

REACHING THE LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUAL

Responding Redemptively

LGBTQ+ This group of letters has become something that most likely we all hear regularly. In fact, given the recent events in our country it seems we hear this reference daily. More so than ever before it seems that LGBTQ+ matters are front and center in our culture. But really this is not just something that we read or hear about in far away places, it is front and center in our own communities but really more than that, it is front and center in our own families and churches.

LGBTQ+ is an acronym that originated in the 1990's and replaced what was formally known as "the gay community". It was created so that this community would be more inclusive of diverse groups. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning individuals and the "+" is for any others. The reality is that it is likely that everyone of us knows someone who is LGBTQ+. So what do we do about that? How do we respond? How do we reach out to them and minister redemptively? Well the answers to these kinds of questions are what this article is about. Because the acronym LGBTQ+ has become so familiar to us, I want to use it not as a reference to those who are gay identified rather I want to use it as a guide for us to follow in ministry to the LGBTQ+ individual. In other words, when you hear LGBTQ+, you know it refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning individuals and all others but I want your next thought to be what I am about to give you today as a guide to minister to these individuals. If I can't change someone else's mind, belief, or actions about homosexuality, then I must focus on the only part of this issue that I do have control over and that is myself. I can and must examine and evaluate myself. I can and must engage my culture, community or family member in a redemptive way with the gospel. So here then is a guide to reaching and ministering to the LGBTQ+ individual.

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1. LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY.

I realize that truth is a relative term today. The majority of our culture and world believes that truth is what is truth for you. It would appear that there is no such thing as absolute truth. We find this to be true in a lot of areas but it seems to be especially true when it comes to sexual orientation and specifically homosexuality.

What complicates this is that while most believe that there is no absolute truth they seem to agree that what the media says is true. The irony in this is that for the most part what the media says is truth is simply just what is truth to them. They are their own standard. Reminds me of the period of the Judges in the Bible where “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” (Judges 17:6)

Even though in the culture there seems to be no standard or basis by which truth is determined except what the individual believes for themselves, as followers of Jesus we know that truth is not what we decide it to be but rather it is what God says it to be and that standard of truth is God’s Word. Because our world view is a biblical Christian world view then the Word of God and our faith in Christ are what inform our belief and behavior.

All of that said here is the truth about homosexuality. I know that sounds like an arrogant statement but what I am saying is that based on careful observation of scripture, my own study and my own personal experience in trying to understand why I struggled with homosexuality, here are the conclusions I have come to. Here are some of the things we need to learn about homosexuality.

Learn why an individual has same sex attractions leading to homosexuality.

Though the culture and the media in particular say homosexuality is genetic, there is no conclusive scientific evidence to prove a genetic link to homosexuality. Yes scientific studies have been done but where effort was made to replicate those studies, they were not able to do so and so there is no conclusive scientific evidence that homosexuality is genetic.

Knowing there is no genetic link is important because LGBTQ+ individuals and groups rely on a genetic link to support their point of view that sexual orientation is determined in them just as race, eye color or any other genetic trait is. Their reasoning is that if it is genetic then you cannot change what is genetic in a person.

Some in the scientific community acknowledge that there is no genetic link and they go on to say that while there is no genetic link there are various factors that contribute to same sex attraction in a person's life. I agree with this observation though I do not agree with all of the factors they identify as contributing.

The Genome Project (www.genome.gov), a secular project related to genetics has spoken on this and their conclusion is that while there is no scientifically conclusive evidence of a genetic link to homosexuality there are various factors that contribute to a person having a same sex orientation. Here is what they said: *"There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation."*

As I sought to understand the same sex attractions in my own life, I have come to see that there are four main factors that contribute to an individual having SSA. These include:

Depravity of the human heart. What I mean by this is that the potential for any of us being or doing anything is in our heart before we are saved. Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23 that "it is not what goes into the man that defiles him but what comes out." And then He listed some of what comes out of the heart and immorality is in the list. The word used for immorality is a word that encompasses all sexual sin. God even made this same point to Jeremiah in 17:9-10 when He said that the heart of man is more wicked above all else and desperately sick. My point is that a factor that contributes to same sex attractions and homosexuality is the depravity of the human heart.

Deception of the devil. The devil is a liar and a deceiver. He roams around seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). His desire is to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:1-3 that the unbeliever is dead in their trespasses and sin and that they walked or lived their lives according to the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience." I just know from my own personal experience that part of what contributes to same sex attraction in a person's life is how they are deceived by the devil. I am not seeking to blame the devil but I am saying that his fingerprints are all over this sinful bondage as well as all others.

Deficiencies in early development. This contributing factor is that something was missing in the individual's relationship with their parents in the early years of development. The deficiency can be perceived rather than real though often it is a real deficiency. This results in the individual learning how to meet their own needs in other ways rather than legitimately. This is not an effort to blame one's parents but to show that these deficiencies do contribute to one's same sex attractions.

