements on homosexuality incomplete and even erroneous.”¹⁷ Therefore one’s understanding of the Greco-Roman culture determines how New Testament texts must be interpreted.¹⁸ It is said that “the Bible opposes prostitution and idolatry in conjunction with homosexuality not homosexuality, as such.”¹⁹ It is also suggested that Scripture does not address monogamous, permanent same sex relationships,²⁰ because it allegedly is not aware of innate or inverted homosexuality,²¹ and that it refers only to exploitive homosexuality, such as pederasty,²² rape, perversion, promiscuity, or excess of passion.²³

Some choose the “christological principle” and reject biblical statements that appear to contradict it.²⁴ They mean that because Jesus would have accepted practicing homosexuals, we should do the same, independent of any biblical statements to the contrary²⁵ this would, then, mean that the church, moved by the Spirit, would be free to accept or reject biblical laws²⁶ and that the authority of Scripture would be seriously restricted.²⁷ Others go a step further, claiming to follow the Spirit indi-

¹⁷ James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in the Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), 11. See also Springett, 49-51; Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 55.

¹⁸ Cf. Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 16, 127, 128.

¹⁹ Springett, 51, although this is not his own position. Gary Chartier, “Love, Subsidiarity, Equality, and Inclusiveness,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 5 – 58.

²⁰ See Springett, 50; Vincent J. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality*, second edition (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 277, 296; Ellen F. Davis, “Reasoning with Scripture,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90/3 (2008): 518; Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 89.

²¹ Cf. Scroggs, 28.

²² See Scroggs, 84.

²³ Cf. David E. Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, edited by David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 197-222.

²⁴ Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 15, 53-55, 66. See also Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 47, 48. William Sloane Coffin, “Liberty to the Captives and Good Tidings to the Afflicted,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 107, points out: “not everything biblical is Christlike.”

²⁵ Cf. Nancy Duff, “Christian Vocation, Freedom of God, and Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality, Science, 261-277*.

²⁶ Cf. Soards, 17; Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 42-44.

²⁷ Richard Treloar, “‘Come Out and Stay Out!’ Hermeneutics, Homosexuality, and Schism in Anglicanism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90/1 (2008): 54, 55. On page 58 he writes: “Anglicans can resist the Bible’s ‘plain teaching’ in this matter, as we patently already do with regard to much else . . . ‘with Scripture. . . at times we must read ‘against’ Scripture.” “The Bible . . . is not directly equivalent to God’s word . . .” (61).

vidually, even if their conclusions contradict the Scripture.²⁸

Some pit the law against the gospel.²⁹ It is said that the concept of love overrides narrow interpretations of biblical texts. Some regard their personal experience as normative and use it to reject or accept specific biblical statements.³⁰ Others give priority to science, humanities, and reason rather than to the Scripture³¹ or suggest that we have to use, as final authorities, Scripture plus science/reason (e.g., biology, sociology, and psychology),³² tradition,³³ and experience in order to make informed decisions.³⁴ Furthermore, it is assumed that the human sexual drive must be lived out and cannot be fully controlled.³⁵ Consequently, proponents of such a view have no problem with premarital sexual relations,³⁶ divorce and remarriage,³⁷ adultery, and sometimes even polygamy and incest.³⁸

Representatives of an evolutionary reading of Scripture not only

²⁸ Cf. James A. Forbes Jr., "More Light from the Spirit on Sexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 6-8. Ken Sehested, "Biblical Fidelity and Sexual Orientation: Why the First Matters, Why the Second Doesn't," in *ibid.*, 59; Richard Rohr, "Where the Gospel Leads Us," in *ibid.*, 85-88.

²⁹ Soards, 17, states, "Grace, not law, governs Christian life."

³⁰ Cf. Paul Wennes Egerton, "One Family's Story," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 23-30; Phyllis A. Bird, "The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions," in *Homosexuality, Science*, 143; John B. Cobb Jr., "Being Christian about Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 91-93; René D. Drumm, "Interaction and Angst: The Social Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists," in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 3 - 20.

³¹ Bird, 168; Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 46; Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 35, 36.

³² Cf. Ben Kemena, "Biological Determinants of Homosexual Orientation," in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 2 - 16-19; Harry C. Wang, "Psychiatry, Antihomosexual Bias, and Challenges for Gay and Lesbian Youth," in *ibid.*, part 2 - 40; Fulton, part 2 - 48, 49; Sherwood O. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and the Biblical Doctrine of Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (July-September 2000): 348-361. This view would be opposed to the *sola scriptura* principle and is rejected by Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, "The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science in the Ecclesiastical Homosexuality Debates," in *Homosexuality, Science*, 120; and Christopher Seitz, "Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense: The Christian Community and the Law of God," in *ibid.*, 177-196.

³³ Paul G. Crowley, "Homosexuality and the Counsel of the Cross: A Clarification," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 637.

³⁴ Cf. Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 29. Via states: "I have tried to show that if we look at a number of biblical themes in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience, we can justifiably override the unconditional biblical condemnations of homosexual practice" (38). See, Soards, 55, 64.

³⁵ Springett, 25, stresses "that human beings can control and are, therefore, responsible for their sexual expression." They have a choice. Cf. Cole, 360.

³⁶ See Larson, "Christian Sexual Norms Today," in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 5 - 13, states: "The guideline of 'nothing before' and 'everything after' is neither realistic nor wise. . . . We should not ask whether to allow loving heterosexual and homosexual unions to exist; they already do. . . . We should do everything we can to sustain them and to support people who are in them. . . . We should also find ways to honor them in appropriate Christian ceremonies."

³⁷ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 43, 44.

³⁸ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 82; Treloar, 51, refers to Regina Schwartz as saying that there is "a virulent biblical abhorrence to incest, which resonates with what she describes as the general biblical hysteria about, and its explicit horror of, homosexuality" (Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 107).

deny direct Creation by God and the order of Creation, but also the Fall. They claim that God has “created” homosexuals, and, as such, homosexuality is a gift of God, not a consequence of the fallenness of humanity.³⁹

2. Seventh-day Adventist Presuppositions

Officially, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible was given by divine inspiration, that it is the infallible revelation of God’s will. It is “the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history”⁴⁰ (Isa 8:20; 66:2; *sola scriptura*). Although written by human beings, it not only is the word of humans, but also the Word of God. Principles of interpretation have to be derived from Scripture and should not be forced upon it. Deductions from the fields of philosophy, psychology, and sociology that contradict Scripture are to be rejected. In addition, tradition and natural sciences should not be allowed to determine matters of faith. Scripture is its own interpreter. There is agreement, harmony, and clarity in Scripture. Clear texts shed light on difficult texts. The Holy Spirit is needed in the process of interpretation, but He does not override previous revelations.

3. Summary

The real issue in the homosexuality debate is the nature, authority, and interpretation of Scripture.⁴¹ It is clear that “the decision one makes about the validity of homosexual behavior . . . is effectively a decision on the authority of the Bible in the life of the church.”⁴² Awareness of our own presuppositions helps us to be consistent and to avoid pitfalls in our interpretation of biblical texts.

³⁹ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th edition (Silver Spring: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 9.

⁴¹ Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 1-65; Helminiak, 29-41; Soards, 1-14; Via and Gagnon, 2; Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 33; Cf. James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), 15; and Jack Rogers, “Presbyterian Guidelines for Biblical Interpretation: Their Origin and Application to Homosexuality,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 37/4 (2007): 179.

⁴² Soards, 73.

IV. Homosexuality in Scripture

1. Homosexuality in the Old Testament

Israel was surrounded by nations for which sexuality and fertility cults played an important role. Homosexuality was practiced among the Egyptians, the Babylonians, Assyrians, the Hittites, and the Canaanites.⁴³ Sacred prostitution, homosexuality between consenting partners, transvestite behavior, and bestiality can be found among Israel's neighbors. Yet, the Old Testament opposes all these practices, challenges the other gods, and rejects homosexuality.⁴⁴ It contains texts with direct as well as indirect references to homosexuality.⁴⁵ Among the direct references, two passages occur in legal material, whereas the other references are found in historical narratives.

a. Old Testament Narratives

(1) *Genesis 1–2*⁴⁶

Although the Creation account (Gen 12) does not talk about homosexuality, it sets the stage for all subsequent sexual relations.⁴⁷ God created the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, and joined them in marriage. With this institution of marriage, God clearly established the divine plan for sexual relations among humans. Authors supporting homosexual partnerships suggest that the male female combination was chosen only because procreation was divinely commanded (Gen 1:28); it was necessary in the beginning. But since the situation has changed and overpopulation is rampant, it is claimed that homosexual partnerships are even more in tune with the needs of the world today than heterosexual relationships.⁴⁸ Therefore, supposedly, Genesis 1 and 2 cannot be used to proscribe only one form of human sexuality.

⁴³ See, e.g., Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 134–142; Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 44–56; Springett, 33–48; Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books Publishing Company, 1998), 43–61.

⁴⁴ Cf. Webb, 81.

⁴⁵ Cf. Springett, 69–88.

⁴⁶ We will be using the New American Standard Bible.

⁴⁷ Webb comments: "Obviously, this pattern does not sit well with homosexual relationships, whether the covenant or casual type" (131).

⁴⁸ Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 4.

The problem with this argument is that it restricts heterosexual relationships to the function of procreation. This restriction is not what Genesis 1 and 2 portray.⁴⁹ The Creation account is interested in the concept of complementation. When Adam notices his lack of a companion, God creates for him the woman “suitable to him.” They complement each other. This complementation is holistic, because God is holistic. Its expression is found particularly in heterosexual marriage.

(2) *Genesis 19 and Judges 19*

Whereas narratives that deal with homosexuality, such as the Sodom narrative (Gen 19:410) and the outrage in Gibeah (Judg 19:22-25), are sometimes interpreted in such a way as to avoid homosexual connotations, homosexuality is read into other passages, such as the stories of Ham’s sin,⁵⁰ the friendship of David and Jonathan, and the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship between Ruth and Naomi. It has been suggested that the story dealing with Sodom is about a lack of hospitality⁵¹ rather than homosexuality and that the term “to know” means “to get acquainted” rather than “to have coitus with” (Gen 19:5).⁵²

Although homosexuality was one of the sins of the inhabitants of Sodom, it was not the only one, and the city was destroyed because of its many grievous sins. Christian homosexuals today argue that the problem with Sodom was not homosexuality, per se, but a violent type of gang rape, which has nothing to do with covenant homosexuality. This argument is also applied to what happened in Gibeah.⁵³ Yet, “the authors of Jude and 2 Peter undoubtedly understood a key offense of Sodom to be men desiring to have sex with males.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Springett, 53.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of this incident, reported in Genesis 9:20-25, see Davidson, 142-145. Wold, 65-76.

⁵¹ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 67; Helminiak, 43-50.

⁵² The NASB translation “to have relations with them” (cf. Gen 4:1, 17, 25) seems to be the meaning required by the passage, especially by verse 8, based on the context dealing with various sexual problems and the intertextual connections with Judges 19 and Ezekiel 16 (see, Wold, 89).

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion of both passages, see Davidson, 145-149, 161, 162; White and Niell, 40-51, Köstenberger, 204-208. Davidson concludes his passage on Sodom by saying, “That the opprobrium attached to the Sodomites’ intended activity involved not only rape but the inherent degradation of same-sex intercourse is confirmed by the intertextual linkages between Ezekiel and the sexual ‘abominations’ mentioned in Levitical legislation” (149).

⁵⁴ Via and Gagnon, 59.

(3) *Alleged Homosexual Relationships*

To interpret David's relation to Jonathan or Ruth's relation to her mother-in-law as a beautiful expression of homosexuality is farfetched.⁵⁵ Men embracing and kissing each other and holding hands is common today even in the Near East. This custom has nothing to do with homosexuality.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Fritz Guy not only speculates about physical intimacy between David and Jonathan but also about the Roman military officer who asked Jesus to heal his boy, suggesting that this boy was a valuable slave and sexual partner of the officer. He also suggests that the Ethiopian eunuch was a potential homosexual.⁵⁷ He adds, "These possible instances are, of course, highly conjectural. . . . None of the stories contains an explicit recognition, much less an endorsement, of same sex love."⁵⁸ But then his speculation becomes almost certitude: "Given what we know about human nature and same sex love, statistically it is highly probable that *some* of the figures in the scriptural narratives were participants in same-sex erotic relationships."⁵⁹ Such an approach has nothing to do with sound biblical interpretation.⁶⁰

b. The Mosaic Laws

(1) *Leviticus 18 and 20*

Leviticus contains two texts that are clearly dealing with homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 reads: "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." Leviticus 20:13 goes further by warning against the consequences of homosexual activities: "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them."

It has been suggested that "the Old Testament limits the prohibitions against same-gender sexual behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20 to the

⁵⁵ See Davidson, 164-167.

⁵⁶ See also Springett, 73; Webb, 102.

⁵⁷ Fritz Guy, "Same-sex Love: Theological Considerations" in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4 - 52, 53.

⁵⁸ Guy, part 4 - 54.

⁵⁹ Guy, part 4 - 54.

⁶⁰ Davidson, 165, speaks about speculation.

ritual or cult of Israel. . . . These passages have no impact on the New Testament/Christian moral code.”⁶¹ It has been argued that

our challenge is not to maintain culturally conditioned law, but rather, with Jesus, to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40). When these texts in Leviticus are taken out of their historical and cultural context and applied to faithful, God-worshiping Christians who are homosexual, it does violence to them.⁶²

It has been proposed that the context deals with purity and holiness and that those cultic concerns are, supposedly, irrelevant to the New Testament church.⁶³ Furthermore, homogeneity is forbidden because it is considered “unclean” and “not because it is wrong in itself. The Christian Scriptures insist that cleanness and uncleanness do not matter.”⁶⁴

It is true that in the immediate or larger context we find terms referring to purity, holiness, and idolatry. Still, the question must be asked whether or not these references limit the warning against homosexuality to specific situations only. This restriction is clearly not the case. First, these two texts describe and condemn male homosexual activity. No exceptions are mentioned. Obviously they are opposed to any homosexual activity.⁶⁵ However, it is very likely that they included lesbianism. It has been pointed out that

The Mosaic legislation in general is considered from a man’s (male’s) perspective. Even the Decalogue is addressed in the masculine singular, but this certainly does not mean that it applies only to the male gender. The masculine singular is the Hebrew way to express gender inclusive ideas. . . .⁶⁶

⁶¹ DeYoung, 10.

⁶² Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 69. In the context of Leviticus 18 and 20 and the discussion on homosexuality, Helminiak, 66, 67, calls people to break away from conventions and taboos because they are “unreasonable and oppressive” (67).

⁶³ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 69.

⁶⁴ Helminiak, 72.

⁶⁵ Cf. Springett, 63.

⁶⁶ Davidson, 150.

Second, although these passages are found in the context of holiness and purity, they have a moral quality as indicated in their usage in the New Testament. Kaiser states: “. . . there is a category of temporary ceremonial laws, but I do not agree that homosexuality is among them. Nothing in its proscription points to or anticipates Christ.”⁶⁷ Roy Gane shows that there is a difference between ritual impurity, which can be removed by ritual purification, and moral impurity, which is not remediable. He concludes by stating that

the impurity of homosexual practice was not ceremonial, but moral. . . . This is confirmed by the fact that in Acts 15, which releases Gentile Christians from circumcision, the ‘Holiness Code’ prohibitions against meat offered to idols, sexual immorality . . . , and meat from which the blood is not drained at the time of slaughter . . . remain in force for Gentiles.⁶⁸

It is clear that “any attempt to draw hard distinctions between sin and impurity is doomed to failure. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the Holiness Code is that it incorporates ethics under the rubric of purity; that is, sin and impurity merge” (Lev 18:24-30; Eze 18:22, 26).⁶⁹

Third, the passages deal with more than exploitive situations. The two persons involved in these acts of immorality are men. Both of them were to be punished because both of them are responsible for their acts by mutual consent.⁷⁰ It was an abomination.⁷¹ Fourth, these laws extend beyond the Israelite community and were also applicable to the stranger (Lev 18:26).⁷² The lists of Leviticus 18 and 20, together with other vices and virtues, “reflect transcultural values.”⁷³ They are also based on the

⁶⁷ Quoted in Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 247. Similarly Webb, 177.

⁶⁸ Roy E. Gane, “Same-sex Love in the Body of Christ?” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4 – 67, 68.

⁶⁹ Via and Gagnon, 66. Wold, 119, adds: “The sex crimes of Leviticus 18, with the possible exception of Molech worship, were not cultic in nature . . . the term *tô-ê-bâ* [abomination] shows no distinction between intrinsic wrong and ritual impurity as suggested by Boswell.”

⁷⁰ See Davidson, 149.

⁷¹ The Greek term *bdelygma* is discussed by Wold, 118.

⁷² See Davidson, 154, 155; White and Niell, 68.

⁷³ Webb, 196. See also pages 192-196.

Creation order and, therefore, are not limited to the people of Israel.⁷⁴

Fifth, the text itself provides the reason for the prohibition: “lying with a male as though lying with a woman.” The reason appears to be that “male-male intercourse puts a male in the category of female so far as sexual intercourse is concerned. Because sexual intercourse is about sexual completion, it requires complementary sexual others.”⁷⁵ Interestingly, “in the entire Pentateuch, the only forbidden sexual act to which the word *tôēbâ* [“abomination”] is specifically attached is homosexual intercourse.”⁷⁶

Sixth, W. Webb provides a reason for the inclusion of child sacrifice in the list of seventeen sexualintercourse prohibitions mentioned in Leviticus 18. The first fifteen prohibitions preceding child sacrifice could result in offspring; the next two, homosexuality and bestiality, do not. The chapter is concerned with appropriate sexual boundaries between male and female. “Such a structural perspective speaks against any type of homosexuality today.”⁷⁷

Seventh, the context of the law against homosexual activity in Leviticus 18 and 20 includes Leviticus 19 in which we find the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself (19:18). This commandment is not abolished, although others in the immediate context are or may be (Lev 19:21-25,27). Love is stressed again and again in the New Testament. Therefore, when a decision has to be made as to whether or not a specific regulation is still normative for Christians, it has to be made on an individual basis and by consulting the New Testament. Eighth, in Romans 1:26, 27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, Paul alludes to Leviticus 18 and 20 and makes his own statement about homosexuality. The law was still valid in Paul’s time, and Paul did not indicate that it was to be abolished. Ninth, a specific case of fornication, namely incest, is related in 1 Corinthians 5. The act of having sexual intimacy with one’s stepmother is called *porneia* (“sexual immorality”). This act is clearly spelled out in Leviticus 18:8. So, Paul considered Lev 18 or at least parts of it as still valid for Christians. This validation should also apply to the case of incest and

⁷⁴ See Wold, 130.

⁷⁵ Via and Gagnon, 64, 65.

⁷⁶ Davidson, 151.

⁷⁷ Webb, 200. See also pages 197-200.

bestiality, as well as child sacrifice. In addition, the term *porneia* clearly stands for incestuous relations and may include all unlawful sexual activities spelled out in Leviticus 18.⁷⁸ As incest is still to be shunned, so is homosexuality.

Tenth, the issue of fornication was discussed and decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). As a result, Gentile Christians were ordered to abstain from fornication. Obviously, the Jerusalem Council did not discuss the validity of the Decalogue. They dealt with *porneia*, whereas the Ten Commandments use the verb *moicheuō* (LXX; “adultery”). The other three items from which the Gentile Christians had to abstain were things polluted by idols, what is strangled, and blood. All four restrictions remind us of similar prohibitions for Israelites and strangers in Leviticus 17:8-15 and 18:24-27.⁷⁹ It seems quite certain that the delegates to this Council and especially James had in mind Leviticus 18.⁸⁰ *Porneia* was referring to a broad range of sexual deviations, including incest, prostitution, and homosexuality.

(2) *Deuteronomy 23*

None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deut 23:17, 18).

Springett suggests that homosexuality may have been prohibited in this passage through the terms translated “cult prostitute” and “dog.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Oftentimes, the New Testament, when it alludes to or quotes an Old Testament text, not only refers to the specific text but also to the entire context. When, e.g., in Revelation 12:5 the male child is mentioned, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, the reference is not just Psalm 2:9 but the entire second Psalm. This principle may apply to 1 Corinthians 5:1 and its Old Testament source, Leviticus 18.

⁷⁹ Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. II, (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 734; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 506, 507; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 253.

⁸⁰ This, is, e.g., supported by the margin of Nestle-Aland’s Greek New Testament, as well as their list of Old Testament quotations and allusions. When discussing the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, Bruce refers back to Lev 18. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 315.

⁸¹ Cf., Springett, 63-65.

The term “dog” may, in contrast to the cult prostitute, describe non-cultic male prostitution. Davidson points out: it “is found in the section of Deuteronomy that elaborates upon the seventh commandment; this indicates that any homosexual activity is a violation of the Decalogue.”⁸²

c. Summary

The Old Testament contains clear texts, especially in the legal material, rejecting any form of homosexual activity. These texts were referred to in the New Testament and considered binding. However, one should be careful not to read wishful thinking into Old Testament narratives and misuse texts that do not deal with homosexual activities in order to support a homosexual agenda. It is important to notice that “all the references to homosexual acts in the Old Testament are negative—whether in narrative (Gen 9:20-27; 19; Judg 19) or law (Lev 18; 20)—and carry heavy sanctions.”⁸³

2. Homosexuality in the New Testament

The New Testament contains three explicit texts dealing with the issue of homosexuality. Before approaching them, we will examine Jesus’ position.

a. Jesus and Homosexuality

Although Jesus did not make a direct statement about homosexuality, His position on the issue is recognizable.⁸⁴ First, according to the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did not abolish the law but pointed out its real intent. In Matthew 23:23, He talked about the “weightier provisions of the law” but supported the law of tithing. R. Gagnon comments on Mark 7:1519: “If Jesus did not abrogate even such things as food laws and meticulous tithing, then it is impossible that he would have overturned a proscription of sexual immorality as serious as that of male-male intercourse.”⁸⁵

⁸² Davidson, 160.

⁸³ Wold, 162.

⁸⁴ Gagnon has devoted a number of pages to Jesus and the issue of sexuality. Cf. Via and Gagnon, 68-74 Wold, 161-175, devotes an entire chapter to “Christ and the Homosexual.”

⁸⁵ Via and Gagnon, 69.

Second, Jesus was not supportive of sexual activities other than the marriage relation between one man and one woman. Although He mingled with sinners and cared for them, He did not condone their behavior (see Luke 7:36-50; John 4; 8:3-11). In the Sermon on the Mount, He spent two antitheses dealing with sexual issues (Matt 5:27-32). In Matt 19:18 and Mark 10:19, Jesus again confirmed the seventh commandment.⁸⁶ Third, during a discussion with the Pharisees on the question of divorce, Jesus referred back to the creation account and quoted Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (Matt 19:4, 5; Mark 10:6, 8). Two human beings, male and female, become one flesh in marriage. By stressing that only male and female become one, Jesus rejected polygamy as well as homosexuality. Obviously, for Jesus the Creation account was not only descriptive but prescriptive. In Matthew 19:12, He mentioned three groups of eunuchs: (1) those who are eunuchs from birth,⁸⁷ (2) those who have been made eunuchs by men, and (3) those who for the sake of the kingdom of heaven made themselves eunuchs. The last group probably does not refer to literal eunuchs but to people such as John the Baptist who remained unmarried for the sake of their ministry. This would imply that humans have the ability to postpone sexual intercourse indefinitely, which is true for persons with heterosexual as well as those with homosexual inclinations. According to Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus allowed for two alternatives only, namely being married to a person of the opposite sex or staying single.

Fourth, in Mark 7:21-23, Jesus mentioned among the evils that come out of the heart three sexual transgressions, namely *porneia* (“fornication”), *moicheia* (“adultery”), and *aselgeia* (“sensuality,” “licentiousness”).⁸⁸ As mentioned above, *porneia* has a wide range of meanings, including homosexuality. “No first-century Jew would have spoken of *porneiai* (sexual immoralities) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20, particularly incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, and bestiality.”⁸⁹ Jesus also mentioned Sodom (Matt 10:15;

⁸⁶ Via and Gagnon, 71.

⁸⁷ Some scholars attempt to read into this phrase the issue of homosexuality. Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 78, 79.

⁸⁸ Wold, 167-170, shows that *aselgeia* may include homosexuality.

⁸⁹ Via and Gagnon, 73.

Luke 10:12).⁹⁰ He was concerned with keeping the commandments, that is to say exhibiting a Christian lifestyle, which includes proper sexual relationships. Homosexuality is implicitly addressed and rejected.⁹¹

b. Paul and Homosexuality

The three major Pauline texts dealing with homosexuality are Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10.

(1) Romans 1:26, 27

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Whereas a number of Christians hold that these verses describe homosexuality, which they reject in all its forms, others argue that the text is dealing with homosexuality but then suggest that the issue is idolatry or pederasty. Paul, they believe, was not dealing with sexual orientation as we know it today, because he did not know about inverted homosexuals.⁹² Furthermore, it is argued that the phrase “against nature” means, “It is ‘against nature’ for homosexuals to practice heterosexuality or for heterosexuals to practice homosexuality.”⁹³ Therefore, the issue to be studied is whether or not homosexuality in Romans 1 includes all forms of it and has a universal scope.

