



RELATIONAL GUIDE FOR  
**PARENTS OF  
NEWLY OUT  
LGBTQ+ PEOPLE**

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designed and edited by  
Q Christian Fellowship



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# Foreword

by Executive Director Bukola Landis-Aina

No one related to me attended my wedding. They never deigned to respond to the wedding invitation such that we had to create a contingency plan with the wedding planner just in case my family happened to show up. But instead of a change of heart, I saw that my family were texting about my nephew's latest basketball game during the intimate occasion of my rehearsal dinner. I felt invisible and insignificant in that moment. I handed my phone to a person of honor in the wedding and asked her to please make the messages stop. She did. And from that point on, I focused on the family of intention that I was creating. It was the most amazing day! It was not until I arrived back home that the grief of abandonment slammed into me. It was crippling and took years to overcome. I am not sure that I ever truly have.

I cannot stress enough that non-affirmation from your loved ones is piercingly painful. And for those who were much more vulnerable than I, non-affirmation is downright dangerous. At 29, I came out as a fully independent and privileged adult, and yet the very thought of coming out to my parents made me feel like I was staring over the side of a cliff and I only saw jagged rocks. And yet, I jumped off that cliff, fearing there was nothing to catch me. No water, no safety. It gave me panic attacks and took much counseling and my unwavering dependence on Christ to make it through. Our LGBTQ+ youth are dying because when they think of coming out, they truly are facing death, whether it be spiritual, emotional, relational, or literal death.

It is statistically and empirically conclusive<sup>1</sup> that a non-affirming dynamic is damaging to a child, no matter their age. LGBTQ+ youth are “experiencing heartbreaking levels of stress, anxiety and rejection, but also overwhelmingly feel unsafe in their own school classrooms. LGBTQ+ young people who participated in the survey also made crystal clear that supportive families and inclusive schools are key to their success and well-being.” Q Christian has accompanied thousands of parents through the years and recognizes and respects the journey many parents take. We recognize and deeply respect the journey many parents and children take, because we are also those parents, and we are also those children.

In our ministry, Q Christian Fellowship's top priority is the affirmation and health of the LGBTQ+ child. Our devotion as a Christian Fellowship compels us to strive to offer unconditional love and acceptance of all God's children, in the example of Christ. We also seek to equip parents to relate to their LGBTQ+

1 <https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report>

child in healthy and respectful ways. We respect the autonomy of adult LGBTQ+ people to choose the degree to which they engage with their non-affirming parents. We offer a variety of resources<sup>2</sup> for families, including our annual Parent Summit<sup>3</sup>. In all our engagement with parents, we stress these essential data points courtesy of The Trevor Project<sup>4</sup>:

- LGB youth seriously contemplate suicide at almost three times the rate of heterosexual youth
- LGB youth are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth
- LGB youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide as LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection

In a national study, 40% of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt. 92% of these individuals reported having attempted suicide before the age of 25.

I wish that there had been relational guides like this one to help my parents and my siblings when I came out. I hope that this guide helps prevent LGBTQ+ youth from experiencing emotional, physical, and spiritual abandonment, and certainly harms like conversion therapy. I pray that this relational guide helps parents and loved ones who would otherwise be prone to years of toxic interactions that harms everyone involved. LGBTQ+ children aren't the only ones harmed in this toxic dynamic. So many parents have expressed to us their deep pain, grief, and inner conflict that comes with the difficult process of loving and supporting their LGBTQ+ child within a non-affirming family or community. Parents of newly out LGBTQ+ children are thrust into a situation where they need to quickly and often unexpectedly develop a new language and practice of expressing unconditional love for their child. This relational guide is for them.



**Q Christian Fellowship's top priority is the affirmation and health of the LGBTQ+ child.**

2 Visit [qchristian.org/resources/families](https://qchristian.org/resources/families) for familial, personal, denominational, and crisis resources.

3 Visit [qchristian.org/parents Summit](https://qchristian.org/parents Summit) to learn more.

4 <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/facts-about-suicide/>



# Introduction

*If you're the parent of an LGBTQ+ child, then this is for you.*

August 11th, 2011, was the hardest day of my life. And there's not a close second.

That's the day I drove across several states to my mom's house near Louisville, Kentucky. She wasn't expecting me, so, naturally, she was surprised when she opened the door to find me standing on her front porch.

I was there on a very specific mission. This mission was simple, but it wasn't easy. I'd spent years—decades, really—dreading the moment when I'd tell my conservative Christian mom the one thing I'd never wanted her to know: that I was gay.

That initial conversation was tough, but we survived it. She assured me she still loved me and that her love would never change. Relief.

But the years that followed were tougher than that first conversation. We argued and debated over email. We made bad-faith assumptions of each other. We said things to each other that we regretted.

In 2016, I published a blog and podcast about my years living in the closet as a gay Christian. I called it Blue Babies Pink<sup>1</sup>. Tens of thousands of people read or listened to my story. And hundreds of them reached out personally over email or Facebook. Many of those messages turned in to conversations, and many of those conversations were with Christian parents of LGBTQ+ people. This was just the beginning.

I've since had conversations with parents over coffee and dinner.

I've spoken to groups of parents at churches.

I've met with small groups of moms and listened to them recount the moment their child came out to them.

I've spoken with dads—one who told me, "Everything has changed and nothing has changed." I've never

1 <http://bluebabiespink.com/>

forgotten that.

In all these conversations, I noticed parents voicing similar concerns and feelings:

- “I feel like I have to choose between my son and my faith.”
- “I fear for my son’s future. I’m worried that life is going to be difficult for him.”
- “What will my friends think?”
- “I dread telling her grandmother!”
- “My son doesn’t even try to see things from my perspective. I need time to process this.”
- “I wish my daughter would have told me sooner.”
- “I can’t reconcile what the Bible says with my son’s identity.”

While I have so much empathy for every LGBTQ+ person’s journey, I also have empathy for each parent who is walking this road. For many, it is fraught with worry and fear.

In response to these interactions, I decided to launch Harbor<sup>2</sup> in 2017. It’s an online support program for Christian parents of LGBTQ+ children.

Some of our Harbor parents are affirming, which means they believe God can and does bless same-gender relationships (I also believe this).

But we also have some parents who believe that God can only bless relationships between a man and a woman. I love both of these groups. They’re united by their unwavering commitment to loving, supporting, and understanding their children better each day.

Thank you so much for downloading this guide. I want to affirm you for making a good first step! This is just one of the countless amazing resources offered by the team at Q Christian Fellowship, and I’d encourage you to read as much as you can.

I’m praying that God gives you all the grace you need on this journey—and that you learn the beautiful dance of honoring Him and loving your child without conditions.

