

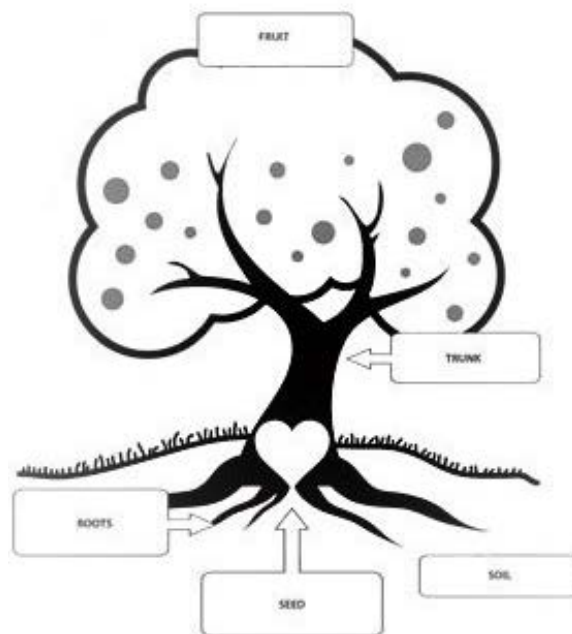
# HELPING THOSE STRUGGLING WITH HOMOSEXUALITY AND GENDER CONFUSION

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## Session I: Examining Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Dysphoria through a Biblical Lens

### A. Introduction

1. Where do patterns of desire, temptation, and sin come from?
  - Why is it important to know where these patterns come from?
    - 1) To minister effectively
    - 2) To sympathize or empathize with those who struggle
2. Harvest USA's Tree Model



- a. **The Seed:** that from which everything we do, think and say grows
  - 1) Corrupted by sin—Genesis 3:1-7; Romans 5:12
  - 2) Controlling—Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18–20
- b. **The Soil:** circumstances that influence us
  - 1) Soil influences fall into eight general categories:

- a) Gender, and cultural definitions of gender
  - b) Physical characteristics
  - c) Personality and gifting
  - d) Family influences
  - e) Cultural influences
  - f) Peer pressure
  - g) Trauma (emotional, physical, sexual)
  - h) Spiritual oppression, spiritual starvation
- 2) Soil influences never have a determinative effect on a person. They do, however, have a strong shaping effect.
- c. **The Roots:** Desires that feed the heart
- 1) Roots reach out into the Soil in search of:
    - a) Life
    - b) Sustenance
    - c) Meaning
    - b) Identity



- 2) When Roots try to find satisfaction in broken Soil, the best they do is find counterfeit satisfaction (gratification).

d **The Trunk:** Worldviews that shape our decisions

1) The Trunk is what we functionally believe about

- a) Ourselves
- b) Others
- c) God
- d) The world in general

2) Some common worldview statements

- *I never fit in around other men (women), so I must be gay.*
- *My mother (father) was always just a little displeased with me, so I need to find affirmation from others, no matter the cost.*
- *My parents told me I wasn't the kind of girl (boy) they wanted, so I must be trans.*
- *God doesn't really love me, because I've asked him to make me straight (cisgender) over and over and he hasn't done it*
- *The only value I have is in being sexual with someone else.*
- *The only way I can find comfort is by acting queer.*
- *Life will always be too hard. I should never expect anything to go my way.*
- *It's too difficult for me to make real friends. But I can find intimacy through sex.*
- *I will always be alone.*

3) The Trunk is the result of the Roots interacting with the Soil, and being interpreted through the fallen Seed.

4) The Trunk develops (and changes) over the course of a lifetime.

5) The Trunk becomes our operating system. We use it as a sorting mechanism (a filter) to determine all present and future decisions about how we'll respond to disappointment.

e. **The Fruit:** Particular behaviors that reflect the rest of the Tree

- The Fruit really isn't the problem—it's only the product of a system that's broken.

f. **The New Seed:** Our hope

- 1) Through the work of Jesus, God has given us new hearts with renewed desires and the power to live them out—Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 11:19–20.
- 2) The New Seed is grafted onto the Fallen Seed, and over the course of time, becomes increasingly dominant. However, the historic influence of the Fallen Seed doesn't completely fade away.
- 3) Repentance is the lifelong process of our Roots and Trunk gradually being transformed so we look, think, desire and act more and more like Jesus does.

g. Four takeaways

- 1) The background and causes of sexual and gender-related sin patterns and other sin patterns are generally the same.
- 2) Real, transforming relationship with Jesus Christ is the only answer to patterns of sexual or gender-based sin (or any patterns of sin).
- 3) The way we *generally* grow in relationship with Jesus Christ is through real, dynamic relationship with one another in His Body (the Church).
- 4) Holiness, not sinlessness, is the goal of sanctification.