First, the larger context is universal in nature. Romans 1 shows that

⁹⁰ However, his use of the term “dogs” in Matt 7:6, although reminding us of the dogs of Deuteronomy 23:17, 18, that is homosexuals, does not seem to refer to homosexuals in this context.

⁹¹ Soards, 29.

⁹² Cf. Everett R. Kalin, “Romans 1:26-27 and Homosexuality,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30 (2003): 423-432. Scroggs, 121, 122, is opposed by Wold, 185, 186, Springett, 121, 122, and Soards, 48. Rogers, 76, opts for the idolatry position. Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 36, claims that “Paul was unaware of the distinction between sexual orientation . . . and sexual behavior.” Cf. John R. Jones, “In Christ There Is Neither . . . : Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4 - 23.

⁹³ DeYoung, 10. Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 74.

all Gentiles are sinners (Rom 1:21-32), Romans 2 points out that the Jews are also sinners, and Romans 3 concludes that all people are sinners and all are dependent on God's grace. In Romans 5, Paul elaborates on the fact that all of us have been slaves to sin but in Jesus we are free from it. The Fall is clearly referred to in Romans 5:12-19. The topics of Creation, Fall, and salvation are universal in nature and are of relevance to humans at all times.⁹⁴ Therefore, the list of vices, including homosexuality, is not limited to a special period of time but is still applicable today.⁹⁵

Second, Paul's background for the discussion of idolatry and homosexuality is Creation (Rom 1:20).⁹⁶ Evidently, Paul's argument is that God can be known through His created works. But although the Gentiles "knew God, they did not honor him as God" (Rom 1:21). God was replaced by gods that were nothing more than images of humans or animals (Rom 1:23). The list of animals, the mention of humans, and the concept of "likeness/image" suggest that Romans 1:23 echoes Genesis 1:24-26. In addition, Romans 1:25 points out that the Gentiles worshiped created things instead of the Creator. Furthermore, Romans 1:26, 27 seems to echo Genesis 1:27 by the use of the terms "male" (*arsēn*) and "female" (*thēlu*), instead of "man" and "woman."⁹⁷ Since Creation is so clearly referred to in the preceding verses, homosexuality must be understood in the context of Creation. "Idolatry and same-sex intercourse together

⁹⁴ Cf. Springett, 124.

⁹⁵ See White and Niell, 134.

⁹⁶ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 76, argues that Paul's condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply to contemporary homosexual Christians because they are not idolaters. But even if idolatry should be the overarching theme of Romans 1, the statements on homosexuality have to be taken seriously and cannot be discarded. Furthermore, it would be wrong to contend that "idolatry . . . is the necessary prerequisite for homosexuality," according to Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 285. Some advocates of a homosexual lifestyle deny that the Fall occurred or that the Fall is related to homosexuality. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 77, points to homosexual animals, an apparent genetic influence on sexual orientation, and biological differences between homosexual and heterosexual people, concluding that "This data suggests that homosexuality is indeed part of God's created order" (81). However, Genesis 2:20 indicates that the cattle, the birds, and the beast of the fields had "helpers," while Adam did not have "a helper suitable to him." For Adam this "suitable helper" was Eve, the missing female partner. Similarly, the Flood story mentions pairs of male and female animals only (Gen 7:2). Genesis does not indicate that God created homosexual beings. D. Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995):338, complains: "Modern scholars read the Fall into Romans 1 because it renders the text more serviceable for heterosexist purposes." Although the Fall is not directly mentioned in Rom 1, Creation is, and the Fall's mention in Romans 5 reveals that it forms part of the background of Paul's theology, even in Romans 1.

⁹⁷ See Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 37.

constitute an assault on the work of the Creator in nature.”⁹⁸

Third, obviously the ancients knew about inverted homo-sexuality. If the number of invert homosexuals among the general population amounts to somewhere between three to ten percent⁹⁹ and “has remained relatively constant for hundreds, even thousands of years,”¹⁰⁰ as it is claimed, it would be quite strange, if loving and caring homosexual relationships were formed only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and that the ancients were completely ignorant of them.¹⁰¹ References to homosexuality have been found not only in sources dating back to centuries before Christ but also in Greco-Roman society and in the writings of the church fathers.¹⁰²

It is hardly possible that Paul, who was an educated man and who even quoted Greek authors (e.g., Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), would not have known innate homosexuality.¹⁰³ To suggest that Paul was referring only to violent or exploitative homosexuality or pederasty but not to permanent, caring one partner same gender relationships because they supposedly were not known at that time, cannot be demonstrated.¹⁰⁴ Fourth, for Paul the law of Moses is still applicable.¹⁰⁵ The mention of adult-adult

⁹⁸ Via and Gagnon, 78.

⁹⁹ See Kemena, part 2 - 10, and Fulton, part 2 - 48.

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell F. Henson, “Ministering to Gays within the Church Community,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 5 - 27.

¹⁰¹ Cf. White and Niell, 128, 129.

¹⁰² Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 76, argues that Paul’s condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply to contemporary homosexual Christians because they are not idolaters. But even if idolatry should be the overarching theme of Romans 1, the statements on homosexuality have to be taken seriously and cannot be discarded. Furthermore, it would be wrong to contend that “idolatry . . . is the necessary prerequisite for homosexuality,” according to Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 285. Some advocates of a homosexual lifestyle deny that the Fall occurred or that the Fall is related to homosexuality. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 77, points to homosexual animals, an apparent genetic influence on sexual orientation, and biological differences between homosexual and heterosexual people, concluding that “This data suggests that homosexuality is indeed part of God’s created order” (81). However, Genesis 2:20 indicates that the cattle, the birds, and the beast of the fields had “helpers,” while Adam did not have “a helper suitable to him.” For Adam this “suitable helper” was Eve, the missing female partner. Similarly, the Flood story mentions pairs of male and female animals only (Gen 7:2). Genesis does not indicate that God created homosexual beings. D. Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995):338, complains: “Modern scholars read the Fall into Romans 1 because it renders the text more serviceable for heterosexist purposes.” Although the Fall is not directly mentioned in Rom 1, Creation is, and the Fall’s mention in Romans 5 reveals that it forms part of the background of Paul’s theology, even in Romans 1.

¹⁰³ See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 452; White and Niell, 99, 128, 129.

¹⁰⁴ See Via and Gagnon, 81.

¹⁰⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 76.

homosexual intercourse in Romans 1:27 is dependent on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.¹⁰⁶ Leviticus 18 and 20 are in view in Acts 15 and are declared binding for gentile Christians. Paul refers to Leviticus 18:8 when he sharply criticizes incest in the church of Corinth (1Cor 5), indicating that for him Lev 18 and 20 are still valid. Paul goes even a step further by including female same gender activity (Rom 1:26), which was not directly spelled out, though included among male homosexuality in the Old Testament.

Fifth, dealing with the suggestion that Romans 1 “identifies a temporary Jewish purity rule rather than a universal moral principle,” De Young remarks: “God cannot consign the Gentiles to punishment for breaking a Jewish purity law.”¹⁰⁷ Because divine judgment (Rom 1:27) is associated with the breaking of the laws of Leviticus 18 and 20, they must have a moral quality and be universal in nature and cannot be merely culturally and nationally determined and abolished by Jesus.¹⁰⁸ A distinction is sometimes made between a level of “moral evil” and a level of “ceremonial impurity” in Romans 1, assigning verses 24- 27—the passage dealing with homosexuality—to the ceremonial level. It is held that the three terms “unrighteousness” (*adikia*), “evil” (*ponēria*), and “godlessness”/“wickedness” (*asebeia*) in Romans 1:18, 29 have a moral quality, while the word “uncleanness”/“impurity” (*akatharsia*) in Romans 1:24 is ceremonial in nature. Supposedly, homosexuality belongs to the level of ceremonial impurity, not to the level of sin.¹⁰⁹ However, already in the Old Testament, impurity had at times a moral quality.¹¹⁰ A closer look at the New Testament reveals that *akatharsia* (“impurity”) is found next to terms such as “lawlessness” (*anomia*; Rom 6:19), “licentiousness” (*aselgeia*; Eph 4:19), and “fornication” (*porneia*; Eph 5:3). According to 2 Corinthians 12:24 people should have repented of their “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*). These terms describe the fleshly nature corrupted by sin (Gal 5:19, 20).¹¹¹ Thus, for Paul “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*) has a moral

¹⁰⁶ These chapters are also found in a kind of universal context. See Leviticus 18:24-30; 20: 2, 23.

¹⁰⁷ DeYoung, 159.

¹⁰⁸ J. R. Jones, part 4 - 4-7, argues for a cultural and national limitation of the laws in Leviticus 18 and 20.

¹⁰⁹ J. R. Jones part 4 - 13-22.

¹¹⁰ See discussion above and Gane, 4 - 66-68.

¹¹¹ A similar list occurs in Col 3:5 and includes *akatharsia*.

dimension. Christians are called to stay away from it, because a lifestyle of “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*) excludes people from the kingdom of God (see Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 4:7).¹¹²

Sixth, the argument that the phrase “the natural intercourse” and its opposite “against/contrary to nature” (*para phusin*) in Romans 1:26, 27 are describing what comes natural to an individual is unsubstantiated. Nowhere is the term “nature” (*phusis*) used in such a sense.¹¹³ In Romans 11:24 the phrase “by nature” (*kata phusin*) means to exist in harmony with the created order. On the other hand, “against nature” (*para phusin*) refers to what is in contrast to the order intended by the Creator.¹¹⁴ This corresponds with Romans 1, where Creation is clearly the background for the discussion of idolatry, homosexuality, and other vices. Behavior described as being “against nature” implies a negative moral judgment: “homosexual practice is a violation of the natural order (as determined by God).”¹¹⁵ Obviously, this practice includes all forms of homosexuality.¹¹⁶ Any attempt to explain what is natural on “conventional grounds,” namely as understood in the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D.,¹¹⁷ does not fit Paul’s argument. He argues biblically rather than from a cultural perspective.¹¹⁸ We can suggest that “Paul in effect argues that even pagans who have no access to the book of Leviticus should know that same-sex eroticism is ‘contrary to nature’ because the primary

¹¹² White and Niell, 120, add: “the fact that a ‘penalty’ or ‘punishment’ is attached to the ‘error’ of performing these ‘shameful deeds’ reinforces the understanding that these are sinful deeds.”

¹¹³ In the letter to the Romans the noun is found seven times (Rom 1:26; 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24, 24, 24), and the phrase *para phusin* (“against nature”), twice (Rom 1:26; 11:24).

¹¹⁴ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 286; Wold, 182. Cf. DeYoung, 156, 157; and Köstenberger, 48.

¹¹⁵ Dunn, 74. Cf. Via and Gagnon, 79, 80.

¹¹⁶ Springett, 130, 131, declares: “If homosexual acts could gain divine approval in any sense, surely Paul would have indicated how and drawn the distinction. . . . An interpretation of his words that allows homosexual activity would have to allow also any sin in the list of vices which follows.”

¹¹⁷ Cf. J. R. Jones, part 4 - 17. Lewis B. Smedes, “Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 80, 81, first seems to argue for a cultural understanding of “unnatural,” but then admits being a traditionalist: “I do believe that having babies is the teleological bent of sexuality. And my traditionalism leads me to suppose that homosexuality is a product of nature sometimes gone awry. But this, in turn, leads me to assume that God wants gay people to make the best life they can within the limits of what errant nature gives them. . . . Would not God also see same-sex partnerships as a morally worthy improvisation on the ‘unnatural?’” (81).

¹¹⁸ The same applies to the effort to explain “unnatural” as unexpected or unusual but not immoral behavior. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 112.

sex organs fit male to female, not female to female or male to male.”¹¹⁹

Seventh, the fact that Paul adds lesbianism to male homo-sexuality supports the previous point. “Lesbian intercourse in antiquity normally did not conform to the male pederast model or entail cultic associations or prostitution.”¹²⁰ It was not exploitative. Therefore, non-exploitative but caring homosexual partnerships are included in the sins mentioned in Romans 1. However, there are those who hold that Romans 1:26 does not talk about lesbianism. They claim that Romans 1:26 may describe any sexual deviation, but not lesbianism.¹²¹ In answer we should observe that verse 26 is linked to verse 27 by the term “likewise. The case is very clear.¹²² Male homosexuals are mentioned in verse 27 and lesbians in verse 26. In order to avoid this conclusion, the term “likewise” has to be reinterpreted.¹²³ But even Helminiak concedes that his interpretation may not be correct.¹²⁴

Eight, that Paul was not so much concerned with coercion in a homosexual relationship can be derived from Romans 1:27: “men . . . burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Obviously in such a homoerotic union, both partners lust for each other. Both of them consent to the homosexual relationship, both are responsible for their actions, and both of them receive the penalty. It would be unfair for God to punish a boy who has been forced to play the female in a homosexual relationship.¹²⁵ However, if Paul is even opposed to a relationship of consenting adults, it can safely be assumed that he would be opposed to all other homosexual relationships.¹²⁶ Homosexuality in Romans 1 is not limited to a certain time, culture, or to certain

¹¹⁹ Gagnon, 254. Cf. Gane, part 4 - 65.

¹²⁰ Via and Gagnon, 80.

¹²¹ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 75.

¹²² Cf. White and Niell, 117.

¹²³ See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual*, 297-299, versus James E. Miller, “The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual?” *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 1-11.

¹²⁴ Helminiak, 90, states: “But even if this interpretation is wrong, even if verse 26 is a reference to lesbian sex, the general conclusion argued below must still apply: Romans may refer to same-sex acts, but it intends no ethical condemnation of them.”

¹²⁵ Cf. Via and Gagnon., 80, 81; DeYoung, 158

¹²⁶ Köstenberger, 217, argues, “There was a clear and ambiguous Greek word for pederasty, the term *paidērasḗs*. We have every reason to believe that if Paul had wished to condemn, not homosexuality at large, but only pederasty, he would have used the appropriate Greek term for this practice.”

homosexual forms only. Paul understands it as sinful behavior.

(2) 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

It is claimed that in this text Paul does not refer to monogamous homosexual relationships of mutual respect but condemns pederasty, homosexual prostitution, and exploitive and dehumanizing forms of homosexuality.¹²⁷ If this were true, not all male-male intercourse would be prohibited.¹²⁸ This, does not seem to be the case. First, the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 reaches from 1 Corinthians 5 to 1 Corinthians 7 and deals with the issue of human sexuality. In chapter 5, Paul mentions a case of incest. He accepts Leviticus 18 as binding and urges the Corinthian church to disfellowship the church member involved in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Toward the end of chapter 5, Paul presents a short list of four different categories of people involved in vices (v. 10), the first one being fornicators. This list is enlarged in the next verse (1 Cor 5:11) by two additional groups of people. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 Paul expands his list to ten groups of people.¹²⁹ The unrighteous of verse 9, who will not inherit the kingdom of God, are the same as the subsequent ten groups of evildoers. These groups can be divided in two major parts.

The first five groups of people are idolaters and sexual offenders, discussed in 1 Corinthians 57. The problem with the next five groups is, to some extent, addressed in 1 Corinthians 11. The first part, probably two groups, describes persons involved in heterosexual misconduct, while the next two describe people engaged in homosexual misconduct. “Adulter-

¹²⁷ Cf. the examples listed by Köstenberger, 216.

¹²⁸ Cf. DeYoung, 10, 11.

¹²⁹ In all these lists *porneia* is mentioned first.

ers” applies to married people, while “fornicators” may refer here to singles involved in sexual misbehavior. The rest of chapter 6 warns against a relationship with a prostitute. In 1 Corinthians 6:16, another Creation text is quoted, namely Genesis 2:24. Chapter 7 goes on to describe heterosexual marriage, singleness, and divorce.¹³⁰ In order to avoid *porneia*, “each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2). There is no room for homosexuality. If people “do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:9). Paul clearly is referring to heterosexual marriage.

First Corinthians 6:9, 10 is part of this larger context, which is based on Leviticus 18, the creation account, and Jesus’ exposition of it. Although the Corinthian church, with its problems pertaining to sexuality, is addressed, the issue is broader. The interconnectedness of 1 Corinthians 57, as well as its Old Testament background, implies a universal dimension, again not limited to a particular time, culture, or to certain forms of homosexuality. The entire passage is prescriptive and not just descriptive.¹³¹ The practice of homosexuality excludes people from the kingdom of God, as does any of the other vices mentioned by Paul.

Second, the two terms dealing with homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are *malakos* and *arsenokoites*.¹³² *Malakos* has been rendered “effeminate,” “those who make women of themselves,” “boy/male prostitutes,” “[pervert] homosexuals,” and “catamites.” The term normally means “soft” or “luxurious” and appears four times in the New Testament (Matt 11:8 – twice; Luke 7:25; 1 Cor 6:9). The meaning of this word must be determined by its context. In later Christian literature, the term describes an unworthy person and could have been easily seen as effeminate (1 Cor 6 Polycarp).¹³³ Obviously, “none of this, of course, negates the possibility

¹³⁰ Cf. Thiselton, 447, 451; Via and Gagnon, 84-87.

¹³¹ Therefore, Thiselton, 447, suggests that 1Corinthians 6:9-10 is “an even more important and foundational passage than Romans 1.”

¹³² They have been hotly debated. E.g., David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes: The Meaning of ARSENOKOITAI (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 38/2 (1984): 125-153 has shown that John Boswell’s claim in Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, that arsenokoitai means male prostitutes, not male homosexuals, is groundless. William L. Petersen, “Can ARSENOKOITAI Be Translated by ‘Homosexuals’ (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 40/2 (1986):187-191, has responded to Wright. Basically, he holds that the modern concept of homosexuality does not correspond with the one prevalent in the antiquity.

¹³³ J. R. Jones, part 4 - 9.

that the term *malakos* included male homosexual behavior.”¹³⁴ The majority of the interpreters agree that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 the term *malakoi* refers to homosexuals, especially partners who play the female role in a homosexual relationship.¹³⁵ In verse 9, *malakoi* is surrounded by other terms referring to sexual behavior, which makes it clear that this word has also a sexual meaning. To restrict it to children and pederasty is quite speculative.¹³⁶ The term *arsenokoitēs* (“male homosexual”) helps to define *malakos*. *Arsenokoitēs* is a unique term employed only by Paul in the New Testament.¹³⁷ It clearly goes back to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (LXX), in which the two terms *arsēn* and *koitē* are used together as is also the case in Paul.¹³⁸ The image is that of a man lying with a man in bed and, therefore, designates homosexual intercourse. The *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 may be the active partners in any kind of homosexual relationships.¹³⁹

Third, the severe penalty for being a *malakos* or an *arsenokoites*, namely exclusion from the kingdom of God, indicates that the two terms refer to adult males who of their own free will, whether by innate orientation or not, have homosexual intercourse with each other.¹⁴⁰ The background of the Creation narrative and Leviticus 18 and 20 in 1 Corinthians 6, as well as the other reasons mentioned above, suggest that, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, homosexuality includes all forms of homosexual activity and transcends application to the Corinthian church only.¹⁴¹

(3) 1 Timothy 1:8-10

But we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the

¹³⁴ J. R. Jones, part 4 - 10.

¹³⁵ Cf. Fitzmyer, 287, Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 93; and Springett, 134.

¹³⁶ Cf. Thiselton, 449.

¹³⁷ In his book, DeYoung devotes an entire chapter to the discussion of the term (175-214).

¹³⁸ Cf. Köstenberger, 216.

¹³⁹ Cf. Thiselton, 448-450; Via and Gagnon, 83. Springett, 136, suggests: “If Paul was condemning only a crude form of homosexual activity here, by implication allowing other types, he surely would have been more explicit.” See also David E. Malick, “The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 492. On the other hand, J. R. Jones, part 4 -12, proposes that *arsenokotoi* “almost certainly” has to do with homosexuality, however, “of an exploitive sort.”

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Via and Gagnon, 82; deYoung, 192.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Thiselton, 452.

unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.

The term *arsenokoitēs* (“male homosexual”) is also found in 1 Timothy 1:10, in which the background is Leviticus 18 and 20. This time, however, the term seems to have a broader meaning than in 1 Corinthians 6, because the *malakoi* (“homosexuals”) are not mentioned. A distinction between passive and active partners is not made. Probably, the *arsenokoitai* are all those who are involved in any type of homosexual activity.¹⁴²

The contribution of 1 Timothy to our discussion is that homosexuality is set in the context of the law, and this law is still binding. “Homosexuals” are part of one of the longest vice lists in the New Testament, consisting of fourteen vices. Of these fourteen vices, eight are forming four pairs of two, whereas the remaining six describe individual categories of sinners.¹⁴³ At least the last half of the list of vices corresponds clearly with the Ten Commandments: “those who kill their fathers or mothers”—fifth commandment; “murderers”—sixth commandment; “immoral men and homosexuals”—seventh commandment; “kidnappers”—eighth commandment; and “liars and perjurers”—ninth commandment.¹⁴⁴ The phrase “whatever else is contrary to sound teaching” may relate to those commandments that are not directly referred to. Understood in this way, homosexuality is also a violation of the seventh commandment.¹⁴⁵

The study of the Pauline passages dealing with homosexuality shows that homosexuality is not limited to violent and promiscuous activity; nor is it restricted to pederasty. All homosexual activity is against the Creation order and against divine law and is, therefore, a sin that needs

¹⁴² Cf. Via and Gagnon, 87.

¹⁴³ Cf. Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 31.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Via and Gagnon, 87.

¹⁴⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 464, states: “This commandment [the seventh commandment] does not explicitly condemn premarital sex, postmarital sex (as by a widow or widower), cohabitation without formal marriage, bestiality, or incest, all of which are dealt with elsewhere in various ways; but by implication it certainly does condemn all those practices.”

to be repented of, forgiven, and given up. Both Old and New Testaments address our present situation.

c. Other New Testament Texts on Homosexuality

There are a number of other texts that seem to address homosexual activity. For our discussion they are less important than the previous texts. Second Peter 2:6-10 goes back to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and their sins. Lot is mentioned as one who was emotionally and spiritually tormented by the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Sodom. The passage also mentions licentiousness, lawlessness, and corrupt desires, obviously encompassing all sexual sins, including homosexuality.¹⁴⁶ In Jude 7, 8 the Sodom episode is mentioned again. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah “indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh. . . . Yet in the same way these men [the heretics of Jude’s time], also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.” Again, more than homosexuality seems to be included.¹⁴⁷

In Revelation 22:14, 15, “dogs” are mentioned among those who will not enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. “Dogs” may refer to Gentiles (Matt 15:26), Judaizers (Phil 3:2), heretics (2 Pet 2:22), or male prostitutes (Deut 23:18).¹⁴⁸ Aune suggests: “It may be that ... ‘dog’ . . . is used more specifically here for male homosexuals, pederasts, or sodomites since the term on the parallel vice list in 21:8 . . . is . . . ‘those who are polluted.’”¹⁴⁹

Although it is true that there are just a few references to homosexuality in the Scriptures that does not mean that they are unimportant or that they do not pertain to contemporary Christian homosexuals.¹⁵⁰ Doctrines are not determined by the number of direct biblical references to them. For instance, footwashing and the Millennium are explicitly mentioned only once in the Scripture. The fact that they are mentioned only once does not mean that we should reject both of them. The refer-

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Springett, 142-144.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Springett, 144-148.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 1,223; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 408; and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2002), 701; Springett, 148-150.

¹⁴⁹ Aune, 1,222, 1,223.

¹⁵⁰ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 86.

ences to homosexuality in Scripture clearly reveal God's will to us.

3. Summary

The situation in both Old and New Testaments is comparable. The Old Testament contains texts that are clearly dealing with homosexuality; so does the New Testament. The biblical texts are not limited to a particular time and culture but address homosexual activity at all times. They spell out that homosexual behavior is a sin that needs to be repented of and forgiven. After the presentation of a list of vices (1 Cor 6:9, 10), Paul comments that some members of the Corinthian church had been involved in these sinful activities, including homosexuality, but they gave up this lifestyle and now live a different life (1 Cor 6:11). God is willing to forgive and bring about healing. Thus, this investigation confirms the statements of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as a redemptive community reaching out to those who are battling sin. They respect all people, whether heterosexuals or homosexuals, and acknowledge that all human beings are creatures of the heavenly Father whom He loves and whom they should also love. Each person is extremely valuable in God's sight. Therefore, Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to hating, scorning, or abusing homosexuals. They distinguish between homosexual behavior and homosexual orientation. Although they do not condone the sin of homosexual activity, they treat each individual with respect and compassion, knowing that all people are sinners and are dependent on God's grace yet are also called to serve Christ and separate themselves from sin. While upholding the biblical witness, they support those who are struggling and searching for healing.



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A CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION GUIDE

CREATING SAFE AND
INCLUSIVE SPACES
FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL
& TRANSGENDER

WE ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was created by the Religion & Faith Program & Project One America at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) to support Christians in building safe and inclusive faith communities for all God's children including people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT).

When asked, Jesus told us that the greatest commandment was to love, and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). This is an important lesson when thinking about the role of our faith communities in ending the violence, fear and discrimination that many people who are LGBT experience.