2 <http://harborhere.com/>



# LGBTQ+ Definitions

by Amy Hayes

*In this chapter, we will provide an overview of some of the terminology and language used by LGBTQ+ people to put words to their experiences, identities, and expressions of self. This chapter was authored by Amy Hayes, featured in our Relational Guide for Allies.*

## Affirming Theology

Affirming theology maintains that the gender identities, sexual orientations, and sexual relationships of LGBTQ+ individuals are equally as good and holy in the sight of God as those of cisgender, heterosexual people. Proponents of this view extend an unqualified invitation to our LGBTQ+ siblings to participate fully in the life of the church, including weddings, membership, and leadership positions.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community may espouse different variations of affirming theology according to each individual's personal convictions. These can be broadly grouped into two categories, although individuals may hold convictions somewhere between these definitions:

- Side A Theology: Any theology which fully affirms both LGBTQ+ identity and same-gender sex. Side A theology fully affirms same-gender relationships, marriage and sex as good and acceptable to God. Side A theology also recognizes that celibacy may be freely chosen for many reasons, including by individuals who identify along the spectrum of asexuality. Individuals within this theological framework may hold a broad range of sexual ethics. *Example: Antonio, an Anglican priest, just celebrated his sixth wedding anniversary with his husband Jeff.*
- Side B Theology: Any theology which affirm LGBTQ+ identities, yet maintains that Christians should refrain from same-gender sex for a variety of personal and/or theological reasons. This includes single, celibate LGBTQ+ Christians as well as those in celibate partnerships and mixed-orientation marriages. These are marriages wherein at least one person is married to a person of a differing sexual identity, such as a heterosexual man married to a gay woman. Important: Side B refers to a theological viewpoint reserved for LGBTQ+ persons only. When celibacy is imposed by cisgender, heterosexual people onto others, it is referred to as non-affirming. *Example: After struggling with internalized shame about her sexual identity, Mia came out as a lesbian this year. In full acceptance of who God created her to be, Mia embraces celibacy as a faithful expression of her personal theological convictions.*

# Gender

## SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. It is important we don't simply use "sex" to describe people's identity, because gendered characteristics in humans occur along a spectrum and because of its role in transphobia (sex doesn't always equal gender).<sup>1</sup>

## GENDER IDENTITY

One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be aligned with or different from their so-called 'sex' assigned at birth.<sup>2</sup>

## GENDER EXPANSIVENESS

**1. Transgender person:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the 'sex' they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. (Note: Transgender identity does not depend on medically transitioning through either hormone therapy or surgical interventions.)

- **Trans man:** a person who was assigned female at birth but now embraces a male identity
  - **FTM:** acronym for female to male<sup>3</sup>
  - **Transmasculine/transmasc:** an adjective that can refer to a trans man, or an adjective that can describe a non-binary person's masculine gender experience/expression
- **Trans woman:** a person who was assigned male at birth but now embraces a female identity
  - **MTF:** acronym for male to female<sup>4</sup>

1 Trans Student Educational Resources. "Definitions." <http://www.transstudent.org/>, n.d. <http://transstudent.org/gender/>

2 Human Rights Campaign. "Glossary of Terms." HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

3 dictionary.com

4 dictionary.com



- **Transfeminine/trans femme:** an adjective that can refer to a trans woman, or an adjective that can refer to a non-binary person's feminine gender experience/expression
  - **AFAB/AMAB:** Acronyms meaning "assigned female/male at birth" (or DFAB/DMAB, "designated female/male at birth"). No one, whether cis or trans, gets to choose what sex they're assigned at birth. At the time of publication, this term is preferred to "biological male/female", "male/female bodied", "natal male/female", and "born male/female", all of which may be defamatory and/or inaccurate.<sup>5</sup>
  - **Transition:** Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or designated "sex" on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. Some people will only complete some steps while others may complete more. Some who identify as trans may not transition. Please avoid the phrase "sex change."<sup>6</sup>
2. **Nibling** is a gender-neutral term used to refer to a child of one's sibling as a replacement for "niece" or "nephew". The word is thought to have been coined in the early 1950s, but was relatively obscure for several decades before being revived in recent years.
  3. **Drag / Drag King / Drag Queen:** The term "drag" refers to the performance of masculinity, femininity or other forms of gender expression. A drag queen is someone (usually male) who performs femininity and a drag king is someone (usually female) who performs masculinity. The term may be used as a noun as in the expression in drag or as an adjective as in drag show.
  4. **Stealth:** Going "stealth" commonly refers to a trans person who is not open about the fact that they are trans, and choose to pass as a cis person. This could be due to an unaccepting environment, or just personal choice of not wanting to disclose their trans identity.
  5. **Deadnaming** occurs when someone, intentionally or not, refers to a person who's transgender by the name they used before they transitioned. You may also hear it described as referring to someone by their "birth name" or their "given name."
  6. **Egg:** A person who doesn't realize they are transgender yet, or is in denial; an undeveloped transgender person. When they realize, it's referred to as the "egg cracking."

5 <https://standwithtrans.org/glossary-of-terms/>

6 <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

7. **Cisgender person:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the social and cultural expectations typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. The abbreviation cis may also be used. Cis-hetero or cishet refers to a straight cisgender person.

8. **Nonbinary person:** Someone whose gender identity blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female.<sup>7</sup>

- **FTX:** A way to describe someone who is assigned female at birth and identifies as nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth. It is in the same family as the FTM and MTF labels, but provides nonbinary/ genderqueer/GNC/etc. folks space to identify themselves (and their transition) outside the aforementioned binary options.<sup>8</sup>
- **MTX:** A way to describe someone who is assigned male at birth and identifies as nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth.<sup>9</sup>
- **Agender:** Having no specific gender identity or having a gender identity that is neutral. Sometimes used interchangeably with gender neutral, genderless, or neutrois.<sup>10</sup>
- **Bigender:** Having two distinct gender identities or expressions, either simultaneously, at different times, or in different situations.<sup>11</sup>
- **Genderfluid:** Moving between two or more gender identities or expressions.<sup>12</sup>
- **Genderqueer:** A catch-all term for individuals with non-binary gender identities.<sup>13</sup>

9. **Gender Expression:** External presentation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.<sup>14</sup>

7 Definition from <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

8 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/lgbtq-definitions-gender-sexuality-terms>

9 Ibid.

10 Definition from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-non-binary-or-have-non-binary-gender-4172702#types-of-non-binary-gender>

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Human Rights Campaign. "Glossary of Terms." HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

- **Femme:** Feminine identified person of any gender/sex.<sup>15</sup>
- **Boi:** A person assigned female at birth who expresses or presents themselves in a culturally/stereotypically masculine, particularly boyish way. Also, one who enjoys being perceived as a young man and intentionally identifies with being perceived as a “boy.”<sup>16</sup>
- **Masculine of Center:** A term originating within communities of color describing people whose gender identity or expression falls towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum; includes a wide range of terms such as butch, stud, aggressive/AG, dom, macha, tomboi, trans masculine, etc.<sup>17</sup>
- **Butch/Stud:** A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.<sup>18</sup>

**10. Intersex person:** A person born with sex organs, genetic coding and/or secondary sex characteristics which are a blend of typically male and female physical traits (historically referred to as a hermaphrodite). “Intersex” refers to people who are born with any of a range of sex characteristics that may not fit a doctor’s notions of binary “male” or “female” bodies. Variations may appear in a person’s chromosomes, genitals, or internal organs such as testes or ovaries. Some intersex traits are identified at birth, while others may not be discovered until puberty or later in life.<sup>19</sup> An intersex person may or may not personally identify with their assigned gender. “The most thorough existing research finds intersex people to constitute an estimated 1.7% of the population.”<sup>20</sup>

## Sexuality

- 1. Sexual Identity:** This term is not widely used, but it refers to the socially influenced self-understanding/labeling<sup>21</sup> of one’s self.
- 2. Sexual Orientation:** The presence or absence of an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.<sup>22</sup> There are several types of orientations:
  - **Asexual:** describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction or desire for other

15 Definition from [https://www.mvc.edu/files/Allies\\_Terminology.pdf](https://www.mvc.edu/files/Allies_Terminology.pdf)

16 <https://lgbt.williams.edu/resources/terms/>

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 <https://interactadvocates.org/intersex-definitions/>

20 <https://www.intersexequality.com/how-common-is-intersex-in-humans/>

21 David G. Myers, *Psychology*, 10th Edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2013)

22 Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

people

- **Lesbian:** describes a woman or woman-aligned person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Gay:** describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender OR a man/male-aligned person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other men
- **Bisexual:** describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.
- **Pansexual:** describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree. Overlaps with bisexuality.
- **Demisexual:** describes a person who only experiences sexual attraction to people with whom a close emotional connection has been formed. Considered to be along the spectrum of asexuality.
- **Queer:** describes a person who is not straight and/or cisgender. The term began as a slur, but has been partially reclaimed and it used as a catch-all identifier by some in the LGBTQ+ community. Others find it offensive.<sup>23</sup> Note: Should only ever be used as an adjective, never as a noun.