## Session II: What the Church Must Do to Help Same-Sex and Gender Strugglers

### A. Introduction

Be proactive—Ephesians 4:11–24

- God has given us a pattern for life and for obedience. He calls the Church to faithfully live it out through:
  - 1) Church leaders equipping the saints for the work of ministry (4:11–12), which is that we all grow up “into” Christ (4:13–14).
  - 2) Church members actively help one another to put off the old self and put on the new self, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:15–24).

### B. Be proactive: pray and fast

1. Pray for the church leaders, for the Body and for those in the church who are struggling in secret.
2. Invite the church to assemble to fast and pray together, that your church might be a particular place of healing, where the “Body grows, so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

### C. Be proactive: teach God’s design for sex, sexuality, and gender

1. Teach a positive view of sex, sexuality, and gender.
  - a. God’s design is inherently good, and following it as a pattern of life brings blessing.
  - b. Don’t let everything your members hear about sex, sexuality, and gender be negative and prohibitive.
2. God’s design for sex and sexuality: 1 Corinthians 6:12–7:35
  - a. Our bodies and our minds are not our own—we were designed for the Lord and to serve the Lord.
  - b. Sex, in its proper context, is meant to be good and edifying.
  - c. Sex is to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in the context of covenant marriage.
  - d. Sex is meant primarily for the other—not for ourselves.
  - e. Sex and sexuality are not ultimate. They serve as signposts, pointing us toward the Lord, our union with him and the intimacy we share with him.
  - f. Obedience to God’s design is meant to lead to our devotion to and pleasure in the Lord.
3. God’s design for gender: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:21-25
  - a. There are two and only two genders made in creation: male and female.

- b. Gender and birth sex correspond to each other.
- c. You can't decouple sex and sexuality from gender; they operate as a system.
- d. Male and female complement each other; together they (dimly) reflect the nature and glory of God in the Trinity.

#### **D. Be proactive: Invite Strugglers to Come into the Light**

1. Be aware that most of the same-sex and gender strugglers in the Church are struggling secretly.
2. Actively and publicly address barriers to strugglers coming forward.
  - a. Shame and guilt
    - Focus on grace: Titus 3:4–7 | 1 John 4:16–19
  - b. Fear of exposure and judgment
    - Communicate that struggles with sin are supposed to be dealt with in the Body: Ephesians 5:8–14 | Galatians 6:1–2
  - c. Culture of deception and self-deception
    - Cultivate authentic community in the church: Hebrews 3:12–13 | Ephesians 4:11–16
  - d. "I'm the only one. No other Christian struggles like this."
    - Communicate that there is no temptation or sin pattern that is unique: 1 Corinthians 10:13.
  - e. "Real Christians don't struggle with this."
    - "Normalize" the struggle with sin among Christians: Romans 7:15-25 | Hebrews 4:15-16.
  - f. Prior, unsuccessful attempts at change
    - Communicate that effective repentance is something that requires the help of the Body: 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14.
  - g. Misunderstanding of the real problem
    - Communicate that no sin pattern is behavioral in nature, but is rooted in idolatry: James 1:13–15 | 1 Corinthians 10:13–14.