Every week, the church pews are filled with our family and friends, co-workers and neighbors, and countless others throughout our communities. By promoting inclusive messages and practices inside and outside of the church, our congregations can have a positive and supportive impact on the everyday lives of people who are LGBT. Just like the welcome Christ demonstrated to all in society (Galatians 3:28), these actions — when rooted in the same love and compassion — can be transformative and even life-saving.

This guide provides practical suggestions for facilitating conversations and other actions to build safe and inclusive faith communities. As a general recommendation, you'll want to adapt these materials to meet the needs of your own community. Remember, we're all on a journey and we're constantly deepening our understanding on ways to be more inclusive of people who are LGBT. Members of your community whom you may assume aren't inclusive may surprise you. Conversely, those who have been inclusive may actually be unwelcoming to people who are LGBT in their congregations. We recognize these conversations can be hard and that people are in different places. However, we believe people of faith and goodwill can have honest conversations about these issues and agree that no one deserves to be harmed or treated unfairly for any reason. What's most important is ongoing dialogue.

If you need any information or support at any point in the journey, feel free to contact the Religion & Faith Program staff at the Human Rights Campaign Foundation via email (religion@hrc.org) or by phone (202.216.1524).

We hope this work will prove an effective tool as you reach out to your community, and work to create a safer and more inclusive world for **all God's children**.

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6 WAYS TO GET STARTED



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Each church community is at its own place in the journey toward becoming fully welcoming and inclusive of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). Some congregations may be well on their way. Others will be just venturing out. The following is a list of six possible steps on that journey. Consider each with an eye for what best meets the strengths and needs of your own community.

SIX STEPS ON THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

- 1. Host a small group conversation:** Small group conversations are a starting point for your congregation or faith community to talk about the needs of people who are LGBT. These conversations allow your congregation to build a compassionate response, even if there is theological disagreement. Read the enclosed section "Hosting a Small Group Conversation" to get started.
- 2. Preach or teach a sermon or Sunday school class on Love, Inclusion and Compassion:** Depending on your role in your congregation, consider writing a sermon or creating Sunday school or Bible study curriculum around the themes of Love, Inclusion and Compassion. Talk about the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ and His message of unconditional love for all God's children (Matthew 7:12). Read the enclosed section, "Themes for Sermons and Religious Education" to get started.
- 3. Pledge to become an inclusive congregation:** Sign our pledge today and commit to becoming an inclusive congregation. If you're a lay leader or clergy person, we invite you to complete the enclosed "Clergy Commitment Form."
- 4. Signup for the HRC Foundation's Religion & Faith newsletter:** We invite you to receive email updates that provide easy access to information, resources and community events on faith and LGBT-inclusion issues. Visit www.hrc.org/religion and sign up to receive the newsletter. We offer state-specific newsletters in some states.
- 5. Contact the HRC Religion & Faith Program:** If you need further support or suggestions on how to begin a discernment process toward becoming an inclusive congregation, contact the Religion & Faith Program at HRC. Our staff is available to answer any questions and provide or recommend support and resources. For many denominations, there are existing resources and LGBT-inclusive groups that our staff can bring to your attention.
- 6. Become a lead volunteer:** Lead volunteers in a number of states are trained by HRC Foundation Religion & Faith Program staff to recruit and retain volunteers from within the faith community; organize and host community dialogues and gatherings; and identify folks who are interested in sharing their story. Contact the Religion & Faith Program at HRC to become a lead volunteer in your city.

PEOPLE OF FAITH WHO ARE LGBT



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It is often assumed that people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) have no interest in religion or in joining a faith community. Stereotyping perpetuates this misconception. In fact, many people who are LGBT enjoy a deep and abiding faith. Their longing for a loving and welcoming spiritual home is shared by all people of faith – and is often what draws us into communion.

PEOPLE OF FAITH WHO ARE LGBT

In many parts of our country, it's still difficult to live openly as a person who is LGBT. In a 2014 survey¹ conducted by the Human Rights Campaign, a majority of people who are LGBT across several states, cited "preventing harassment and violence" as their top concern. They spoke about discrimination in the workplace; unfriendly healthcare providers; bullying at schools; intolerant teachers or administrators; and experiences of violence, harassment or rejection in public, at home and at their houses of worship. As a result, many people of faith who are LGBT are unable to act on the impulse to worship and serve alongside others of a like mind.

Because our larger communities are closely linked to our congregations, people of faith play a critical role in ending violence and discrimination against LGBT individuals. The consequences of closing our doors can be devastating:



My parents yelled at me daily and said mean and hateful things, sometimes waking me up in the middle of the night. My high school teachers and administrators knew but couldn't do anything about it. I called a local shelter to see if I could stay there but when I told them I feared for my safety because I'm gay, they said they couldn't help me — because they were a Christian shelter and didn't support my "lifestyle."

1 "2014 Human Rights Campaign Survey of LGBT People"

While there are many stories of people who are LGBT experiencing rejection from a faith community, there are also stories about congregations that opened their doors to their LGBT neighbors:

“As a child I knew nothing of being transgender. When I turned to my Southern Baptist theology for help, it told me that I had to pray for God to take this ‘sin’ from me. I begged God to make me ‘normal,’ but to no avail. So I walked away. Trying Unitarianism was my first step back into a church community. Then I was invited to do a program at a United Church of Christ. As soon as I arrived, people began to welcome me. I had thought I would never be welcome in God’s house again, much less share in communion. That was seven years ago. Now I’m active in my local UCC church and I educate people and faith groups on trans issues.”²



2 Story Shared by www.BelieveOutLoud.com

Creating safe and inclusive congregations for people who are LGBT embodies Jesus' message that we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Such communities create transformational and, in many cases, life-saving experiences. As you work to better understand the needs of people who are LGBT, the best course of action is often to simply listen with an open mind and heart. An authentic desire to support the needs of people who are LGBT will help you discern the path ahead, and build a ministry rooted in unconditional love.

It will take strong leadership to make your community a safer and more inclusive place for people who are LGBT. That doesn't just mean leadership from the pulpit. It means individuals starting private conversations, and it often depends more on raising thoughtful questions than on making statements or demands.

Included in this toolkit are activities you can use to initiate conversations in your faith community. We recommend contacting the HRC Foundation's Religion & Faith Program via email (religion@hrc.org) or phone (202.216.1524) if you need any help or support getting started.

HOSTING A SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION



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People of faith who wish to initiate conversations toward greater inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people will benefit by first acknowledging love, compassion and care as their guiding values. It is important for people inside and outside our congregations to see that our faith calls us to create safe and inclusive communities for all God's children. Many Christians who are new to this conversation and conflicted — that is, not sure how to reconcile being theologically affirming or supportive of people who are LGBT — are typically confronting several challenging realities.

Many well-meaning, compassionate people face very real challenges when discussing the inclusion of people who are LGBT. They include:

- ▶ Traditionally held beliefs that the Bible calls for the exclusion of people who are LGBT.
- ▶ Unclear or vague biblically-based language and reasoning to support the full inclusion of people who are LGBT inside and outside the church.
- ▶ Family, friends and other community members who may influence them to be supportive or unsupportive of full LGBT inclusion.
- ▶ Feelings that the prevailing attitudes within churches and the larger culture are in conflict.
- ▶ A belief that being “homosexual” or “transgender” is a choice rather than acknowledging LGBT identities as inherent.

When speaking with conflicted Christians, it's important that you (or the facilitator) feel comfortable meeting people where they are. Sometimes things will be said that are not intentionally hurtful but may impact or trigger people who are LGBT or allies in a negative way. Sometimes, conflicted Christians will want to address how you (or the facilitator) are able to reconcile your faith and LGBT-inclusive beliefs and practices. Often, the real issue is a lack of access to resources or to space for dialogue to talk this through in a productive and healthy way. Remember, we are all on a journey and we're constantly deepening our understanding of ways to be more inclusive of people who are LGBT.

Before convening a group for conversation or sharing your ideas with individuals, think about with whom you will be speaking, their specific

strengths and their challenges, and whether or not you are the best facilitator for a conversation with that group. It's especially helpful to model the very sense of inclusion that you're hoping to create. (For example, if the congregation refers to people who are LGBT as “gay” you can use transgender and lesbian examples.) Always return to the message of building safe and inclusive communities for people who are LGBT. Here are some helpful suggestions for starting the conversation.

TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

This section outlines some tips and practices for the facilitator in convening a small group conversation. These conversations are a starting point for your congregation or faith community to talk about the experiences of people who are LGBT in faith communities. These conversations allow your congregation to build a compassionate response, even if there is theological disagreement.

Remember that a faith-based conversation about building LGBT inclusion should be just that — faith-based. The issue should be acknowledged as profoundly relevant to the values and actions of the congregation. The facilitator can set the tone by sharing their own deeply-held beliefs. For example:

- ▶ As you begin the conversation, mention your faith tradition: “I am ...”
- ▶ Connect your faith tradition to your actions in the world: “My faith tradition teaches me to treat others the way I want to be treated and to love all of my neighbors (Matthew 7:12).”
- ▶ Evoke the example that Jesus set in His ministry as a model for how we live today: “I

look at the way that Jesus ministered and showed unconditional love to all and I wonder how I might do the same.” “Part of Jesus’ ministry was to create an inclusive family that included the marginalized. How might I do the same within my immediate community?”

Conversations on this topic can be challenging for all concerned. Often, you’ll find a wide range of personal experience, knowledge and attitudes. It’s important that the facilitator model the key asset of active listening and work to ensure that all voices are heard. Below are some things to keep in mind:

- ▶ Rather than dwell on theological arguments based in scriptural condemnation of things like same-sex practices, focus on core Christian values, such as love, compassion, grace, mercy, justice, unity and/or forgiveness.
- ▶ When the conversation does touch on passages that are often interpreted as condemnation of people who are LGBT, follow the guidelines set out in “Talking About the Bible,” which is available for download at www.hrc.org/religion.
- ▶ The common question, “What would Jesus do?” might actually be helpful in the context of this conversation. His actions, as described in the Gospels, are consistently inclusive, welcoming and compassionate.
- ▶ Consider raising the issue of the congregation’s responsibility to the larger community. What steps can be taken to break the cycle of violence and harassment being experienced outside and in some cases inside your walls?

ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

It is possible that issues of religious liberty might come up in your conversation. Religious freedom is guaranteed in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and is a grounding principle of our democracy. Clergy will always have the choice about who they want to marry and how they choose to conduct worship.

As an organization working with faith communities that are new to this conversation, we fully honor the process by which religiously affiliated organizations address LGBT inclusion — as long as it’s in accordance with local and federal laws.

For questions about how laws affect your faith community, please contact the Human Rights Campaign at (202) 628.4160. For information about how LGBT-inclusion looks in a different faith group’s polity and church structure, review our faith positions at www.hrc.org/religion.

FACILITATING A SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION IN “HEALTH AND WELLBEING” CONGREGATIONS

SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION (1 hour 30 minutes)

OVERVIEW

These dialogues are a starting point for your congregation or faith community to talk about the experiences of people who are LGBT in faith communities. These conversations are designed for small groups of no more than 10 to 15 people. You'll want to be sure everyone has an opportunity to participate so try not to let the group get too big. Read “Tips for the Facilitator” in this section and follow the steps in this outline to get started.

MATERIALS

- Flipchart or chalkboard
- Markers or chalk

GOAL

To broaden awareness about the health and well-being of people who are LGBT.

AGENDA OUTLINE

ACTIVITY	FORMAT	TIME
▶ Introduction & Prayer	Facilitator	5 minutes
▶ Ground Rules	Group Discussion	10 minutes
▶ Need for Dialogue	Group Discussion	30 minutes
▶ Inclusive Statements	Group Exercise	25 minutes
▶ Day-To-Day Worries and Actions	Group Discussion	15 minutes
▶ Closing & Prayer	Facilitator	5 minutes



INTRODUCTION & PRAYER (5 minutes)

Once you convene your group, you may feel it's appropriate to begin with a prayer that responds to the tradition or needs of the group. There are some suggested prayers in the "In the Sanctuary" section of this guide, which you can use. Designate an individual to lead and close the group in prayer.



GROUND RULES (10 minutes)

After the prayer, begin the conversation with a reminder of the love and care that lies behind the impulse for greater inclusion. You should then lead with the following exercise to establish ground rules for the conversation.

Facilitator Can Say:

"Before we get started, it is important that we have some shared understanding about ground rules in order to create a safe space for everyone who is present. Let's take the next 10 minutes to review some ground rules I've prepared, and we can also expand this list for today's conversation."

Prior to the meeting, prepare some initial ground rules on the flipchart or board, such as speaking from your own experience (use "I" not "they" or "we"), or listen actively and don't interrupt people when they're talking. Read through the suggested ground rules. Once you finish, invite participants to modify or share additional ground rules for the conversation. Ask the group if there is a shared consensus on the ground rules, and once there is, adopt them before beginning the conversation.



NEED FOR DIALOGUE (30 minutes)

After this activity, keep the conversation going and make sure it's open, flexible and on topic. Take a moment to specify your goals and the reality that prompts the need for dialogue.

Facilitator Can Say:

"As people of faith, a group of us have been discussing our responsibilities in making our community safe and welcoming for all people. Our goal today is to take steps in that direction."

The following prompts help clarify your objectives. Spend about 30 minutes facilitating dialogue on these questions.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“Have you ever thought about the safety of people who are LGBT in our community? What do you think that experience might be?”

“A majority of people who are LGBT in a recent HRC survey said that ‘preventing violence and harassment in their community’ was their top concern. How does this affect your perspective on our greater community?”

“Have you ever met a person who is LGBT who experienced violence or harassment in the community? How did you respond (or how would you respond)?”

“Imagine the experience of a youth who is LGBT in our community. What would they struggle with? Consider the experience of their parents. What are their fears and worries?”

“The word ‘sanctuary’ is an architectural term that refers to our primary worship hall. What other meanings does the word have, and how might they be relevant to this conversation?”



INCLUSIVE STATEMENTS EXERCISE (25 minutes)

Following this discussion, let the group know that they will now spend some time considering what message the congregation is sending with its current policy on LGBT issues. If they don't have one, this would be a great space to discuss what a commitment can look like.

Facilitator Can Say:

“Let's take a moment to talk about the ways we can make our congregation(s) safe and more inclusive of people who are LGBT. An inclusive statement is a way that we can send a message that our congregation welcomes all. Let's talk through a sample commitment statement.”

Write out one of the following commitment statements on the flipchart or board. If the group is not ready to discuss an inclusive statement, share the draft “Health and Well-Being” commitment. If your group feels they are ready to discuss an inclusive policy for their congregation, discuss the draft “Inclusive Statement.” Have either commitment written

out on the large pad of paper or board in advance of the conversation. Read the statement out loud for the group.

DRAFT Health and Well-Being Commitment

Our welcome extends to persons of all races, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, physical or mental abilities, economic statuses, cultures and ethnicities. We affirm that every person has worth and is a bearer of God's image. Although we have a diversity of opinion about the biblical guidance on marriage between same-sex couples, we believe we are called to create loving places where people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) will feel included as part of our church family. We pledge to continually work to create more openness and understanding, and to stay in regular dialogue with the LGBT community about how best to do so. We agree not to speak in ways that can directly cause harm to people who are LGBT and their families.

DRAFT Inclusive Statement

Our welcome extends to all persons of all races, ages, sexual orientation, gender identities, physical or mental ability, economic status, culture and ethnicity. We affirm that every person has worth and is a bearer of God's image. No matter who you love, how you look, or what you do, we welcome and affirm you in the full life of the church. Many people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and their families have been or are ostracized by their faith community. We believe that people who are LGBT are a gift from God and are fully embraced by our congregation. As Christians, we are called to unconditionally love everyone.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“What are some initial reactions to this statement? Is there anything you'd change?”

“What does it mean to be a bearer of God's image as it pertains to our unique sexual orientations and gender identities?”

“Do you think members of your faith community would react positively to this statement? Would you feel comfortable adopting this statement for your congregation? Why or why not?”

Spend time modifying the draft statements as a group with a pen or marker until it meets the needs of the group. No matter which statement you discuss, the most important thing to stress to the group is the need for ongoing dialogue. There is no commitment to implement this policy in order to participate in the activity.

After spending no more than 25 minutes, conclude the activity by reading the final statement. Please consider scanning a copy of the final edited commitment and email it to the HRC Religion & Faith Program staff (religion@hrc.org). You can end with a final question.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“How do the actions of the church — and the message it sends — align with your core Christian values? Remember that this action is only a beginning and that continued dialogue to build understanding is essential to creating loving spaces for people who are LGBT and their families. “

**DAY-TO-DAY WORRIES AND ACTIONS** (15 minutes)

Conversations about inclusion and the love of neighbors can become overly philosophical and avoid immediate, day-to-day worries and actions. Participants should feel they are in a safe space to voice their feelings. It might be helpful to end the small group conversation exploring the following questions. This should take no more than 15 minutes.

Facilitator Can Ask:

“Do you feel you can freely advocate for the safe treatment of people who are LGBT? What challenges and opportunities do you see as your congregation takes this step?”

“What would inclusion look like in your congregation?”

“What might be the ripple effect of a change in church policy? Is there a fear of losing existing members? Is it possible that church membership would grow with the inclusion of LGBT persons and those who love and support them?”


“How will the discoveries of this group be shared with the congregation and with church leadership? Are you ready to take that step?”

“What next steps might you take in becoming better informed on this topic?”

**CLOSING AND PRAYER** (5 minutes)

After the conversation, you can end in prayer and thank participants for showing up. It's important to also provide participants with resources and opportunities for additional learning and conversation. If you are planning another small group conversation, let the group know about that. Also let participants know they can receive a copy of the “Christian Conversation Guide: Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for People Who Are LGBT” by contacting religion@hrc.org.

IN THE SANCTUARY



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Each faith community has its own place on the broad continuum of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion. As you move forward on that continuum, consider the suggestions that follow as steps to support your journey. Some might be immediately applicable; others might be goals to move toward. All of them will help your community come closer to creating welcoming, inclusive, safe spaces for everyone who walks through your door.

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

As a community member, lay leader or volunteer, you can do many things to build a more inclusive environment for people who are LGBT. We encourage you to engage your community through any of the following actions:

- 1** If you or members of your faith community are new to this dialogue, host a “small group” conversation using the enclosed guide.
- 2** Talk to people — have conversations with members of your congregation, friends, neighbors and family. Discuss the importance of creating safe communities for people who are LGBT. Host gatherings for conversation and fellowship.
- 3** Make the enclosed “Useful Terms: A Glossary” available as a resource to your house of worship and congregants. Many folks in your congregation will want to learn more about inclusive language and how different terms can impact the LGBT community.
- 4** Make a commitment with your leadership team to host at least four “small group” conversations within your congregation throughout the year.
- 5** In collaboration with others, discuss and develop a “Health and Well-Being” commitment statement and pledge to not speak in ways that can directly or indirectly cause harm to people who are LGBT, their friends and families. Post this commitment on your website and/or a public space inside your congregation for all congregants and visitors to see. For guidance on how to develop this statement, see the “inclusive statements” activity in the “Hosting a Small Group Conversation” section of this guide.
- 6** Encourage your senior minister, pastor and other church leaders to pledge to become an inclusive congregation. Complete the enclosed “Clergy Commitment” form in this section and submit it to the Religion & Faith Program at HRC’s Foundation.
- 7** Host prayer services, conversations or dialogues focused on compassion and love for people who are LGBT, and invite other faith communities to join. For suggested themes, see the enclosed, “Themes for Sermons and Religious Education.”
- 8** Schedule and host regular Bible study opportunities for your congregants using some of the enclosed discussion readings. This is a great way to create and sustain ongoing dialogue within your faith community.
- 9** Develop an inclusive statement or policy that expresses your congregation’s support and affirmation of people who are LGBT. Post this statement or policy on your website and/or a public space inside your congregation for all congregants and visitors to see. For guidance on how to develop this statement, see the “inclusive statements” activity in the “Hosting a Small Group Conversation” section of this guide.
- 10** Publish personal stories of congregants who are LGBT and their families in your faith community newsletter or blog. When people see their lives reflected in the stories of others, it builds relationships and support.
- 11** Promote local organizations or events that address the needs of people who are LGBT as a way for the congregation to engage with a wider community.
- 12** Depending on your role, write a sermon, Sunday school lesson or religious education curriculum dedicated to intentional welcome, inclusion and action directed towards the compassionate treatment of people who are LGBT. As a starting point, you can use the “Themes for Sermons and Religious Education” section of this guide.
- 13** In collaboration with congregational leadership, present a statement to support employment non-discrimination policies. Make that support as public as possible. Having workplace protections for people who are LGBT is a key step toward creating safer communities overall.
- 14** Email your story to HRC (religion@hrc.org) about why you believe in welcoming and affirming LGBT people inside and outside of the church.
- 15** Finally, if there are other activities that have worked for you, please let us know! Contact us at religion@hrc.org.

PRAYERS

As you deepen the conversation around creating an inclusive community, consider adopting a focused prayer practice that is consistent with the values of your congregation. Prayers can be used to open or close gatherings, and to begin one-on-one conversations. They help create an atmosphere for the respectful sharing of ideas and for active listening. You can adapt any of these to meet the needs of your group.

PRAYER 1

Gracious God,
We are reminded every day, through the complex beauty of the world around us, that You are a lover of all Your creation. You give life, redeem life and stay with us forever — nudging us forward into the great goodness for which we were created. Thank You for loving us no matter what. Thank You for standing with us no matter the forces against us. Thank You for giving us the strength to live and love another day. Hear our prayer, Holy Spirit, to make a home for all people, in all churches that call themselves the body of Christ. May we work today toward healing for those who have been hurt and harmed in the very places that house Your Spirit. And may we work to do everything in our power to create a safer world for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters. Amen.

(Adapted from “There Is No Power But God” Prayer, by Rev. Adriene Thorne.)

PRAYER 2

Heavenly Father,
We know You are the God who changes not. You are the same yesterday, today and forever, and Your eyes are always on the righteous. Here we stand as Your children, seeking to better understand Your will for our lives. All we want to do is please You. So, on this day, as with every day, we come to You for wisdom and guidance. Show us the way that will keep us on the straight and narrow path that leads only to You through Jesus Christ, our Lord. All these blessings we ask in His name. Amen.

PRAYER 3

Dear Lord,
You speak to us through Scripture. You speak to us through the voices of the oppressed. You rejoice with us through the uplifted. You pray with us through the church. You remind us through Your voice and presence that You are always with us, and that You are always speaking to us. Keep us talking. Keep us listening. And speak to us through each other. Amen.

(Adapted from Duncan, Geoffrey. *Courage to Love Liturgies for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002.)

PRAYER 4

Spirit of Life and of Love,
Today we open our hearts and minds to You, striving to recognize through Your presence the great and glorious complexity of the world around us. As we open ourselves to the many wonders and mysteries of the human race, we ask for the wisdom that comes with understanding experiences outside of our own. We ask to enter into the joys and sorrows of people whose journeys may seem distant from ours, but who share a common goal: to live fully and joyfully in the world that we share. Blessed be, and amen.

PRAYER 5

Dear Lord Jesus,
We come together and give thanks for Your love of us, and all Your good creation. We ask You to speak through us as we carefully listen for Your guidance to help us live compassionately in accordance to Your will. Guide us as we work to better understand the many ways we can serve our neighbors with greater love and compassion. Help us as we work to practice understanding and learn to leave all judgment in Your hands. We ask that Your Holy Spirit work through us as we listen to You and to each other, and work to create a world that is shaped in Your vision of unconditional love of all creation. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.

THEMES FOR SERMONS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

As you prepare or guide the content of sermons and religious education curricula, look for opportunities to link issues of LGBT inclusion to the foundational values that ground your congregation. This section includes a few familiar themes that pave the way for the compassionate welcome and inclusion of people who are LGBT. Keep in mind that in some communities, particular language may be an inspiration and in others it may not. Pay attention to the language that communities use to express their idea of the highest good. For instance, in some spaces “justice” is held out as inspirational and something we as Christians should strive to bring into being. For other congregations, justice is a word of suspicion that translates into activism and will turn people off. It is important to pay attention to the core values professed by a community before developing your themes.

Whether speaking from the pulpit, in conversation or in the classroom, be mindful of the words you choose. In addition to avoiding disrespectful terms, avoid using the language of “us” and “them.” Focus, instead, on how “we” are all part of the same community.

It’s also good to avoid comparing the support of people who are LGBT to Jesus’ love for the “unclean” or “social outcast.” In addition to encouraging negative attitudes to people who are LGBT, this approach emphasizes the difference between people, rather than the divine light we all share. It is, however, powerful to ground your discussion in the Gospel stories. Jesus created a profound ministry for the most marginalized and showed how they are loved by God and can be an instrument for God’s vision of beloved community.

LOVE: Love is universally extended to all people. There is nothing we can do in our lives to make the Divine love us more and there is nothing we

can do that will make the Divine love us less. Love is what moves in the midst of the darkness of fear and hate, bringing light that allows people to be seen as the beloved of the Divine. All people have been created to love and be loved.

MERCY: Mercy is found and experienced among those who are in community. Our faith community becomes like a large extended family when all of God’s beloved people are intentionally invited to join. It is in community that we are able to see reflections of our story in the stories of others. The whole person (heart, mind and soul) is opened to a new understanding of mercy when they are able to journey through life with others.

