

When Someone In Your Congregation Says, “I’m Gay”

(The following is a “re-type” of a brochure prepared by CHRISTIAN LIFE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. It serves as a resource for those in our churches that may have opportunity to minister to those impacted by homosexuality. You can get additional resources from BSCNC at www.ncbaptist.org or from Exodus International at www.exodusinternational.org.)

Things to Remember.....

- 1. TO DATE, THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE WHICH PROVES A PERSON IS BORN GAY** and we believe most people do not choose homosexual attractions. Because of relational brokenness in families and among peers, some people experience emotional needs that they try to meet in all kinds of inappropriate ways. Many are uncomfortable with their own gender; later, they discover they are attracted to others of the same sex, but it is not their choice. Acting on it, however, is.
- 2. CHANGE IS POSSIBLE.** Even going back to the first-century church, the Apostle Paul wrote to former homosexuals in the Corinthian Church, “...and such were some of you” (I Corinthians 6: 11).
- 3. BECAUSE WE LIVE IN A FALLEN WORLD, WE ARE ALL BROKEN.** Many people in our churches are sexually broken – victims of incest, pornography, and masturbation addicts, and sex addicts. Homosexuality is only one form of sexual and relational brokenness.
- 4. HOMOSEXUALITY GROWS OUT OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS AND IS HEALED IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS,** especially healthy, same-sex relationships. Therefore, it is essential for recovering homosexuals and lesbians to be actively involved in the church. It is the body of Christ that can find healthy, God-honoring friendships.
- 5. TREAT THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH RESPECT LIKE YOU WOULD ANYONE ELSE.** They are people made in the image of God for whom Christ died – they are not their sexuality. Many people trying to come out of the gay lifestyle expect to find respect and acceptance only in the gay community. Finding it in church is immensely healing to their souls.
- 6. ACCEPT THEM WHERE THEY ARE, JUST AS JESUS DID.** Choose to accept the person, but not sinful behavior. People don’t change unless they experience God’s love and grace. Once they know they are loved and accepted as children created in God’s image, then they are willing to do what it takes to live a life of obedience to God.

7. **SEE THEM WITH GOD’S EYES OF LOVE AND MERCY**, and with His vision for their wholeness, healing, and freedom. This means depending on the Holy Spirit for divine perspective and exercising humility to recognize that first impressions are often incomplete and inaccurate.
8. **REMEMBER THIS IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD PEOPLE TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.** Some homosexual strugglers feel that they have committed the unpardonable sin. They have heard that they are going to hell no matter what they do and often think they are permanently separated from God. They need to know when we confess our sins, the blood of Jesus covers ALL our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1: 9).
9. **BECAUSE OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND BROKEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, MANY STRUGGLERS HAVE A HARD TIME RELATING TO GOD AS FATHER AND A DIFFICULT TIME RECEIVING HIS LOVE.** Yet it is the masculine voice (first in earthly fathers, and ultimately in our Heavenly Father) that calls gender out in both men and women. It is the Father’s personal and powerful love that is the most important healing agent in human hearts.
10. **BECAUSE PASTORS ARE MEN IN AUTHORITY, MOST STRUGGLERS (MEN AND WOMEN) ARE INCREDIBLY INTIMIDATED BY YOU.** Pastors need to understand this truth in order to minister to strugglers. Pastors must respect the fragility of strugglers’ relationships with men in authority and choose to be deliberately tender and gentle. They really need “good shepherds.” Verbalize to them that God can not only change them, but He is very proud of them (as you are) for sharing their struggle with you and desiring to change.
11. **MOST SAME-SEX STRUGGLERS HAVE VERY WEAK AND BROKEN BOUNDARIES.** Their deep neediness often causes them to lapse into emotionally dependent relationships with those desiring to help. We encourage pastors to exercise appropriate boundaries when counseling anyone. Meeting during regular office hours where others can be aware of your activities gives a sense of security to the struggle and a protection for you as pastor.
12. **PEOPLE FIND HEALING FROM SAME GENDER ATTRACTIONS WHEN THEY EXPERIENCE GOD AS HEALER THROUGH HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO COME ALONGSIDE THEM IN THEIR JOURNEY** – men helping men, and women helping women. We encourage pastors to

find someone willing to befriend and mentor the struggler. The mentor should be a person of high moral character and willing to invest deeply and significantly in the person's life. The mentor will need to be available, accessible, and willing to commit for the long haul. This is NOT a quick fix, but a long process of healing.

- 13. IF SOMEONE COMES IN WITH AN AGENDA OF ARROGANCE, DEMANDING ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR SEXUAL SIN, DON'T LET THEM BULLY YOU.** Be Jesus-in-the-flesh for them. Show His compassion and grace. Yes, homosexuality is sin (Lev. 18: 22 – 23; Rom 1: 26 – 27, 1 Cor 6: 9 – 11), but note that these verses condemn homosexual behavior, not feelings. Demonstrate Jesus' love to them in all you do and say.

FIVE IMPORTANT DON'TS

- 1. DON'T PANIC.** An excellent resource for understanding the issue of homosexuality is *SOMEONE I LOVE IS GAY* by Anita Worthen and Bob Davies (published by InterVarsity Press). Also, Exodus International (www.exodus-international.org), a Christ-centered ministry that helps people deal with unwanted homosexuality, has excellent resources. Living Hope Ministry (www.livehope.org) is an Exodus referral ministry in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area with excellent online, moderated, support forums for parents, spouses, men, women, and youth (ages 13-26) who struggle with homosexuality.
- 2. DON'T MAKE FALSE ASSUMPTIONS OF ACCUSATIONS.** For example, please do not assume person is HIV positive. Most aren't. And if he or she is, AIDS is sexually transmitted; the people in your congregation are safer than many fear. Handshakes and hugs are perfectly safe.
- 3. DON'T SHUT DOWN PASTORALLY OR EMOTIONALLY.** The person coming to you has known a lifestyle of rejection and desperately needs to know that a representative of Jesus Christ will extend grace to him. Hug them when they leave. It may be the first positive touch they have had in years. Pray with them and for them. Let them hear God's love for them in your voice and prayer.
- 4. DON'T PASS JUDGMENT.** All of us have besetting sins! As Billy Graham said, "Don't take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place."
- 5. DON'T DISCLOSE THIS PERSON'S SECRET WITHOUT PERMISSION EVEN AMONG CHURCH STAFF.** There is nothing safe about the gay lifestyle; people struggling with same-sex attraction need to find safety in the church.