Did you notice the terms were divided into two distinct categories? It's common for people to equate gender identity with sexual orientation, but they are not the same. Keep that in mind as we move through the guide.

Remember: language is dynamic and politicized, as well as deeply personal. As various cultures keep evolving so too does language, rendering the above terms obsolete or even offensive. So don't take correction personally, instead embrace the opportunity to flex your curiosity and humility.

23 Harman, B.T. "Relational Guide Parents of Newly Out LGBTQ+ People." Q Christian Fellowship, n.d. <https://www.qchristian.org/guides/parents>.



# Tales from a Worn Path

A Mom's Perspective I by Laura Rodich, Mother of B.T. Harman; Foley, Alabama

My journey as “the mother of a gay son” started officially in 2011, when my 29-year-old son B.T. showed up at our door unannounced (he lived seven hours away). Very seriously, he said, “I have something I need to talk to you about.” Fear gripped me immediately. I knew this probably wasn’t good news.

B.T. is my third son, my baby. His life, to this point, had been remarkable—he was a leader amongst his peers at his Christian high school and college, strong in his faith, wise beyond his years. He was the kind of young man who’d cause dads of daughters to sidle up to me at school events and whisper, “I have given my daughter permission to marry your son... no one else.”

Strangely though, during his teens and twenties, he never—not even once—dated a girl. He was always surrounded by a bevy of lovely Christian ladies who were his dear friends, but never in a romantic sense.

By the time he was 30 (and *still* unattached) I should have had a clue. But he was traditionally masculine and into sports, so I just attributed it to his strong sense of morality. I figured one day he would meet “the one” and everything would click.

But here he was, sitting in my living room, tearfully admitting he’d always felt attracted to men. He told us he’d been in therapy and prayed for over a decade that God would make him “normal.” He had never acted on these feelings. He said he was committed to celibacy because that was the only way he could honor God, moving forward.

For the next two weeks, I was literally sick in bed—utterly heartbroken and devastated. I prayed and hoped things would change. Three years later, he told me he could be alone no more, and that he’d decided to start dating men.

Today he is happily married to a very precious young man, Brett. I love my son-in-law. He is someone’s baby too.

I do not endorse their relationship, but I do accept it.

***We have all agreed to disagree and to keep loving each other.*** I have learned that it is my Father’s job to shape and change the lives of those He loves, not mine. It is my job to love them. I trust Him fully to

work in the lives of these two fine young men for His glory and their good. I have peace.

It's been nearly a decade since my son came out to me. I've had lots of time to process and think. Here are some things I wish I had known back then:

## I TRUST GOD FULLY TO WORK IN THE LIVES OF THESE TWO FINE YOUNG MEN FOR HIS GLORY AND THEIR GOOD.

1. ***It is okay to grieve, but please realize that they have suffered too.*** Listen—really listen—when they first tell you, and in all future conversations. This is very hard for them.
2. ***They are not “doing this to you.”*** They are grappling with how to live their life, and may have struggled with self-hatred and fear. Though you may feel like it, you are not the victim.
3. ***They did not choose this. No one would choose this.*** For reasons we don't fully understand, their “wiring” is different from ours. How it happened is not as important as that it happened.
4. ***Do not let others tell you how you should handle this in order to be a good Christian.*** This is not their child! You'll likely get advice from pastors and well-meaning Christian friends who have no skin in the game. This is your journey. It requires prayer (lots of it) and earnestly seeking the Father's heart for your child.
5. ***Search, pray, and find your own convictions on this matter as directed by the Holy Spirit—*** not by political correctness or peer pressure. If you maintain a traditional view (as I do) you can still love and have a relationship with your child. It's not your job to correct them. That is the Holy Spirit's job. It is your job to love them. If you don't fully agree with them, they may distance themselves from you for a while. This is the time you must show your love to them the most.
6. ***Educate yourself.*** Read books you may disagree with so that you may understand and empathize more. I recommend *Torn* by Justin Lee, as well as my son's blog/podcast *Blue Babies Pink*<sup>1</sup>. These have helped countless Christian parents in the early stages of this journey.

1 <http://bluebabiespink.com/>

7. **Seek out support from other Christian parents going through this.** It's comforting to know you're not alone and that many other outstanding Christian parents have a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender child. There are several wonderful groups on Facebook and each of them approaches this topic from a different viewpoint. Find the one that's right for you.
8. **Drop the stereotypes!** Gay people are not all wild, promiscuous people marching half-naked in parades. Most are just people like you and me, trying to find love and meaning in their lives. Learn to love them all. They all have a story. They are all someone's baby. They are all created in His image. And they are all dearly loved by a Heavenly Father who knows every hair on their heads! Can we love them any less?
9. **Take your hands off, and trust God with your child.** Really trust Him. They are not an "abomination" to Him. He loves them way, way more than you do! He is faithful. He will bring them to the place He wants them to be, even if we don't fully understand.





# Tales from a Worn Path

A Dad's Perspective I by Greg Walker; Tacoma, Washington

Our oldest son came out to us when he was 26. That was five years ago.

I'm not sure how I survived that week. Devastated is too mild a word to describe my condition. This was not in my plans. While my views had softened over the years (from viewing "homosexuality" as a sin to viewing "homosexual acts" as sin), I was firmly in the camp of having a traditional view of sexuality and marriage. And I had no intent to change. I felt like my son—my only son—was choosing to shake his fist in rebellion at God and also at me. On top of my destroyed dreams, he was also destroying his mother, my wife.

There was no time for me to deal with my own hurt, fear, and grief. I had to be the rock for my wife. Our family was her everything, and her relationship with Todd was special. I wasn't sure if she could survive this. I felt it was my job to assure her that everything was going to be okay.

Everything changed that day. Our son wasn't the person we thought we knew. We discovered, as we listened, that he'd been walking this journey out for thirteen years. He hadn't sought this, and he'd done everything he could to change it. He knew my stance on this "issue," yet this was his reality.