COMPASSION: Compassion fills a person when they are able to see the needs of others. How do you and your faith community choose to fully see the needs of your brothers and sisters in God’s inclusive family? How is the heart of your community moved to respond to the compassion that fills it? How does your congregation recognize and name the needs of people who are LGBT?

JUSTICE: Through justice, a community can transform its belief in love, mercy and compassion into action. What steps is your faith community taking to show people who are LGBT that you see them, see their needs, and are committed to acting in solidarity with them? Be bold in encouraging compassion for people who are LGBT and reaffirm the importance of all people in God’s extended family. Your work is not done until all people are welcome at the table and are able to exist in society as fully equal.

USEFUL TERMS: A GLOSSARY



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In order to create a safe space to explore these complicated issues, it's important to choose the right language. Words like “homosexual,” for example, are outdated and should be avoided. Words like “faggot,” “dyke” or “tranny,” are derogatory and offensive. The words “trans” and “transgender” can be used interchangeably to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. These pages will help guide your language choices.

To have a productive discussion about sexuality, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, explore the terms listed below. Always remember, though, that terminology is always changing as people live into their identities in new ways.

ALLY: Someone who supports members of a community other than their own. In the context of the LGBT community, "ally" is often used to refer to non-LGBT people who advocate and support LGBT people.

BISEXUAL: A person who is physically, romantically, emotionally and/or relationally attracted to more than one gender, though not always at the same time, in the same way or to the same degree.

CLOSETED: An adjective that describes people who have not disclosed their LGBT identity, or who have only told a few people. The person is "closeted" and has not "come out of the closet." Often, people do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity for safety reasons.

COMING OUT: The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share it with others. Coming out happens many times over the course of a lifetime.

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR: An inclusive term that typically refers to people who are not white.

DYKE: A derogatory term for a lesbian. Some lesbians have reclaimed this word and use it as a positive term, but it is still considered offensive when used by the general population.

FAGGOT (OR FAG): A derogatory term for a gay man. Some gay men have reclaimed this word and use it as a positive term, but it is still considered offensive when used by the general population.

GAY: An adjective used to describe a person whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or relational attractions are to people of the same sex.

GENDER IDENTITY: One's internal, personal sense of their own gender. For many transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

GENDER EXPRESSION: External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through "masculine," "feminine" or gender-variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Many, transgender people seek to match their gender expression to their gender identity rather than their birth-assigned sex.

HETEROSEXUAL: An adjective that describes people whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attractions are to people of a different sex. Also: straight.

HOMOPHOBIC/TRANSPHOBIC/BIPHOBIC: Fear, hatred, anger, discomfort, intolerance or lack of acceptance toward LGBT people.

HOMOSEXUAL: An outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many LGBT people. "Gay" and "lesbian" are more commonly accepted terms to describe people who are attracted only to members of the same sex.

INTERSEX: A person whose biological sex is ambiguous. There are many genetic, hormonal or anatomical variations that make a person's sex ambiguous (i.e., Klinefelter syndrome or congenital adrenal hyperplasia). Parents and medical professionals usually assign intersex infants a sex, and in some cases, even perform surgical operations to conform the infant's body to that assignment. This practice has become increasingly controversial as intersex adults speak out against the practice, accusing doctors of genital mutilation.

LESBIAN: A woman who has emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual attractions to other women.

LGBT: Abbreviation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

LIFESTYLE: Avoid using this term. Just as there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one bisexual or gay lifestyle.

QUEER: People who are not heterosexual and/or who do not conform to rigid notions of gender and sexuality. For many LGBT people, this word has a negative connotation since it was historically used as a derogatory term when referencing LGBT people. However, some LGBT people believe it is an inclusive term and feel comfortable using it.

SAME-GENDER LOVING: A term typically used in communities of color as an inclusive way to describe people with same-sex attractions.

STRAIGHT SUPPORTER: A heterosexual person who supports and honors LGBT diversity, acts accordingly to challenge negative remarks and behaviors, and explores and understands his or her own bias. It is important to note that many transgender people are straight. See also Ally.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: An individual's enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual. For example, a trans woman who is attracted only to other women is also a lesbian.

TRANSGENDER: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically and may identify as male, female, gender queer, agender, or other terms.

TRANSEXUAL: A term that is no longer widely used. Use transgender unless the person self identifies as transexual.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The HRC Foundation's Religion & Faith Program works to create a world where nobody is forced to choose between who they are, who they love and what they believe. Below are a few additional resources developed by our team. To learn more about these resources online, visit: www.hrc.org/religion. To speak to program staff about accessing any of the resources, contact us via email (religion@hrc.org) or by phone (202.216.1524).

A LA FAMILIA

This comprehensive, multi-faceted program geared toward Latino Christian communities aims to facilitate conversations around the intersections of faith, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and family. Our program has components ranging from facilitated dialogues conducted by our 30 national facilitators to local trainings involving community and faith leaders who wish to enhance Latino participation in civic discourse leading to LGBT inclusion.

"BEFORE GOD, WE ARE ALL FAMILY"

This video features the compelling journey of five Latino families who reconcile their unbreakable love for each other and their deep commitment to living faithful lives in the face of religious-based intolerance of those with different sexual orientations and gender identities.

COMING HOME TO FAITH, TO SELF, TO SPIRIT: LGBT GUIDE

This guide is aimed for those who hope to lead their faith communities toward a more welcoming stance, and those seeking a path back to beloved traditions. Because each faith tradition is built upon its own complex history and doctrine, this guide offers general, overarching insights and suggestions.

FAITH POSITIONS ON LGBT-INCLUSION

Many religious organizations have issued statements officially welcoming LGBT people as members, including the solemnizing of same-sex marriage, and the ordination of clergy who are openly LGBT. Visit our "Faith Positions" on the HRC website (www.hrc.org/resources/entry/faith-positions) for an in-depth overview of different religious organizations' position on people who are LGBT and the issues that affect them.

SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS & THEOLOGICAL STUDY

This project seeks to encourage and promote dialogue on LGBT issues and religion in seminaries and, by extension, in our congregations and communities. In partnership with

Vanderbilt Divinity School, HRC provides 15 graduate and post-graduate students with a week-long intensive program to encourage and promote dialogue on LGBTQ issues.

TRIUMPH THROUGH FAITH

Produced by the Human Rights Campaign, this guide offers practical, field-tested steps to engage people of faith, their clergy and community leaders in the ongoing struggle for equality and justice. Drawing on strategies employed in five state campaigns (Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina and Washington), this guide and its accompanying educational programs share the tools that made faith a critical factor in the marriage equality victories of November 2012.

TALKING ABOUT THE BIBLE

This resource provides pointers on how to initiate thoughtful, compassionate and productive conversations on Scripture.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT "HOMOSEXUALITY?"

This publication provides an overview of how the Bible addresses LGBT-related issues, and how scholars have responded over the centuries.

OTHER READINGS

A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor's Path to Embracing People Who Are Gay, Lesbian and Transgender into the Company of Jesus, Ken Wilson

A Lily Among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexual Ethic, Miguel A. De La Torre

Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships, David Brownson

Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism, Patricia Hill Collins

Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility, Stephen G. Ray Jr.

God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships, Matthew Vines

Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View, Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Mom, I'm Gay: Loving Your LGBTQ Child Without Sacrificing Your Faith, Susan Cottrell

No More Goodbyes: Circling the Wagons Around Our Gay Loved Ones, Carol Lynn Pearson

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Resource for Congregations on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,
Cody J. Sanders, Paul Smith, Peggy Campolo, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Brian Ammons and Mahan Silar

Science, Scripture and Homosexuality, Alice Ogden Bellis

Sex + Faith: Talking with Your Child from Birth to Adolescence, Kate Ott

Sexuality and The Black Church: A Womanist Perspective,
Kelly Brown Douglas

Spirited: Affirming the Soul, Lisa C. Moore

The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety and Public Witness, Raphael G. Warnock

The Good Book: Reading the Bible With Mind and Heart,
Peter J. Gomes

The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities,
Delroy Constantino-Simms

The Holy Spirit and Preaching, James A. Forbes

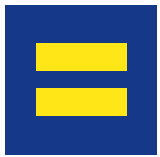
Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches, Horace L. Griffin

Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays vs. Christians Debate, Justin Lee

Transgendered: Ministry, Theology, and Communities of Faith,
Justin Tanis

Understanding the Black Church: The Dynamics of Change,
Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson

Where The Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion, Yvette Flunder



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ADVENTIST EDITION

GUIDING FAMILIES

OF LGBT+ LOVED ONES

FOR ADVENTIST FAMILIES,
MINISTRY LEADERS, AND
ALL WHO CARE

FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

If you are the parent, family member, or friend of a young person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT+), this guide is for you. If you are the pastor or teacher of a student navigating sexual orientation and/or gender identity concerns, this resource has been created with you in mind, as well. This booklet is not designed to address the finer points of theological, biological, social, or legal issues. It is written to increase your understanding of and care for LGBT+ young people, so that you can nurture their well-being and faith identity without condemnation or exclusion. We pray that this resource will greatly improve your ability to demonstrate the love of Christ to those in your Adventist home, church, or school who are of another orientation and/or identity.

PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND FRIENDS

Whether your child, family member, or friend just came out or did so some time ago, our hope is that this resource will equip and encourage you. It all starts with what some have called a posture shift. The LGBT+ population has been misunderstood and mistreated for decades, resulting in a great deal of emotional and spiritual harm. Against this backdrop, Adventists must shift our behavioral posture to ensure that our actions, attitudes, and words reflect those of Jesus.

FOR PASTORS AND TEACHERS

As an Adventist church or school leader, you will no doubt come into contact with students who identify as LGBT+. Your leadership and influence can make a significant difference in their lives. This guide will help you provide relational care for these young people and offer much-needed guidance to their family members, friends, and fellow believers. Use this material to educate yourself and others on how to generously engage and thoughtfully care for LGBT+ individuals.

WHAT IS POSTURE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

When taking up a new sport, it is necessary to learn the correct posture. You cannot simply step on to a snowboard or swing a golf club and expect results. You have to learn how to use your body to carve the board across the slope or drive the ball squarely down the fairway. Even the slightest shift in posture can determine success or failure. The same is true of the gospel. God has entrusted us with Good News, but our posture—the way we communicate it to others and live it out in our own lives—can make all the difference. Many Christians think the gospel can be compromised only by a loss of biblical truth. In fact, the gospel can also be compromised by a loss of biblical love. To love others is to live out God's truth. When we fail to love, we misrepresent God (who is love) to those He desires to reach.

CARE—NOT COMPROMISE

Teaching others to love and care for LGBT+ people can trigger concerns about biblical compromise. **Nothing in this resource will dishonor God's Word. We encourage you to maintain the biblical position of the Adventist Church (see page 71), while adjusting your posture to love others like God has loved you. We are all sinners and regularly fall short of God's glory.** Yet Jesus has saved us by His amazing grace. We did not earn it or achieve it—let alone deserve it. Those who have received such mercy must not mistreat others or place roadblocks in their path. We are called to remove obstacles and consistently reveal the love and kindness of Jesus to others—no matter where they may be in life. Sadly, many Adventist LGBT+ young people have left the church due to family rejection or church exclusion. What might happen if we learned to love and nurture our LGBT+ young people instead?

We pray that this resource will help you live out the gospel.

Prayerfully in Christ.

NAD Commission on Human Sexuality

Working with Bill Henson, author of *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones*

GUIDING FAMILIES

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North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists
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WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

It is important for family and friends of LGBT+ young people—along with the pastors and teachers who support them—to have a resource that can guide them. In this booklet we draw on recent research with more than 300 Adventist LGBT+ young adults, ages 18 to 35 years (VanderWaal, Sedlacek, and Lane, 2017). Based on the findings, we offer the following waypoints for the journey ahead.

1. You are *not alone*—family resources (such as this guide) are available.
2. It takes *strength and courage* for an LGBT+ young person to come out.
3. Your reaction to a young person's disclosure has a direct impact on their emotional and spiritual *well-being*.
4. Even if you feel confused or uncomfortable with the sexual orientation or gender identity of your family member or friend, your *support* and care is key for their welfare.
5. You need to seek *knowledge and understanding* of LGBT+ issues (this resource is a good start).
6. Your responsibility is to express your constant *love and care* for a struggling young person, not to contest or try to change their orientation and/or identity.
7. It is essential to communicate to LGBT+ young people that *God loves them unconditionally* as you come to terms with their orientation and/or identity in the context of your own religious beliefs.
8. It is important to understand that your LGBT+ family member or friend may be a deeply religious person and that they can have a *happy future*.

We will share insights and quotes from these research participants in the pages to follow.

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN LIFE DIFFERS FROM OUR EXPECTATIONS

WATCHING OUR CHILDREN GROW from babies into toddlers and from adolescents into young adults is one of the greatest privileges and miracles that a parent can experience in life. By the time our kids reach adulthood, they will have made us cry tears of joy and filled our lives with much laughter and love.

Finding out unexpected things about our children begins early on in parenthood. Some things that we discover involve their propensity to sin. We may be shocked to find out that our son lied to hide a bad test result. Or maybe he stole something from his friend or the neighbor. Possibly, we overhear our daughter using language with her middle school friends that betrays the person we know her to be.

No doubt, our children are sinners. Just like us. They need God's grace. Just like us.

Other unexpected discoveries involve developmental gifts or vulnerabilities: We may discover that our daughter is particularly brilliant, artistic, or athletic. Or that our son struggles with learning. Maybe our child struggles to maintain attention. Or maybe they lack the initiative or drive it will take to succeed.

Some of our children's weaknesses are related to character flaws, but many of their failures and mistakes arise from vulnerabilities they face. More broadly, every child is growing up in this world for the first time and trying to figure out how life works.

These realities apply to every human being. As parents, these realities apply to all of our children.

When the unexpected discovery involves our child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, we can suddenly feel very alone. Maybe shocked. Possibly fearful. For some, shameful. For many, big questions arise: *Why did this happen? How did this happen?* Lurking under these questions is often a deeper question that we may not want to face: *Did I cause this?*

Is this my fault?

As parents, this question can hit us hard. Our minds may be flooded with memories of our worst mistakes. Maybe I am a mother who became exhausted and neglected my child. Possibly, I am a father who worked too many hours. We may remember yelling at or exasperating our children with overly high expectations. Our thoughts may go something like this:

Impatience. It's every parent's struggle, right? Oh, how many times I was impatient and demanding! Did my lack of gentleness cause my child to be gay? Did our divorce cause my daughter to be transgender?

While it is tempting to focus on causation, I want to resolve this question up front: **the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity are highly complex, multi-factorial, and likely rooted in both nature and nurture.** For any one person, it can be impossible to

know the exact cause. For this reason, we propose that we shift our focus from *causation* to *compassion*. Your LGBT+ loved one, regardless of their age, needs your faithful presence, understanding, and compassion in their life.

**"WE PROPOSE THAT
WE SHIFT OUR FOCUS
FROM CAUSATION
TO COMPASSION."**

You deserve the same compassion. In that spirit, *Guiding Families* is designed to help you increase understanding and build a trustworthy relationship with LGBT+ loved ones. To accomplish this, we have to address common mistakes that many parents make. This is not about shaming or blaming you. It is our heartfelt intention to help you.

Our resource will not "fix" sexuality or gender identity, but it will equip you to lay down your life for your LGBT+ loved one.

As you move through our resource, you may discover ways that you've damaged relational trust with your loved one. Please remember: even loving parents make many mistakes. *Guiding Families* offers action steps you can take to begin the process of repairing trust and healing relational wounds.

We pray that you find this resource to be comforting. May God give you hope that He will bless your family.

*"REMEMBER [FERVENTLY]
THE WORD AND PROMISE TO
YOUR SERVANT, IN WHICH
YOU HAVE CAUSED ME TO
HOPE. THIS IS MY COMFORT
AND CONSOLATION IN MY
AFFLICTION; THAT YOUR
WORD HAS REVIVED ME AND
GIVEN ME LIFE."*

- PSALM 119:49, 50

GLOSSARY *OF* TERMS

ACCEPTANCE

An honest and full acknowledgement of the reality of a situation; a love toward someone as they are, not as one would like them to be. Acceptance does not inherently mean approval of a situation or of other people's dealings with that situation. Acceptance also does not mean feeling good about a situation. It is a state in which each person (loved ones and self) can move forward owning their respective roles and responsibilities in a situation—no more, no less.

BAIT-AND-SWITCH

Occurs when intentions, beliefs, or attitudes are initially misrepresented and later found to be different from expected. An example would be vaguely expressing a love for LGBT+ people, only to later disclose a significant aspect of belief that was not clearly communicated earlier. A bait-and-switch can leave someone feeling hurt, betrayed, or lied to. While the purpose of a bait-and-switch tends to be avoiding difficult confrontation, it can ironically end up being more hurtful than an honest disclosure.

COMING OUT

When a person shares with other people their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, as well as the process that individual goes through to discover and understand their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Originated from the phrase "coming out of the closet." Coming out does not necessarily mean "living it out"—a person may share about their experience without an intent to date the same gender or transition their gender. Conversely, a person may come out while they are already in a relationship or in the process of a gender transition. When someone's sexual/gender identity is announced by someone else without consent, it is called being **outed**.

TRAUMA

A psychological shift resulting from a distressing event or series of events. Trauma may result from a one-time occurrence, such as a death of a loved one. Trauma may also result from (often seemingly "smaller") distressing events occurring repeatedly over a long period of time, such as repeated physical or verbal harm at home or at school. The latter form is often called **complex trauma**, **developmental trauma**, **historic trauma**, **traumatic stress**, **toxic stress**, or "little t" trauma.¹

LESBIAN

Adj./N.

(A woman who is) attracted exclusively or most significantly to other women.

"She is lesbian." "She is a lesbian woman."

GAY

Adj.

Attracted exclusively or most significantly to the same gender. Historically used only for males, but increasingly used also for females.

"He is gay." "He is a gay man."

BISEXUAL

Adj.

Attracted to more than one gender, but not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

"She is bisexual."

TRANSGENDER

Adj.

Refers to those whose gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex at birth. In some persons, this can cause deep and persistent distress known as gender dysphoria.

"He is transgender."

¹Paynter, Michael L. (2017). *Exploring a School Culture and Climate Where Students Can Flourish: Using Focus Group Methodology to Capture Key Stakeholder Perceptions About School Culture and Climate in an Alternative Education High School*. San Jose State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 10635374.

²Yarhouse, Mark A. (2015). *Understanding Gender Dyshporia: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. InterVarsity Press.

QUEER/NONSTRAIGHT

Adj.

Umbrella term referring to individuals who are not **straight** (exclusively attracted to the opposite gender) and/or who experience a level of discomfort with their birth gender. Queer is a formerly derogatory term that has been presently reclaimed as an empowering identifier.

"He identifies as queer."

QUESTIONING

Adj.

Unsure of the exact nature of one's own gender identity and/or sexual identity, and thus unable to confidently identify by a particular sexuality/gender label in the present.

"She is questioning her sexuality."

INTERSEX

Adj.

Having been born with sex characteristics (ex., genitals, gonads, chromosomes, endocrinology) that do not correspond with the typical notions of male or female bodies.

"My child is intersex."

ASEXUAL

Adj.

Experiencing minimal to no sexual attraction to other individuals. Asexual people can experience a range of romantic inclination, from none (**aromantic**) to some (**gray-romantic**) to full (**romantic**).

"He is asexual, but not aromantic, so he still enjoys going on dates."

ALLY

N.

A person who is not LGBT+ but who affirms progressive LGBT+ social, political, and/or theological causes.

"His best friend is an LGBT+ ally."

PANSEXUAL

Adj.

Attraction to people not limited by the people's biological sex, gender, or identity. Whereas "bisexual" tends to denote two gender categories ("bi" = "two"), someone who is pansexual may not view gender as limited to two categories ("pan" = "all").

"She identifies as pansexual."

GENDERQUEER

Adj.

Not conforming to or identifying with typical notions of masculine or feminine appearance, roles, traits, or identity. Synonymous with **gender non-binary**, **genderfluid**, **gender non-conforming**, **pangender**, **androgynous**, or **androgyny**.

"They are gender nonbinary, or 'NB' for short."

GENDER DYSPHORIA

N.

The experience of distress associated with the incongruence wherein one's psychological and emotional gender identity does not match one's biological sex.² A person with no or low gender dysphoria is said to have **gender coherence** or **gender congruence**.

"She experiences gender dysphoria."

TRANSITION

N./V.

A process of bringing one's gender presentation and/or sex characteristics into accord with one's internal sense of gender identity.

"My son has announced plans to transition."

HOMOSEXUAL

Adj./N.

A person who is attracted to the same sex/gender. Generally considered an outdated or offensive term to LGBT+ individuals.

SAME-SEX ATTRACTION (SSA)

N.

(Or **same-gender attraction**) This term is common for those who consider attractions toward the same gender to be a sin struggle, yet it is offensive to many LGBT+ people because it has "behavior" connotations and diminishes the "identity" aspects of sexual orientation. (Many LGBT+ people prefer the term **same-gender loving**.)

"He experiences same-gender attraction."

STRAIGHT/HETEROSEXUAL

Adj.

Attracted exclusively or most significantly to the opposite sex/gender.

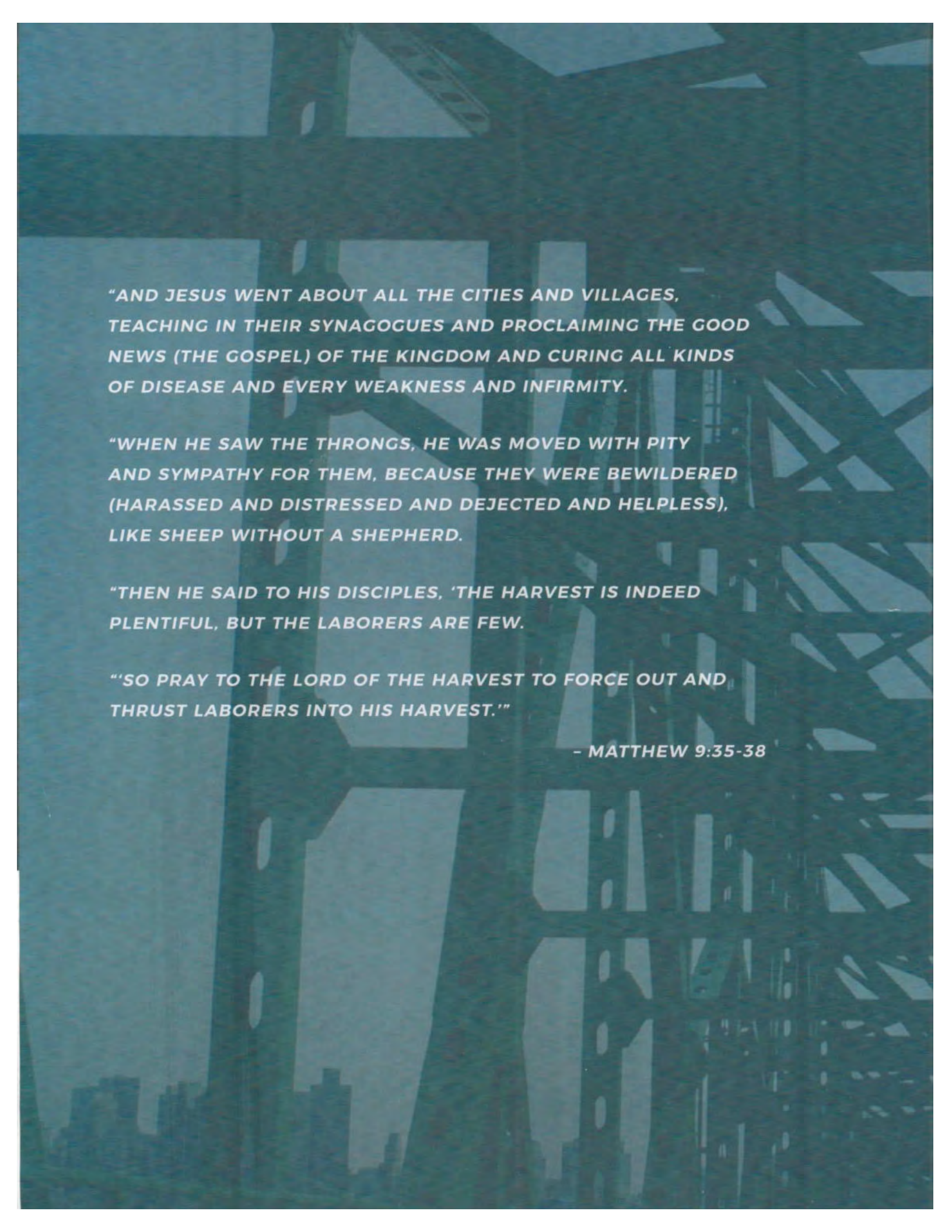
"She is heterosexual."

CISGENDER

Adj.

(Or **Cis**, pronounced "/sis/") Describes a person whose internal sense of gender identity corresponds with their birth sex. (The prefix "trans" means "across," while the prefix "cis" means "on the same side of.")

"Being cisgender, I don't face the challenge of having to question my gender."