#### **E. Be proactive: cultivate discipleship, accountability, and community**

1. Discipleship
  - Focus on union with Christ: both the ontological reality and the economic benefits. Ephesians 1:3–2:22

- 1) Effective discipleship helps the individual to both answer and experience the benefits of the answer to this question: “What difference does the Person and Work of Jesus Christ make for me in the ways in which I struggle?”
  - 2) Discipleship is most effectively experienced within the context of ongoing, intimate relationship with other Christians.
    - The “Life on Life” Model
2. Accountability
- a. Accountability should be proactive, rather than reactive, in nature.
    - 1) Reactive accountability is confessional in nature and leads to feelings of shame and guilt.
    - 2) Proactive accountability is discipleship-based and is meant to both cultivate an experience of oneness with Christ and to prevent sin in the first place.
      - a) Proactive accountability is based in ongoing friendship and attacks sin at the level of desire and temptation.
      - b) Proactive accountability helps sexual and gender strugglers not only to walk in repentance from patterns of desire, temptation and sin, but to become more fully engaged members of the Church.
    - 3) Proactive accountability is based in ongoing friendship and attacks sin at the level of desire and temptation.
    - 4) Proactive accountability helps sexual and gender strugglers not only to walk in repentance from patterns of desire, temptation, and sin, but to become more fully engaged members of the Church.
3. Community
- a. Many same-sex and gender strugglers feel, at some level, as though they lack authentic community in the Church and in the world.
    - 1) Some same-sex and gender strugglers will seek out others who struggle similarly in order to create that sense of community.
    - 2) Others may seek out other forms of counterfeit community and connectedness through pornography, fantasy, hooking up with others for sexual encounters, flirting or dressing up to go out in public.
  - b. The Church must offer authentic community to all its members and work diligently to cultivate that community.
    - 1) For same-sex and gender strugglers, it needs to create and maintain effective structures to invite these men and women who would otherwise be on the margins of the Church into real and effective community with other believers. According to Scripture, this is the only way in which God’s people thrive and grow in Christ.

- 2) The Church must also offer authentic community to its members who are not married, and who may never be married, in order that they would experience some of the relational and emotional fulfillment of their married peers.
- c. The Church must cultivate the view that same-sex and gender strugglers are an essential part of the Body—and as such, must be contributing members of the Body community, as well as receiving love, affirmation and relational fulfillment.

## **F. Be proactive: Cultivate a Network of Helpers in Your Church**

1. Why specially-equipped helpers?
  - a. Same-sex and gender strugglers already struggle feeling as though no one will understand them, and no one will understand their particular struggles or desires. Part of each church's ministry to them must be to provide as safe, as positive and as practically helpful a space as possible for them to grow in faith and repentance.
  - b. Since same-sex and gender strugglers likely feel so different from others in the church, they may not experience standard discipleship programs in the church (Bible studies, small groups, etc.) as being helpful to them. They also may not feel safe sharing what's going on in their hearts and lives in the context of a larger group.
2. What kinds of specially-equipped helpers?
  - a. Individual discipleship partners
  - b. Facilitators for all-male or all-female Biblical support groups
  - c. Married couples to come alongside other married couples working to recover from the effects of sin or betrayal
3. How long would strugglers or families work with these helpers?
  - a. Not long. The goal is to work to progressively mainstream strugglers into the fuller life of the church.
    - Average: six months to two years
  - b. A companion goal is for the struggler to have an ever-increasing circle of accountability (progressively more people in the church who are aware of their story, how they struggle, and how they need particular ministry). This gradually obviates the need for working exclusively with helpers.
4. How do you select and equip these helpers?
  - a. Select men and women who:
    - 1) Understand God's grace and have seen it at work in their own lives
    - 2) Know how to patiently and compassionately disciple others
    - 3) Are willing to sacrificially care for the men and women whom God brings them
  - b. Equip these helpers:



- 1). Pray with them, over them and for them.
- 2). Use a life-on-life style discipleship curriculum.
- 3). Consider Harvest USA's Partner Ministries Program.
- 4). Offer ongoing support, encouragement and accountability.

## **G. Be proactive: exercise church discipline**

1. Church discipline is meant to be applied to unrepentant sinners, and its purpose is to bring that individual to repentance.
  - a. Remember that repentance is progressive and lifelong.
  - b. Remember that the goal of repentance is holiness, not sinlessness.
2. Discipline is meant to be proactive and progressive.
3. Formal discipline can provide an opportunity for others in the church who struggle similarly to come forward and ask for help—pray for that outcome.
4. Exercise formal discipline prayerfully, wisely and sparingly.
  - To whatever extent it is within your control, you don't want others struggling in secret to be afraid of coming forward for help for fear of formal discipline.