As a family, we've come a long way in five years. During that time, I've discovered a few things I wish I'd known then:

- 1. Love first and always.** I learned that "speaking the truth in love" isn't really helpful. I'm not required to fix anyone, but Jesus clearly commands me to love as he loved (John 13:34-35). I believe this means choosing to value the relationship with my son over "being right." Pastor Andy Stanley teaches an incredibly powerful principle around this: Instead of asking, "What is right?" in a particular situation, ask, "What does love require of me?" Your child already knows what you believe about the Bible and LGBTQ+ issues. What they need is to experience unconditional love from their heavenly Father and their earthly father.
- 2. You're not your family's savior, and you need some support.** We dads believe we have to be strong, stable, keep it together, and never show weakness or fear. This journey may be the most difficult thing you've ever experienced. You can't go it alone, although the enemy of your soul will try to convince you that you must. Not only do you need to lean hard on Jesus; you also need to



find other people to walk with you and support you. Find a local community of LGBTQ+ parents to connect with, join an online community, or do both! If you try to go it alone, you'll fail yourself and your family. Believe it or not, your family can grow stronger through this, but only if you learn to let others support and love you.

- 3. *Be a learner, not a teller.*** This starts with listening to your child. Remember that, for many years, your child's been living a life you know nothing about. Lean in and really listen as they tell you their story. Listen, not to answer, defend, or correct. Listen to understand. Being a learner also means opening yourself up to new ideas. Read (or listen) to thinkers and authors who hold differing viewpoints from your own. If you're non-affirming, seek out well-researched, intelligent books and teachings from affirming Christians. I'm not asking you to change your mind, but I am asking you to be open to what Jesus wants to teach you while seeking out differing perspectives.

**YOUR FAMILY CAN GROW STRONGER THROUGH THIS,  
BUT ONLY IF YOU LEARN TO LET OTHERS SUPPORT  
AND LOVE YOU.**

- 4. *Commit to deliberate, regular communication with your child.*** My son lives hundreds of miles from his mom and me. It would have been easy to grow more distant. After he came out to us, we had to build an entirely new relationship. We decided to schedule weekly calls for over a year. The conversations were strained, shallow, sometimes short, and often lacking substance. At first the dialogue wasn't so much about deep topics, but about each of us committing to open communication and practicing a new behavior. We were successful because we identified our common ground early:

- We agreed that we loved each other.
- We agreed to extend grace to one another. To truly build a new relationship, we'd have to discuss difficult, painful things. But those discussions had to be rooted in love and filled with grace and forgiveness.
- We agreed to be patient, as we knew that forging this new relationship would take time. We acknowledged that we wouldn't get to a new place of health overnight.

- 5. *Devote yourself to loving your spouse.*** You are going to process this at a different pace and sometimes in different directions. Your spouse will need you, and you will need her, like never before. You will likely hurt one another at some point on this journey, so grace and forgiveness

will be crucial tools for you both. Get counseling when needed, and refuse to let this drive the two of you apart.

While the path is different for each of us, I understand a portion of the pain you're feeling. You're processing unexpected news—news that most parents were never prepared for. And you're dealing with a radical alteration of hopes and dreams you've had for your child since before they were born.

Know that your journey to a new place is not going to be linear. You're going to experience bumps and setbacks. You're going to get some new wounds and discover some old scars. You're going to have to confront deeply held theological beliefs and examine them with a fresh perspective.

The good news is that, if you let him, Jesus will grow you through this process. He will!

After five years, I'm closer to my son than ever before. And I'm so proud to be his father. There is *always* hope.





# Parents' Top 5 Questions

## 1. Did I do something wrong raising them?

While no parent is perfect, there is nothing you did to contribute to them being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. After a child comes out, it's common for parents to replay their entire parenting journey, rewinding the years and obsessing over past words and actions. Have you found yourself thinking any of these thoughts?

- Maybe his dad worked too much when he was little.
- Maybe we should have encouraged her to date boys more in high school.
- Maybe we should have pushed him to play sports. (Or her not to.)
- Maybe we didn't discipline her enough.

A child coming out feels like an outcome—one that was likely unexpected and maybe even unwanted. And it's human nature to ponder the origins of outcomes. However, I'd strongly encourage you not to center yourself as the cause of that outcome. For decades, there's been a very stubborn myth in circulation that says gay children are the result of overbearing or emotionally distant parenting. There simply isn't research that supports this. My personal story also bears this out. I grew up in a very loving home with two nurturing, Christian parents. My physiology is fully same-sex attracted, but not one second of their parenting contributed to that.

Over the years, polling<sup>1</sup> has revealed that 3-5% of the human population identifies as LGBTQ+. Yet we still don't know exactly why some people are straight and cisgender, and others aren't. It's still a mystery.

I'd encourage you to make peace with that mystery. Resist the impulse to look at yourself (or someone else) and assign causation or blame.

## 2. Couldn't it be that my child is just confused or that this is just a phase?

Most likely, no.

1 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/234863/estimate-lgbt-population-rises.aspx>

Each of us has a deep-seated and highly intuitive awareness of our own romantic attractions.

Think about yourself for a minute. If you're straight, did someone have to teach you to be straight? Did someone have to explain your heterosexual attraction to you? Of course not. You just...knew. It's the same for your child. They are the only person who lives in their body, which means that only they can determine their sexuality or gender.

The only caveat I would mention here is: If your child is still young, the only guarantees ahead are questions, hormones, and new, awkward conversations about sexuality and gender. A child's understanding of their own experience may still be coming into view. Like someone peering through a foggy windshield, they may have a general sense of what they're looking at but not know how to communicate it precisely. However, I must also mention that lots of LGBTQ+ people have told me they had a keen sense of their orientation or gender identity at a very early, prepubescent age. This is not uncommon. Others have realized it later in life yet, once they learn this part of themselves, they cannot un-ring that bell.

Early after a child comes out, many parents presume their self-identification is just a phase. However, from my experience, this is often wishful thinking, rooted in the desire most parents have for their child to live the "normal" life of a straight, cisgender person.

Be prudent, ask questions, listen intently, but err on the side of believing your child and lovingly helping them cope with this revelation.

### **3. I'm worried about my child's future health and safety. Will their life be harder now?**

In surveys and in person, I've often asked parents this question: "What were the first, raw emotions you felt immediately after your child came out to you?"

Without fail, the most frequent answers are "fear" and "worry."

There is fear and worry that their child will face mental health issues.



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There is fear and worry that people will be unkind.

There is fear and worry that their child will be targeted with discrimination.

There is fear and worry that family members will shun their child.

There is fear and worry that their child will get caught up in what they imagine as the “gay lifestyle” (partying, promiscuity, STDs, etc.).

There is fear that their child will be rejected by the church or turn their back on God.

I wish I could say that all these fears are ridiculous. Sadly, I can't. LGBTQ+ people still face unique struggles.

However, I can say this: At least in America, there's never been a better time in history to be openly LGBTQ+. It's true! The latest opinion polls have consistently showed a strong majority in support of LGBTQ+ identity and relationships, and specifically of gay marriage.<sup>2</sup> We are more represented and more visible than ever before. And personally, I've experienced exponentially more kindness than hate since I've come out publicly.

Remember that most LGBTQ+ people want exactly what straight people want—happiness, peace, meaningful work, companionship, and supportive family. While many young people—gay or straight—have a season of rebellion or “wandering,” I believe most will come back to the idea of settling in and putting down the roots in one way or another. For many in previous generations of LGBTQ+ Americans, this was unattainable. But now, your child has more opportunity to live a happy and healthy life.

## 4. Do I have to choose between my child and my faith?

Absolutely not!

This is by far the most common question Christian parents of LGBTQ+ children grapple with after their child comes out, and pondering it can make for lots of sleepless nights.

Many parents feel trapped—torn between asserting their theological convictions and affirming the child they would give their own life for. Many fear the reactions of those in their churches if they accept their children's experiences. Parents often end up having to ‘come out’ themselves as having an LGBTQ+ child.

