

How should the church respond?

The sexual revolution has changed our world. It has especially changed the view of homosexuality, offering two divergent views. It is either seen as blatant sin or as a God-created lifestyle to be celebrated.

How, then, shall the church respond?

We can learn a great deal from the Bible and, especially, from Jesus' ministry. There are many parallels between the city of Corinth and our situation today. Corinth was near the intellectual city of Athens. Corinthians took pride in their intellectual pursuits. Corinth was a large, wealthy port city and the people enjoyed luxury and comfort. Corinth was known for its wild party life and sexual freedom. The phrase "live like a Corinthian" was understood to mean drunken, promiscuous living. Corinth was part of the Roman Empire which considered religious tolerance a great virtue. They detested Christianity's claim that Jesus was the only way to God.

Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to plant seeds and water them.

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Cor. 3: 6-9.)

Paul uses the imagery of a farmer to say that the church's job is to spread the good news of the Gospel and create a healthy church community where people come to faith and then grow up in faith. Interestingly, Paul also clarifies something about the church's job: the church's job is not to make people change or grow. That's God's job.

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What did Paul mean by planting seeds? What does it mean to spread the good news of the Gospel to the people of Corinth? Was it to include those involved in homosexuality?

Paul did not tell the Corinthian church to protest, march, or cry out against homosexuality or any of the other sins of the people. Why not? Perhaps it is because Jesus said that "He did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it." (John 3:17) There is no scriptural reference anywhere where the church is told to engage in protests, confrontations or petitions.



Sometimes today's church seems to use Jonah as an example of spreading the Gospel to people involved in homosexuality. "In 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed." (Jonah 3:3) That is all Jonah said. "You are going to die." He did not speak about repentance, forgiveness, God's grace, or God's power to produce deep and lasting change. In fact, he got angry when the people of Nineveh repented and God forgave them.

Sometimes today's church says, "Homosexuals are bad people, the worst sinners, and God is going to destroy them." Often the church is as angry as Jonah and does not want to see people reclaimed from homosexuality and coming to their church.

Jesus responded differently than Jonah. He did not condemn the prostitute who poured perfume on His feet, the woman caught in adultery or the woman at the well. He did not shame them for their lifestyles. Jesus became their friend. He forgave their sins and sought to reclaim them for His kingdom. The church, likewise, is to seek those who are lost, become their friends, visit their homes, eat with them and tell them that Jesus Christ offers them living water.

Belong, Believe, Become

We can use three words to guide how the church shall respond. The church is called to invite people who are affected by homosexuality to Belong, Believe and Become.

Jesus did this with his disciples. Paul's instructions to churches can be summarized in these three words — Belong, Believe and Become. Missions to unreached people groups follow this strategy. We should reach out to people affected by homosexuality the same way.

When Jesus invited His disciples to follow Him, he first invited them to eat with Him, travel with Him, and listen to His teachings. His invitation did not begin with the question, "Who do you think I am?" or the condition that they must believe before they could follow him. He asked that question later. He began by inviting them to follow Him, be with Him — to belong. He showed them acceptance, affection and approval before He

asked them to believe.

All of us have a deep desire to belong. God made us that way. People's need to belong is true across all ages and all cultures. Jesus' approach with His disciples fits the characteristics of today's post-Christian, post-modern societies.

Men and women who are involved in homosexuality don't become interested in Jesus through arguments that

opening doors

homosexuality is wrong. They become interested when we love them and make them feel like they belong.

For the disciples, believing came after belonging. It was after Jesus took His disciples around Galilee Lake, calmed the storm, preached the Sermon on the Mount, fed the 5,000, and walked on water, that He asked the question, “Who do you say I am?”

Can people involved in homosexuality be saved? If someone involved in homosexuality asks, “What must I do to be saved?” the answer is the same as for everyone else. We need to understand our need for a Saviour, believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead, accept that salvation is God’s gift to us and that we accept it with gratitude, and confess that Jesus is our Lord. Becoming a Christian does not require that we first clean up our lives. That happens later.

