

Harvest USA | 15-Session Video Curriculum

G O D ' S
D E S I G N
for
S E X U A L I T Y
in a
CHANGING
CHANGING
CULTURE

GOD'S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY
IN A CHANGING CULTURE
LEADER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE

OVERVIEW

THE MAIN IDEA FOR THIS VIDEO SERIES

This entire video series, *God's Design for Sexuality in a Changing Culture*, is geared toward helping churches think and talk through the orthodox, historical, and scriptural views on sex, sexuality, and gender in light of the impact of our secular culture's viewpoints. Increasingly, Christian beliefs on sex, sexuality, and gender are being reshaped—and in some places turned upside-down—and Christians are more confused about how to live with God's gift of sexuality than ever before.

The church is making two errors today in dealing with sexual issues: One is to not talk about the subject; the other is to talk on the subject without engaging in a discussion. Both these approaches weaken God's people because, unless the issues are thoroughly explored, most Christians today don't know how to think through the ways they are being influenced by the culture. Getting the issues of sexuality out on the table and discussing them in open, safe settings is critical to help people begin to understand why God's design for sexuality is good and why it remains relevant for our lives today.

That's what Harvest USA's video series, *God's Design for Sexuality in a Changing Culture*, intends to do. Its objective is to help Christians better grasp biblical thinking (what God's Word says and what it means for us), and how God's design for sex, sexuality, and gender contrasts with the way our culture thinks. Understanding and faithfully following God's Word in how we ought to live with the bodies God has given us will only take place when we better understand how Christian belief contrasts with current cultural thought. That distinction might seem obvious, but far too often the believer barely knows why Scripture proclaims a particular point of view. In the meantime, he or she is being enticed by the onslaught of personal stories and media situations that argue that what the church has long believed is no longer relevant nor healthy for the individual and for society.

This intellectual weakness is leading people in the church to follow unbiblical ideas. Christians are struggling to follow God in this area of life. Much of that struggle is because the church hasn't helped them to fully think through their functional beliefs—unbiblical ideas that have infiltrated their minds and hearts and that have provided justification to live in ways that dishonor Christ and hurt their own lives and others.

Although Christians live by God's grace, grounded in the total forgiveness of sins we receive in Christ's death and resurrection, we are also called to live faithfully in the ways he calls us to live—as a demonstration of how his mercy has changed our life!

So, let's get the discussion going!

HOW DO WE TALK?

First, here is the format for the discussion.

The format for this video series is for a group (Sunday school class, small group, men's or women's group, etc.) to watch about a 30-minute video on a given topic. Following the video, use the rest of your time to talk about the particular issue.

FORMAT

Each video (approximately 30 minutes in length) comes with the following:

1. A participant outline that has an outline of the video talk. Print the outlines and give one to each participant, so he or she can take notes.
2. A Leader's Discussion Guide that has the following directions:
 - a. Each Leader's Guide will briefly discuss the need for open and safe discussion. Each video has the same set of instructions, so if your church will have different class or group leaders for showing some of the videos, each one will know how to conduct the discussion.
 - b. Each guide has a "Big Idea" summary, so that the main point of the video and the discussion is kept in view.
 - c. Each guide has a list of online and print resources (most are free), so that a leader can do some studying on the topic before leading a discussion. To read the PDF on your computer or mobile device, click on the resource hyperlink to easily access the resource online.
 - d. These resources are also listed in the class Participant Outlines, so that those in the discussion can learn more after the class. So please make the Participant Outlines available to everyone as an online PDF, so the hyperlinks can be easily accessed.
3. For the discussion time, the questions in each guide will be more than what can be discussed in a typical 30-minute discussion (if, for example, you are using a typical one-hour Sunday school class, with the video taking up about half that time).
 - a. If you only have a discussion time right after the video, pick those questions that you think would best generate a good discussion. You don't have to choose the questions in the order they are given.
 - b. If you have a longer discussion time, or you are able to schedule a second meeting for more discussion, then you might be able to get through all the questions.
 - c. Of course, if you come up with questions that are different than ours, that's great!

d. The important thing is not to get through the videos as quickly as possible—it's to get the discussion going.

Second, here are some pointers for facilitating a good discussion.

DISCUSSION LEADERS

Someone needs to lead the discussion. Although the leader or leaders can watch the videos at the same time as others, and then launch into the discussion using the guided questions, we strongly recommend that the leader do a bit of study beforehand. Each video lesson will recommend a few resources that the leader can read beforehand, most which are online and free, and some that can be purchased (either in print or e-book format). Clear directions are given for how to obtain these resources.

It's important for the discussion leader to be as familiar with the material as possible, because that will help facilitate a good discussion. It's also important that he or she holds to a scriptural view on sex, sexuality, and gender, and is able to articulate it. Ideally, a class such as this, or a small group meeting, will have a wise man and woman leading, so that they can address specific issues that might be more relevant along gender lines.

However, the person leading the discussion needs to allow for an open discussion format, inviting class participants to say what they think or believe regarding the topic of each video.

A discussion is important because of what we just said; talking about these matters in only a lecture-type format does not get at the hidden struggles and questions many Christians have.

It will also be important for the leader to make the discussion safe for everyone. The issue of sex, sexuality, and gender—and how we ought to live faithfully before God with our bodies—is an emotional topic. Everyone struggles to live well with God's powerful gift of sex, sexuality, and gender. There will be people in your class who struggle here, and some will have had painful sexual histories that make this discussion difficult. Some may have come to different conclusions about what a biblical view of sex, sexuality, and gender is. Having a safe and open conversation about these topics includes having a discussion about why people choose to interpret the Bible in different ways. There may be a temptation to assume a person who thinks differently is not really committed to the Bible, but such is not necessarily the case. It is important to understand why a person interprets the Bible in specific ways and to engage in nonjudgmental dialogue about why you disagree. This is the only way to build the trust that is needed when engaging in conversation about such personal and vulnerable topics. A willingness to listen to each other is critical in order for everyone to understand the ways Christians are being influenced by our culture.

While some perspectives and opinions may not be biblical, it will nevertheless be important that respect is given to what everyone says. Always. That doesn't mean you have to agree with someone's perspective or opinion. It may be necessary to say verbally that such

a view is outside of Scripture and/or outside of the historical understanding of the church. There is no intent here in these discussions to affirm or suggest that multiple viewpoints on sex, sexuality, and gender are just fine, or that how we live our lives as sexual and gendered beings is open to any interpretation that is at variance with Scripture and Christian tradition. It does matter that biblical principles for faith and life are affirmed and encouraged.

We do, however, need safe and open discussion to help people learn and come to want to obey God. Calmly giving the reasons why God wants us to live lives of sexual integrity, in the context of the discussion, can help someone grow into understanding and obedience. We need to help one another thoroughly know what we need to learn, and then encourage each other to grab hold of God's revealed will on this matter and assist one another to live it out faithfully, in the grace-strength that God gladly gives to his people.

Third, what happens after the class/group is over?

Growing in Christ in all areas of life is not merely an intellectual process. We need others in the body of Christ to walk along with us, encouraging us to apply the gospel to our lives.

If you are the leader for this class/group, pray. Pray for those who will attend. Pray especially for those to attend who struggle with believing and following Scripture regarding sex, sexuality, and gender. Ask the Lord to give them a willingness to listen and then engage his Word.

Pray, as well, for those who struggle to follow Christ in this area of life but want to. As this video series will say over and over, we need others in the church to help us walk in obedience.

After the class, be available to those who might need to talk with you personally. Ideally, a class such as this, or a small group meeting, will have a wise man and woman leading, so that they might be able to talk with someone of their own gender. Continue to be sensitive to those who struggle in this area of life, either with their behavior or believing in what Scripture says. Lovingly pray with them to ask the Lord to help them believe and follow what Scripture says, and then help them find ways to learn how to do this.

SESSION 1

WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT SEX?

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » Sex and the Silence of the Church: How It Is Crippling God’s People—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/sex-silence-church-crippling-gods-people>)
- » Is Yours a “Yeah, We Can Handle This” Church?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/is-yours-a-handle-this-church>)
- » Three Stories of Struggle, Addiction, and the Role of the Church—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/three-personal-stories-of-struggle-addiction-and-the-role-of-the-church-to-help>)
- » Leaders and the Minefield of Discussing Sexuality and Gender—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/real-life-conversations-leaders-must-enter-the-minefield-of-sexuality-and-gender-discussions>)
- » Living Faithfully with Our Bodies: It Still Matters—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-faithfully-bodies-still-matters>)
- » Living in the Shadows: Life as a Game-Player—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-shadows-life-game-player>). Read also the personal testimony that follows: “Stepping into the Light after a Lifetime of Shadow Living.”