2 <https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>

There are three ways traditional parents can respond to a child coming out:

- **Rejection** – Treating your child as a pariah or disease to be diagnosed or cured. Pushing them away. Manipulating them with shame. Advising them to go to therapy to be “fixed.” All of these are various forms of rejection that will ultimately hurt your child. I cannot say this strongly enough: Please don’t do this! I have countless LGBTQ+ friends who experienced early rejection from their parents, and they are still deeply wounded by it. For relevant research on the mental health and experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, check out The Trevor Project.<sup>3</sup> I’d also encourage you to read Linda Robertson’s sobering story<sup>4</sup> on rejecting—and ultimately losing—her gay son.
- **Affirmation** – Parents who affirm that God blesses faithful, loving same-sex relationships. Some studies suggest that the children of these parents have the best long-term health and mental health outcomes. On your theological journey, be sure to read Q Christian’s *Affirmation Guide on Reconciling Faith and Sexuality*<sup>5</sup>.
- **Loving Compromise** – Parents who learn to show acceptance and love towards their child despite continued theological disagreement. This option takes a tremendous amount of emotional work, grace, and communication. Even then, your child may feel invalidated or unloved and may need to exercise strong boundaries around your relationship for their own emotional health.

## LGBTQ+ PEOPLE WANT EXACTLY WHAT STRAIGHT PEOPLE WANT—HAPPINESS, PEACE, MEANINGFUL WORK, COMPANIONSHIP, AND SUPPORTIVE FAMILY.

My desire is that every parent would be fully affirming of their child’s identity and relationships (option two). I truly believe that’s what God would want. However, I believe the next best option is the third above, loving compromise. This is the tension that exists between me and my mom. It’s taken us a while to get to a place of mutual respect, but it is possible. We deeply love each other in spite of our disagreement about how God views same-sex relationships.

More than anything, I hope you’ll open up your heart and mind to what God has to say to you about this.

3 In particular, LGBTQ+ youth are “experiencing heartbreaking levels of stress, anxiety and rejection, but also overwhelmingly feel unsafe in their own school classrooms. LGBTQ+ young people who participated in the survey also made crystal clear that supportive families and inclusive schools are key to their success and well-being.” HRC 2018 LGBTQ+ Youth Report.

4 <https://justbecausehebreathes.com/>

5 [qchristian.org/guide/sexuality](http://qchristian.org/guide/sexuality)

If you've grown up in a non-affirming Christian context, you've probably heard all about God's thoughts on "the gays." I'd encourage you to take a step back, pray for a fresh perspective, and then begin reading everything you possibly can. There are so many good resources available.

But please, no matter where you end up theologically, I beg you to love your child at all costs. Love them with your words and actions. The way you love (or don't love) them through this vulnerable, tender season will forever affect your relationship with them. Always, always, always err on the side of love.

## 5. I'm worried my child will lose their faith. What can I do?

If your child has been involved in church and has been active in their faith, the future can feel scary. The evangelical church in America has been hurtful and harmful to LGBTQ people in many ways over the years. It's an ugly legacy that I'm hopeful will be transformed for the better over time.

Ultimately, your child's relationship with God is between them and God. None of us can control, preserve, or cajole the vibrancy of another person's faith. However, there are a few ways you can help your child continue to feel a connection with God:

- **Center Christ in their spiritual narrative.** There are thousands of denominational permutations of the Christian faith. Each of them has a distinct set of principles and ways of interpreting Scripture. But Jesus is the constant. He is the friend of sinners. He is the one who sprinted to the margins to find the people that others have rejected. Reassure your child that, though the Church may hurt them, Jesus is constant and His love never fails.
- **Consistently remind them that they are loved by God.** This may seem simple or cliché, but it's important! Growing up, I had an ugly voice in my head, telling me that God was disgusted by me—that I was dirty, tainted, and hell-bound—due to a sexuality I never chose and couldn't change. This was a highly toxic and destructive pattern of thinking. Thankfully, I was surrounded by friends and family who helped change that over time with the truth that I was loved and that God took delight in me.
- **Consider attending an affirming church.** For families actively involved in a non-affirming church, this may seem drastic, but it's worth considering. Most towns—even small ones—have at least one affirming church now. These churches are often filled with wonderful people, eager to extend love to both you and your child. And this may be exactly what your child needs to see God through a new lens.



# A Difference Hermeneutic

by Rev. Danny Cortez

*This chapter, we'll be discussing the differing ways people can read Scripture, particularly the passages that are often cited in conversations around sexuality and identity. This content is excerpted from our Relational Guide for Clergy featuring Rev. Danny Cortez.*

## Reading through a Jewish Lens

A young man knocks on the door of a great Talmudic scholar. “Rabbi, I wish to study Talmud.”

“Do you know Aramaic?”

“No.”

“Hebrew?”

“No.”

“Have you ever studied Torah?”

“No, Rabbi, but I graduated from Harvard summa cum laude in philosophy, and received a Ph.D. from Yale. I'd like to round out my education with a bit of Talmud.”

“I doubt that you are ready for Talmud. It is the broadest and deepest of books. If you wish, however, I will examine you in logic, and if you pass the test I will teach you Talmud.”

“Good. I'm well versed in logic.”

“First question. Two burglars come down a chimney. One emerges with a clean face, the other with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

“The burglar with the dirty face.”

“Wrong. The one with the clean face. Examine the logic. The burglar with a dirty face looks at the one with a clean face and thinks his face is clean. The one with a clean face looks at the burglar with a dirty



face and thinks his face is dirty. So the one with the clean face washes.”

“Very clever. Another question, please.”

“Two burglars come down a chimney. One emerges with a clean face, the other with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

“We established that. The burglar with the clean face washes.”

“Wrong. Both wash. Examine the logic. The one with a dirty face thinks his face is clean. The one with a clean face thinks his face is dirty. So the burglar with a clean face washes. When the one with a dirty face sees him washing, however, he realizes his face must be dirty too. Thus both wash.”

“I didn’t think of that. Please ask me another.”

“Two burglars come down a chimney. One emerges with a clean face, the other with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

“Well, we know both wash.”

“Wrong. Neither washes. Examine the logic. The one with the dirty face thinks his face is clean. The one with the clean face thinks his face is dirty. But when clean-face sees that dirty-face doesn’t bother to wash, he also doesn’t bother. So neither washes. As you can see, you are not ready for Talmud.”

“Rabbi, please, give me one more test.”

“Two burglars come down a chimney. One emerges with a clean face, the other with a dirty face. Which one washes his face?”

“Neither!”

“Wrong. And perhaps now you will see why Harvard and Yale cannot prepare you for Talmud. Tell me, how is it possible that two men come down the same chimney, and one emerges with a clean face, while the other has a dirty face?”

“But you’ve just given me four contradictory answers to the same question! That’s impossible!”

“No, my son, that’s Talmud” (Eretz Israel’).

My friend, Carlos Delgado comments on this story told by Peter Enns.