*"AND JESUS WENT ABOUT ALL THE CITIES AND VILLAGES,
TEACHING IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES AND PROCLAIMING THE GOOD
NEWS (THE GOSPEL) OF THE KINGDOM AND CURING ALL KINDS
OF DISEASE AND EVERY WEAKNESS AND INFIRMITY.*

*"WHEN HE SAW THE THRONGS, HE WAS MOVED WITH PITY
AND SYMPATHY FOR THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE BEWILDERED
(HARASSED AND DISTRESSED AND DEJECTED AND HELPLESS),
LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.*

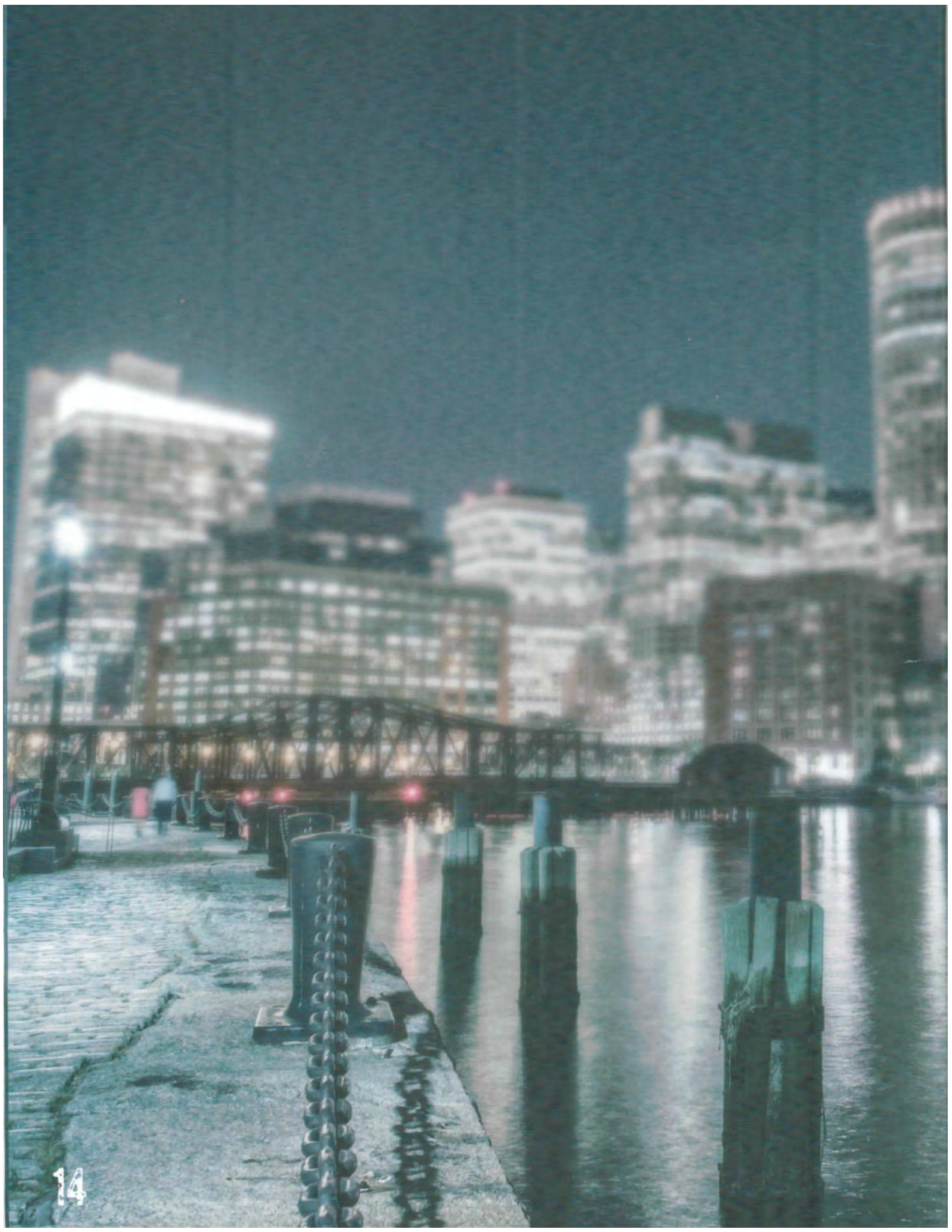
*"THEN HE SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, 'THE HARVEST IS INDEED
PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW.*

*"SO PRAY TO THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO FORCE OUT AND
THRUST LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST."*

- MATTHEW 9:35-38

PART 1:

UNDERSTANDING LGBT+ LOVED ONES



THE COURAGE IT TAKES

FOR A LOVED ONE TO COME OUT

THE DAY YOUR CHILD COMES OUT is one of the most critical days of their life. On the following pages, you will learn just how scary this moment can be for young people. Imagine knowing that your parents are loving yet worrying that one disclosure could mean that you are rejected—or even disowned.

As a parent, it might seem unthinkable that your beloved child could possibly fear you or wrestle with anxious thoughts of being rejected.

Yet many *do* fear family rejection and disownment, which still occur today. Additionally, prior traumas (such as bullying) may be fueling some of your child's fears of being rejected.

For this reason, we must start with the premise that coming out may be the most risky and vulnerable moment of their life. What they are sharing with you often has been processing inside them for a long time, possibly for years. For them to share with you reflects deep cour-

age, which can be described as “trusting in the midst of fear.”

Your response is critical. It will determine the difference between safety or fear, peace or anxiety, secure love or sense of rejection.

Similar to how young people can fear their parents' response, some parents fear, *What will happen when our pastors and others in our church find out?* Sadly, this fear can disable a parent's natural inclination to radically love and demonstrate acceptance.

Families and friends may assume the Adventist Church and its leaders expect them to reject or respond harshly to a young person when they come out. To the contrary: many Adventist pastors and teachers would be deeply saddened by this outcome. We at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists join with these leaders in calling you to walk lovingly and patiently with LGBT+ young people—do not reject or withdraw from them. Keep reading to find out why.

In light of these things, we join your pastors/teachers in supporting you as you walk in love with your LGBT+ child. Your natural inclination to accept and love your child is God-given. At times, you might be tempted to withdraw in disappointment or grief, but it is a critical time to gently engage and assure your child of your love.

GROWING UP LGBT+

THE WEIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE CARRY

Young people do not decide to come out on a whim. They likely have been sorting out their identity for a number of years. Many experience isolation and depression as they look for answers on their own, with little or no support from others. The cumulative impact of the traumas listed on the right can result in lower self-worth, difficulties in academic performance, and greater risk of self-harm.

Understanding one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity can be a confusing and frustrating process that takes time. While young people may experiment sexually as they develop, they do not *choose* the enduring attractions or longings that come to make up their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. As a family member, friend, or church leader, you cannot demand that certain feelings go away or deny the reality of what a young person experiences. However, you can walk beside them, encourage them, and help them to bear the cumulative weight of the burdens they carry.

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"My life now is much better [since coming out] because I am not living in constant fear of my parents finding out about my sexuality. I am able to be much more open with my parents about my life now and feel more like I can trust them and come to them with any issue, not just those relating to my sexuality."

Come Out



Shame



Repression



Coming to Awareness?

THE WEIGHT THAT

MANY LGBT+ TEENS CARRY

IS TOO HEAVY. WE CANNOT

LIGHTEN THEIR BURDEN

IF WE ARE UNAWARE OF WHAT

THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH.

WRESTLE WITH:
SHOULD I
COME OUT?

11

10

CAN SHUT DOWN
EMOTIONALLY OR
MENTALLY

MAY HAVE
ATTEMPTED OR
CONTEMPLATED
SUICIDE

9

8

TEND TO "REPRESS"
TO A POINT OF
EXHAUSTION*

ANTICIPATE
JUDGMENT
AT CHURCH

7

6

EXPERIENCE ISOLATION,
LONELINESS, AND
DEPRESSION.

LIVE WITH FEAR OF
FAMILY REJECTION

4

5

WONDER IF GOD
HAS DISOWNED
THEM

**BECOME SELF-AWARE:
"I AM GAY"**

ARE BULLIED AND
TEASED FOR YEARS

3

2

POORLY INTE-
GRATE WITH
SAME-GENDER
PEERS

FEEL "DIFFERENT"
AT AN EARLY AGE

1

1

*Repression is the mental and emotional energy expended in an attempt to subdue or shut down unwanted feelings through self-effort. This process commonly leads to mental exhaustion, or even a psychological breakdown. This can lower hope, increase feelings of self-contempt, and increase suicidality.

SIX DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

HOW YOUTH PROCESS IDENTITY



Young people may be distressed to discover they are attracted to persons of the same gender or that their gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. For many this reality may not agree with what's going on with their friends or with their family's biblical beliefs. Because they want to be like others, be a "good Christian," and/or meet parental expectations, they often attempt to repress their experience. They may try to make it go away by asking God to change them, claiming Bible promises, or engaging intensely in religious activities. Those who are not spiritually inclined may try to repress using their own strength.

Often confused and uncertain of who they are, many LGBT+ youth struggle silently with their thoughts and feelings. They do not always understand how critical it is to have adult support. Some do, but they fear rejection or judgment. Many withdraw, isolate, and hide. Some hide physically for fear people will discover what they are experiencing. Others hide emotionally so their secret is not at risk.



After a period of denial, repression, and hiding, many young people conclude that their thoughts and feelings are not likely to go away. They accept this as their reality and begin to think in terms of identity, saying to themselves, "This is who I am." It should come as no surprise that young people consider sexuality and/or gender to be important aspects of their personal identity, as these are core elements of the human experience.

Not all young people who identify as LGBT+ are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Some inwardly admit they are gay or transgender, but live publicly in isolation and fear. Young people who let this stress build up without peer or adult support run the risk of increased depression and suicidal ideation. Mental, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion can overtake a young person when pain and distress from the past and anxiety about the future accumulate for too long.



Young people need to be genuine about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as they grow and develop. Those who remain closeted are often at an increased risk for self-harm. Those who choose to come out take a risk by disclosing very personal information about themselves to others and will only do so if they feel it is safe. If a young person comes out to you, it is generally with much forethought, and it is important to maintain confidentiality. Never "out" an LGBT+ young person to someone else without that young person's express permission. Keep in mind, coming out is a long-term process. A young person may come out to a trusted friend before doing so with parents, classmates, or church members. If they move to a different city, they will need to negotiate the disclosure process all over again with a new group of friends, acquaintances, or a new boss.

When young people come out, it is an opportunity to recover from isolation, bullying, and/or self-hatred. Hurt can turn into anger if people around them do not accept their identity. It is very important for parents, family members, and pastors to offer unconditional love and acceptance during this time. Save a life! Be a safe person when a young person comes out. In a later section of this resource, we discuss how to give an LGBT+ young person the support and care they need during this difficult time.



ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"When I first came out, it felt like I was walking on eggshells just being around my family and even closest friends. I felt like I was on display when I was in a room full of family and they would be quiet around me."

SIX ACCEPTANCE STAGES

HOW PARENTS OFTEN REACT

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE COME OUT MAY EXPERIENCE NORMAL REACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SIGNIFICANT LOSS OR MAJOR LIFE CHANGE. THESE REACTIONS DO NOT OCCUR IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER. IN FACT, SOME MAY NOT OCCUR AT ALL, WHILE OTHERS CAN SURFACE MULTIPLE TIMES. EVERY PARENT'S JOURNEY IS UNIQUE.

**THERE IS NO
ONE RIGHT WAY
TO GRIEVE.**



It is often a shock for parents to learn that their child is LGBT+, even when they suspect it. They may feel as if their world has been turned upside down. Some parents readily adjust to their child's reality, while others take much longer to process it—if at all. No one can predict how they or other family members will respond.

Parents may try to hide from reality, feeling unprepared for what the truth might mean for them, their child, and their family. This can lead them to minimize or discredit their child's disclosure, in hopes that it is just an experimental phase or act of rebellion. Parents may say things like, "You are not lesbian. You have dated boys." Or, "I don't want to hear about it. We don't have gays in our family." Parents begin to face reality when they listen to their child and take them seriously.



Another common reaction is anger. Parents suffering from guilt may become angry with themselves. Those who are believers may become angry with God for allowing their child to be LGBT+ or with their church for not being more loving. Parents may even become angry with their child for disrupting the life of the family. Underneath that anger is hurt. Parents should deal with their pain and anger and be careful not to direct it at their child, as this will hurt their child even more. Patience, listening, and respect are critical to preserving relational connection and trust.

When young people come out, they often emerge from years of isolation and effort to change their situation, either alone or with God's help. They risk even further isolation if family and friends do not accept them. Parents may attempt to negotiate their child back into silence by saying things like, "This is not you. Don't tell anyone. We'll find you help." Yet most children at this point have already accepted their reality and can no longer be untruthful about it. Attempts to bargain an LGBT+ child into continued isolation are often internalized as parental rejection.



When feelings such as loss, anger, fear, or anxiety are directed inward and not processed in a healthy way, major depression can result. Normal feelings of sadness can give way to symptoms such as a chronic loss of energy, frequent insomnia, persistent feelings of worthlessness, decreased interest or enjoyment in most activities, and a lack of concentration. Parents encountering these or similar symptoms should reach out to a professional counselor for assistance, if they have not already done so.

The path toward accepting a new reality is different for every person. Although parents may feel as if they have "lost" their child, their loved one is still the same person they were before coming out. What parents may need to grieve are some of the heterosexual or gender-conforming hopes and dreams they had for their child. As parents process these losses, it can help to reframe the situation. Know that many LGBT+ young people emerge from the coming out phase as strong and resilient individuals—especially if they have the love and support of their family. Ask LGBT+ children what they envision for their future, and support them in pursuing that. Parents who adjust their expectations and trust in God's ongoing plan may be better able to reimagine the future and reorient their feelings of loss.



ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"I was dealing with severe depression and even attempted suicide prior to coming out to my mother."

RISKS LGBT+

THE 2 LEADING RISK FACTORS

1 BULLYING

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"I have not come out to either of my parents because I am too afraid to make either of them uncomfortable."

COMPARED TO THEIR HETEROSEXUAL PEERS,
LGBT+ YOUTH ARE...^{1,2}

- 2-4X** more likely to attempt suicide (in accepting families)
- 4-8X** more likely to attempt suicide (in rejecting/disconnected families)

- 91%** more likely to be bullied
- 46%** more likely to be victimized
- 3X** more likely to miss school (out of fear of bullying and rejection)
- 2X** more likely to skip college

¹Schuster, M.; Bogart, L.M.; Klein, D.J.; et al. A longitudinal study of bullying of sexual-minority youth. *N Engl J Med* (2015); 372:1872-1874.

²Family Acceptance Project™. Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics* (2009); 123 (1) 346-352.

³Durso, L.E., & Gates, G.J. (2012). Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of service providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund.

⁴Kosciw, J. G.; Graytak, E. A.; Giga, N. M.; Villenas, C.; & Danischewski, D. J. (2016). The 2015 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

LGBT+ YOUTH HOMELESSNESS³

- 40%** of homeless youth identify as LGBT+
- 62%** have attempted suicide
- 59%** have been sexually victimized, and many being forced to trade "services" for food and housing
- 94%** of youth homeless shelters report serving LGBT+ youth in the last year
- 75%** report working with transgender youth in the last year
- 68%** of homeless LGBT+ youth report serious family rejection

Percentages of LGBT+ teens who have already experienced bullying and victimization:⁴



HIGHER VICTIMIZATION =

- Lower GPA
- Higher depression
- Higher self-harm
- Higher suicide attempts¹

Bullying for all students declines as age increases, but it **remains higher at every grade level** for LGBT+ students relative to heterosexual peers.¹

YOUTH FACE

FOR LGBT+ TEEN SUICIDE:

2 FAMILY REJECTION

HOW TO AVOID FAMILY DISCONNECTION

Avoid asking questions that convey you are trying to find a cause or a cure (more about this later).

Listen to their story and show your unconditional love.

Safe conversation conveys relational connection.

Absence of connection (silence) can lead your family member to perceive that you are rejecting them.

Remember that bullying and family rejection are the leading causes of LGBT+ youth suicide.

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"When I came out to my parents, there was a definite change in the closeness of the relationship. It felt like a wall had been put up and that I was now a different person."

FAMILY REJECTION

FAMILY DISCONNECTION

Imagine this family scenario. A young person comes out to her parents. They hug her. They cry. They say, "We love you no matter what." **But then the topic is never raised again**, because her parents are uncomfortable with her sexual orientation. Their silence leaves her **isolated, having to carry a load of internal stress** all on her own. Holding this stress in, rather than being able to verbalize it in safe conversations, **raises her risk of suicidal ideation**. Family disconnection—even in a loving home—operates similarly to active forms of rejection. **Although disconnecting from a sensitive issue may give the appearance of all being well, it can actually produce risks for young people comparable to rejection.**

IS THIS AN EMERGENCY?

Emergencies may arise when our loved ones show signs of severe helplessness and/or hopelessness. Thoughts of just "checking out of life" are seen as their best option. While many who think about suicide are not immediately in danger of acting on that thought, it is very important to assess what is going on. Four factors that indicate help is *urgently* needed are:

1. ACTIVE SUICIDAL THOUGHTS
2. SPECIFIC PLAN TO TAKE ONE'S LIFE
3. STATED INTENTION TO HARM OR KILL ONE'S SELF
4. ACCESS TO MEANS TO CARRY OUT THE INTENTION

**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE:
(800) 273-8255**

Stay close by your family member or friend for support, and contact a licensed counselor if any of the above four indicators are present. **If imminently suicidal, call 911 or take your family member or friend to the emergency room at your local hospital immediately.** If uncertain, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for further evaluation.

Be calmly alert about these risks. Stay present in your loved one's daily life.

Q & A

FROM THE 2017 RESEARCH BY VANDERWAAL, C.J., SEDLACEK, D., & LANE, L.* (2017): "THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION AMONG LGBT+ MILLENNIALS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH." *JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK AND CHRISTIANITY*, 44 (1-2), 72-95.

AT WHAT AGE DO ADVENTIST YOUNG PEOPLE COME OUT TO THEIR PARENTS?

One-third (33%) came out during their teen years (mostly between ages 16–19 years). The largest group (40%) came out between ages 20–29 years, presumably after leaving home. A small percentage (6%) came out when they were 30 years or older. One-fifth (21%) have never come out to their parents.

ARE ADVENTIST LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE ALSO AT RISK FOR SUICIDE?

Almost one-third (32%) said they had thoughts of suicide during the last six months. Nearly one-third (29%) had made a suicide attempt at some point in their life. Of this group, almost a third (30%) said their suicidal thoughts or attempt(s) were closely related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

HOW HAVE ADVENTIST FAMILIES RESPONDED TO CHILDREN WHO COME OUT?

Less than half (41%) of LGBT+ young adults said their family listened attentively as they shared their sexual orientation and/or gender identity journey with them. Over two-thirds (70%) said their parents/caregivers were disappointed, and 43% said their parents forbade them to tell anyone else about their orientation. Only one-fourth (25%) of parents communicated they "loved me no matter what." Nearly one out of ten (9%) said they were kicked out of their house when they came out to their parents.

WHAT DOES REJECTION LOOK LIKE IN ADVENTIST FAMILIES?

Two out of five young adults (42%) said they were ridiculed by their family for the way they dressed or fixed their hair. Over a third (38%) said their family used demeaning language about their orientation or identity, with one-fifth (21%) saying their family called them names such as "fag" or "sissy." Almost a third (29%) said their parents' financial support was dependent on them complying with their parents' wishes about their sexuality or gender. Almost a third (28%) said their family blamed them for any anti-LGBT+ mistreatment they received.

HOW DO ADVENTIST YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT COMING OUT TO THEIR FAMILY?

Four-fifths (81%) said they were scared to come out because they knew their family would think they were sinful and/or disgusting. Three-fourths (76%) knew of their parents' prejudice toward LGBT+ individuals, making it hard to come out to them. Around half were afraid their parents would disown them (57%) or knew they would be rejected (48%) if they came out as LGBT+.

HOW MANY ADVENTISTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS LGBT+ INDIVIDUALS?

We currently do not have information about this. According to one study, national LGBT+ percentages is between 3.8% and 4.7%.

WHO DO ADVENTIST LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE RELY ON FOR SUPPORT?

Friends generally offered the strongest support, with about two-thirds saying they have a friend who cares about their feelings, who is around when they are in need, and with whom they can talk about their problems. Family members were much less available and helpful, with between 21% and 42% believing their family was available for support. Clergy and congregations were not considered to be supportive, with 12% saying, "I have a clergy person who is an important source of support to me" and only 9% saying the same of their congregation.

DO ADVENTIST YOUNG PEOPLE WHO COME OUT AS LGBT+ REMAIN INVOLVED IN THE CHURCH?

Currently, of the 18-35-year-olds who responded, 42% identify as Adventist, with a third (33%) claiming no religious affiliation and another fourth (25%) selecting "other." Despite having grown up in strongly religious families, only a third (32%) considered themselves to be religious. However, three-fourths (73%) considered themselves to be spiritual. As evidence for this claim, almost a third (31%) said they pray daily, with another one-fourth (23%) praying at least weekly. In addition, one-fourth study the Bible or other sacred text (24%) or read religious books or journals (23%) at least weekly. Finally, almost a third (30%) participate in religious services on a weekly basis.

HOW DOES RELIGION SHAPE FAMILY RESPONSES TO ADVENTIST LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE?

Eight out of ten (82%) said that religious beliefs led to difficulty in parents accepting their orientation and/or identity. Almost two-thirds (60%) of parents prayed that God would change their child's orientation and/or identity, and well more than half (57%) of parents used Scripture to try to talk their child out of their orientation and/or identity. One-fourth of parents (25%) took their child to a pastor for prayer and counseling to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In contrast, about a third (37%) of parents drew upon their religious beliefs to help them understand and support their child's sexual and/or gender journey.



“BEAR (ENDURE, CARRY) ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS

AND TROUBLESOME MORAL FAULTS, AND IN THIS WAY

FULFILL AND OBSERVE PERFECTLY THE LAW OF CHRIST

(THE MESSIAH) AND COMPLETE WHAT IS LACKING

[IN YOUR OBEDIENCE TO IT].”

– GALATIANS 6:2



PART 2:

DEVELOPING A CARE PLAN

DUE TO HIGHER TRAUMA FACTORS DESCRIBED ON THE PRIOR PAGES, LGBT+ YOUTH ARE OFTEN LEFT FEELING ALIENATED AND REJECTED, SUSCEPTIBLE TO BELIEVING THAT THEY WILL BE MISTREATED. SOME LOSE HOPE OF BEING LOVED OR ACCEPTED EVER AGAIN AND GIVE UP ON LIFE. MESSAGES THAT WOULD BE MOST IMPORTANT FOR A YOUNG PERSON TO HEAR DURING THIS TIME ARE:

HOW TO EXPRESS ACCEPTANCE WHILE HOLDING TO YOUR BELIEFS

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"After coming out I felt even more removed from family because I didn't fit in with them and their beliefs."



"I love you."

"I will always love you."

"You are my son (daughter), and I will always love you and be here for you."

"I am so thankful you shared this with me."

"You are very courageous."

"I am going to walk with you no matter what."

"Nothing will keep me from loving you."

"This is your home/school/church family—always."

"I am your family member/friend—always."

"I really want to hear your story."



LGBT+ YOUTH ARE 2-4X MORE VULNERABLE TO SUICIDE

THAN THEIR HETEROSEXUAL PEERS. THEY ARE 8X MORE VULNERABLE

IF FAMILY REJECTION OCCURS.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS TO ENSURE A YOUNG PERSON'S SAFETY

BEGIN BY SAYING...

"You have lived for several years with little or no support. I am so sorry I did not know and was not there for you. I would like to hear more about what it has been like for you."

1. ARE YOU FEELING OR HAVE YOU EVER FELT SUICIDAL?

2. ARE YOU BEING OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TEASED OR BULLIED?

3. HOW HAVE YOUR FRIENDS RESPONDED TO YOU?

4. HOW HAVE PEOPLE AT CHURCH RESPONDED TO YOU?

5. ARE THERE ANY OTHER DETAILS YOU WANT TO SHARE?

6. SHOULD I TELL ANYONE ELSE OR DO YOU PREFER TO MAINTAIN YOUR PRIVACY?

AVOID 2 EXTREMES:



Note to Parents: Even parents who respond in a loving manner may be **grieving** (see page 19). This **shock or sadness** can result in a **growing silence** that lowers family connection. Silence can convey to your child that you are not happy with them. A healthy parent-child connection requires genuine conversations that value your child and their experience. In moments like this, take a big breath, be open to listening, show your unconditional love, and begin this journey together. Many families have shared that things get better and less confusing, to all, with time.

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE

Many LGBT+ young people lack adequate support. A support system can include relationships with God, parents, pastors, counselors, adult mentors, and peers. Quickly correcting any relational mistakes you have made will make room for you to play a critical role in a young person's support system. Remember that trust may build slowly, so don't become discouraged if your young person doesn't immediately open themselves up to you.