BIG IDEA

The silence of the church about sexuality sows confusion and doubt.

The silence of the church hurts faith and life. When the church doesn’t talk about issues of sex, sexuality, and gender, it allows the prevailing culture to step into the vacuum with its unbiblical voice. Believers then become increasingly confused about what the Scriptures say, and some will begin to think that living in ways that are outside of God’s design is permissible,

if not affirmed. The result is a weakened body of Christ. The solution: Get real about these issues and start talking about them.

DISCUSSION

Nicholas Black opens up the class by mentioning that the culture thinks Christians spend way too much time focusing on sex. By contrast, he says we are, in fact, talking very little about it in the church.

- » What do you think? Is your experience in the church one in which sex and sexuality is excessively talked about, or is it rarely discussed?
- » He then goes on to say that when the church community fails to talk about sex, sexuality, and gender “well and persuasively enough,” Christians struggle in two ways:
 - One, Christians are becoming confused about what the Bible says about sex and its proper expression.
 - Two, Christians who struggle sexually live “double lives,” hiding in fear of being caught. Silence about sex leaves strugglers feeling hopeless and defeated over their own hidden struggles.
- » Do you see these things happening in your church? Where is the confusion the greatest? Who do you think struggles the most?

Nicholas lists three reasons why people and the church find it hard to talk about sex and sexuality:

- 1. It’s too personal.**
- 2. It’s too shameful.**
- 3. It’s too fearful a topic.**

- » Do you identify with some of these reasons? What are the major reasons why talking about sex, sexuality, and gender might be so difficult, either for you or, especially, your church?

Nicholas then lists four ways the church's silence is negatively impacting the faith of believers. Discuss each point. Is this happening to you, your friends, or your church as a whole?

1. "I don't know what to believe anymore."

- » Where are you confused about what the Bible teaches? What do you need to learn about what the Bible says about sex, sexuality, and gender? Where are you weak in biblical knowledge? Be as specific as you can with your answers.
- » How do the personal stories of others confuse your understanding of what Christians have historically believed regarding sex, sexuality, and gender? What arguments are you hearing about same-sex relationships that seem persuasive to you—or if not to you, persuasive to others?
- » How are you responding to the culture's distortion and intimidation of what Christians believe? Nicholas says he feels pressure at times to change his views on what the Bible says about same-sex relationships. Do you feel that pressure? How do you deal with that pressure? Do you find yourself giving in, becoming angry, or do you fall somewhere in the middle?

2. "If I struggle here, I must not be a Christian."

- » Pornography has become a big sin and struggle among Christians. Do you believe that? Do you think it's as big a problem as Nicholas says? Why?
- » Nicholas mentioned that pornography is about more than just looking at sexual images; it's about a worldview that shapes the way you look at people and relationships. What do you think porn "teaches" about life and relationships? (Hint: This worldview discussion of pornography will be taught in "Session 10: What's Wrong with a Little Porn?". But for now, see what people might be thinking at this point.)

3. "My life is a lie."

- » Do you think it's easy to live in "two worlds?" Can you understand the struggler's fear of being found out? Is it difficult to admit your own struggles with someone else? What does it feel like to admit your struggles or sin to someone else?

4. "I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to help."

- » Share any times you have been in a discussion with someone and you found yourself unable to give a good argument for holding to a biblical position.

SESSION 2

SEX, LIES, AND CULTURE: DOES GOD'S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY MAKE SENSE? (PART 1)

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » **Voices That Confuse: Reclaiming Biblical Truth from Interpretative Distortions**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/voices-that-confuse-reclaiming-biblical-truth/>)
- » **Gay Marriage: What the Church and God's People Need to Do Now**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/gay-marriage-what-the-church-and-gods-people-need-to-do-now/>)
- » **Facing the Hard Questions**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/on-the-road-facing-the-hard-questions/>)
- » **My Mixed-Orientation Marriage**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/mixed-orientation-marriage/>)

BIG IDEA

To grasp biblical truth, you also need to understand what the culture is saying.

In today's culture, the Christian principles regarding sex, sexuality, and gender are not just seen as being dated and irrelevant—they are increasingly seen as being harmful to society and individuals. Christians need to articulately respond to this challenge. The main way to do so is by understanding the underlying worldviews that our secular society communicates about this issue. We need to respond to our culture with humility, grace, accuracy, and truth.

Christians must also strive to understand the underlying worldviews that buttress the culture's views on sex, sexuality, and gender. Only when understanding the cultural issues can we best speak into the culture about the relevance and beauty of God's design for sexuality.

DISCUSSION

I. A deeply divisive issue

II. Everything is different now

1. Living in the world of marriage equality

David described the challenges facing the church as Christians hold onto biblical sexuality in our current cultural climate.

- » Have you experienced ridicule and misunderstanding because of your Christian stances on sexuality? In what way? And where (workplace, extended family, etc.)?
- » Do you feel a sense of pressure to conform to what others believe? What have you heard that sounds compelling to you? Is it easier to just “go with the flow” or not?

2. Worldviews in conflict

David mentioned that the deeper worldview issue behind secular sexuality is radical autonomy—a belief that the individual should determine what is best for him/herself. The individual no longer looks to God to shape his or her life according to his will. What matters is my freedom and my personal fulfillment.

- » Do you see this worldview in action? Where and how?
- » Do you see this foundational worldview in the church today? What about in your own thinking?

3. How should Christians respond?

David points out that Christians have not always had the godliest response to cultural issues and declining morality.

- » Describe relationships in your life with family, friends, and neighbors with differing worldviews. Do you avoid “hot-button” topics like politics and religion? Have you engaged in good conversations on these issues, or have you realized that you have said things that are inaccurate or defamatory?
- » What are some ways our church can grow in humility toward others with a radically different worldview?

4. Remember! Scripture is authoritative

David said that believing in the total authority of Scripture is essential for understanding this issue.

- » How do you view Scripture as you consider God's design for sexuality? David mentioned that the Bible was not a "book of rules," so how do we view Scripture as showing us how to use our bodies in the way God calls us?

III. The sexual scripts of the twenty-first century

David talked about the "Three Taboos" of the secular sexual worldview.¹ Go over these again with the class and see if they ring true for how people view sexuality in our culture.

1. **One may not coerce or cause harm to another.**
2. **One may not engage sexually with someone without their consent.**
3. **One may not criticize or restrict another's life choices or behavior.**

- » What can we affirm about the "Three Taboos"? How do they differ from a biblical perspective?

1. Cultural lie: Sex = Life

Sex is a good gift, but life is only found in living for the Giver (worshipping God) (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Christianity differs significantly from other world religions/philosophies by celebrating the goodness of God's creation.

- » Do you see this worldview as being predominant today, that sexual freedom is one of the highest values to life?
- » But sex is only one place we're tempted to go looking for "life" outside the Giver. What are more "acceptable" ways you're tempted to find meaning in life?

2. Cultural lie: My personal freedom must be guarded at all costs.

True freedom is living by design as an image-bearer of God (Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

¹ Dale S. Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationships Beyond an Age of Individualism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 71.

- » Have you previously considered the idea of freedom as living according to God's design for you? How does that view of freedom subvert the typical view of freedom in our society?
- » Dave spoke about our culture's idolatry of personal freedom as leading to personal, family, and societal breakdown. Do you agree?

3. Cultural lie: Love is what really matters.

Biblical love encompasses more than emotions or desires.

Our culture proclaims that one's personal experience and emotions determine "truth"—"my truth." But the Bible says love is not the same thing as one's emotions or one's fleeting affections.

- » How do you love biblically, while being influenced strongly by your emotions for another person?
- » In what areas are you most prone to listen to your emotions more than Scripture or the wise counsel of others?

4. Cultural lie: Sex is just a physical act.

Humanity is created in God's image, so there's a spiritual reality behind sexuality.

- » David talked about how this cultural perspective on sex can lead one to think that it's no big deal how I use my body. How would you argue to someone that sex is something that is profound and points to God?

SESSION 3

DOES GOD'S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY MAKE SENSE? (PART 2)

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » Just What Is Godly Sex? How Sexual Pleasure Points to Something Greater (Parts 1-2)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/just-godly-sex-part-1>)
- » God Gives the Best Sex: A Positive Theology of Sex—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/God-gives-the-best-sex>)
- » Transgenderism: The Reshaping of Reality—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/transgenderism-reshaping-reality>)
- » The Great Transgender Case of Mistaken Identity—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/identity-the-great-transgender-case-of-mistaken-identity>)
- » Homosexuality and the Bible: Outdated Advice or Words of Life?—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2014. A brief overview of the passages in Scripture that mention homosexuality directly, and an overview of both traditional and revisionist interpretations. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/homosexuality-and-the-bible-outdated-advice-or-words-of-life/>.