*“Enns’ story about his Jewish professor and the story about Talmud help me see it’s possible (and not only possible, but a cultural norm, an assumption many have made for centuries and millennia) to enter into dialogue with this important thought in mind: many robust views can exist within all kinds of biblical debates; ours is not the first generation to navigate disagreement while we also are trying to stay together. In fact, it’s a long and beautiful Jewish tradition, and we ought to learn from it.*

*“It may just be that Christians (and that Protestants in particular) aren’t very good at it (yet). So rather than look only at our Protestant spiritual heritage, which includes postures of certainty and anathema, we might instead learn a new cultural norm. Can we view the Bible as ‘a problem to be solved’ more than ‘a message to be proclaimed’? Can we admit contradictions into the conversation—without diminishing our own views? Is it unfair to believe that we might learn from Jewish tradition, from a corporate posture of humility? That we might coexist with others whose views of the Scriptures differ from ours? Are we wide enough, are we large enough, as Walt Whitman might say, to contain these contradictions?”*

“For Jews, the Bible is a problem to be solved; for Christians it is a message to be proclaimed.” (Noted Jewish biblical scholar Jon Levenson.)

## Reading the Bible

There are many theologians who have opposing views to each other. And there are other theologians that make counterarguments from those opposing views. This back and forth could give anyone whiplash. Who do we choose to believe regarding the history and context of these passages? Is the understanding of the mind of God reserved for the educated? Or does God give ordinary people access to the Kingdom? Do we read Scripture like a legal document, or do we engage in it relationally?

Let me illustrate. Suppose you were a Jewish person living just before the time of Jesus’ public ministry. One day you heard that the synagogue leaders had discovered that there was an adulterer in the community. Everyone knew the Law which said, “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10, NIV). So the leaders began to pass out rocks to stone the adulterer. Imagine then that the person who was caught in adultery was your own son or daughter. Would you cast a stone? Would you take

1 <https://blog.eretzyisrael.org/post/134464365843/a-young-man-knocks-on-the-door-of-a-great-talmudic>

part in putting to death the one caught in adultery? Would you, in essence, be faithful to upholding the commandments of Scripture, or choose to save the life of your child?

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus was faced with a similar situation. The religious leaders had brought a woman accused of adultery to Jesus. John tells us that it was a trap, set to see if he would interpret the Law literally. But instead of taking part in the stoning, Jesus said, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7, NIV).

At this point, everyone left, and the woman was saved. However, according to Scripture, Jesus was without sin, and should have thrown the stone in accordance with the Law. But Jesus chose to not apply the Scriptures literally in order to save a life. There was nothing in the Law that said the adulterer could be released. This *apparent* disobedience by Jesus to the Law was what created animosity toward him among the religious leaders. It wasn't scandalous that Jesus said, “Go and sin no more.” But the scandal of the story, the main point, is that Jesus didn't apply the literal and traditional reading of Scripture when the religious leaders believed he should have.

## **THE SCANDAL OF THE STORY, THE MAIN POINT, IS THAT JESUS DIDN'T APPLY THE LITERAL AND TRADITIONAL READING OF SCRIPTURE.**

I'm often critiqued for not applying a literal reading of Scripture. I often respond by pointing to this story and other stories to show that Jesus didn't read and apply Scripture literally. He chose to read Scripture through a hermeneutic of grace and compassion. The lens that seemed to pervade the application of Jesus was: Will this allow the person to thrive? Will this give life? Will this cause separation or bring people together through love? Simply put, at the core of Jesus' hermeneutic was the question: Is what is being taught bearing good fruit or bad fruit?

As I have walked with people in the LGBTQ+ community, my pastoral discernment has led me to believe that the traditional teachings which have led to disowning LGBTQ+ people, forcing them to change their orientation or not to accept their stated gender identity, have caused great harm. Jesus isn't asking us to parse Greek and Hebrew words in order to discern truth. He is asking us to examine the fruit. Jesus is asking us to pay attention to whether people are thriving or are being harmed. That is the basis of how we can tell truth from error because Scripture was meant to administer love and grace.

## **The Apostle's Theological Test**

There were at least two pillars of what it meant to identify as a faithful Jewish man. The first was to obedience to the Sabbath and the second was male circumcision. Jesus re-imagined an understanding of Sabbath obedience that allowed for non-traditional understanding of Sabbath keeping. Jesus healed on the Sabbath and allowed his disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath. He even said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, NASB). Jesus was stating that the Sabbath should never be made a burden for people. If people are being harmed by your understanding of the Sabbath, then give preference towards the people. Let them work or help their animal escape from a ditch, even though the fourth commandment states, “You shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:10, NIV). The disciples saw Jesus’ application of the Scriptures repeatedly. What they didn’t realize was that they would soon be put to the test.

I’ve often wondered why Jesus never addressed circumcision in the Gospels since I think he knew it would be the biggest theological hurdle the disciples would face. But now I see it was purposeful. The life and ministry of Jesus showed the disciples how to read Scripture and apply it in a way that doesn’t exclude, but instead offered life to as many people as possible. So even though the disciples knew what Genesis said about circumcision being an eternal sign of the covenant between God and the people of Israel, the disciples chose to remove the requirement of circumcision. They said that there shouldn’t be

a stumbling block for those who choose faith in Christ.



**The life and ministry of Jesus showed the disciples how to read Scripture and apply it in a way that doesn’t exclude.**

The removal of physical circumcision was an unprecedented theological change that shook the Jewish-Christian community to its core. The disciples were accused of no longer upholding the authority of Scripture. But what the disciples did was merely an extension of the way Jesus taught them to uphold the spirit behind the Law. And in discovering the spirit of grace and love, the Law would be upheld along with faithfulness to God.

So here you have the two biggest things of what it meant to identify as the people of God—Sabbath keeping and physical circumcision. Both of these were re-imagined in order to save life and include those who were excluded. The shift from conservative understandings of Sabbath and circumcision were far greater issues at the time Scripture was being written than our modern questions regarding orientation and gender identity. But the principles we apply to these questions remain the same. How do we read and apply Scripture as Jesus did? Because it’s not so much about what Scripture says, as much as it is about how Jesus applied what

Scripture said.

Churches have historically placed a stumbling block before the LGBTQ+ community by their interpretations of Scripture, which have led to exclusion and harm. The same kind of criticism that had been launched towards Peter by the traditionalists regarding the authority of Scripture in excluding the uncircumcised Gentiles living outside the Law is being launched against LGBTQ+ people and their allies who are seeking their inclusion in the church.

## **IT'S NOT SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS AS MUCH AS IT IS ABOUT HOW JESUS APPLIED WHAT SCRIPTURE SAID.**

Jesus and the disciples set into motion what the church must continue to practice—a hermeneutic that practices compassion that moves toward inclusion. This is the radical nature of the Gospel—when it moves toward accepting people who were previously on the outside and told they were inherently disordered.

Throughout history the church didn't wrestle with every major doctrine in the infancy of the church. The early church dealt with various heresies and were able to develop a more robust Christology. There was the issue of Modalism<sup>2</sup> and the doctrine of the Trinity. There were also, though, questions about slavery and biracial marriages. These questions were a result of push-back from marginalized and enslaved people that caused theologians to talk through what Scripture might really be saying in regards to biracial marriages and slavery. These wrestlings were in response to people who before didn't have a voice in the church but were now being given voice to speak. The church as a whole had never seriously questioned its longstanding beliefs around LGBTQ+ inclusion until recently, as more and more LGBTQ+ people are raising their voices.

One of the problems of every generation is the belief that they are the generation that has finally understood the full counsel of Scripture and that our beliefs no longer need to be challenged. But our theological history shows us that this is false. There must always be a posture of willingness to learn and be challenged in our assumptions. The church must always be willing to reform.