FAMILIES: If your family member has been judged or mistreated by others, they may have withdrawn at home or school and given up on faith or the church. You can help them build a support system, beginning with your own offer to listen, learn, and love. Please be aware: teenage peers may not be mature enough to provide confidential support. Allow but do not encourage youth to disclose their orientation or identity to friends at this age. Monitor peer relationships for signs of teasing or bullying.

If you feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable with your family member's disclosures about their orientation or identity, choose whom you talk to about these issues with care. Careless gossip started by well-meaning friends and loved ones can easily make your young person's life more difficult. Be willing to seek help and support from a professional counselor or clergy person who is sensitive to LGBT+ issues and is good at maintaining confidentiality.

PASTORS, TEACHERS, AND ADULT MENTORS: You may be the very first person to whom a young person comes out. Be a safe person and help students access other safe adult support. If you choose to recommend the services of a Christian counselor, it should not be for the purpose of changing a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Such "change ministry" approaches carry the risk of harm and may be illegal for minors in some states. A counselor should have experience working in a nonjudgmental way with LGBT+ young people and be able to show respect for the client's religious doubts and beliefs.

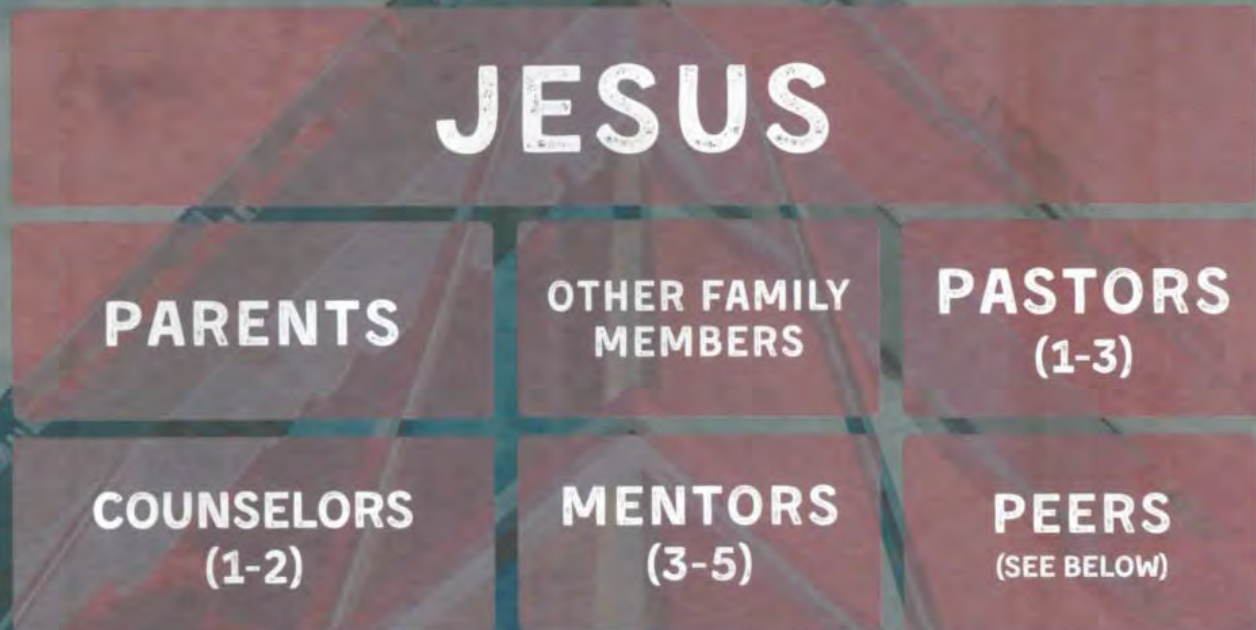
FRIENDS: Peers sometimes gossip, tease, or reject their friends, potentially raising the risk of suicidal thoughts. Treat friends who come out to you with kindness, and respect their confidentiality. Don't tell others about your friend's sexual orientation and/or gender identity without their express permission.

NEVER DISCLOSE A YOUNG PERSON'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION. EVEN IF

MANDATED REPORTING IS NECESSARY DUE TO A THREAT OF SELF-HARM OR HARM COMMITTED AGAINST A MINOR, SUCH

REPORTING CAN BE PERFORMED WITHOUT DISCLOSING SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY.

BLE SUPPORT SYSTEM



Whether your family member or friend is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, or another identity involving sexuality or gender, the process of self-discovery and the risk factors many LGBT+ young people face are similar. For this reason, our guidance on how family members and friends should respond is the same for all.

AVOID 2 BIG ERRORS:

ASKING YOUR FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND TO HIDE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND/OR GENDER IDENTITY.

OUTING YOUR FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND (DISCLOSING THEIR ORIENTATION AND/OR IDENTITY) WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION.

HOW TO CHECK FOR A HEALTHY SUPPORT SYSTEM

ASK: "In your view, is God for you or against you? Is He someone you can turn to?"

ASK: "Do you feel safe with coming out to your parents? Do you feel like your parents truly love and accept you?"

ASK: "Do you feel safe in your church? Do you have a church family that welcomes and includes you?"

ASK: "Do you feel safe at school? Whom can you turn to for support? How have you been treated at school by teachers and classmates?"

COMMON MISTAKES EVEN LOVING PARENTS MAKE

HAVE YOU ALREADY MADE MISTAKES?

Even loving parents, in a time of shock or grief, can respond in hurtful ways. Sometimes parents are even connected with "support" that encourages mistakes that will lead to a toxic relationship. We share these common mistakes to help other parents prevent mistakes—or identify past mistakes—that can hinder a close relationship with their child.

REJECTING

Scolding, mocking, or yelling at your family member or friend for being LGBT+. ● Threatening to reject or disown. ● Saying, "You are not the person I thought you were. I no longer trust you." ● Refusing contact or excluding from family activities. ● **ASKING YOUR CHILD TO LEAVE YOUR HOME.**

NEGLECTING

BEING UNAWARE OF HOW YOUR CHILD IS BEING TREATED BY PEERS, RELATIVES, AND OTHER ADULTS. ●

Contributing to family gossip. ● Quoting Scripture when a child is suicidal. ● Not standing up to bullies on your child's behalf. ● Communicating more about doctrine than expressing love for your child. ● Exhibiting favoritism toward your other child(ren).

FALSELY ASSURING

Telling your child that God will make them straight. ● **TELLING YOUR CHILD THEY CAN CHANGE WITH ENOUGH PRAYER OR FAITH IN GOD** ● Getting overly excited about your child's attempt at a heterosexual relationship (especially when it's unhealthy or harmful).

ACCUSING

Accusing your family member or friend of "choosing the gay lifestyle." ● Saying, "Being gay/transgender is a mental illness." ● Accusing your family member or friend of faking self-harm in order to get attention. ● Blaming a spouse or your friend's parents for causing their child to be LGBT+. ● Threatening to divorce your spouse because your child is LGBT+. ● **TELLING YOUR CHILD THEY ARE NOT AN ADVENTIST—OR A BAD ADVENTIST.** ● Trying to get your child to explain why she/he is gay. ● Saying, "It's like he (or she) is dead." ● Telling your family member things like, "This will kill your grandmother." ● Telling your child, "You broke my heart." ● Blaming your transgender child for being a homosexual (confusing gender identity with sexual orientation).

DENYING

Saying, "You just need to get over this." ● Telling your child that they are really heterosexual—or that they better be. ● **TRYING TO EXPLAIN AWAY YOUR CHILD'S SEXUALITY FOR THEM.** ● Making jokes or judgmental statements about LGBT+ people. ● Questioning your child's recollection of painful memories. ● Doubting gender dysphoria as a real experience. ● Blaming your child's gender dysphoria on culture or the "gay agenda."

CONTROLLING

Taking your family member or friend to a counselor with the intent to “fix” them.

● IMPOSING FINANCIAL PENALTIES SUCH AS WITHHOLDING COLLEGE FUNDING OR INHERITANCE.

● Preventing your family member from attending family gatherings. ● Attempting to limit what ideas or worldviews your adult child is exposed to. ● Constantly telling your child you are praying about their gender/sexuality. ● Reassuring your child with unbiblical promises (eg., “temptations will be healed”). ● Seeing your child’s wedding as your loss of control over their life. ● Expecting your child to experience orientation change by discussing and processing nurture-related wounds. ● Using “tough love” to attempt to force healing. ● Demanding that your child come back to Jesus.

PERSONALIZING

Seeing your LGBTQ+ child as a threat to your career or integrity. ● Fixating on whom to blame (“Who caused this?”). ● Leaning on your child to support you in your grief. ● **THREATENING TO COMMIT SUICIDE BECAUSE HE OR SHE HAS COME OUT.** ● Making your child’s sexuality or gender all about you (your grief, guilt, or reputation). ● Asking where you went wrong as a parent. ● Focusing on your pain and disregarding your child’s pain. ● Telling others, “It would have been easier had my child not been born.”

“UNDERSTAND [THIS], MY BELOVED BRETHREN. LET EVERY MAN BE QUICK TO HEAR [A READY LISTENER], SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO TAKE OFFENSE AND TO GET ANGRY. FOR MAN’S ANGER DOES NOT PROMOTE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD [WISHES AND REQUIRES].”

– JAMES 1:19, 20

MISCOMMUNICATING

Using unhelpful clichés like, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” ● Asking, “How could you do this to us?” ● Asking leading or loaded questions rather than open-ended questions. ● Failing to make time and create emotionally safe space for your child to talk about sexuality or gender. ● **NOT FOSTERING RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION.** ● Wrestling through your own theology in front of your child (sending mixed messages). ● Not talking with your spouse after your child comes out (within a reasonable time frame). ● Making assumptions before seeking understanding. ● Assuming that what you intended to say is what was actually heard.

DOUBTING

Refusing to recognize Christ’s presence in your child’s life. ● Not leading your child spiritually by modeling a dependence on God’s promises.

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO APOLOGIZE—EVEN FOR REALLY BIG MISTAKES!

*Some youth and young adults are so hurt or angry that they cannot quickly forgive you. **Others will immediately release their hurt and be deeply touched** as they realize you are coming to understand how your response hurt them.*

WORDS MATTER

YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS IN A CONVERSATION
CAN EITHER DAMAGE OR BUILD TRUST.

EVERYTHING YOU SAY COUNTS!

BELOW ARE A FEW WORDS AND

PHRASES TO AVOID.

"DO NOT LET ANY UNWHOLESOME TALK COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTHS, BUT ONLY WHAT IS HELPFUL FOR BUILDING OTHERS UP ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS, THAT IT MAY BENEFIT THOSE WHO LISTEN."

— EPHESIANS 4:29

"HOMOSEXUAL"



LGBT+ friends and family members will interpret this word negatively, since it has often been used in the context of deviancy, mental illness, and religious judgment. Try saying "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual" or "transgender" instead.

What you may refer to as "the sin" is what many LGBT+ family members and friends think of as "my identity." Consequently, they will hear, "Although God loves me, He hates who I am." Try saying, "God loves you, and I love you, too."

**"LOVE THE SINNER,
HATE THE SIN"**



**"LOVE THE SINNER,
HATE THE SIN"**

"GRACIOUS WORDS ARE A HONEYCOMB, SWEET TO THE SOUL AND HEALING TO THE BONES."

— PROVERBS 16:24

"A GENTLE ANSWER TURNS AWAY WRATH, BUT A HARSH WORD STIRS UP ANGER."

— PROVERBS 15:1

"[T]HE TONGUE IS A SMALL PART OF THE BODY, BUT IT MAKES GREAT BOASTS. CONSIDER THAT A GREAT FOREST IS SET ON FIRE BY A SMALL SPARK."

— JAMES 3:5

**"A TRANSGENDER"
"A TRANS"
"TRANSGENDERISM"
"TRANSGENDERING"
"TRANNNY"
"I REFUSE TO USE
THOSE PRONOUNS"**

Sometimes Christians use language to talk about LGBT+ people that LGBT+ people do not even use themselves. When we do this, it gives the impression that **we are not listening to them—and do not care what they have to say.** Resolve not to speak a "foreign language." If in doubt, ask what terms, names, or pronouns someone prefers.

Note: Many people use the words *homosexuality* and *transgender* interchangeably, but sexual orientation and gender identity are two distinct matters.

**"THE GAYS"
"SEXUALLY BROKEN"**



**"HOMOSEXUAL
STRUGGLER"**

"THE WORDS OF THE RECKLESS PIERCE LIKE SWORDS, BUT THE TONGUE OF THE WISE BRINGS HEALING."

— PROVERBS 12:18

"SET A GUARD OVER MY MOUTH, LORD; KEEP WATCH OVER THE DOOR OF MY LIPS."

— PSALM 141:3

"UNDERSTAND [THIS], MY BELOVED BRETHREN. LET EVERY MAN BE QUICK TO HEAR [A READY LISTENER], SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO TAKE OFFENSE AND TO GET ANGRY."

— JAMES 1:19

"THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES RELIGIOUS AND YET DO NOT KEEP A TIGHT REIN ON THEIR TONGUES DECEIVE THEMSELVES, AND THEIR RELIGION IS WORTHLESS."

— JAMES 1:26

"CHOOSING THE GAY LIFESTYLE"



"SEXUAL PREFERENCE"

Your loved one will feel blamed for choosing a sexual orientation when, in fact, it was not their decision. People can choose their behaviors but not their identity.

Many young people are accused of living a "gay lifestyle," even when they are not dating anyone. Others, through both choice and circumstance, live long-term celibate lives. Those who do marry a same-sex partner will hear you refer to their committed relationship as a "lifestyle" and assume that you think of them as promiscuous. Indeed, there is no single "gay lifestyle," just as there is no one "straight lifestyle."

Because these phrases are demeaning, convey judgment, and demonstrate a lack of understanding, it is best not to use them at all.

"ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE"



"PRACTICING HOMOSEXUAL"

Would you say someone is a "practicing heterosexual"? Probably not. We don't think about "practicing" or "not practicing" heterosexuality—it is simply who we are. So why would you speak of same-sex oriented family and friends only in terms of whether or not they are having sex? If you must refer to someone's sexual behavior, try using the phrase "sexually active."

"GOD MADE ADAM & EVE, NOT ADAM & STEVE"

LGBT+ family and friends will not think of this as a clever line. They will sense you are ridiculing them for missing the obvious or chastising them for not conforming to God's ideal. You should refrain from ever saying this.

"THE WORDS OF A WISE MAN'S MOUTH ARE GRACIOUS AND WIN HIM FAVOR, BUT THE LIPS OF A FOOL CONSUME HIM.... THE FOOL MULTIPLIES WORDS."
— ECCLESIASTES 10:12-14

Statements like this make your LGBT+ family and friends feel excluded and judged. Many have grown up in the church and would like to continue being part of it. Even those who differ with the church's biblical teachings on human sexuality may still consider Adventists to be their "family." Be open to that sense of belonging and connection.

"THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A GAY OR TRANSGENDER ADVENTIST."



NAVIGATING RELATIONAL GAPS

THE OBJECTIVE FOR PARENTS (and other family members) is to **grieve well** and **avoid inflicting shock, denial, anger, bargaining, or depression** upon LGBT+ loved ones. That said, no parent is perfect. As we've said, even loving parents will make mistakes on this journey. Every parent of every child makes many mistakes.

We never want to minimize the pain or mistreatment that LGBT+ young people may have experienced, and we certainly must be committed to doing everything possible to prevent mistreatment within homes, schools, neighborhoods, and churches. Without lessening this focus, let us for a moment consider all the gaps that parents are processing in the hours, days, weeks, months, and years after their child comes out.

TIME GAP #1: MATURITY GAP

Whether a teen is gay, straight, or transgender, all teens desire to exercise autonomy in decision making. The Maturity Gap captures the age distance between an **LGBT+ loved one's desire to exercise autonomy in decision making** versus a **parent's sense of responsibility to oversee such decisions**. As detailed below, authority must be incrementally released as loved ones age—but capturing the right balance can generate tension for all involved. Further, while some requests that LGBT+ youth make of their parents are very similar to other teens' requests (like permission to date), others are quite unique (like asking to take hormone blockers). Do you hold the line? Maybe; but if so, for how long?

There is a season to say "no" and a season to let our adult children make their own decisions before God. Parents who exercise an absolute "no" eventually send their young adult children into the world with no parental guidance in making personal decisions. Progressively permitting your teen to make more of their own decisions is necessary for their emotional, mental, and spiritual maturity.



EVERY PARENT OF EVERY CHILD, GAY OR STRAIGHT, MUST EVENTUALLY LET GO AND TRUST GOD.

PARENTAL POWER MUST TRANSFORM INTO TRUSTED INFLUENCE AS TEENS GROW INTO ADULTS.

TIME GAP #2: DISCLOSURE GAP



The Disclosure Gap represents the time distance between **when a teen realizes their LGBT+ experience** and **when they come out to their parents**. Oftentimes, this gap can be 2 to 8 years wide. For some, it can be 10 or more years wide. Loved ones have been self-discovering and working toward self-acceptance for years. For many parents, though, it's like an instant, unexpected breaking news headline.

GAP #3: EXPECTATION GAP

The Expectation Gap expresses the emotional distance between **the relief (or even celebration) that LGBT+ loved ones experience** and **the shock (or grief) that their parents often experience**. LGBT+ loved ones are shedding what may be a years-long repression in order to joyfully embrace self-acceptance and potentially pursue a romantic interest. Some parents, at this same point in time, could feel very angry. Other parents, even while intending to demonstrate love and acceptance, may inwardly be feeling extreme loss, sadness, and shock.

GAP #4: BELIEF GAP

The Belief Gap describes the difference between **an LGBT+ loved one's religious beliefs about marriage and sexuality** and **their parents' beliefs**. Adventist parents may have just heard their child express a biblical belief related to sexuality only weeks ago, but suddenly those beliefs are wobbly or entirely abandoned. This can add frustration to the relational mix for both LGBT+ loved ones and their families.

GAP #5: LANGUAGE GAP

The Language Gap constitutes the relational distance between an LGBT+ loved one's and their parents' **understanding of, and vocabulary related to, sexual and gender identity**. Parents may question whether sexuality and gender are even legitimate aspects of identity, while their children are operating in a world that is rapidly expanding both the categories and spectrums for sexual and gender identity. As indicated in *Words Matter* (pages 32-33), language mistakes can severely damage relational trust. *Every word counts.*

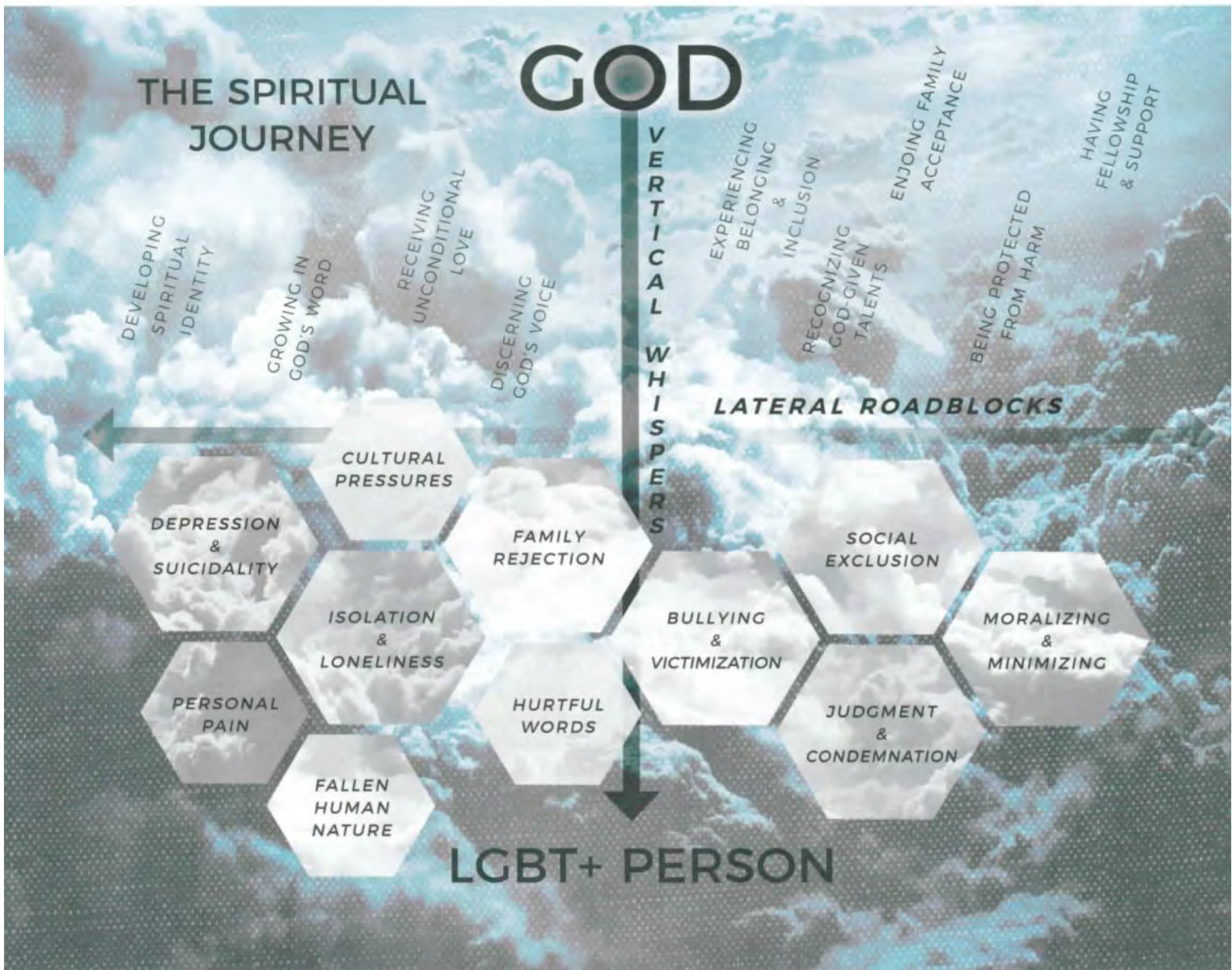
IMAGINE ALL 5 OF THESE GAPS CRASHING INTO A PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

IN A SINGLE POINT IN TIME! PARENTS AND TEENS ARE BOUND TO MAKE

MISTAKES. MUTUAL FORGIVENESS IS A NECESSITY.

REDUCING LATERAL ROADBLOCKS

The arc of God's redemptive activity is long, and His leading in a person's life may not always be visible. According to the apostle Paul, the journey that leads a person to turn fully toward God is the result of His "kindness and tolerance and patience" (Romans 2:1-4, NASB). We can either clear the way for God to work in the lives of family members and friends or we can allow (or even cause) the path to be obscured by injustice, mistreatment, shame, loneliness, and fear. **Removing roadblocks, healing wounds, and generously offering time and space give faith identity a chance to grow.**



HOW TO RESET THE RELATIONSHIP

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"Even when my mom was struggling to accept it, [my parents] never once suggested or even implied that I should move out or that they didn't love me anymore. At one point, I asked Mom if she still loved me. She hugged me tight and told me that there was nothing I could do to make her stop loving me."

Specifically confess every mistake you know you have made.

Ask your family member or friend if they have been hurt in ways you don't recognize.

Apologize and ask forgiveness for anything you've done to hurt your family member or friend.

Ask to start again—and reset your attitude, tone, and language.

Invite dialogue without letting differences take over every conversation.

Declare that you accept and love your family member or friend.

Admit that this is all new, but you are willing to listen and learn.

Immediately take any "threats" off the table.

Pay back any financial penalties or withholding of college tuition.

Tell your child how valuable they are to you.

If your adult family member has a partner, find ways to welcome and include that person.





PART 3:

BELIEFS & IMPORTANT FAMILY MATTERS



“CHRIST’S METHOD ALONE

WILL GIVE TRUE SUCCESS IN REACHING THE PEOPLE.

THE SAVIOUR MINGLED WITH PEOPLE [MEN]

AS ONE WHO DESIRED THEIR GOOD.

HE SHOWED HIS SYMPATHY FOR THEM,

MINISTRED TO THEIR NEEDS,

AND WON THEIR CONFIDENCE.”

— ELLEN G. WHITE, *THE MINISTRY OF HEALING*, 143

WE WILL NOW ADDRESS A NUMBER of delicate matters. We start by offering answers to some of the most common questions parents face when a child comes out. Many Christians have *strong* but *uninformed* views on the toughest questions. It can lead to unfruitful arguments and unnecessary fractures in relationships.

For example, **Christians (of all stripes) sometimes think any inborn cause of same-gender attraction necessarily suggests that God “makes” people gay.** It is important to remember that although God’s design for human beings was perfect, sin has resulted in every individual being born into a world that is not what He originally intended. We are all made in His image and should strive to love as Jesus loves.

As another example, **Christians (of all stripes) routinely think that a conversation about biblical beliefs only honors God’s character if “I” win the debate.**

This sets up a dividing wall and fuels a combative or condemning spirit. It is not actually

so easy to change another person’s deeply held beliefs. Reducing the gospel to “convincing others to agree with me” is unhealthy. We are not called to “win” a debate; we are called to love and honor God and to love and serve one another.

We have no power to convince others to change their views. It works both ways: our beliefs are deeply held. No one can simply flip a switch to change our beliefs.