BIG IDEA

God's design for sexuality reflects what love is really about, and reflects a deep understanding of human relationships.

God is the creator of sex, sexuality, and gender, and his design is clearly shown in Scripture, even though it has been marred by the fall. Gender (male and female), in complementary union with one another, is at the heart of God's design. And marriage—where sex, sexuality,

and gender are highlighted—points to deeper spiritual realities: of partnership, longing, particularity, and faithfulness.

I. God is the creator of sexual pleasure.

David begins the discussion of God’s design for sex, sexuality, and gender by stressing the point that the worldview of Christianity is positive and not negative on this subject. This is important in light of the distortions and misunderstanding about what Christianity teaches.

- » What do you think is your neighbors’ and colleagues’ perception of the Christian view of sex and sexuality?
- » If you grew up in the church, do you remember what you heard about how the church or the Bible viewed sexuality? Did you even hear your church talk positively about sex and sexuality?
- » Have you ever thought or considered that God is the creator of sexual pleasure? How does realizing that affect how you think about sex and sexuality?

II. God’s design for sexuality

David talks about the importance of gender to sexuality. Rather than gender being immaterial, he argues that the Bible makes the existence of gender foundational to sex and marriage.

- » Why do cultural voices argue that gender doesn’t matter?
- » What does culture say are the important determining factors for sexuality? (for e.g., love, or how one feels, etc., independent of opposite-genderedness)
- » What difference does it make that Jesus, in Matthew 19, refers to Genesis 2 when teaching about marriage?
- » Do you agree that Jesus makes gender the foundational basis for marriage and sexuality? If not, how would you explain his reference to Genesis and the logic of his “Therefore”?

David then spoke about four more key principles for marriage, according to God’s design.

1. Procreation

- » Although procreation is not the whole point behind sexuality, it is an important factor.
- » In what ways has procreation been minimized in our culture?
- » How does minimizing procreation affect our understanding of sexuality?

2. An opposite partner

- » Genesis 2 says it is “not good” that Adam is alone, and prescribes a helper who is “like the opposite” as the solution.
- » Discuss the benefits of the “opposite-ness” of heterosexual marriage.
- » Describe some typical ways that men and women are different, and how these differences can enhance marriage.

3. Particularity

- » David said that God’s design for sexuality is not heterosexuality in a general sense (as it exists in its current fallen state and as it is generally understood today). He created us for union with a specific (particular), opposite-gender individual with whom we become “one flesh.”
- » How does the idea of particularity change your perspective on the typical focus of heterosexuality?
- » In what ways does the idea of particularity challenge the goals of conversion or reparative therapy for people dealing with same-sex attraction?

4. Marriage is a signpost to the ultimate union.

- » According to Ephesians 5:32, God’s goal in marriage is to point to the mystery of our union with Jesus.
- » What does it mean to you that God created humanity with a romantic impulse, so that we’d have a glimpse at his longing for relationship with us?
- » How does that challenge your typical view of God—or your perception of his view of you?

III. What this means for God's people

David stressed that Scripture's portrayal of God's design for sexuality is not an issue that Christians have disagreed upon throughout church history, like baptism, but that God's design for sexuality is a major doctrinal issue that should not be minimized as something a Christian can believe or not.

» Do you agree with that perspective? Why or why not?

Although the church has often portrayed sexual sin as worse than other types of sins, 1 Thessalonians 4 describes our sexuality as a litmus test for our spirituality.

» Why do you think this passage makes such a strong connection between sexuality and spirituality?

» Does this indicate that sexual sin is somehow worse than other sinful behaviors?

» What would it look like for your church to be a safe place to talk about sexuality and sexual sin? What would need to change; what are you doing well?

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING OUR SEXUAL STRUGGLES: WHY DO WE STRUGGLE WITH OUR SEXUALITY SO MUCH? (PART 1)

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » How Does the Church Help Us Live with Sexual Integrity? (Parts 1-5)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/sexual-integrity-its-hard-now-it-was-hard-then-too/>)
- » Finding Your True Self in Feelings and Desires?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/finding-your-true-self/>)
- » Identity Theft! Who Are You in Christ?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/identity-Theft>)
- » Women: Running the Race Well (Parts 1-4)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/women-running-the-race-well-integrity-part-1/>)
- » Lust—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Lust>)
- » Protecting Desires: God Cares about Your Longings—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Protecting-Desires>)
- » Questions about Sexuality Need Good Answers—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/on-the-road-did-good-answers/>)

BIG IDEA

Understanding behavior is complex, and it starts with understanding the whole person.

The concept of understanding our behavior has not only captured the attention of great thinkers and writers throughout history; it's also something everyone wants to know.

Two of the greatest questions we can ask about life are, “Why do I do what I do?” and “How can I change?” The answers to those two questions will reveal our worldview about human behavior and hope.

The Scriptures readily answer those two questions when we apply them to sexual struggles. A Scriptural understanding of human behavior involves the central place of the heart, which is the locus where intellect, will, decision-making, and emotions all converge. As Ellen said, “The heart is our volitional center, the place from which we make decisions to obey or disobey God as well as to love or not love him.”

In order to understand behavior, however, we must also understand all the factors that influence and impact a person’s heart. That’s the essence of what Ellen discusses in explaining the Harvest USA Tree Model.

In Part 1, Ellen discusses the fruit of the tree (behavior), the seed (the heart), and the soil (factors generally outside of one’s control that impact the heart and influence behavior).

DISCUSSION

Ellen says that the issue of understanding why we behave as we do is important, and that a biblical worldview differs significantly from cultural worldviews.

- » Let the group read the two biblical passages Ellen read (Luke 6:43-45 and Matthew 5:19), and discuss some current worldviews that try to explain human behavior (such as brain chemistry, parenting and upbringing, social environment, poor self-image, etc.) Ellen uses broad strokes here, mentioning how other explanations of behavior describe the problem as being “outside” the person (meaning, that the individual’s responsibility is diminished, if not erased).

The soil influences discussed in the video refer to dynamics outside of our control that exert strong shaping power on our hearts. They are: gender, physical characteristics, personality and natural talents, our brain, family dynamics, the culture, peer pressure, trauma, and spiritual warfare.

- » Ellen says that the key idea about soil factors are that they are influencers, not determiners (i.e., they don’t force us to act a certain way) in our responses to life. Her example was the typical response we have to someone who “makes me angry.” Ellen points out that Scripture says that’s not true; rather, that one’s behavior flows from within one’s own heart. Do you agree with this or not?
- » Although Ellen hasn’t yet finished talking about the entire “tree” in Part 1, do you think the emphasis on the heart, along with understanding a person’s soil factors,

is a balanced approach in understanding our behavior and the sin struggles that we all have? Why or why not?

Two key soil factors Ellen talked about were culture and peer pressure.

- » Discuss how these two work hand-in-hand, especially today in a culture where it can be detrimental to speak your opinion if it's not the culturally accepted one.
- » How much of a shaping influence do these two factors have in your own life?

At the end of the video, Ellen says that if all sin is birthed in our sinful hearts, then we really are much more alike than different! Oftentimes men and women who struggle with sexual sin feel condemnation because these sins are often referred to as “worse” than others. Ellen quoted Jeremiah 2:13, which says, “my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

- » If this is God's diagnosis of our problems, then how can this influence the way Christians view brothers and sisters who have engaged in sexual sin? How is it true that we are much more alike than different from others who have particular sin patterns and struggles that we don't have?

SESSION 5

HEART CHANGE IS THE KEY TO HEALING: WHY DO WE STRUGGLE WITH OUR SEXUALITY SO MUCH? (PART 2)

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. They are the same resources given in Session 4, so if you've not read them yet, do so now. Part 2 of this talk about "Why Do We Struggle with Our Sexuality So Much?" focuses on desires, their origins, and where they lead to in our lives. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline, for those who desire to study further.

- » How Does the Church Help Us Live with Sexual Integrity? (Parts 1-5)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/How-does-the-church-help-us-live-with-sexual-integrity>)
- » Finding Your True Self in Feelings and Desires?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/finding-your-true-self-in-feelings-and-desires>)
- » Identity Theft! Who Are You in Christ?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/identity-Theft>)
- » Women: Running the Race Well (Parts 1-4)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Women-Running-the-Race-Well>)
- » Lust—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Lust>)
- » Protecting Desires: God Cares about Your Longings—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Protecting-Desires>)
- » Questions about Sexuality Need Good Answers—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/on-the-road-did-good-answers>)

BIG IDEA

What the heart believes is the key to self-understanding, change, and healing.