Helmut Thielicke said, "He who speaks to this hour's need and translates the message will always be

2 <https://www.theopedia.com/modalism>

skirting the edge of heresy. He, however, is the man who is given this promise, [the promise that] Only he who risks heresies can gain the truth.” This is what many generations before us were willing to do—skirt the edge of heresy in order to gain the truth.

## A Look at Oft-Cited Passages

*You can now address new ways of reading the “clobber passages” used against LGBTQ+ inclusion. One thing to note is that in most churches, this turns out to be the most contentious conversation. This is because it centers personal convictions, not only around the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion, but on the veracity of the Scriptures themselves. This means that the conversations can spiral down very quickly. It may be good to create boundaries for these conversations by acknowledging community guidelines that everyone present is willing to adhere to. Due to the dense nature of this content, you may want to consider making a two-section study, examining Old Testament verses one section and New Testament verses another. With your congregation in mind, use the following as the basis for a slide presentation or lecture.*

*There are many Bible-related objections that church leaders have to inclusion. Although the goal of this guidebook isn’t to debate the biblical text, it will be difficult for some to move forward if certain texts of Scripture isn’t addressed. I would like to briefly address the main texts and will list resources at the end of the guidebook for further study.*

### GENESIS 1

Genesis 1 (along with other passages that reference this chapter) is often used to argue against nonbinary and transgender identities. It’s often stated that since God created man and woman, there can be no other gender categories than male and female. However, as Kathy Baldock wisely stated, “God created man, woman and intersex.” We see through science and creation that there is biological gender variation in creation. People’s biology isn’t as binary as we are led to believe, and Scripture speaks of eunuchs, people who lived as neither male nor female.

What we can also see in the creation story is that, while God created day and night, that doesn’t mean there is nothing in between. Dawn and dusk are expressions of creation that don’t fall neatly into the categories of day and night. So when Genesis tells us that God created man and woman, it doesn’t mean that we are limited to the two. In this world, there are nonbinary, genderfluid, transgender, and



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other multi-faceted expressions of the non-gendered image of God within creation.

## GENESIS 2

Genesis 2 tells the marriage story of Adam and Eve. However, the word “marriage” isn’t used. Instead, “one flesh” is used to describe their covenant relationship. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The “one flesh” reference to marriage is repeated twice in the New Testament, first by Jesus when he condemned the practice of men divorcing their wives (Matthew 19:4-6), and also in Ephesians, when Paul talks about marriage: “For we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:30-31).

In Ephesians, Paul expands the definition of marriage. He uses the language of marriage, the coming together of “one flesh,” to describe Christ’s marriage to the church. Here, Paul no longer limits marriage as something that happens between one man and one woman, but between Christ and the church. We find that marriage is not based on gender, but rather on covenant. Gender difference is therefore not a requirement of marriage.

## GENESIS 19 (CF. 18:20)

Throughout Scripture there is a condemnation of sexual immorality, which is often specified to mean sexual abuse (1 Thessalonians 4:6). It is wrong to forcibly take advantage of someone sexually. The story of Genesis 19 is that the men of Sodom wanted to rape Lot’s guests. This is the sin of Genesis 19—the attempted gang rape. Unfortunately, this story is often used as a proof text against same-sex relationships even though there is no condemnation of consensual sexuality in Genesis 19.

Also, Ezekiel tells us that the sin of Sodom was about inhospitality. “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen” (Ezekiel 16:49-50, NIV). Jude 7 does say that there was sexual immorality and perversion in Sodom. But the immorality and perversion was about sexual abuse and not about same sex consensual relationships.

## LEVITICUS 18:22 (20:13) AND DEUTERONOMY 23:17-18

Leviticus is an interesting look at a legal system foreign to us. In Leviticus we are told that you can’t worship God if you’re physically imperfect. If you’re disabled, if you have eczema, if you have crushed

testicles, you are forbidden to enter places of worship. There are many things labeled abominations: clothing made out of mixed cloth, eating pork, and intercourse with menstruating women. There were many things defined as unclean that we no longer consider forbidden.

As Mary Douglas (*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*) points out, when you see dirt in the garden, you don't label it "dirty." But if dirt is on your clothes, then you deem it dirty. She explains that the issue of purity in Leviticus has to do with maintaining distinctions. Blood in itself wasn't a problem; it became problematic when skin broke because blood was supposed to be contained within the skin. The prohibition against shrimp and lobsters occurred because these sea creatures had legs, which blurred the understanding of what made land and sea animals distinct. Anything that broke away from the distinct categories that were spoken of in the creation account were problematic, which is the basis for the passage that says, "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman" (Leviticus 18:22, NIV). So even the idea of holiness was about making distinctions and separating one thing from another. The idea was that one thing was a contagion and the other was something that could be contaminated. Categories were established to maintain order, purity and holiness.

But Jesus brought in a re-creation ethic that disrupted the ideal of Levitical purity. Jesus touched people with skin diseases. Jesus wreaked havoc by healing on the Sabbath and allowing his disciples to work by picking grain. And if this wasn't enough, God told Peter, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 11:9, NIV). The categories rooted in a binary understanding of creation were uprooted. Purity was no longer about reflecting the binaries of creation; it was about breaking down the walls of

## **JESUS BROUGHT IN A RE-CREATION ETHIC THAT DISRUPTED THE IDEAL OF LEVITICAL PURITY.**

hostility. All days, not just Sabbath, are now holy. There is neither Jew nor Gentile; all people are chosen. The curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the less-holy is torn; all is sacred. And we are no longer bound by an ethic of separation; now the commandments are rooted in love. In Christ, there is a nonbinary multifaceted beautifying of every person that more closely reflects the image of God.

### ROMANS 1

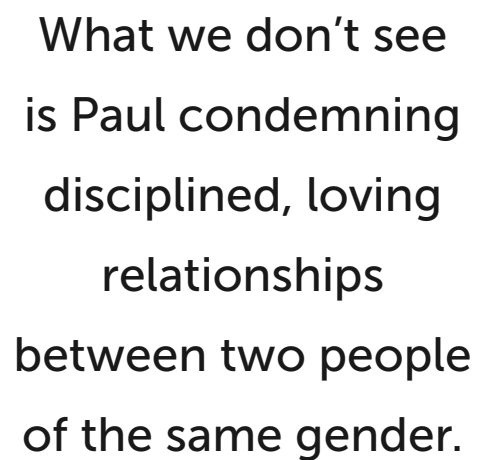
There are deeper cultural issues that we must be aware of before Romans 1 can be understood. Romans 1 requires a much lengthier discussion than we have space for. But to make things as simple as possible,



Romans 1 is Paul's attempt to speak to Gentile believers about the righteousness of God. And since Paul can't use the Jewish Law in a way that would be meaningful to Gentiles, he instead references Greek thought.

The philosophy of Stoicism, especially the ideal of being in tune with nature and the ideal of self-control, is embedded throughout this chapter. Paul calls attention to the need for people to not go overboard, to maintain discipline, to avoid sexual excess. Paul uses Greek thought to address the type of excess called lust. The Gentile Christians would have understood Paul condemning overindulgence, which was contrary to their value of harmony. What we don't see is Paul condemning disciplined, loving relationships between two people of the same gender.