## Session III: Walking with Sexual and Gender Strugglers on the Road toward Repentance

### A. Helping Priorities

1. Incarnate the love and ministry of Jesus Christ, in order to build up the Body—Ephesians 4:11–16.
2. Help the struggler to tell his or her story and sympathize with them—Hebrews 4:15–16.
3. Point the struggler toward Christ and offer them practical guidance in their walk in repentance—Colossians 3:1–17.
4. Lovingly pursue the struggler—Jude 22–23.

### B. Helping Process

1. The PALACE Method
  - a. **Pray** (by yourself, and/or with the struggler).
  - b. **Affirm** that the struggler coming forward and asking for help is a good thing.
  - c. **Listen** actively to his or her story.
  - d. **Ask** questions that will begin to uncover idols and worldviews.
  - e. **Challenge** false statements with truth from Scripture.
  - f. **Encourage** and **Establish** a simple agenda for change.
2. The PALACE Steps
  - a. **Pray** (by yourself, and/or with the struggler).
    - 1) For wisdom and discernment
    - 2) For the struggler to be honest and transparent
    - 3) For the struggler to hear and believe the Gospel, at a heart level
  - b. **Affirm** that the struggler coming forward and asking for help is a good thing.
    - 1) The struggler is usually fearful, ashamed, terrified of consequences and discouraged because he or she has tried to correct this pattern of thought or behavior on his or her own.
    - 2) Affirm the struggler verbally.
      - *The Lord wants to help you; that's why we're talking about this right now.*
      - *You don't have to go through this alone; I'm here to help you.*

- *I know you're afraid right now, but God is faithful and is working for your good in this.*

3) Affirm the struggler regularly.

c. **Listen** actively to his or her story.

1) Ask them to tell you the contours of their story—not just about the sin pattern, but about the person.

- *Ask about the history of their struggle: how it began and how it changed over the course of time.*
- *Ask about their own history:*
  - *The family in which they grew up*
  - *Their friendships—none, few, many? Are they superficial or heart-level? What keeps their friendships from being deeper?*
  - *Their relationship with the Lord*
  - *Marriage (if applicable)—what are the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship? What are the levels of spiritual, emotional and sexual intimacy? Why?*
- *Ask for three adjectives they would use to describe themselves. Talk about why he or she chose those three.*
- *Ask what he or she has done to overcome the struggle. What has worked and what hasn't? Why?*

2) Ask follow-up questions in a conversational manner.

3) Make note of your questions and the struggler's responses.

d. **Ask** questions that will begin to uncover idols and worldviews.

1) Find out what functional idols the struggler serves.



2) Some diagnostic questions to help a struggler identify which idols he or she struggles with:

- Which of these desires do you put the most energy into achieving?
- What in your life are you most afraid of losing?
- When you have downtime or extra money, which of these desires do you automatically tend to focus on?
- When you daydream, which of these desires seem to play out in those fantasies?
- In which ways do you feel like you don't measure up to other people?
- In which ways do you feel like you don't measure up to your own expectations?
- When you experience sexual or gender-related temptation, what is going on in your circumstances at that moment? How are you feeling physically, emotionally and spiritually?

- 3) The key to discipleship is realizing that we sin for a reason: because our hearts react to the felt needs of these unsatisfied desires | James 1:13–15.
- 4) Instead of treating sin as a purely behavioral problem, we help strugglers submit their desires to the Lord, with the understanding that he is the one who ultimately satisfies desires—or grants grace to be content if they aren't met in that moment | Psalms 107:9.
- 5) Find out what the struggler believes functionally about themselves, God, and others. Listen to what they say, extrapolate potential worldview statements and ask the struggler if they seem to make sense to them.

Some sample worldview statements:

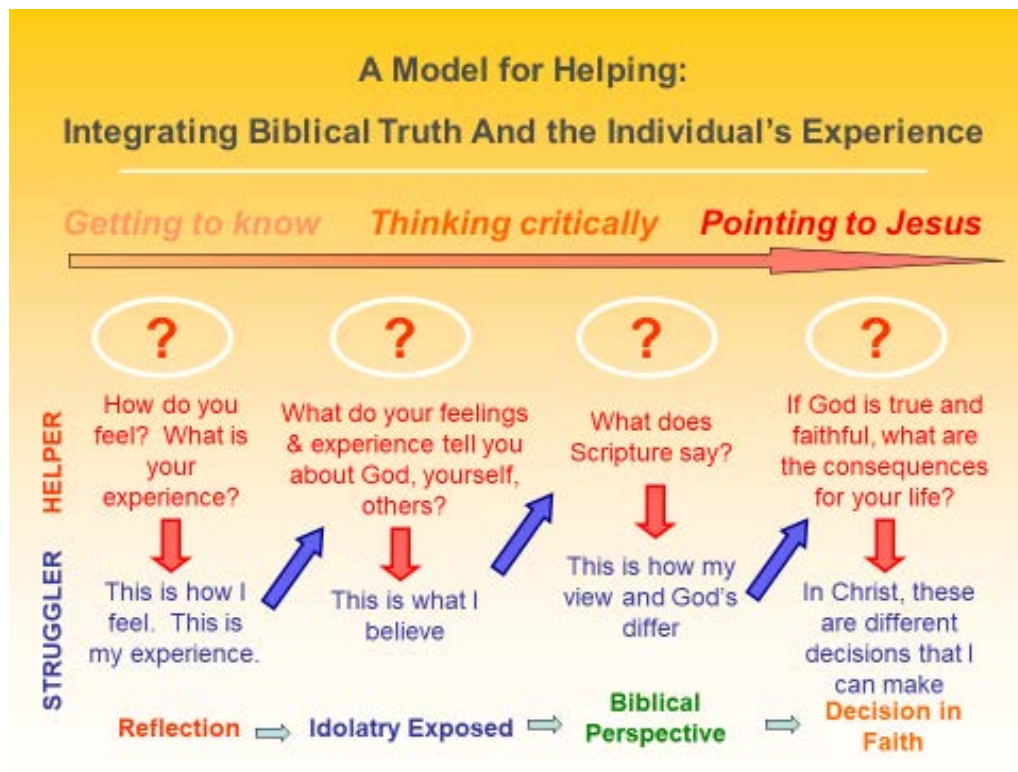
- God could never love someone like me.
- God loves other people differently than he loves me.
- I'm a failure.
- Other people are too risky to be honest with.
- I deserve better treatment from others / from God.
- Life will never get any better for me.
- I'm condemned to live out the consequences of my behavior.
- God hates me.
- I'll never fit in.
- Being sexual with someone else is the only way to feel affirmed.
- I'm not the right kind of man / woman.
- Others have failed me and will continue to fail me. I can only depend on myself.
- Others have hurt me in the past and will hurt me again if I give them the opportunity.

- 6) Worldview statements often function at the subconscious level—so strugglers may not be immediately aware of which statements guide them. You might need to help them process which ones fit them.
  - 7) Worldview statements tend to develop over the course of many years as an individual cycles through many instances of feeling despair because their desires aren't being met in the ways that they want.
  - 8) Worldview statements serve as the filters through which we make everyday decisions about how to act, and why.
- e. **Challenge** false statements with truth from Scripture.
- 1) Show the struggler what Scripture says about their functional false beliefs.
  - 2) Ask the struggler:

- Based on what Scripture says, is what you believe really true?
- If not, then what are the consequences for you? (In other words, what must be really true, if your worldview is not? And what does that mean for how you act?)
- What are different decisions you can therefore choose to make, in Christ, that will change the way you respond to various situations?

f. **Encourage** and **Establish** a simple agenda for change

- 1) Process with the struggler what he or she can do differently when they experience strong desires and are in triggering situations.



- 2) Assign easily-accomplished, high-payoff homework like Scripture memorization, reading and thinking about a chapter in a book, or committing to prayer for 10 minutes daily.
- 3) Plan to meet again.
- 4) Draw the struggler into redemptive community that will help him or her grow in union with Christ. Acknowledge that this process might be difficult for the struggler. Make a plan, role-play, and process with him or her regularly how the integration is going for them (and how it makes him or her feel).
- 5) Applaud successes, no matter how small.
- 6) Failures are temporary, not ultimate.
- 7) Process with the struggler how his or her typical desires are surfacing, and what he or she is doing with those desires.
- 8) Facilitate an expanding circle of accountability, and process with the struggler how he or she is experiencing those relationships.

- 9) With each successive meeting, build on prior successes and make homework progressively more challenging.
- 10) Keep the goal in mind: **holiness**, not sinlessness.