The concept of understanding our behavior has not only captured the attention of great thinkers and writers throughout history; it's also something everyone wants to know. Two of the greatest questions we can ask about life are: "Why do I do what I do?" and "How can I change?" The answers to those two questions will reveal what your worldview is about human behavior and hope.

The Scriptures answer those two questions, especially when we apply them to sexual struggles. A scriptural understanding of human behavior involves the central place of the heart, which is the locus where intellect, will, decision-making, and emotions all converge. In order to understand behavior, however, we must also understand all the factors that influence and impact a person's heart. That's the essence of what Ellen discusses: The Harvest USA Tree Model.

In Part 2, Ellen rounds out her discussion of how the heart is impacted by our desires and beliefs (faith beliefs and functional beliefs), and how this translates into behavior. Ellen also describes how actively living out the gospel leads to changed behavior.

DISCUSSION

It would be good to review the main sections of the Harvest USA Tree Model from the prior video. Ask if anyone can succinctly define the Seed and the Soil, and how they help describe patterns of human behavior.

Our hearts are the "seed," and the seed represents the volitional center—the place where our deepest commitments and hopes for life are made. From the heart flows our emotions, behaviors, and patterns of life.

The "soil" includes all the factors in our life that impact and shape our hearts (the seed). Generally, these factors, which are mostly external, are not something we have control over (gender, physical characteristics, personality and natural talents, our brain, family dynamics, the culture, peer pressure, trauma, and spiritual warfare, etc.)

The next part of the Tree Model are the Roots, which correspond to our desires. Some desires are universal to all of us, but the key to understanding ourselves is to identify which desires in our life are strongest, and which ones we pursue to the point of harmful behavior that can cause us to struggle and to sin.

- » Discuss how a universal desire (like to love or to belong) can become a controlling desire. Perhaps use Beth as an example of how this happens.
- » What is key to understanding what desires rule our hearts (i.e., whether our hearts are presently being ruled by Christ or by our desires)?

- » Controlling desires become idols in our lives; people or things become false gods that we live for, that we “worship.” Discuss the How Desires Become Idols chart. Would anyone share how good desires have become idols in their life?
- » Do you agree or disagree with what Ellen said—that desires always motivate us in a direction? (Keep in mind that desires are not the same as emotions; emotions can be experienced and yet not be a motivating desire.)

The Trunk of the Tree Model describes our beliefs—the worldviews through which we interpret life and behave. They correspond to our true, or functional, beliefs about God, ourselves, people, and relationships. They are not what we say we believe but what our lives actually reveal about our true worldview. For example, many Christians may quote that “Jesus is Lord” in their lives, yet patterns of sin always reveal that in many ways they serve as their own lords.

- » Talk about how desires can morph into beliefs. Talk about how Beth’s soil (events) and roots (desires) grew into a trunk (specific beliefs about herself, God, and life). What examples might you have in your own life? Can you tease out soil, roots, and trunk?

Here’s the main point of the Harvest USA Tree Model for understanding sexual struggles: We cannot just look at the fruit (behaviors) in order to stop sinful behavior. Our lives are transformed as we allow God’s Word to challenge and replace the lies and distortions that have developed and been nurtured in our hearts and desires.

- » Do you see why simply telling someone to stop their behavior, while it may be the right thing to say, is not an effective solution?
- » In reviewing the Harvest USA Tree and the How Desires Become Idols chart for Beth—and how the gospel worked change in her life—discuss those aspects of repentance Beth displayed. Do you see how all the sections of the Harvest USA Tree work together to change Beth—and us—from the inside out, which is how lasting change happens?
- » Share how God has specifically transformed your own “Life Tree” in ways that have led to a changed heart, a renewed outlook, and to Christ-honoring behavior. It is encouraging to hear from others how God is at work in each other’s lives.
- » Ellen again mentioned at the end of her talk that in understanding the different parts of the Tree as we describe our behaviors, we find that all of us are much more alike than different in our personal struggles. How does this understanding of similarity assist us in helping a sexual struggler whose fruit (behavior) is not similar to our own (for example, someone who struggles with pornography or attraction to someone of the same sex when those are not issues in our lives)?

SESSION 6

MINISTRY TO THE SEXUALLY HURTING

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » From Isolation to Community—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/from-isolation-to-community>)
- » Is Yours a “Yeah, We Can Handle This” Church?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/is-yours-a-handle-this-church>)
- » From Despair to Hope: One Man’s Journey, Part 1 and Part 2—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/despair-hope-one-mans-journey-part-one> and <https://www.harvestusa.org/from-despair-turney-part-two-2>)
- » Living Faithfully with Our Bodies: It Still Matters—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-faithfully-bodies-still-matters>)
- » Living in the Shadows: Life as a Game-Player—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-shadows-life-game-player>). Read also the personal testimony that follows: “Stepping into the Light after a Lifetime of Shadow Living”
- » Helping a Sexual Struggler Open Up—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/helping-a-sexual-struggler-open-up-and-talk>)
- » Living in the Light: A Redemptive Response to Sexual Sin—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-in-the-light-a-redemptive-response-to-sexual-sin>)
- » Five Reasons Why I Lead a Men’s Group on Sexual Integrity—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/five-reasons-why-i-lead-a-mens-group-on-sexual-integrity>)
- » Pornified Mind: Reclaiming Your Thought Life (Parts 1-3)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/renewing-your-mind-from-pornography-taking-thoughts-captive-part-1>)

- » **Fighting the Battle with Pornography (Video Blog)**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/bob-heywood-fighting-battle-pornography>)
- » **Gender Confusion: What Do We Say to Someone?**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/gender-confusion-what-do-we-say-to-someone>)

Here are some book-length resources that can help you go deeper in understanding this issue, and in helping someone.

- » **Sexual Sanity for Men: Re-Creating Your Mind in a Crazy Culture.**—a one-on-one mentoring or small group workbook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2012. A workbook for men to use with other men to find support and freedom from pornography and other sexual struggles and sexually addictive behavior. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sexual-sanity-for-men-re-creating-your-mind-in-a-crazy-culture>.
- » **Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Relational and Sexual Brokenness.**—a one-on-one mentoring or small group workbook by Harvest USA, Ellen Dykas, ed., New Growth Press, 2013. A workbook for women to use with other women to find support and freedom from sexual struggles and sexually addictive behaviors. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sexual-sanity-for-women-healing-from-sexual-and-relational-brokenness>.
- » **Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex**—by Harvest USA, John Freeman, New Growth Press, 2014. Explores the heart issues that keep men in bondage to porn and other sexual struggles, and the practicality of the gospel as the one thing to set them free. A great one-on-one mentoring book as well. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/hide-or-seek>.
- » **When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart.**—a devotional, one-on-one or small group resource by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2012. A daily devotional workbook to help wives assess and grow through sexual brokenness in their marriage. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/when-your-husband-is-addicted-to-pornography-healing-your-wounded-heart>.

BIG IDEA

Sexual strugglers need to be disciplined with compassion and biblical truth.

We all want to help those in trouble, especially when it's someone we care about. But good intentions can backfire if you don't have an understanding of their particular struggle. Knowing the best ways to help is critical to assisting someone leaving a life of desperate isolation and moving toward a life of openness, transparency, and joy.

The main objective of this class, "Ministry to the Sexually Hurting," is to help your church begin to disciple people in your midst who are looking for help with sexual struggles. It's important for the class leader to make it clear that the video and the class discussion are

meant to broadly introduce guiding principles for discipling sexual strugglers. People should not feel the pressure to be fully equipped after this class to expertly engage in these kinds of helping relationships. It should, however, give them a sense of the trajectory and goals of a helping relationship. While people won't feel like experts at the end of this class, our hope is that after this video and discussion, when people hear of sexual struggles in their friends' lives, they will move toward them, not away from them.

It will also be prudent as the leader to consider who in the class might have both the skills and heart for this kind of ministry. Not everyone will be called to walk with strugglers in this kind of depth, and often the people most willing to help are those who themselves have received help first for their own struggles. It's important to follow up with certain people who show potential for future ministry in these areas. These are the people who would be recommended for further training and equipping in this area of discipleship.

While not everyone in your church will be called to walk alongside sexual strugglers in very intentional ways, everyone in your church is called to be a loving friend. The principles and applications of this class can be broadly applied to any friendship or relationship in the church, and that is important for everyone in the class, as they consider how they will appropriate the things discussed for their specific callings as brothers and sisters in Christ.

DISCUSSION

In this video, Mark encourages people to first recognize that sexual strugglers need confidentiality and a safe place to be transparent.