We have no power to control people, and we have no interest in judging people. Rather, we strive to follow Jesus in laying down our lives to care for vulnerable people. Along the way, we have found that answering distant, complex, and controversial questions with accessible, simple, and accurate answers is a bridge to building trust across differences. When relationships are safe, love can transcend differences.

“You have to reach people where they are, because you can’t reach them where they’re not” (David R. Osborn, D. Min).

We invite you to enter into Part 3 with humility, respect, and sensitivity. You never know what you might discover along the way. Learning about complex topics does not mean your beliefs have to shift. It does mean you are growing in understanding. The more you understand, the better you can reflect Jesus Christ.

COMMON QUESTIONS

WHY DO PEOPLE SAY THEY ARE BORN GAY OR IN THE WRONG BODY?

People usually experience a same-gender orientation and/or gender dysphoria through no choice of their own. Many have sensed from an early age that something is different about them. If you had never made a choice to be gay or transgender, and if you knew nothing but an orientation to persons of the same gender or a deep sense of belonging to another gender, wouldn't you conclude you were born that way?

DOES GOD MAKE PEOPLE GAY OR TRANSGENDER?

Although God's design for human beings was perfect, sin now results in every person being born into a condition that is not what God originally intended. However, this does not change the fact that each person is made in the image of God—with dignity, value, and purpose. Nor does it lessen the immense love God has for each of His children, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. Even though we all suffer from the results of sin and struggle with its inclinations, we can say with the psalmist, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13, 14).

ISN'T ACCEPTANCE REALLY A FORM OF APPROVAL?

Acceptance means that God loves us just as we are, even when we do things that do not meet with His approval. When we accept others as God does, we love and care for family members, classmates, and fellow believers even when we disagree with them or disapprove of their behavior. We can fully honor God and His Word in our own personal beliefs and behaviors and still—simultaneously and fully—love a friend or family member when they may differ or depart from those.

DOES REPARATIVE THERAPY WORK?

Sexual orientation change efforts, including "reparative" or "conversion" therapy, have been shown to be largely unsuccessful and psychologically damaging. Adults making an informed and voluntary decision to pursue change efforts should not be ridiculed. Parents, however, should never encourage or force their child to be involved in such therapy. In several states, conversion therapy on minors is illegal. While some adults who have participated in these efforts report varying levels of desired change, the results are often less than hoped for or prove to be unsustainable. Others report no change and, at times, harmful effects.

DID MY PARENTING CAUSE MY CHILD'S SAME-SEX ORIENTATION OR GENDER DYSPHORIA?

We encourage families to focus on relationship rather than causation. Experts believe the factors leading to same-gender orientation and gender dysphoria entail complex "nature" (biological) and "nurture" (environmental) inputs, but the exact causes remain unknown. No parent should feel—or be made to feel—guilty for causing their child's sexual orientation. If you know you have made mistakes in parenting, then—unrelated to your child's sexual orientation or gender identity—confess, apologize, and improve how you love them, just as they are.

WHAT ABOUT ADVENTIST STANDARDS? ARE THERE THINGS I SHOULD NOT ALLOW IN MY HOME, CHURCH, OR SCHOOL?

It's appropriate for homes, churches, and schools to establish boundaries. How groups relate to these varies. Parents establish firm boundaries for their children while they are young, but become more flexible and free with those as their children mature (see page 34). Conversely, churches may freely welcome all who wish to fellowship with them but hold higher standards for individuals as they grow into membership and leadership. How parents, pastors, and teachers respond to young people whose conduct falls short of expectations is critical. While at times loving correction may be necessary, shaming, threatening, or excluding LGBT+ young people is detrimental to their well-being and should never happen.

CAN GAY PEOPLE CHANGE?

Most people do not experience material change in their orientation over a lifetime, even when religious or therapeutic efforts have been made to do so. When young people do change, it often represents sexual experimentation occurring as part of a questioning stage of development or resulting from prior molestation (which may increase the likelihood of sexual encounters with persons of both genders). While such scenarios can complicate the process of developing a sexual identity, they should not be seen as the cause of a person's ultimate sexual orientation.

SHOULD MY LGBT+ FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND BE INCLUDED IN CHURCH YOUTH GROUPS?

Absolutely. Why exclude youth when we should be nourishing their faith identity? All young people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, need an opportunity to grow in Christ. Acts of exclusion on the part of the faith community can have a devastating effect on a young person's spiritual life. We should include LGBT+ youth, reduce their vulnerability to bullying, and recognize their gifts and calling. We should also be careful not worry anymore about these youth acting in sexually inappropriate ways than we might with heterosexual youth. Setting proper and consistent boundaries and rules for all young people is the best way to manage any concerns that may arise.

"DO NOT JUDGE AND CRITICIZE AND CONDEMN [OTHERS UNFAIRLY WITH AN ATTITUDE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUS SUPERIORITY AS THOUGH ASSUMING THE OFFICE OF A JUDGE], SO THAT YOU WILL NOT BE JUDGED [UNFAIRLY]. FOR JUST AS YOU [HYPOCRITICALLY] JUDGE OTHERS [WHEN YOU ARE SINFUL AND UNREPENTANT], SO WILL YOU BE JUDGED; AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR STANDARD OF MEASURE [USED TO PASS OUT JUDGMENT], JUDGMENT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU." —MATTHEW 7:1, 2. AMP (JESUS)

HOW DO I DISCUSS BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY?

Before beginning this conversation, it is important to note that while many young people have conflictual feelings about their church and may no longer identify with the religious beliefs of their earlier youth, the strong majority describe themselves as spiritual. Even though they may not currently attend church, many continue to have an active belief in God and even engage in spiritual practices. At the early stages of any conversation it is better to focus on the broader themes of God's love and His salvation for all people rather than discussing particular doctrines or church guidelines.

- We caution against focusing on theology. While there is a place for biblical discussion, when youth and young adults are hurting, safety and social connection must be the top priorities.
- Please understand, your LGBT+ family and friends are not sinners because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but for the same reason we are all sinners—we were born into sin.
- **Avoid positioning God against** anyone's sexual orientation or gender identity. Remember, many LGBT+ young people anticipate condemnation due to past emotional and sometimes physical **trauma**.
- Unintentionally, many Christians have so strongly judged LGBT+ young people that it has actually dismantled their faith identity.
- Remind your family member or friend from Scripture of God's love and constant care. **Nourish a faith identity** that encompasses their questions and doubts and seeks to uphold or rebuild their trust in God.
- At an appropriate time, you can humbly and thoughtfully ask your family member or friend about their beliefs (see questions on the next page).
- **Regardless of their response, prove that dialogue can be safe.** Do not shame them or show disapproval if they no longer share your beliefs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A HEALTHY FAITH AND SEXUALITY CONVERSATION

- 1** Support the Adventist identity of your family member or friend (if present).
- 2** Suggest dialogue, but do not force it.
- 3** Ask thoughtful questions and listen well.
- 4** Avoid hurtful labels or accusations.
- 5** Respond to belief differences with respect.
- 6** Foster a holistic conversation about faith—one that goes beyond biblical teachings on human sexuality.

HONORING QUESTIONS

YOU CAN ASK ABOUT BELIEFS

We stress that the following questions are intended for emotionally and mentally healthy persons. **If your loved one or friend has a recent history of victimization, suicidality, or emotional distress, you should put on hold any questions about biblical beliefs.** The safety of loved ones is a top priority. The following questions are suggested open-ended ones to help you think about and discuss together what is going on with your loved one. These questions should not be used in a leading way, however, to insert your own beliefs or agenda.

What does your sexual orientation or gender identity mean to you?

How would you describe your **faith identity**? What does your faith mean to you?

How does your sexual or gender identity **intersect** with your faith identity?

Have you ever experienced **conflict** between your sexual or gender identity and your biblical beliefs?

Do you have any spiritual conflicts or doubts that still bother you?

If so, how are you working through those with God?

Have you turned to others for spiritual support?

If not, how did you find **peace**? How did God help you to come to terms with your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?

Who helped you develop or clarify your beliefs?

Are you planning to stay connected with an Adventist congregation?

Are you open to talking with a pastor about **what you believe**?

"LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER.... NEVER OVERESTIMATE YOURSELF OR BE WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS.... IF POSSIBLE, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE." – ROMANS 12:16,18

YOUR LOVED ONE'S PARTNER

IF YOUR ADULT LGBT+ FAMILY MEMBER HAS A PARTNER, GOD HAS GIVEN YOU THE PRIVILEGE OF SHARING THE LOVE OF CHRIST WITH YET ANOTHER PERSON!

If you attempt to **segregate** your child's partner from your family, you will **damage trust** with your own child.



If you **honor** your child's partner and **generously welcome** them into your family, then you have an opportunity to **gain relational trust** with your child—and their partner.



REMEMBER:

The goal is to love and respect the person who is significant in the life of your adult family member, even if you disagree with their decision to date or marry someone of the same gender. It is likely that your biblical position on human sexuality is already known. What may not be apparent is your posture of love and hospitality toward those who do not share your position.

HOLIDAYS: Invite your child and partner home for all family holiday gatherings.

EVERYDAY LIFE: If they live nearby, invite them to dinner and accept invitations they may extend to you. If they are married, treat them as you would any other married couple in your family.

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"My parents discouraged me from ever coming out publicly or to too many people for fear that I would miss out on job opportunities in the Adventist education system. They also discouraged me from coming out knowing it would reduce my opportunities to share my spiritual gifts in local churches."

"THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT: THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER [JUST] AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. NO ONE HAS GREATER LOVE [NO ONE HAS SHOWN STRONGER AFFECTION] THAN TO LAY DOWN (GIVE UP) HIS OWN LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU KEEP ON DOING THE THINGS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TO DO." - JOHN 15:12-14

WEDDINGS

While Adventist pastors may not officiate same-sex wedding ceremonies, the church views ceremony attendance by its members as a matter of personal discretion.

If you decide against attending a gay family member's wedding, no one should judge your effort to honor your religious convictions. However, you should count the cost. A decision not to be present on the most special day of a loved one's life can (and often does) yield deep and lasting relational damage.

Being "right" for one day can limit your opportunity to be present in the life of your loved one for months and years to come. Acts of rejection—no matter how

sincere your motives—may so damage trust that you no longer have a meaningful relationship when it matters most.

For that reason, we encourage you to prayerfully weigh your decision. In some cases, it may be possible to miss a wedding without damaging the relationship. In many cases, though, failing to attend can seriously compromise and even end a close family relationship.

HEALTHY ORTHODOXY IS NOTHING LESS THAN ABIDING IN CHRIST:

- + MY POSITION
- + MY PERSONAL PRACTICES
- + MY TREATMENT OF OTHERS
- + MY BRINGING CHRIST'S PRESENCE TO PEOPLE

I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE
THE BRANCHES. THE ONE
WHO REMAINS IN ME AND
I IN HIM BEARS MUCH FRUIT,
FOR [OTHERWISE] APART
FROM ME [THAT IS,
CUT OFF FROM VITAL
UNION WITH ME]
YOU CAN DO NOTHING.

- JOHN 15:5

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

1. BELIEFS THAT HONOR GOD
2. BEHAVIORS IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD
3. CHRISTLIKE TREATMENT OF OTHERS (WHETHER THEY ARE CHRISTIAN OR NOT)
4. COMPASSIONATE CONCERN FOR HURTING, VULNERABLE, OR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE
5. JOYFUL, WILLING, AND COMMITTED HEART TO LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR OTHERS
6. HOLISTIC (NOT TARGETED) USE OF SCRIPTURE TO PLANT GOD'S WORD IN HUMAN HEARTS
7. ACTIVE PRAYER LIFE, EXPRESSED IN FAITH, BELIEVING IN GOD'S PROMISES FOR MY FAMILY

*Jesus constantly confronts our tendency to have a **religious "blind spot"**—which we can define as critical elements of biblical truth that we are missing. **What am I missing?***



"FEAR NOT

[THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR],

FOR I AM WITH YOU;

DO NOT LOOK AROUND YOU

IN TERROR AND BE DISMAYED,

FOR I AM YOUR GOD.

I WILL STRENGTHEN AND

HARDEN YOU TO DIFFICULTIES,

YES, I WILL HELP YOU;

YES, I WILL HOLD YOU UP

AND RETAIN YOU WITH MY

[VICTORIOUS] RIGHT HAND

OF RIGHTNESS AND JUSTICE."

- ISAIAH 41:10

A sunset over the ocean with a person swimming. The sky is a gradient of orange and red, and the water is a deep blue with ripples. A person is visible in the water, swimming towards the left.

PART 4:

BEYOND LGB

BEYOND LGB

TRANSGENDER ^{AND} “PLUS” IDENTITIES



WHETHER YOUR CHILD IS...

LESBIAN

Same-gender loving females

QUEER

Non-conforming orientation/identity

ANDROGYNOUS

(Non-binary or Genderqueer)
Expressing male and female traits

GAY

Same-gender loving males

QUESTIONING

Uncertain orientation/identity

PANSEXUAL

Love/sex not based on gender

BISEXUAL

Attraction to both genders

INTERSEX

Ambiguous/both genitalia

SSA

Unwanted same-sex attraction

TRANSGENDER

Sense of identity does not conform with birth sex

ASEXUAL

No/limited sexual orientation



Any other binary or non-binary identity or inclination involving sexuality or gender



...THE PROCESS OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND THE RISK FACTORS MANY YOUTH FACE REMAIN THE SAME.

FOR THIS REASON, OUR GUIDANCE ON HOW PASTORS AND PARENTS SHOULD RESPOND REMAINS THE SAME.





PRACTICAL TIPS

FOR GUIDING TRANSGENDER YOUTH

Make presence and togetherness a priority. • Demonstrate high levels of acceptance, unconditional love, and affection. • Allot reasonable time for talking about life. • Set age-appropriate boundaries and flexibilities in allowing certain realms of gender expression. • **HELP BUILD AN ADEQUATE SUPPORT NETWORK FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES, INCLUDING CONSISTENT COUNSELOR CARE.** • Take your more desperate pleadings to God rather than laying impossible demands on an already anxious teen. • Avoid phrases or words that trigger misunderstanding or reveal underlying bias or judgment. • Avoid us-and-them language toward LGBT+ people. • Bless your child with special treats. (eg., "Quinn, it's Friday. You did awesome in school this week. Can I treat you to ice cream?") • As your child gets older, allow them increased autonomy about "who knows." • **LOVE NO MATTER WHAT. DECIDE TO "WALK WITH" NO MATTER WHAT.** • Don't shut down their coming out or be ashamed when they come out. • If you feel embarrassment or fear, call someone in your own support network to process those feelings. • **WHEN "THE BRIDGE DOES NOT CROSS" AND DISAGREEMENTS REMAIN, PRAY.**

Realize that whatever the origin, however permanent or temporary, regardless of whether it is clinical-level dysphoria or general gender discomfort—this journey must play out organically with as much love and acceptance as possible.

For the roughly 80% of youth who eventually "outgrow" gender dysphoria (or see it lessen),¹ this process can best occur when family, home, church, and school are safe for them. This process can be delayed by actions, attitudes, and words that reject young people and deny or minimize their experience. For 0.6% of the general population, dysphoria is a lifelong experience.² Avoid any temptation to use a statistic relating to the 80% as an unrealistic expectation for the 0.6%.

During the teenage years, we as parents cannot know which story is at play in our child's life. We can offer unconditional love, earn relational trust, help build adequate support, depend upon God in prayer, and surrender to Jesus all that we cannot fix or control.

¹Yarhouse, M. A. (2015). *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. InterVarsity Press.

²Flores, A. R., Herman JL, Gates, G. J. & Brown, T. N. T. (2016). *How Many Adults Identify as Transgender in the United States?* Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

JOURNEYING WITH TRANSGENDER FAMILY AND FRIENDS

If you have a family member or friend who identifies as transgender, it is important not to react based on what you may have read in the headlines or seen on social media. This is a complex reality and every situation is unique. The

most important thing a family member or friend can do is to suspend judgment, begin listening to their loved one, and learn more about that person's experience.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

New studies reveal that the American population of transgender people is double what researchers previously thought, a difference due in part to improved sampling and better reporting conditions. Roughly 0.6% of the general population identifies as transgender, equating to approximately 1.4 million people (Williams Institute, 2016).

Parents, in particular, should seek out trusted support following the self-disclosure of a transgender child. Sadly, not every family member, friend, pastor, teacher, or physician will understand your situation. You will need knowledgeable and empathetic people who are committed to walking with you and your loved one, no matter what.

INSIGHTS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

MOVE BEYOND CAUSATION & ACCUSATION

The discomfort or distress (*dysphoria*) many transgender persons feel is real and stems from the fact that their gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. Some transgender persons conform to gender norms associated with their biological sex, while others—often out of an inner necessity—do not. Some identify with the opposite gender, while others may view their gender as neither male nor female, as both male and female, or somewhere on a spectrum between the two.

Differently from transgender persons, those with intersex conditions are born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, and/or chromosomal patterns that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female but are, in fact, ambiguous. This means it can be difficult to tell the actual sex of the child just by looking at sexual characteristics.

Despite all of the attention and debates surrounding transgender issues, the factors that cause someone to be transgender are still largely unknown and likely to be diverse. Since causation is not fully understood, even by scientific and medical experts, family members and church leaders should focus **on offering compassion and care for transgender individuals and their families** as they work through a number of difficult unknowns.

BEING TRANSGENDER IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING GAY

Do not equate gender identity with sexual orientation. Many transgender persons are heterosexual. But gender identity is not about those to whom one is romantically or sexually attracted. **Most who identify as transgender are seeking relief from dysphoric frustration, anxiety, and anguish.** Under such heavy stress, **they are longing for internal peace**—a state of being whole that helps them feel that their body matches the way they internally identify their gender.

**NO MATTER WHAT, DO NOT LOSE
FOCUS ON NOURISHING A DEEP SENSE
THAT GOD WILL BE A REFUGE AND
SHELTER FOR YOUR FAMILY.**

UNHELPFUL COMPARISONS DAMAGE TRUST

When talking to (or about) a transgender person, we may attempt to draw comparisons with the familiar. One common comparison goes like this: "Just because a woman who is anorexic thinks of herself as overweight does not mean we should go along with her harmful perception. Likewise, I am not going to pretend my son is female just because he thinks of himself that way." **Such statements hurt our transgender family members and friends, leave them feeling misunderstood, and severely damage trust.** We may try to reduce complexity in order to make ourselves feel comfortable, but often our comparisons are neither fair nor accurate.

FOSTER SAFETY AND INCLUSION

We may not be able to fully understand the experience of a transgender person, but that should not prevent us from loving them. In a world that often mistreats transgender people, we should do everything possible to make our homes, schools, and churches hospitable places. Safety increases when we surround transgender family members and friends with care, include them in our activities, and allow them to share their stories. How tragic it would be if our loved ones were suffering such deep anxiety and pain, yet we allowed them to remain isolated, alone, and anxious.

CHILDHOOD ISSUES

Cross-gender identification and behavior can appear very early in childhood, raising concerns on the part of parents. Just because a boy says he wants to be a girl or a girl complains about wearing dresses does not make them transgender. Only consistent and persistent feelings of being the wrong gender are characteristic of transgender children. For a majority of children in this category, these experiences will not persist into adulthood. This prompts the question as to whether parents should take a "wait and see" approach or opt for early medical intervention. While pastors and teachers should not attempt to answer such questions, **they can offer spiritual and emotional support to families having to make complex decisions with their care providers.**

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"Since coming out as transgender to my mother at the age of 15, we have become closer and more honest with each other."

TRANSITIONING

Transitioning refers to changes transgender persons make personally and relationally in order to align with their gender identity. For some, this involves coming out to family and friends, changing their name and preferred pronouns, or dressing and grooming in a different way. For others, it involves hormone therapy or undergoing surgical procedures. Not every transgender person transitions. Nor does every person have to transition to the same extent in order to gain relief from gender dysphoria. There are nonsurgical options that help some people. Others may conclude the only way to escape life-crippling pain is to pursue surgical alternatives. You can prayerfully support individuals and families as they seek out medical opinions, weigh treatment options, and make important decisions. It is possible that your adult transgender loved one may make choices with which you do not agree. **Continue to love, include, and accept—no matter what.**

IDENTITY & PRONOUNS

As indicated earlier, a transgender young person may adopt a name matching their gender identity. If they are a minor, this should be done in consultation with their parents. If they are an adult, we recommend that family and friends refer to them consistent with how they self-identify, as a matter of respect. This may include the use of preferred pronouns, such as he/him, she/her, or they/them. Reach out to your transgender family member or friend on their terms rather than based on your idea of who they are.

INVEST IN THEIR FAITH JOURNEY

Finally, **don't let outward appearances detract from the legitimacy of a transgender person's faith experience.** If your transgender family member or friend identifies as an Adventist, then mutually share your faith with them. If not, be open to their spiritual interests or questions. Rid your heart of judgment, nurture your family member or friend's faith identity, and posture yourself to learn from their walk with God.

*I WAITED PATIENTLY AND EXPECTANTLY FOR THE LORD; AND HE
INCLINED TO ME AND HEARD MY CRY.*

*HE DREW ME UP OUT OF A HORRIBLE PIT [A PIT OF TUMULT AND
OF DESTRUCTION], OUT OF THE MIRY CLAY (FROTH AND SLIME),
AND SET MY FEET UPON A ROCK, STEADYING MY STEPS AND
ESTABLISHING MY GOINGS.*

*AND HE HAS PUT A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH, A SONG OF PRAISE
TO OUR GOD. MANY SHALL SEE AND FEAR (REVERE AND WORSHIP)
AND PUT THEIR TRUST AND CONFIDENT RELIANCE IN THE LORD.*

- PSALM 40:1-3



PART 5:



PRAYING IN FAITH AND
TRUSTING IN GOD



FOR TRUSTFULNESS

O Heavenly Father,
thou understandest all thy children;
through thy gift of faith
we bring our perplexities
to the light of thy wisdom,
and receive the blessed
encouragement of thy sympathy,
and a clearer knowledge of thy will.
Glory be to thee
for all thy gracious gifts.
Amen.¹

FOR QUIET CONFIDENCE

O GOD of peace,
who hast taught us
that in returning and rest
we shall be saved,
in quietness and in confidence
shall be our strength;
By the might of thy Spirit
lift us, we pray thee,
to thy presence,
where we may be still and know
that thou art God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.¹

¹Church of England. (1960). *The Book of common prayer with the additions and deviations proposed in 1928*. Cambridge: University Press.





SHINING LOVE

by Roberta C. Raftery

Believer, what do you express
As you look at another?
Do your eyes show love
To your sister and brother?

Or do they show disdain
For the one you see
For they are not at all
What you want them to be?

For you measure a man
Only by what you see
And not by what God
Can cause him to be.

Yet Jesus desires
To give you
His loving heart
And His eternal view;

For He looks at men
As those for whom He died
For He had seen their needs
And heard how they had cried;

And He desires today
That others may see
His love shining forth
Through you and through me,

That men might know
That they have worth
And how God longs to give them
A spiritual new birth.

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A SPECIAL WORD FOR LGBT+ LOVED ONES

IN MENTIONING PRAYER, there is a risk that some LGBT+ readers may interpret us as encouraging parents to “pray away” a child’s sexual orientation or gender identity. If you have read the first four parts of *Guiding Families*, it is our prayer that you know this is not our intention.

By suggesting prayer, our purpose is to invite *all of us* to bring our greatest challenges, fears, doubts, worries, anxieties, and questions into the presence of God. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites each one of us:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavily burdened [by religious rituals that provide no peace], and I will give you rest [refreshing your souls with salvation]. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me [following Me as My disciple], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest (renewal, blessed quiet) for your souls. For My yoke is easy [to bear] and My burden is light.”

You might be an LGBT+ teen with a history of bullying. For you, Jesus might be inviting you to bring your trauma to Him and receive His healing touch and comfort. You are made in His image. He is your Heavenly Father. He never intended for you to experience mistreatment. He deeply loves you.

Or maybe you are an LGBT+ adult whose parents or extended family reject your partner. *Anyone* (gay, straight, or transgender) who deeply loves their partner or spouse would be hurt by conditional acceptance—or even worse, overt exclusion. Maybe Jesus is inviting you to bring your hurt into His presence—or even to offer forgiveness for wrongs done to you.

For a parent who has made mistakes, maybe you already offered an apology and sought your child's forgiveness. Your child, though, may not be ready to let go of the hurt they have experienced. Maybe Jesus is inviting you to keep the faith and cast your dependence upon Him to help you restore the relationship with your child.

Or possibly you have been loving and accepting throughout your child's journey, but your child is demanding that you shift your beliefs before they will have any meaningful relationship with you. Maybe Jesus is inviting you to bring your hurt and surrender it fully at the Cross.

We all need God. We find Him most deeply when we bring *our everything* to Him. Whatever our need, we experience peace when we surrender our lives into His presence. In 1 Peter 5:6, 7, His Spirit invites us:

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God [set aside self-righteous pride], so that He may exalt you [to a place of honor in His service] at the appropriate time, casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully]."

But can God be trusted? *Only if we trust Him.* He desires relationship with us. He hungers to be *our everything*. For our ultimate security and rest, God promises refuge in Psalm 91:1, 2.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will remain secure and rest in the shadow of the Almighty [whose power no enemy can withstand]. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust [with great confidence, and on whom I rely]!"

