

Ministering to families impacted by homosexuality

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Every church does not have the opportunity to minister to someone struggling with same-sex attraction but most churches do have the opportunity to minister to family members of gay sons or daughters. While the church dynamic and culture issues are the same for both groups, there are some unique characteristics to ministering to people who have gay loved ones.

For Christian parents of gay children, a child's 'coming out' is often described as being like a death to them. It can represent the death of many dreams for their children and for themselves. It can completely change the family dynamic, and cause conflict where open conflict never existed before. For this reason, listening is so much more important than counsel. Families must be allowed to process what they know in their own way, and in their own time. This is not to say that counsel can never be given, but counsel should be given with understanding of what the family is going through, and following prayer and Bible study.

The homosexual struggle or lifestyle can consume families.

There is so much misinformation circulating about homosexuality and theology. These families will be looking for answers, and it is important that they have access to the truth in their churches. The more the church body is educated on homosexuality, and the more church leaders are trained on issues related to homosexuality, the more the families will have to answer their questions and dialogue intelligently with their gay family members.

The homosexual struggle or lifestyle of a family member can consume families. It is important to always work to pull their eyes off of their loved one and onto themselves. The revelation of homosexuality in a family can feel like death at first, but so often it is the catalyst for great personal and spiritual change in parents, siblings and other family members. Even where the gay family member never moves away from their homosexuality, their family members can experience love, grace, truth and compassion in ways they have never experienced before.

Finally, churches should always remember that there are legitimate reasons for families to keep these issues somewhat private. They carry the burden of knowing things about their kids or family members that everyone does NOT need to know. Do not encourage public disclosure of someone else's sexuality. But, work to create an environment where these families can share their personal burden confidentially, and can build a safe support network to walk with them on their journey with their loved one. Parents and families should be encouraged to maintain a small but loyal support group.

Five essentials for the Church

A church may be big or small, heavily programmed or lightly programmed. However, there are several key elements of church life that must exist for a church to minister effectively to someone impacted by homosexuality.



1. The church must be committed to uncompromised truth. While culture is indeed fluid, Scripture is a foundation that withstands the fluidity of culture. To assume that Scripture changes with the whims of society is to create a weak foundation for the building of new lives.
2. Churches must teach in an authentic, vulnerable and real manner. When the 'important' people are real and vulnerable, the people will follow. An environment that fosters honesty and vulnerability is essential for people who struggle with same-sex attraction.
3. Churches must be places of real-life community. Relationships in safe churches are based in love, not in fear. People don't just pray for illnesses and distant relatives, but instead walk with other people through joy and sadness, gain and loss, hurt and healing. Safe churches foster relationships that go beneath the surface.
4. Churches must provide simple, easy opportunities to serve. There is such a thing as healing service. Service allows people to move outside of themselves and to, if even for a short time each week, live with their eyes off of their own issues and on someone else. Safe churches encourage people to live for others.
5. Churches must be committed to real discipleship. Safe churches are not just about salvation and not just about imparting Biblical knowledge, but are about making disciples. Leading people into discipleship means leading people to die to themselves and to live lives surrendered to Jesus Christ. Walking people into surrendered lives will, at the same time, walk them away from everything else they are inclined to follow.

opening doors

All churches have the answer

For those who struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction, and for those impacted by the struggle of someone else, the answer is not so much in the change of sexual attractions, feelings or orientation. The answer is to become a disciple of Jesus, with all of the wonderful challenges and joys that journey entails. This is what the church has to offer – to all sinners, and all strugglers, and all broken people. This was an apparent strength of the church at Corinth, where all sorts of sinners, including homosexuals, were obviously moving away from what they were and into all that God had for them to be (I Cor. 6:9-11). This can be the testimony of any church.

So, church, just be the church. Welcome all people, love all people, teach the truth, be real, be discerning, equip people to serve...make disciples. Change for people with same-sex attraction may or may not include changes in feelings and desires, but it always includes a change in what they seek in life, in what they follow, in what they make sacrifices for, in what they pursue, and in what brings them true and lasting joy. People can be disciples of many things, including their feelings. But if the church will just be the church, then the church can walk with all people as they become a disciple of Jesus, and everything else will fall into place.

Equipping the Church to respond with truth and grace

It is a rare church that is not impacted in some way by homosexuality. For some, it is clear and obvious. Perhaps an openly gay person or couple begins attending, or someone struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction comes for help, or a family in the church shares that a son or daughter has 'come out' as a gay man or lesbian.

For others, the issue does not surface as directly. The church may be indirectly impacted by the gay subculture in the community or education system, or people may be questioning how to deal with a gay friend or acquaintance, or there might be someone secretly struggling with same-sex attraction sitting in the pew every Sunday. The church is called to respond and often feels ill equipped. The answer is for the church to simply *be the church*.

Historically, many Christians singled out homosexuality as a sin more serious than all the others. Today's culture is increasingly viewing homosexuality as something to be celebrated, embraced and protected. Some churches embrace gay-friendly theologies. Some refuse to deal with it at all. Others raise their voices in opposition to homosexuality. Still others may not be vocally against homosexuality, but have decided that they don't want any of

'that' in their church. Some hold to the truth of Scripture while graciously loving anyone impacted by homosexuality.

The wide variety of responses within the Christian church is similar to the wide variety of churches described in Revelation. Jesus' words to John about the seven churches are surprisingly clear. We see legalistic, loveless churches, apathetic churches and theologically liberal churches, persecuted churches and churches that have capitulated to culture. Jesus' words provide great instruction to today's church about homosexuality.

The church must be 100 per cent truth and 100 per cent grace.

Four churches — Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira and Laodicea — resonate with the current Christian climate towards homosexuality. The church at Ephesus did not tolerate wrong teaching or heretical theology. Its members worked hard, were moral, tireless and faithful. But they had lost the love they once had for the lost and for each other.

The church in Pergamum held fast to their faith and did not back down in the face of persecution. They were faithful and passionate but they lacked wisdom, and opened their church to false teaching and false doctrine, which led to idolatry and sexual immorality.

The church in Thyatira was full of love, faith, service and endurance. They were probably social activists. They opened their church to false prophets who lured people into sexual immorality under the guise of Christianity.

The church at Laodicea was rich in material things, but was destitute in spiritual things. They stayed squarely on the fence, fearful of offending anyone and in that fear, becoming totally powerless.

Jesus had strong words for these churches, words that every church can take to heart as they minister to people impacted by same sex attraction. Jesus praised the orthodoxy of the church at Ephesus, but called them to love because truth without love becomes cold and powerless. To the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira, he praised their works and their perseverance, but called them to doctrinal wisdom and discernment, and warned them of the dangers of false teaching and false prophets. He challenged the lukewarm, non-committal church at Laodicea to do commit to their faith, and to live what they say they believe. It is not orthodoxy that makes an effective church; nor love and tolerance. To be all that God has called the church to be, it must be 100 per cent truth and 100 per cent grace. In reaching out to those struggling with same-sex attraction, any church can be 100 per cent truth and 100 per cent grace.

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.