Jesus did not tell the Samaritan woman at the well that she needed to clean up her life before He could offer her living water. Cleaning up our lives, finding victory over sin, learning how to resist temptation and how to put on the full armour of God all come after we become Christians. After we become Christians and God washes us, we begin the process of becoming who God designed us to be. This is called transformation. The Bible says that everyone must undergo deep and lasting changes to become the people God designed us to become.

Encourage people to Belong. Believe. Become

How do we help people become what God intends them to be? Simply telling people, “The Bible says it’s wrong, so stop sinning” is not helpful. Consider what Jesus did with the woman at the well. He put first things first. He begins by asking her to meet a need in His life — He asks her for a drink. We should not avoid homosexual men and women but seek them out. Go where they are and ask them for a coffee. Ask them to help you by providing something you need.

Jesus first talks to the woman about her ongoing need for water; then He moves to her spiritual need. Jesus knows how thirsty for love this woman must have been for her to get married five times and then to live common law. To tell her to stop trying to find a man to satisfy her need for love before giving her a significant substitute simply won’t work. So Jesus offers her eternal water.

When she says she is interested in what He has to offer, He brings up her lifestyle. Instead of condemning her, He simply tells her that he knows all about her life. He doesn’t tell her to ‘stop sinning’; he simply acknowledges her real condition. She changes the subject, probably because it is

painful or embarrassing. And He allows her to shift away from the pain of her need. Then He brings her back to the real issue — which is not her sexual sin but putting God first, heart and soul, in spirit and truth — authentic worship. Jesus knew that until she had living water springing up in her soul, flowing out of a right relationship with God that she would forever drink from muddy water.

If we try to force people to clean up their lifestyles before they experience the source of life-giving water, then we spiritually dehydrate them. After they have experienced this life-affirming gift Jesus offers, people will discover that God leads them through deep and lasting change. That’s the Become part of Belong, Believe, Become.

Love them and make them feel like they belong

God want us to become Christ-like. People involved in homosexuality become Christ-like in the same way that everyone else does. There is no special process for homosexuality. God has a part in the process, we as individuals have a part, and the church has a part.

The change process that God uses is not a formula. There are common elements such as recovery from the hurtful things of the past, developing stronger relationships in a family and community, building a new sense of identity and support system. God tailors the timeline and sequence to fit the person. Most importantly, God leads the process of change. Change happens when we follow God.

The church’s role is one of encouragement and friendship when it comes to homosexuality. People need to be encouraged that change, becoming Christ-like, is possible. They need to be encouraged to make use of the help that a good counsellor can provide or to become part of a support group.

Each of us needs to encourage one another to follow God as He leads us to become the person He designed us to be. We need to encourage people to “press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of you. Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which god has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

What happens when a church reaches out to people involved in homosexuality, inviting them to belong, believe and become? Miracles happen. Broken people receive hope and healing. Deep and lasting change happens as people submit themselves to the lordship of Jesus. People become what God intended them to be.

What Can I Do?

Pray. God works through Exodus only when you pray. Exodus needs people who will pray for churches in all EGA regions as they respond to the need for a compassionate ministry to those dealing with homosexuality. Will you send us a letter telling us that God has called you to pray?

Give. Exodus’ ministry to people depends on your financial support. Our support comes from individual donors, not institutions, company sponsors or government grants. Will you give as God directs you? Send your gift using an Exodus response card or contact the Exodus Global Alliance office. Your gift helps Exodus staff provide ongoing support to all of Exodus’ regions and, through them, to churches and organizations in their ministries.

Invite Us to Your Church. That’s right, invite us to your church. Exodus representatives regularly speak in churches or lead seminars that introduce the need for ministry to people affected by homosexuality, explain what ministry involves, and explain how the church can support such a ministry.

Afterwards, many people often say they have never attended a service so understanding, so full of substance and so full of hope. We would love to be able to speak to your church. Take the first step by contacting us. We will take the next step by contacting your pastor.