- » Mark mentioned that confidentiality is meant to foster ever-increasing transparency in people's lives. If someone has told you about a secret struggle they have, how can you practically begin to help them bring others into the situation for more assistance, without breaking confidentiality?
- » How is gossip handled in your church? Is it encouraged or ignored by those around you, or is it treated like a serious sin that requires action to snuff out? What are some practical ways your church can guard against gossip?
- » What has your experience been with entrusting other people with sensitive information? Have you ever brought a serious sin into the light for others to see? Was that information mishandled, or were you cared for and felt secure?
- » What does it look like for you to model transparency for others in your church? How can your church culture grow in real relationships that don't hide the fact that we're struggling in different areas?

Mark's second principle is that sexual strugglers need to see the sin behind the presenting issues. This is the issue of seeing what controlling desires or idols they are seeking to satisfy through their behavior. To understand these deeper root idols, Mark laid out three key principles for listening (Note: These three principles are adapted from three guiding principles for listening from Ed Welch. To hear his lecture "Slowing Things Down—How to Listen Well," follow this link: <https://www.ccef.org/shop/product/slowing-things-down-how-to-listen-well>):

1. What is painful in their story?

- » What does it mean to incarnate the love of Christ for someone before speaking about the love of Christ to them? In a helping relationship, how can we appropriately apply the biblical principle to be slow to speak and quick to listen?
- » Can you recall a time when you experienced negative consequences because of your own sinful behavior, and yet people were sensitive and compassionate to see how you were suffering? How did their response impact you?
- » Why is it important to focus first on the suffering in someone's story, instead of their sin?

2. Where is there hope in their story?

- » How can you point to present negative consequences for sin as a reason to give someone hope?
- » In the midst of difficult present circumstances, what are ways we can point them to gospel-centered hope that is applicable in any circumstance? What promises of God have you found to be anchors of hope in the midst of life's greatest storms?

3. What are they living for?

- » Read Jeremiah 2:13 in class. What are the broken cisterns you find yourself turning to when life gets difficult?
- » How does understanding sexual sin as idolatry level the playing field and give helpers encouragement that they can empathize with sexual strugglers because they are more alike than they are different? Utilize the How Desires Become Idols chart to show how good desires lead to struggles that can dominate and control one's life.

HOW DESIRES BECOME IDOLS

Desire

Love
Good Self-Image
Affirmation
Affection
Security
No Pain or Suffering
Control
Understanding
Intimacy



Idol

"I *must* have this . . .
I don't care what it takes."

The last point in this video is that sexual strugglers need accountability. Mark started by mentioning two pitfalls to good accountability (the savior and cop role). Then he laid out five aspects of good accountability:

- 1. It needs to be a mutual relationship.**
- 2. Focus on "putting on" and "putting off."**
- 3. Aim for the heart, not just the behavior.**
- 4. Reach out before, during, and after slip-ups.**
- 5. See this relationship as a long-term investment.**

- » Describe your experiences with accountability relationships. What was helpful and what wasn't? How long did the relationship last?
- » Is it possible to be friends with your accountability partners? How do you find the right balance in a relationship like that?
- » What keeps people from being open to investing in accountability relationships?
- » How can accountability relationships be less about managing sin and more about holistic discipleship?
- » What keeps us from reaching out to people when we are facing present temptations or suffering in our lives? How can we overcome those barriers?
- » How can accountability move past simple confession and pardon of sin to real strategies to fight future temptation?

SESSION 7

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SEXUALITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE “CLOBBER” PASSAGES (PART 1)

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER:

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » **Voices That Confuse: Reclaiming Biblical Truth from Interpretative Distortion**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/voices-that-confuse-reclaiming-biblical-truth/>)
- » **First Steps: Students and Same-Sex Attraction**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/first-steps-students-sex-attraction/>)
- » **Pro-Gay Theology: A Response to Matthew Vines’ YouTube Video**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/pro-gay-theology-a-response-to-matthew-vines-youtube-video>)
- » **Homosexuality and the Bible: Outdated Advice or Words of Life?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2014. A brief overview of the passages in Scripture that mention homosexuality directly, and an overview of both traditional and revisionist interpretations. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/homosexuality-and-the-bible-outdated-advice-or-words-of-life/>.
- » **Can You Change if You’re Gay?**—minibook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses the issue of sexual orientation and what the gospel means by change, and includes practical steps for those living with same-sex attraction who want to follow biblical sexuality. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/can-you-change-if-youre-gay>.
- » **When Your Gay Child Says, “I Do”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses how to maintain both an ongoing relationship with your gay-identified son or daughter and how to hold fast to biblical sexuality. Available

in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-gay-child-says-i-do>.

- » **When Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Tim Geiger, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses how to talk to your child (or help parents to do so) when they come out. Practical do’s and don’ts for parents in keeping their relationship with their child healthy while maintaining a biblical stance. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-child-says-im-gay>.

BIG IDEA

The Old Testament law on moral behavior did not change in the New Testament.

When facing new cultural challenges to a traditional understanding of Scripture, it is crucial to maintain the authority of the Bible and to be wary of allowing personal experience to be the greater “truth.” Further, it’s important to understand the foundational beliefs behind these new challenges and scrutinize them with a biblical worldview. Although there is a lot of confusion about homosexuality and the applicability of the Old Testament, this session demonstrates that it still speaks with clarity and has much to say to its cultural critics.

DISCUSSION

David begins the teaching articulating the importance of maintaining the authority of the Bible and looking at the entirety of the Bible’s teaching, not just verses isolated from the larger whole. He also warned that one of the ways the Bible’s authority is undermined is when we allow people’s experience—their stories—to be more important than the teaching of Scripture.

- » In what other ways are we tempted to “pick and choose” what the Bible teaches?
- » Why is it important to look at Scripture as a whole when trying to understand particular issues?
- » How have you been impacted by the stories of friends and family who identify as LGBTQ+? Do you feel pressure by them to change the Bible’s stance on same-sex sexual behavior? How are you responding to this?

David describes six foundational beliefs that revisionist (pro-gay) theologians build upon to make their claim that the Bible doesn't forbid loving, monogamous gay relationships.

- 1. A belief in the inherent goodness of humanity—my natural inclinations and desires are good.**
- 2. We know better now (cultural enlightenment argument: ancient vs. modern).**
- 3. The Bible doesn't address gay marriage as we know it today.**
- 4. The only law is “love”—doctrine doesn't matter.**
- 5. Isolate texts from the overall context —especially in defining words.**
- 6. Jesus never mentioned homosexuality.**

» Have you encountered revisionist arguments? Which seem the most plausible?

» How does the overarching narrative of the Bible counter these claims? Can you think of specific passages or theological truths that contradict these statements?

» How does the Bible's definition of love differ from the primarily romantic definition of the revisionists (and broader Hollywood romantic-comedy culture)?

» How would you address the fact that Jesus never spoke against homosexuality? What are other ethical issues in twenty-first century Western culture that Jesus didn't address, but need to be deduced from the broader ethical principles of the Bible?

David agrees with revisionists that the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) doesn't really address the question of gay relationships or marriage, but he challenges their contention that the primary sin was inhospitality and social justice. Nevertheless, the church should be challenged by Ezekiel 16:49, “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.”

» Have you seen Sodom and Gomorrah used as an example of how much God hates gay people?

» How does your church need to wrestle with the indictment of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:49? How does this convict you personally?

- » What would it look like for you to be a “priest” like Abraham, interceding for the gay community? Do you have family, neighbors, and coworkers who identify as gay? Are you praying for them and pursuing relationship with them? What could your church do corporately, as a body?

When it comes to the Levitical law (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13), revisionists often argue that traditionalists are cherry-picking—ignoring certain parts (like dietary restrictions), but being overly dogmatic about others. However, David countered that the law is divided into civil, ceremonial, and moral aspects. The New Testament either annuls aspects of the civil and ceremonial law, or describes them fulfilled in Christ—while the teaching of Jesus and the Epistles actually tightens the moral law. Further, based on all the other sexual taboos laid out in Leviticus 18, still upheld by our culture, it is actually the revisionists doing the cherry-picking!

- » In what ways have you wrestled with whether the Levitical law is still binding? Can you point to Scriptural passages (like Mark 7:18-19) that teach how Jesus reframes aspects of the law that are legitimately no longer applicable because of Christ and his coming?
- » Leviticus 18 describes many unthinkable heterosexual acts, portraying all of human sexuality in desperate need of redemption. How does this change our conversation about homosexuality? Does the church communicate that all of humanity needs redemption in this area of life?