Destructive experiences in a person's life and these include abuses done to them and choices made by them. Many who have same sex attractions have had some kind of abuse in their lives. In other words, there was something done to them that impacted them in some way that contributed to their struggle. These destructive experiences also include choices made by the individual. I know that most if not all individuals say their homosexuality was not something they chose and while that is true there are many choices that they make that certainly contribute to their having same sex attractions.

I have talked with many who have SSA and without exception, myself included, all of these factors are identifiable in their life with varying degrees and these factors contribute to (not so much cause) their having SSA. While this is true, here is the amazing truth I discovered in the Bible. God has countered each of these factors in and through the finished work of Christ. When a person is saved the bible says they are a "new creation in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17) and God also said in Ezekiel 36:26 that we are given a "new heart" which means that God took away and changed our depraved heart. We also have truth in the Word of God to counter the lies and deception of the devil. Jesus declared in John 17:17 that God's Word is "truth". We are also learn in the bible that "God is a father to the fatherless"(Psalm 68:5) and that if my "mother and father forsake me then the Lord will take me up."(Psalm 27:10) All of this showing that whatever was deficient in my early development those needs God meets and as well as His healing the brokenhearted.

Learning what contributes to someone having SSA and knowing how God has countered each one helps us to know change is possible and how change comes about.

Learn what the Bible reveals about homosexuality.

Learning the truth about homosexuality involves our learning what the bible reveals about homosexuality. There are basically six key passages in the Bible that make reference to homosexuality. It is important that you read these and see them in their context. These six passages are Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:1-30 (v22), Leviticus 20:7-24 (v13), Romans 1:18-32 (v26-27), 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1 Timothy 1:8-11 (v9-11). You must know that there are a variety of views about all of these and many of those who are pro-gay see a pro-gay theology in these verses. Some in the religious culture have twisted these to agree with their own ideas. They start with themselves and work back toward God bending scripture to accommodate what they want. The proper approach is to begin with God and then bend ourselves to God. The reality is that no amount of human reasoning will make something right if God has already condemned it.

You should also know that when God addresses homosexuality in the Bible that it is in the context of His addressing other sexual sins. This means we must be consistent with what God says in His Word that all sexual activity outside of sexual intimacy between a man and a woman in the context of a covenant marriage relationship is sin.

I realize that most would say homosexual sin is more serious than other sexual sin but I am saying that we must see all sexual sin as serious in God's eyes. Someone said that what one generation does in moderation the next will do in excess. The sexual revolution of the past has contributed to the sexual mess we are in today. The hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. A critical first step in ministry to an LGBTQ+ individual is to learn the truth about homosexuality. These are some basic thoughts and will equip you for having a gospel based dialogue with an LGBTQ person.

2. GIVE LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY.

It is important that you understand that knowing the truth about homosexuality is to inform you and not to give you ammunition to win a debate. Our desire is to see real heart and life change in a person and that involves knowing the truth as well as to give love unconditionally.

I want to be careful to clearly explain this because this is what our culture is saying as well but we are saying different things. I need you to understand that we are saying more.

Our culture and LGBTQ+ individuals say that what those of us who don't agree with them should do is just love them and not hate. For them love equals acceptance of them, their sexual orientation, and the way they live their lives. Hate equals not accepting them. The question then is it possible to love someone and show love in tangible ways even though we don't agree with them or accept the way they live their lives? The answer is yes and the example is God's love through Jesus for the world.

Before I explain "giving love unconditionally" let me say the importance of this is that in many ways the deepest need in the life of a LGBTQ+ person is love. Love meaning acceptance, affirmation, approval, and affection. It is the most basic of our needs and one that can't go unmet. Gary Chapman in his book "The Five Love Languages" says that unless we feel and experience love we are emotionally empty and more times than not we will turn to whatever feels like love. It is said in Proverbs 27:17 that "to him who is starving even that which is bitter taste sweet." Our need for love is so strong that if it is not there then there is no shortage of substitutes to fill that void and we will readily turn to those substitutes because they satisfy and take away the sting of the unloved feeling.

So how do we give love unconditionally? God's example of loving us is a great place to start. Here is what we learn in the Bible about the way God loves us. He loved us where we were. (Romans 5:6-10) He didn't let our sin stand in the way of His loving us. His love wasn't just in word but it deed and in action. (John 3:16) His love isn't based on whether we respond or love Him back. His love included telling us the truth but He continued to

love us even when we despised His love. All of this is seen in the bible.

The world says “love me”, accept who I am, what I do, how I live my life, don’t judge or try to change me. The gospel says love all people where they are, regardless of who they are, what they do or whether we agree with them or not but doing so with the desire to share the gospel and see Christ transform their lives.

Love is powerful. Real love, unconditional (not conditioned on the response of the one being loved) and uncompromising (not compromising on truth of the gospel) has the power to effect change. Give love unconditionally.