Also, Paul's use of the word "natural" in the context of sex was meant to indicate only sexual intimacy intended for procreation. Therefore, when the passage says, "Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones" (Romans 1:26, NIV), the early church fathers saw this as referencing any sexual acts that didn't lead to procreation, i.e. non-vaginal penetration. It wasn't until the fourth century that church fathers began interpreting Romans 1 as a prohibition on specifically woman with woman sexual intimacy. So what we find described in Romans 1 is sexual behavior contrary to what was culturally viewed as natural: disciplined and procreative. The word "natural" in itself is specifically referencing cultural norms, not rooted in absolute principles, in the Epistles. A man with long hair was also noted as being against nature (1 Cor. 11:14).



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of the same gender.**

If Romans 1 doesn't address woman with woman relationships, then there are no passages in all of Scripture that condemn intimacy between women. This would make sense because much of the understanding behind what was "natural" is that sex ought to lead to procreation. Culturally, marriage between Roman citizens was valued primarily for cementing one's status as the head of a household and contributing to society by opening the avenue for procreation. A marriage ensured offspring you could impart your inheritance to. So men pursued marriage and women accepted it not primarily because they fell in love, or because of attraction, but for social status and for procreation. Unlike today, Roman marriages were not based on romantic attraction. A marriage was the result of two families coming together to agree on an arrangement. People whose marriage was arranged for them

didn't have a valid objection if their sole reason for not wanting to marry was because they weren't in love. Having children was considered a social responsibility to one's family and to the Empire. So one significant reason why gay marriage wasn't addressed in Scripture was because it wasn't a cultural issue; marriage between two people of the same gender was out of the question, since romantic feelings was not the reason for marriage—procreation was.

The idea of a personal sexual orientation was foreign to them. There was a deep cultural understanding of the societal purpose of marriage that no longer exists in our Western context. Marrying or being in a relationship for reasons other than love is now looked down upon. People in Western societies value romantic attraction and compatibility as the basis of intimacy. Romans 1 addresses sexual excess and lust that went contrary to a cultural purpose for sex and marriage which is largely foreign to us. In other words, Romans 1 does not discuss same-sex love but rather same-sex excess and the violation of cultural familial norms.

## **ROMANS 1 ADDRESSES SEXUAL EXCESS AND LUST THAT WENT CONTRARY TO A CULTURAL PURPOSE FOR SEX AND MARRIAGE.**

I CORINTHIANS 6:9 & I TIMOTHY 1:10

Before 1946, there were no Bibles that contained the word “homosexual.” The Greek words mistranslated as “homosexual” have historically been translated as “sodomites,” “abusers of themselves with mankind,” “liars with mankind,” “perverts,” and “buggerers.” Prior to 1946, “malakoi” was translated as “soft” or “effeminate.” Theologians admit that arsenokoitai and malakoi are very difficult words to translate. Unfortunately, the 1946 Revised Standard Version New introduced the word “homosexual” into our English Bibles, and many other English translations chose to follow their example. Simply put, the translations that chose to use the word “homosexual” are in error. The essence of the original Greek word “arsenokoitai” is exploitative in nature. It wasn't simply an issue of homosexuality but the abuse and exploitation of another person as a demonstration of power. For further reading on the history of this mistranslation, see Kathy Baldock's article<sup>3</sup>.

3 <http://canyonwalkerconnections.com/word-homosexual-first-introduced-bible/>

## BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

Theologians have debated these passages for years. There are literally hundreds of debates you can find online in regards to these verses. You'll find that there is a counter-argument to every point I have made. And if you keep looking, there is a counter-argument to that counter-argument and so on. Which theologian do we trust? How do we know who is right?

What's been interesting to me is that Jesus prayed, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25, NIV). Did you hear that? The things of the kingdom are often hidden from people who are wise and learned. And yet, our traditions place so much weight on those who can parse Greek words and explain systems of theology. Jesus knew that the truths of the Kingdom had to be accessible for anyone, especially the poor and uneducated. So Jesus gave us a simple tool that had nothing to do with theological ivory tower discussions. He simply said, Look at the fruit. Is it giving life? If it isn't life-giving and being received as love by those affected most, then our exegesis is probably wrong. After this chapter's reading, I encourage you to go back to the previous section and ask yourselves, "How can we read and apply these verses the way Jesus read and applied Scripture?"





# Annotated Resource Guide

As the parent of an LGBTQ+ person, you'll discover there are lots of amazing resources and support groups out there. We've compiled a list of some of our favorites.

## Embracing the Journey

[EMBRACINGTHEJOURNEY.ORG](http://EMBRACINGTHEJOURNEY.ORG)

Founded by parents Greg & Lynn McDonald, Embracing the Journey is an organization providing “resources that encourage parents to love their LGBTQ+ child well, not in spite of the Bible, but because of the Bible!” Greg & Lynn are also the authors of the book *Embracing the Journey*<sup>1</sup>, which released in 2019.

## Family Acceptance Project

[FAMILYPROJECT.SFSU.EDU](http://FAMILYPROJECT.SFSU.EDU)

From the website: “A research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for LGBT children and youth, including suicide, homelessness and HIV – in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities. We use a research-based, culturally grounded approach to help ethnically, socially, and religiously diverse families support their LGBT children.”

## FreedHearts

[FREEDHEARTS.ORG](http://FREEDHEARTS.ORG)

Susan & Rob Cottrell are the parents of two LGBTQ+ children. They started FreedHearts with the mission to “free hearts to love and be loved.” Susan has been featured on ABC’s 20/20, Nightline and Good Morning America. She also has a TEDx talk that’s been viewed over one million times.

## Q Christian Fellowship

[QCHRISTIAN.ORG](http://QCHRISTIAN.ORG)

As a response to “The Great Debate”—side A theology versus side B theology—Q Christian Fellowship created The Great Communion. “Q Christian Fellowship is committed to radical belonging because our goal is to place emphasis on the spiritual journey, the ever-evolving spectrum of spiritual formation, as a means of respecting God’s children.” LGBTQ+ Christians have ushered in this Great Communion by sharing their stories as part of Q Christian’s Unchanged Movement at [unchangedmovement.com](http://unchangedmovement.com).

1 <https://www.amazon.com/Embracing-Journey-Christian-Parents-Blueprint/dp/1501195689/>

## Harbor

[HARBORHERE.COM](http://HARBORHERE.COM)

B.T. Harman is a blogger and gay Christian who created Harbor as an online support program for the Christian parents of LGBTQ+ people. Harbor offers resources and an online community that helps parents love, understand, and support their children better.

## Mama Bears - Serendipitydodah

[SERENDIPITYDODAH.WORDPRESS.COM](http://SERENDIPITYDODAH.WORDPRESS.COM)

Serendipitydodah for Moms is a private Facebook group exclusively for moms of LGBTQ+ kids. They also offer five sub-groups, special projects supporting LGBT youth, and more than 50 regional groups.

## PFLAG

[PFLAG.ORG](http://PFLAG.ORG)

*From the website:* “PFLAG is the nation’s largest family and ally organization. Uniting people who are LGBTQ+ with families, friends, and allies, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has 400 chapters and 200,000 supporters... in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas.”

## ***JUST BECAUSE HE BREATHES***

[JUSTBECAUSEHEBREATHES.COM](http://JUSTBECAUSEHEBREATHES.COM)

*From the website:* “This blog was created to tell the story...our story...of how God taught us, conservative, evangelical parents, how to TRULY love our gay son. The original Just Because He Breathes piece was written in December 2012 at the request of a small group of LGBT students at a conservative Christian university...it was never intended for a larger audience, but that is what happened.”



Q Christian  
Fellowship