SESSION 8

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SEXUALITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: THE “CLOBBER” PASSAGES (PART 2)

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. They are the same resources given in Session 7. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » **Voices that Confuse: Reclaiming Biblical Truth from Interpretative Distortion**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/voices-that-confuse-reclaiming-biblical-truth/>)
- » **Same-Sex Attraction and Me**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Same-sex-attraction-and-me>)
- » **Pro-Gay Theology: A Response to Matthew Vines’ YouTube Video**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/pro-gay-theology-a-response-to-matthew-vines-youtube-video>)
- » **Homosexuality and the Bible: Outdated Advice or Words of Life?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2014. A brief overview of the passages in Scripture that mention homosexuality directly, and an overview of both traditional and revisionist interpretations. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/homosexuality-and-the-bible-outdated-advice-or-words-of-life>.
- » **Can You Change if You’re Gay?**—minibook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses the issue of sexual orientation and what the gospel means by change, and includes practical steps for those living with same-sex attraction who want to follow biblical sexuality. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/can-you-change-if-youre-gay>.
- » **When Your Gay Child Says, “I Do”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses how to maintain both an ongoing relationship with your gay-identified son or daughter and how to hold fast to biblical sexuality. Available

in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-gay-child-says-i-do>.

- » **When Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Tim Geiger, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses how to talk to your child (or help parents to do so) when they come out. Practical do’s and don’ts for parents in keeping their relationship with their child healthy while maintaining a biblical stance. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-child-says-im-gay>.

BIG IDEA

The New Testament’s view of sexual behavior was relevant then and is relevant now.

There is increasing pressure on the church to abandon the Bible’s teaching on sexual ethics and embrace the LGBTQ+ agenda. Despite the cultural confusion, the Bible speaks clearly to this issue in both the specific passages addressing homosexuality and in the overall narrative. Further, Scripture is often used to depict homosexuality as the “worst” sin, heaping shame and condemnation on many genuine Christians who live with same-sex attraction. What we find is that the New Testament passages that condemn same-sex erotic behavior—particularly Romans 1—demonstrate that all of us are equally guilty of sin before God (Romans 2), but point us to the great hope we have in Christ (Romans 3).

DISCUSSION

David begins this session by talking about three approaches to biblical authority:

- 1. Cut-and-paste parts of the Bible—omitting the parts you don’t agree with.**
- 2. Throw out the Bible entirely—but then there is no higher authority than your opinions.**
- 3. Submit to the Bible’s teaching.**

- » What are some ways the Bible counters our natural tendencies to justify our behavior? Why is it important to let it challenge us, rather than making it fit with our desires?

- » How is our view of God compromised if we “cut and paste” parts of the Bible?

- » Aside from its teaching on sexuality, are there other parts of the Bible you wish you could remove? Why? How have you been changed by submitting to the Bible’s teaching in this area of life?

Romans 1 has been used to depict homosexuality as the “bottom of the barrel” sin—the result when God “gives you over.” David challenged that view, saying that the passage is really describing how idolatry has disordered the cosmos, and sexuality is used as an example of that disordering. The overall context says that all of humanity was “given over” because of their rejection of God.

- » How does this understanding of Romans 1 as condemning idolatry change your perspective on the passage? What does it mean to you that all of humanity is described as being “given over” to sin?
- » In addition to homosexuality, what are other ways idolatry has “disordered” God’s intent for creation?
- » Do you agree that Romans 1 (speaking about Gentiles) and Romans 2 (speaking about Jews) are intended to prepare us for the good news of Romans 3? How does that change the way Christians engage the gay community?

David discussed the way revisionists challenge traditional interpretations by trying to discredit standard definitions of words. There are many examples of words in any language whose definitions vary according to usage, which is why close attention to context is so important. There is a sad irony that a passage revisionists seek to reinterpret (1 Corinthians 6:9) carries the stark warning: “Do not be deceived”!

- » In what ways is our culture altering the biblical narrative about homosexuality? What are the messages you’re hearing? How are these messages alluring or convincing?
- » How is it encouraging that this passage “levels the playing field,” rather than stratifying sin the way we are tempted to do?
- » Describe briefly what it means to you to be “washed, sanctified, and justified” in the name of Jesus by the Spirit. How might this be applied to someone who struggles with sexual sin—that they can still struggle with sexual sin and yet still be righteous? Can you apply this view of sanctification to your own life—knowing that you still struggle with sin in your life?

David concludes the teaching on the “clobber passages,” by drawing five conclusions for the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality:

- 1. Genesis 1 & 2 establishes the normative pattern for sexuality.**
- 2. Homosexuality throughout Scripture is described as behavior, not orientation.**

- 3. The concept of orientation is unbiblical; doing so makes what is a fallen condition part of God's creation.**
- 4. Homosexual behavior is never affirmed in Scripture.**
- 5. The original, creational pattern is reaffirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19. Jesus did speak about sexuality—that sex is about gender and marriage.**

- » Talk through these five conclusions. Do you see the scriptural basis and logic to what David has said?
- » How does Jesus's affirmation of the creational pattern for marriage counter the revisionist claim that he never mentions homosexuality?
- » How does understanding God's design for sex, sexuality, and gender change the way we discuss sexual ethics with unbelievers?
- » Examine your heart on this issue: Are you more prone to think and decide on this issue via your emotions, or by examining the whole scope of Scripture?

SESSION 9

CAN YOU CHANGE IF YOU'RE GAY?

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » **Voices That Confuse: Reclaiming Biblical Truth from Interpretative Distortion**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/voices-that-confuse-reclaiming-biblical-truth/>)
- » **First Steps: Students and Same-Sex Attraction**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/first-steps-students-sex-attraction/>)
- » **Protecting Desires: God Cares about Your Longings**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/protecting-desires/>).
- » **The Dangerous Expectations of Reparative Therapy**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/the-expectations-of-reparative-therapy/>).
- » **Why Do People Fall Back into Homosexuality? (Parts 1–6)**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Why-Do-People-Fall-Back>).
- » **Homosexuality and the Bible: Outdated Advice or Words of Life?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2014. A brief overview of the passages in Scripture that mention homosexuality directly, and an overview of both traditional and revisionist interpretations. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/homosexuality-and-the-bible-outdated-advice-or-words-of-life/>.
- » **Can You Change if You're Gay?**—minibook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses the issue of sexual orientation and what the gospel means by change, and includes practical steps for those living with same-sex attraction who want to follow biblical sexuality. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/can-you-change-if-youre-gay>.

- » **Your Gay Child Says, “I Do”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses how to maintain both an ongoing relationship with your gay-identified son or daughter and how to hold fast to biblical sexuality. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-gay-child-says-i-do>.
- » **Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Tim Geiger, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses how to talk to your child (or help parents to do so) when they come out. Practical do’s and don’ts for parents in keeping their relationship with their child healthy while maintaining a biblical stance. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-child-says-im-gay>.

BIG IDEA

The church has historically spoken about how people change in simplistic and unhelpful ways. Nowhere has this been more controversial and hurtful than when talking about changing one’s sexual orientation.

The idea of changing sexual orientation has long been a controversial notion. The church’s view of orientation change continues to be misunderstood, even when the idea is grounded in a proper understanding of Scripture. This session examines what change means biblically for someone with same-sex attraction, and how God uses ongoing struggles for our good and his glory.

DISCUSSION

David begins this session describing some of the challenges surrounding the idea of “change” and sexual orientation. Pop culture has been adamant that sexual orientation is immutable (think of Lady Gaga’s song, “Born This Way”), even though neither secular mental health organizations nor scientific research have reached these conclusions.

- » What are the current messages we hear from culture about homosexuality and causation?
- » How do you respond to the statement by the American Psychological Association?
- » Does it matter whether the causation of sexual orientation is proved by science or research? Do you think the historic Christian position or the current secular perspective is dependent on such proof?

Although we tend to stratify sin, the Bible makes clear that all of humanity is in desperate need of redemption. And this is true regarding every area of our lives— including our sexuality. David discussed how all of us have a sexuality that falls far short of God’s creational intent.

- » Have you heard messages in the church communicating that homosexuality is worse than other forms of sexual sin? How do you think this impacts Christian men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex desires?
- » Do you agree with David’s position that same-sex attraction struggles are not inherently worse or more sinful than heterosexual sin struggles? Why or why not?

David described a current cultural position within the church: that some people embrace the identity of being a “Gay Christian.” How this term is understood varies. For some people, this means they believe God approves monogamous, gay relationships; for others, it means being committed to living celibately. David cautioned that using an adjective (especially depicting an aspect of our brokenness) with the noun “Christian” is to put limits on the work of the Spirit in our lives.

- » Do you agree that it’s a problem to identify as a “Gay Christian”? Why, or why not?
- » What are other “identities” we’re prone to embrace in our culture, of which we need to be cautious?