3. BUILD REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS.

The third detail in reaching out to and ministering to the LGBTQ+ individual is to build redemptive relationships. Every word is important and the goal is to have a relationship with the individual through which you can respond redemptively.

Building implies taking the initiative, to intentionally be involved in the life of the LGBTQ+ individual. I’m not saying compromise on truth but I am saying relationship is the bridge into the LGBTQ+ person’s life. Without a relationship how will you show love, speak truth, or share grace?

I say relationships are important even critical because I’ve met so many teens that are ready to leave or give up family, friends, and their faith community for a community of LGBTQ+ individuals and the primary reason is the relationship. Some of it is because they want the gay experience but for some it really is that they are starving for relationship and the LGBTQ+ community provides it.

We have to learn to build redemptive relationships. How? Again I think Jesus is a perfect example. A key detail here is that we are not just talking about being friends or just doing things together. It is relationships in which redemption is the key. Redemption means to be restored in a relationship with God. This may be initially as one is saved or it may be an individual who is a believer being restored to fellowship with God. Either way we desire in our relationship to respond to them redemptively and by that I mean in a way that can lead to their redemption.

Jesus was redemptive in His response to people. This is seen throughout His life and ministry as He related to people. Here is what He did. He met them where they were both physically and spiritually. He mingled with them. He was moved with compassion for them which simply means He loved them. He maintained His focus as to why He had come

which was to redeem people. In other words He built relationships for the purpose of redemption.

I realize that all of this requires being involved in the person's life. It is difficult, time consuming, messy at times but it is the plan of God for redemption and transformation.

4. TENACIOUSLY PRAY.

The fourth detail in reaching the LGBTQ+ individual is to tenaciously pray. What I mean is prayer for the situation, for the individual, and for God to work powerfully. There is power in prayer. Praying for others is a powerful way of ministry to another.

My own experience of coming to freedom in Christ from same sex attractions was and is because of prayer. There were people praying for me even before I knew they were and even before I began my own journey to freedom. It just illustrates to me the power of God at work through prayer that results in life transformation.

Here are some bible passages related to prayer for you to stand on. Ephesians 6:12, Psalm 44:4-8, 2 Chronicles 14:9-12, 2 Timothy 2:25-26, James 5:16-17, Luke 18:1 Enlist the prayer support of those who are prayer warriors. Ask them to agree with you in prayer.

5. QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ANSWER.

The next detail is the "Q" and by that I am referring to questions you can ask and answer. Questions to ask yourself and questions to help you engage the LGBTQ+ individual in a redemptive conversation.

Ask yourself where you are in your own life spiritually. Are you humble before God? Have you experienced transformation in your own life? Are you living free in the freedom that is yours in Christ? Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1 that as we seek to help someone else we must first look at ourselves. It is not about being perfect but it is about where you are in your own relationship with God as you are seeking to be used of Him in the life of another.

You might also consider the following questions to ask the LGBTQ+ individual. Ask them to tell you their story and then listen to them. Everyone has a "back story" or the story behind how they got to where they are presently. Ask them. Listen to them. You are giving them an opportunity to explain why they are where they are. This includes asking them when they first realized they had same sex attractions. This assumes they have told you that they do and not that you just think they do. Ask them to join you in a small group

for bible study. The Word of God is powerful and pierces into the heart of everyone. It does not have to be a study about sexual sins. It should be just a study of the bible. God will use His Word to work in them and He will work through the relationships to meet important needs in the individual's life all of which results in life change.

The whole point in this is for you and me to think about ourselves to make sure our hearts are right and our motivations are pure .

6. LEAD THEM TO THE CROSS.

The final part of this acronym is the "+". This symbol looks a lot like a cross and it reminds me as I reach out to an individual who identifies as LGBTQ+ that my greatest desire in reaching out to them is to lead them to the cross. I want them to experience God's love and mercy and grace as expressed through Jesus' death on the cross. I want them to experience the greatest expression of love they could ever know. I want them to hear the gospel and know that it is the power of God for being saved and living saved. I want to lead them to Jesus because He is the only One who can truly transform their lives and give them freedom from sin's power. This is uppermost in my mind as I am seeking to reach out to anyone who identifies as LGBTQ+.

CONCLUSION:

I am sure that you already know it but I will say it anyway. There is no quick fix and there is no blanket solution but there is hope. There is always hope because of the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ. Live the gospel yourself! Share the gospel! Be lovingly, redemptively, actively involved in the life of someone who is LGBTQ+ not that you might change them but that they might be transformed through a personal encounter with Jesus.

We cannot just say homosexuality is wrong. We can't just do nothing. We have no right to condemn. We must not compromise. We must seek to have a redemptive response as we reach out to the LGBTQ+ individual.

For more information or if you would like for us to come share with your church then please contact us at 228-297-9823 or halselbyjr@bellsouth.net.