Prayer is not about an attempt to *fix* or *change* or *judge* or *dismiss* any reader of *Guiding Families*. To the contrary: you are a prized possession. You are a child of the King of kings, who says:

"[I have] plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

God promises that as we seek Him, we *will* find Him.

On the following pages, may you find encouragement, comfort, protection, or whatever you most need.





THE GOD OF ALL

C O M F O R T

The following is a part of a letter the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth to bring them to the one he calls “the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3-11, International Standard Version).

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

God’s compassion and comfort are readily available during our most troubling times. Jesus invites us: “Come to Me all who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest for your soul” (Matthew 11:28). He knows every way that we may hurt over our family and friends. He offers us His presence and desires to comfort us.

No situation is beyond the reach of God’s comfort. David writes: “The one who lives in the shelter of the Most High, who rests in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘You are my refuge, my fortress, and my God in whom I trust’” (Psalm 91:1, 2)! Some of us have faced impossible situations and experienced God’s faithfulness. He walked with us every step of the way. We have been comforted by God, and now we can encourage others to fully place their trust in God. If you are in an early stage of grief—or are continuing to hurt from family rejection—this promise may seem far away. In due time, God will prove faithful: you will be comforted. One day, you will be the comforter of others. God rebuilds our hope even when we have lost all hope.

⁵For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

⁶If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

⁷And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.

⁹Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

¹¹as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

From the sufferings of Christ, our comfort is secured. This comfort, though, came at a great cost to God. As a Father, He endured the excruciating loss of His only Son. In a similar way, we suffer when it feels like we are losing—or being forsaken by—those we love. To begin the process of receiving God's comfort, we first have to sacrifice our attempts to change reality or control our loved ones. We must let go and place our trust in God. Trusting God, though, requires that we act in faith. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, we can pray, "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console."

As we accept reality and surrender control, we lose everything! At this point of surrender, we likely will feel utter despair—a helplessness that leaves us no other option but to cry out to God. In crying out to God, we can be filled with His presence and gain the comfort of Christ. Abiding in Jesus, we can then practice the patient endurance needed for the journey ahead. Our goal is not to escape suffering, but to suffer well—to suffer in the comforting presence of God. It is in this secret place that our hope in God's power can be firm and secure: fears turned into hope; doubts transformed into faith; anxieties replaced with peace; and depression lifted into joy. He will do this for us. Believe.

When the sufferings set before you seem like "deadly peril," it is critical to redirect your thinking to the power of God. Most of us have previously faced threatening situations. God has previously been faithful to rescue, deliver, help, recover, and protect. For our loved ones, God will be equally faithful. We must surround our family with supportive prayer from trusted Christians who are committed to walk with us no matter what. Through prayer, God's "gracious favor" will shower over your life.

DECLARING A DECREE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

When God's people need guidance and rescue, we can personalize the promises of His Word, confess them aloud, and trust His desire to help our family.

WE HIDE IN THE LORD AND DECLARE OUR RELIANCE UPON HIS LOVE AND POWER:

The Lord will defend us and even fight for our family as we hold our peace and remain at rest (Ex. 14:14*).

Resting in God, **the Lord will save us**: a quiet, trusting confidence in Him shall be our strength (Is. 30:15).

The Lord will ordain peace for our family. He keeps us every moment, lest anyone harm us (Is. 26:12, 27:3).

He is our hiding place; **The Lord will protect us** from trouble and surround us with songs of deliverance (Ps. 32:7).

The Lord will keep and save our family from harm. We can trust Him to hide us. He is our refuge (Ps. 16:1, 2).

WE RENOUNCE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND LEAN SOLELY UPON GOD FOR RESCUE AND HELP:

We have no power to face this trial. We do not know what to do! We have no choice but to fix our eyes on God. Listen! **The Lord will uphold us** as we place all our faith in Him (2 Ch. 20:12; 20:20).

The Lord will preserve us even when we are the utter contempt of neighbors. We are strong and courageous as we wait for, hope for, expect the Lord (Ps. 31:11, 24)!

Enemies too strong for us may hate us, but **the Lord will be our stay and our support** (Ps. 18:17, 18).

The Lord will battle for us against strong enemies; with Him on our side, we shall do valiantly (Ps. 108:12, 13)!

Let us boldly approach the throne of God's unmerited favor to us sinners—to receive mercy and find grace! **The Lord will guide us** in good time (Heb. 4:16).

Our hope and expectation are only and earnestly in God! **The Lord will deliver us** from all our transgressions and protect us from becoming the scorn of others. Let those who seek our life be confounded. The Lord is our help (Ps. 38:15; 39:7, 8; 40:14,17)!

The Lord will revoke sentence for His people and relent for our sake when He sees that our power is gone and none remains. Let us surrender what we cannot control and not pretend to have false power over others' lives (Dt. 32:36).

WE DECLARE THAT GOD IS MERCIFUL REGARDING OUR SINS AND MISTAKES:

We have become a reproach to everyone around us. **The Lord will listen to our prayer**: let each member of our family pray to Him because He is merciful, not because we have done right (Dan. 9:1-18).

The Lord will give mercy and loving-kindness when we cry out to Him. He can even cause us to find sympathy among those who harass and ostracize us (Ps. 106:43-48).

We feel sorrow and confess our sins. Our enemies and those who wrongfully hate us are multiplied, but **the Lord will not forsake our family** (Ps. 38:16-22).

The Lord will blot out our transgressions according to the multitude of His tender mercy and loving-kindness. He will wash us and give us a clean heart (Ps. 51).

God forgives iniquity and passes over our transgressions. He subdues and treads underfoot our iniquities. **The Lord will cast our sins away** into the deep sea (Mic. 7:18, 19).

Let us rend our hearts and return to God who is merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. **The Lord will revoke our sentence** (Joel 2).

The Lord will wipe away our transgressions for His sake. He will not remember our sins (Is. 43:25).

God is gracious, slow to anger and full of mercy and loving-kindness. **The Lord will not always accuse us**, neither will He keep His anger forever. He will not treat us as our sins deserve. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord loves and pities those who fear him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust (Ps. 103).

**"THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THOSE
WHO ARE OF A BROKEN HEART
AND SAVES SUCH AS ARE CRUSHED
WITH SORROW FOR SIN AND ARE
HUMBLY AND THOROUGHLY PENITENT."**

- PSALM 34:18

*Scripture paraphrases and personalized statements regarding God's promises are based on the AMPC Version.

WE DECLARE OUR TRUST THAT THE LORD LISTENS TO US AND PROVIDES FOR US:

No matter what we face, God expectantly waits and earnestly longs to be gracious to our family. **The Lord will surely be gracious to us** at the sound of our cry; when He hears it, He will answer us (Is. 30:18, 19).

The Lord will guard our family and give each one of us perfect peace as we lean on and confidently hope in Him (Is. 26:3).

In our most hopeless moments, **the Lord will hear our desperate cries** for His help! Our protection will be found in His presence (Ps. 17:1, 2).

The Lord will move mountains to answer our prayers when we ask in faith for His help (Mt. 21:18-22).

"Lord, we believe! Help us with our unbelief!" **The Lord will help us believe** when we struggle with doubt and fear (See Mk. 9:17-29).

WE DECLARE THAT THE LORD'S HELP IS HERE:

According to God's abundant mercy, **the Lord will send rescuers** to save us from our enemies (Neh. 9:26).

When we cry out to the Lord, He will bring us out of our deepest darkness and break our bonds. Even in trouble, give thanks to God for His lovingkindness for **the Lord will rescue us!** He can break gates of bronze and cut bars of iron (See Ps. 107).

Many question whether God will save our family, but He is our shield, the lifter of our head and hope. We will sleep in peace trusting God, for **the Lord will sustain us** (Ps. 3:2-5).

Will not God defend and protect our family when we cry out to Him day and night? Will He defer and delay helping us? We believe **the Lord will defend and protect us** speedily (Lk 18:7-8).

God is our helper, ally, and upholder. He is also with others whom He uses to protect us. We can thank God right now because **the Lord will help us through every troubling situation** (Ps. 54).

Our hope in God's promise for salvation is based entirely upon faith alone. We do not deserve it. We can never earn it. **The Lord will give and secure salvation** to all who believe. He is our God, who gives life to the dead and speaks of nonexistent things that as if they already exist (Rom. 4:16-17).

Elijah prayed and trusted God for rain. His servant reported that there was no rain, but Elijah told him seven times, "Go and look again." When his servant spotted a cloud as small as a fist, Elijah took radical action believing with certainty that God was bringing rain. We believe that **the Lord will 'rain' blessings upon our family** (See 1 Kgs. 18).

WE DECLARE THAT GOD WILL PROTECT US:

The Lord will remember our family in times of distress and need. He will not wipe out our good deeds and kindnesses done for Him. He will spare us according to His great mercy and lovingkindness (Neh. 13:14,22).

While people (even some friends) may gossip and imagine the worst for us, we trust that God favors and delights in us. Enemies will not harm us, because **the Lord will preserve our integrity** and set us in His presence forever (Ps. 41).

If we are destroyed, will our dust praise God? Will our destruction proclaim His faithfulness? For this reason, in faith, we trust God to help us! **The Lord will turn our wailing into dancing.** He will remove our shame and clothe us with joy. Our hearts will sing thanks to Him forever (See Ps. 30)!

God will never let us be put to shame or let our hope be disappointed. **The Lord will keep us from harm** (Ps. 25:1, 2).

The Lord will be faithful. He says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

No weapon shall prosper against us. Every tongue that speaks against us in judgment shall be cut down. **The Lord will give us peace** (righteousness, security, and triumph over opposition) as part of our heritage in Him (Is. 54:17).

Faith is the assurance of requests we ask of God, the hope for answers we cannot yet see, and the conviction that **the Lord will answer our prayers** (Heb. 11:1).


For every member of our family, God invites us to "come to Him." When we are exhausted and beaten down, **the Lord will give us rest for our soul** (see Mt. 11:28-30).

May our family dwell in the shelter of the Most High. In doing so, we will find protection, provision, and rest. **The Lord will be our refuge and fortress!** On Him we lean, rely, and confidently trust! God will command His angels to guard and preserve us in all our ways (see Ps. 91).

On the day God delivers us, **the Lord will be proven faithful.** We shall say: "Behold our God, upon whom we waited and hoped expectantly that He might save us! We waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Is. 25:9).

**"FOR I CONSIDER [FROM THE
STANDPOINT OF FAITH] THAT THE
SUFFERINGS OF THE PRESENT LIFE
ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED
WITH THE GLORY THAT IS ABOUT TO BE
REVEALED TO US AND IN US!"**

- ROMANS 8:18



WHERE NO WISE GUIDANCE IS; THE PEOPLE FALL,

BUT IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS

THERE IS SAFETY.

- PROVERBS 11:14

PART 6:

GUIDANCE FOR ALL WHO CARE

32 TIPS

FOR

RELATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- 1. Be Sensitive.** Those who have been hurt or judged may easily anticipate condemnation.
- 2. Five-Minute Rule.** There is a brief, initial window in which to demonstrate that you are a safe person.
- 3. Build Trust.** Develop relationships in order to cultivate spiritual interest and growth.
- 4. No Agendas.** Never bait and switch the topic or the purpose of getting together.
- 5. No Biases.** Don't prejudge. Engage others as unique and whole persons.
- 6. No Triggers.** Avoid words or phrases that stereotype or reflect a judgmental attitude.
- 7. No Hammers.** Do not use doctrine to position God against others or their relationships.
- 8. No Hang-ups.** Let go of any hang-ups that hold you back. (What if _____ is attracted to me?)
- 9. Surrender Disgust.** If differences in sexuality or gender identity disgust you, you will not be effective in offering relational care.
- 10. Listen Well.** Make direct eye contact, smile warmly, and genuinely listen to what others share.
- 11. Answer by Asking.** You do not have to carry the weight of every question. You can ask a question back.
- 12. Engage Like Jesus.** Look. Love. Pause. Ask. Listen. Pause. Ask. Listen. Pause. Love. Touch.
- 13. Be Curious.** Be sincere and curious enough to elicit another person's story in their own words.
- 14. Offer Safe Space.** People who are given space to self-disclose can more freely discover God's will for their life.
- 15. Ask About Their Partner.** The best way to honor a friend or family member is to inquire about those who are important to them.
- 16. Lose False Power.** You do not have the ability to condone or convict by either offering or withholding your love and acceptance.
- 17. Be Authentic.** Name-dropping all of the gay people you know will not make you more relatable.
- 18. Walk Humbly.** Remain open to what God wants to teach you from the lives of others.
- 19. Do Justice.** If protection is needed, be the first person to defend against harm.
- 20. Love Mercy.** See beyond wrongdoing to express acceptance, love, and compassion.
- 21. Level the Playing Field.** If the topic of repentance surfaces, refer to it in the context of your own life.
- 22. No Sin Comparisons.** Comparisons with stealing, alcoholism, etc. ultimately break down and become unfair. Don't use them.
- 23. Recognizing Gifting.** Be perceptive and generous in identifying positive qualities, traits, gifts, and talents.
- 24. Nourish Faith.** Commit to nourishing rather than chopping at the roots of faith identity.
- 25. Refuse to Judge.** There is absolutely no room for judgment (Jesus: "With the measure you use ...").
- 26. Practice Patience.** Trust God's timing and ability to work in the lives of others.
- 27. Recall your own salvation.** Did you achieve it? No. Without the Holy Spirit convicting you, you would never have turned toward God.
- 28. Invite Them.** Ask them to be with you by sharing a meal or joining you for an activity.
- 29. Include Them.** A gospel that excludes has no power to reach already banished persons.
- 30. Reveal Jesus.** Always reveal the presence of Jesus within you in both words and actions.
- 31. Share Scripture.** Find ways to experience Scripture together.
- 32. Show Affection.** Within your comfort zone (and that of others), offer affection both physically and verbally.

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS AND TEACHERS

1. INCLUDE

Many Adventist youth and young adults who identify as LGBT+ love God and want to be part of His church. Never try to convince a young person they are not really an Adventist because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Be open to their spiritual interests and nurture their faith identity. Intentionally include them in church and school activities. If you have conduct standards, such as those related to sexual behavior, clearly state and equally apply those with all young people, regardless of their orientation or identity.

2. LISTEN

It takes courage for LGBT+ young people to come out. They risk potential rejection or judgment. Your first reaction is critical. Maintain eye contact and thank them for trusting you with their story. Tell them, "I really want to hear about your experience." Following this kind of disclosure, it is important to make time to immediately listen to whatever they may want to share.

Ask honoring questions that demonstrate understanding and sensitivity. This will allow you to learn about potentially harmful risk factors (bullying, teasing, exclusion, or family rejection).

Refrain from asking questions just because you are curious about that person's life or you are attempting to get to the bottom of what "caused" them to be LGBT+. Research has consistently shown that there is no single cause for same-sex attraction, such as a distant father, controlling mother, or child abuse. Genetics, prenatal hormones, and a variety of environmental factors all combine to create someone's sexual identity, and searching for a "cause" is likely to cause feelings of humiliation, anger, and confusion.

3. PROTECT

No gay jokes. By now, it should be apparent how important it is to treat LGBT+ people with respect and care. Why risk deeply hurting a young person just for a laugh?

No micro-aggressions. Beware of making insensitive remarks. This includes phrases like "that's so gay," telling a young person to "man up" or "be more feminine," or comparing LGBT+ persons to addicts or sexual predators.

No bullying. Teasing, name calling, anti-gay statements, "outing" someone, social media harassment, threatening words, and hitting or pushing are all acts of bullying. Bullying is not acceptable under any circumstance. It can even be a crime. Bullying hurts and kills both gay and straight young people. Protecting LGBT+ youth must be a top priority. Creating safe spaces in a home, church, or school requires advance planning and standard protocols.

Report immediately. Educate and empower staff, lay leaders, and students to protect and report bullying when LGBT+ youth are being mistreated.

4. INVEST

Words are important, but justice requires personal investment and action. Offer to host or join students in bullying prevention programs. Share stories of youth who were harmed or lost their lives due to bullying. For LGBT+ young adults 18 years of age or older, allow them the opportunity to share their stories and educate others (if they wish to do so).

Encourage student leaders to be attentive to their peers, especially those who appear to be isolated or subject to mistreatment and exclusion. Advise them: "Don't just invite that student into your social group. Discover what he or she likes to do, and join with them in that activity."

Identify the God-given gifts and talents of LGBT+ young people and utilize them in the church and community (mission trips, worship teams, service projects, etc.). Help them connect these experiences to God's calling and purpose for their lives.

It is not uncommon for Adventist parents to wonder how they should relate to their child's LGBT+ friends. In the past, many parents were anxious about the influence of LGBT+ peers on their children. Today, many are genuinely asking, "What can we do to help? How can we positively engage our child's LGBT+ friends?"

WELCOMING YOUR CHILD'S LGBT+ FRIENDS

10 GUIDING INSIGHTS

FOR PARENTS WHO AIM TO EXPRESS ACCEPTANCE FOR LGBT+ YOUTH

- 1** Assure your child that all of their friends—gay, straight, questioning, or transgender—are welcome in your family's home.
- 2** Assess how LGBT+ people have been discussed in your home over the years. Has your rhetoric reflected views that demonstrate love for LGBT+ people?
- 3** Reach out to the parents of your child's LGBT+ friends. Take the opportunity to be friendly and hospitable.
- 4** Avoid guessing that your child's friend must be gay due to external appearance (dress, stature, mannerisms, features, talents, or interests).
- 5** Do not shy away from engaging an LGBT+ youth after they disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Convey that your family is safe and welcoming space.
- 6** Recognize that Christians have a reputation of not treating LGBT+ people well. Make certain your actions, attitude, and words are genuine and thoughtful.
- 7** Be natural, and keep it simple. If you try too hard to think of a unique way to talk with LGBT+ people, there is a greater chance of offending someone.
- 8** Reject the notion or fear that an older child's LGBT+ friend might be a negative influence on your younger children. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not socially transmitted.
- 9** Exchange talking for listening. By asking honoring questions (below), you will learn a lot and gradually build trust and influence.
- 10** Be a safe parent or lay leader for LGBT+ youth at your church. In Adventist church settings, LGBT+ youth likely still hear unthoughtful statements about gay and transgender people. Build safe rapport with LGBT+ youth, so that they know you are always available to protect them.

Let's learn how to keep LGBT+ youth in our churches and growing in their faith. When we lose one along the way, let's make a concerted effort to contact them and learn what happened. Based on what you discover, make amends for any mistakes and warmly invite this young person back to church. Let's do whatever we can to ensure that we don't lose even one LGBT+ youth.

GREAT QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CHILD'S LGBT+ FRIENDS

1. "How was your week? What topic did you select for your history project?"
2. "Does your family have any fun summer vacation plans?"
3. "What have you been doing to prepare for the upcoming SAT exam?"
4. "I will contact your mom about dinner at our place. Is your family in town next weekend?"
5. "Thank you so much for honoring us with your story. What is it like to identify as genderqueer?"
6. "I am so sorry that you experienced bullying. What can parents like us do to protect LGBT+ kids?"
7. "Can you make it to youth group if you have a ride home? We're always available to drive you."
8. "We are so grateful to have you on this mission team. How is the mission trip going for you so far?"
9. "Thanks for joining our family night. What board games do you and your family most enjoy?"
10. "You said you identify as pansexual. Tell me more. I am curious what that's like for you."

WHY LOVE AND ACCEPT?

As we come to the end of this guide, it may be helpful to ask again, “Why is it important for Adventists to love and accept their LGBT+ family members and friends?” We believe the data on Adventist LGBT+ rejection makes a strong case for relational care and inclusion. Yet some readers may still fear that love and acceptance will result in biblical compromise. This need not be the case. In fact, we believe that sharing God’s love and acceptance is a necessary condition of being faithful to the Bible. Here is why.

LOVE EXPRESSES THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD.

Above all, the essence of God’s character is love. His holiness, His righteousness, and His justice are never expressed apart from His love. God’s love and acceptance are not dependent upon any one of us being sinless or making the right decisions. They are there for us even when we wander far from home.

LOVE IS COMMANDED BY JESUS.

Jesus gave only one “new” commandment to His disciples—love one another. As we examine the life and ministry of Jesus, we see this commandment consistently lived out in the way He treated others. Quite apart from compromising the Scriptures, Jesus brought them to life by crossing boundaries and showing compassion and care for the despised and marginalized persons of His day.

LOVE PROTECTS.

The regard Jesus had for Scripture never led Him to neglect or harm one of His creatures. When legal experts accused Jesus of breaking the law by healing people on the Sabbath, He asked which of them would leave their child or ox stranded at the bottom of a well during the Sabbath. To do so would be absurd. Likewise, as Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, He did so in a way that cared for the well-being of His children.

LOVE MAKES US AVAILABLE.

When we show love and care for LGBT+ family and friends, even those with whom we may disagree, we make ourselves available to them. In moments of crisis, they will need someone they can trust to listen and love, no matter what. If we cut ourselves off from our LGBT+ loved ones, we cannot be God’s hands and feet for them when they need it most.

LOVE IS PATIENT. LOVE IS KIND.

These well-known lines from Paul’s “love chapter” (1 Cor. 13) express the essence of how God treats all of us as fallen human beings. He knows how we are formed and lovingly works with us as we grapple with who we are and who He is. If any one of us turns toward God, it is only because of His patience and kindness toward us. By offering LGBT+ friends and family our patience, kindness, and unconditional love, we are giving them the same gift God has given us.

In summary, our faith should never become an obstacle to loving and accepting others but a powerful reason for doing so. Love is the highest expression of our faith. As one Adventist young adult said of her LGBT+ friends, “I love them because of my faith, not in spite of it.” May God give us all the kind of faith that loves others well.

“Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God’s love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening].” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

A person wearing a dark hoodie and light-colored pants is leaning against a brick wall. The wall is made of red and grey bricks. The person is looking down and to the side. The background is a blurred city street with buildings.

EPILOGUE:

WRITING A NEW CHAPTER

This must not continue. With prayerful effort, we can end the rejection of LGBT+ family and friends. We can learn to love and care for each of God's children, just as Jesus did.

To uphold the Bible's sexual ethic, we must live it out in our own lives and then treat others with kindness. A lack of personal integrity and compassion for others undermines the reliability of biblical truth.

When we mistreat people in the name of God, those around us rightly call out our injustice. If we continue to do so, some may see no choice but to reject the biblical teachings we profess, in favor of the kind and fair treatment of others.

Many young Adventists have grown up with LGBT+ family and friends. They want to accept and include those who are different from themselves and see it as an important part of living out the gospel. We trust that God is equipping these young people with the gifts, insights, and skills necessary for such a time as this.

Looking back, many of us with a history in the church are saddened by the ways in which we have hurt LGBT+ people. Our role in advancing biblical truth begins with repentance for the mistakes we have made and a commitment to radically love those we have wounded and ostracized.

Looking forward, the young people who will shape the church for years to come have their own part to play. They will need to navigate the changing cultural and scientific understandings related to sexuality and gender in ways that remain faithful to Scripture.

Let's work together to write a new chapter in the Adventist Church: one in which our faithfulness to God and His Word is marked by unconditional love for our LGBT+ family, friends, and neighbors.

Sincerely,

NAD Commission on Human Sexuality

At the North American Division, we believe the time has come for Seventh-day Adventists to write a new chapter in our relationship with LGBT+ persons. We envision a church whose members are (1) committed to honoring God and His Word and (2) willing to lay down their lives for LGBT+ family and friends.

This does not call for a change in our biblical position on marriage and sexuality, but it does require a posture shift. Shifting our posture means adjusting our actions, attitudes, and words to more accurately reflect Jesus to those around us.

To write a new chapter, we must come to terms with our past. Adventists have always sought to be faithful to Scripture. Yet, all too often, we have been complicit in the mistreatment of LGBT+ people. Some of us have been judgmental. Others of us have failed to notice or respond when LGBT+ persons suffered from bullying, family rejection, suicidality, discrimination, and homelessness.



ADVENTIST BELIEF ON MARRIAGE *AND* THE FAMILY

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE, MALE AND FEMALE, WE ARE DESIGNED TO LIVE IN RELATIONSHIPS. MARRIAGE IS GOD'S IDEAL TO LIVE IN HARMONY, AND FOR CHILDREN TO GROW UP IN SECURITY AND LOVE.

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving, tender, and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons. (Gen. 2:18-25; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

When LGBT+ loved ones come out, parents can experience shock. Fear and grief can disable their initial reaction. Emotions erupt. Hurtful words spill. Trust is damaged. Relationships become disconnected. Meanwhile, in the church, LGBT+ people may encounter impossible hurdles and suspicion about their faith. One courageous disclosure can be met with a response that communicates, "I don't understand you."

***Guiding Families* offers a relationally honoring,
biblically sound path forward.**

In these pages, learn how to:

- Respond well when LGBT+ people come out.
- Protect gay youth against bullying and suicide.
- Avoid unintentionally offensive words and phrases.
- Build a support team for LGBT+ loved ones and their families.
- Engage LGBT+ individuals in a trusting relationship over the long-term.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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