When people talk about homosexuality and the issue of “change,” they usually have in view the nature of one’s sexual attraction; that is, that they finally become attracted to people of the opposite sex. David counters that view since all of sexuality is broken, including heterosexuality. The opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, but holiness. Further, God has purposes for us in all the ongoing struggles and trials in our lives.

- » If the opposite of homosexuality is holiness (not heterosexuality), how does that modify the perspective on what it means to “change”?
- » How does the call to “not live for ourselves” challenge all of us in our sexuality? How does it challenge you in other areas of life?
- » How is the Bible’s view of change different than our typical expectations?
- » How have you seen the value of temptation in your own life? How have life’s trials and temptations drawn you closer to God?

David concludes by discussing five aspects of what a changed life can look like. Look at each one of those on your participant outline. His perspectives here challenges the church and each one of us to identify what our life and relationships should look like in following Christ in an increasingly secular culture.

- » Do you still hear the church or individual Christians assert that a changed life necessarily involves a change in one's sexual orientation?
- » Do you agree or disagree with David's view that a too-high view of marriage and family by the church has problems? Are there ways your church communicates that it exists for married couples and families, to the (almost) exclusion of singles? How does your church need to grow in applying Psalm 68:6 (placing the lonely in families; NIV)?
- » How can your church be more intentional in fostering same-sex friendships? Do you think doing so is critical for those who live with same-sex attraction?
- » Is your church a place where people can be honest about living with same-sex attraction? If not, why not? Is your church a safe place to admit and talk about one's ongoing struggles with sin, struggles in their relationships, etc.? How do you need to grow in that area?
- » How does the hope of the new heaven and earth encourage you in the midst of life's trials? Does it have any impact at all on how you live your life here and now?

SESSION 10

WHAT'S WRONG WITH A LITTLE PORN?

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion. It's not necessary, but it can deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant handout for those who desire to study further.

- » **Living Faithfully with Our Bodies: It Still Matters**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-faithfully-bodies-still-matters/>).
- » **Your Church: A Healing Community for Sexual Strugglers**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/your-church-can-be-a-healing-community-for-sexual-strugglers/>)
- » **Lust**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/lust>)
- » **Pornography and Injustice: The Social Impact of Sexual Sin and What the Church Must Do**—3-part blog series at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/pornography-and-injustice-the-social-impact-of-sexual-sin-and-what-the-church-must-do-part-1/>)
- » **What's Wrong with a Little Porn When You're Married?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses the negative impact on the heart of a porn user, the impact of porn use on the marriage relationship, and how to move both the user and the relationship back to health. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/whats-wrong-with-a-little-porn-when-youre-married>.
- » **What's Wrong with a Little Porn When You're Single?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses the subtle and dangerous impact porn usage has on dating relationships and how to find freedom. Excellent resource for teens and young adults in particular. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/whats-wrong-with-a-little-porn-when-youre-single>.
- » **Your Husband Is Addicted to Porn: Healing after Betrayal**—minibook by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2013. Mini book version of her larger book (see below). Practical ways to heal your heart in dealing with your husband's porn usage. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-husband-is-addicted-to-porn-healing-after-betrayal>.

Here are some book-length resources that can help you go deeper in understanding this issue, and in helping your church help those who struggle:

- » **Sexual Sanity for Men: Re-Creating Your Mind in a Crazy Culture**—a one-on-one mentoring or small group workbook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2012. A workbook for men to use with other men to find support and freedom from pornography and other sexual struggles and sexually addictive behavior. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sexual-sanity-for-men-re-creating-your-mind-in-a-crazy-culture>.
- » **Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Relational and Sexual Brokenness**—a one-on-one mentoring or small group workbook by Harvest USA, Ellen Dykas, Editor, New Growth Press, 2013. A workbook for women to use with other women to find support and freedom from sexual struggles and sexually addictive behaviors. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sexual-sanity-for-women-healing-from-sexual-and-relational-brokenness>.
- » **Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex**—by Harvest USA, John Freeman, New Growth Press, 2014. Explores the heart issues that keep men in bondage to porn and other sexual struggles, and how the practicality of the gospel is the one thing to set them free. A great one-on-one mentoring book as well. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/hide-or-seek>.
- » **When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart**—(a devotional, one-on-one or small group resource) by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2012. A daily devotional workbook to help wives assess and grow through sexual brokenness in their marriage. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/when-your-husband-is-addicted-to-pornography-healing-your-wounded-heart>.

BIG IDEA

Porn radically distorts the way we view God and all of life.

Pornography is not a harmless viewing activity (despite what some people believe). It's a behavior that points to a deeper struggle than looking at images or videos or reading erotic literature; it's a matter of what we desire at the deepest level—the level of our hearts. Like all behaviors, what we do points to what we live for, what matters to us the most, and that includes our relationship with God. When we look to something or someone other than God to find meaning and purpose in life, that's what the Bible calls idolatry. Idolatry damages everything—especially our relationship with God and others. Viewing pornography will alter and warp the way we look at relationships. In the long run, it will especially corrode the way we think about and relate to God.

DISCUSSION

Nicholas Black makes this opening comment about pornography: “Christians feel defeated because of our own hidden, personal struggles with sex. One word virtually sums this up: Pornography. Probably the most significant sexual struggle we face today is the epidemic of pornography and how it is impacting men, women and especially the younger generation—our youth.”

- » Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What is your own sense of this issue of pornography usage by Christians? Do you think the church is making too much of this, perhaps because of how sex and sexuality has been a taboo topic in the church? Or do you think it is even more of a problem than we are giving attention to?

Regarding the definition of pornography, Harvest USA locates the definition of it in the human heart, not in the various types of images found in media. Nicholas said, “Pornography is anything that the heart uses to find sexual expression outside of God’s intended design for relational intimacy. It is anything that tempts or corrupts the human heart into desiring sexual pleasure in sinful and broken ways.”

- » How do you feel about this definition? Do you agree with it? In what way is this definition of pornography unique, compared to how pornography is generally understood?
- » What do you think is the strength of this definition of pornography? (Hint: It has to do with the heart’s link to idolatry.)

If pornography is what the heart looks to for escape from the brokenness of living, then what gives it its habitual or addictive power is lust. Nicholas gives this definition of lust in the context of pornography:

“Lust is the strong desire (or “over-desire”) to possess something or someone that is not yours to have. Lust is a desire that is out of bounds (outside of God’s design for sex) or out of balance (where it becomes an idol that consumes your attention).”

- » How does this understanding of lust help us see other issues in our lives that seem to control or dominate us?
- » If lust is a strong desire that is all-consuming, regardless of its object, then how does this inform the way we understand sexual lust? Is sexual lust something radically different from other lusts, or is it no different from any other struggle?

- » How does understanding lust from the perspective of “love your neighbor as yourself” help us to better grasp the harm and damage lust does to us and to others?
- » Since lust and idolatry are linked together, how does that help you better understand that someone who struggles with pornography is simply not able to “just say no” to it?

Nicholas mentions six ways that pornography damages our hearts and relationships. Take some time discussing each one, with the goal being that the class begins to grasp the cumulative effect of pornography usage—on the user, on relationships, on community, and on society.

- 1. It teaches a false view of sex and relationships—it teaches that what is of highest value is me and my needs.**
- 2. Porn slowly drains the life out of reality—and can lead to addictive behavior.**
- 3. Porn disconnects sex from love and respect—it encourages aggression and abuse.**
- 4. Porn teaches a lifestyle of lies and deceit.**
- 5. Porn normalizes perversity and diminishes human dignity.**
- 6. Porn participates in global abuse and injustice.**

Nicholas talked about godly and healthy relationships as the way out of addictive pornography struggles: one’s relationship with God and one’s relationships with others in the church community.

- » Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and then 2:11-12; then reread 4:1. Paul is generally viewed as being stern and combative, but Nicholas points out that his writings show how understanding and tender he was toward those in the faith (and keep in mind that this passage is one where Paul is talking about sexual behavior in the church). Is Nicholas’s view of the apostle Paul one that you have not heard before? How does this view of how Paul tenderly pastored his churches inform us on how to approach someone who is struggling?

Nicholas mentioned three things the church community can do to address pornography issues and to help those who struggle with it. This can be a good discussion about how we, as individuals, and how we, as a church community, think about struggles and how we help others who are struggling.

- 1. The church needs to be real about life.**

- » How honest are you in letting people know of the things you deal with in life? Are you transparent, or more hidden and secretive? What makes it so hard to be honest about struggles?
- » Does your church community encourage you to be honest about what life is like, or do you think there is some level of pressure to look good?

2. The church needs to become unshockable.

- » How helpful is it to believe that God is not shocked nor disturbed by our struggles and sin? Do you believe that, or not? Why?

3. The church needs to give mercy.

- » Do you ask for help when you struggle? Do you ask for help when you are in a pattern of sin? What keeps you from asking for help?
- » How well (or not) does your church invite strugglers to come for help? What does your church community do well here? What could you improve?
- » Do you know the power, and the astonishment, of being forgiven when you expected punishment? What stories can you share to let others know how life-changing that is?

SESSION 11

REDEEMING MARRIAGE FROM PORNOGRAPHY'S DESTRUCTION

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » Responding to My Husband's Sexual Sin—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/how-does-a-wife-respond-to-her-husbands-sexual-sin>)
- » Help for the Shattered Spouse—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Help-for-the-shattered>)
- » Do I Stay or Do I Leave?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Do-I-stay>)
- » From Isolation to Community—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/From-isolation-to-community>)
- » Is a Struggle with Pornography a Deal-Breaker for Getting Married?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/struggle-pornography-deal-breaker-getting-married>)
- » Lies, Lies, and More Lies—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/lies-lies-and-more-lies>)
- » Rebuilding Trust after You've Been Discovered (Parts 1- 3)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/building-trust-again-picking-up-the-pieces-when-youve-been-discovered>)
- » What's Wrong with a Little Porn When You're Married? Minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses the negative impact on the heart of a porn user, and its impact on the marriage relationship, and how to move both the user and the relationship back to health. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/whats-wrong-with-a-little-porn-when-youre-married>.

- » **Your Husband Is Addicted to Porn: Healing after Betrayal.** Minibook by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2013. Mini book version of her larger book (see below). Practical ways to heal your heart in dealing with your husband’s porn usage. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-husband-is-addicted-to-porn-healing-after-betrayal>.
- » **When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart**, by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2012. (This is a long read—a devotional, one-on-one, or small group resource.) A daily devotional workbook to help wives assess and grow through sexual brokenness in their marriage. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/when-your-husband-is-addicted-to-pornography-healing-your-wounded-heart>.

BIG IDEA

Fighting for sexual integrity in marriage is a battle worth fighting.

Secret pornography struggles damage relationships. Hiding the sin produces a life of deceit for the struggler and painful confusion on the part of the spouse. Confession brings forgiveness and the beginning of healing. Both partners have their own unique issues to deal with in order for there to be substantial progress in healing the relationship.

DISCUSSION

Bob talked about the struggle that led to a decision that he could be a Christian and look at porn at the same time, because he felt helpless to overcome it. He said he would just “live with it.” Because of the accessibility and prevalence of pornography, there are people who don’t see this practice as a problem.

- » What did Bob say about the consequences of his behavior, however?
- » Do you see that perspective as being a common way of thinking about the acceptability of looking at porn—that is, it’s everywhere, it’s impossible to avoid it, and it’s not that harmful anyway?

Bob talked about putting up a good front, especially by “throwing up a wall of theology.” He said he was impenetrable. But what made the difference was having friends who stepped into his life and marriage. Think about the scenario: four friends saying they wanted to talk with them that day.

- » Do you have deep enough relationships to have friends who would do this for you?
- » Are you willing and able to do this with your friends?

The key moment for change was Bob's confession. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." It's "safe" to confess privately to God, but doing only that is not enough. God wants us to involve others in the body of Christ.

- » Can you name the unique benefits of opening up to someone else?
- » Ask the group if anyone has a story in their life about how a confession brought about change and hope. Confessing a secret struggle or event is incredibly hard to do, but the Word says it has great power to bring about healing and change.

In the section "How has God worked in your marriage, and in you personally, since Bob's confession?" what do you think of Marilyn's acknowledgement that she needed to repent, too? (Note: Make clear that Marilyn did not need to repent for being responsible for Bob's secret porn struggle.)

- » What did Marilyn need to repent of?
- » When Marilyn finally saw her own sin, what did it do in their marriage?

Discuss Marilyn's advice to couples, that as a wife she was not going to be a detective, and that God intended to work in her own life through her husband's struggles. One key point was her advice to cry out to God and to the church for help.

- » Discuss Bob's advice to couples, especially to men who struggle with porn, about rebuilding trust. One key point was his statement that you need to depend on Christ's acceptance and not your spouse's.

SESSION 12

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY IN AN INTERNET WORLD

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » **Pornography and Injustice: The Social Impact of Sexual Sin and What the Church Must Do**—3-part blog series at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Pornography-and-injustice>)
- » **The Normalization of Porn in the Church: What the Church Needs to Do Now**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/the-normalization-of-porn-in-the-church-what-the-church-needs-to-do-now>)
- » **Your Children Are Looking at Pornography. How Are You Responding?**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/your-children-are-looking-at-pornography-how-are-you-responding>)
- » **Is It Time to Walk Away from Our Mobile Devices?**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/time-walk-away-mobile-devices>)
- » **Protecting Your Home from Porn, Parts 1 & 2**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/protecting-home-porn-part-1-2>)
- » **iSnooping on Your Kid: Parenting in an Internet World.** Minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses not just technology protection strategies but also how to talk to your family about healthy sexuality and the need for accountability. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/isnooping-on-your-kid-parenting-in-an-internet-world>.
- » **Raising Sexually Healthy Kids.** Minibook by Harvest USA, Dave White, New Growth Press, 2014. Discusses how and what to say to your children regarding sex, sexuality and how to address cultural expressions of sex and sexuality with biblical wisdom. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/raising-sexually-healthy-kids>.

BIG IDEA

Every family must take steps to monitor online activity.

The Internet is wonderful, but it's also dangerous. We live in a world of 24/7 access to online content, and some of that content portrays sex, sexuality, and gender in ways that can damage one's mind and heart—and that is especially so with children and teens. No one is immune from turning to online sites to find relief and escape from a fallen world. God is calling everyone to shepherd their sexuality to glorify him, and it takes intentionality to do this.

DISCUSSION

Nicholas gives a startling alarm at the beginning of the video: “What we are facing today regarding technology and the Internet—with its portrayal of sexuality—is lethal to the spiritual, emotional, sexual, and relational development of our children.”

- » Do you agree that the situation is as bad as he portrays it? Why or why not?
- » Nicholas also spoke about how the temptation of Internet porn is real for everyone. Even if you are not someone who looks at pornography, do you agree or disagree that the temptation is real and needs to be actively resisted?

Nicholas discusses three things about technology: its upside, downside, and dark side.

- » Spend a few minutes discussing the upside of technology and how it has benefited you personally and how it has benefitted society.
 - » Spend some time discussing the downside of technology, and ask the group/class if they are experiencing any of these downsides (like technology obsession or dependence).
 - » Open up the discussion to talk about the dark side of technology. If this group/meeting has or has not already seen the video, “What’s Wrong with a Little Porn?” it might be good to read the list of six things pornography does to the one who uses it:
- 1. It teaches a false and fake view of sex and relationships—it teaches that what is of highest value is me and my needs.**
 - 2. Porn slowly drains the life out of reality—and can lead to addictive behavior.**
 - 3. Porn disconnects sex from love and respect—it encourages aggression and abuse.**
 - 4. Porn teaches a lifestyle of lies and deceit.**

- 5. Porn normalizes perversity and diminishes human dignity.**
- 6. Porn participates in global abuse and injustice.**

In the section, “Talk,” Nicholas lists five things parents need to do to get this issue out in the open. Take some time to ask the class to respond to any of these five statements. What might make taking some of these steps hard? How might doing these steps impact your family, either positively or negatively?

- 1. Talk about God’s good design for sex.**
- 2. Talk about both the upsides and the downsides of technology.**
- 3. Be the parent—be in charge of guiding them.**
- 4. No “Big Brother”**

» In this section Nicholas talks about two ways a family can deal with these protection issues: Total lockdown or hands-off/ignore. Which side of the spectrum do you tend to gravitate toward, and why?

» Does Nicholas’s proposal that not being Big Brother is accomplished by always informing the family what you are doing and why? Issues of parents “controlling” their kids is a hot-button topic today. Open up a discussion on this to get various viewpoints on how families deal with internal and external dangers.

- 5. We are all in this together.**

Nicholas moves into the section, “Block.” Discuss his perspective on how pornography can capture someone and hold them captive. In this section, Nicholas spoke about how pornography is not something from which Christian homes are immune.

» Do you think that Christian families have better protection from this than secular families?

» Discuss Nicholas’s argument for how pornography hooks our hearts, and ask whether that view is accurate, simplistic, or not enough.

While Nicholas does not go into specifics on how to take these protection steps, he does highlight some technological areas to watch for. Open up the discussion to examine these areas. Ask people to share their observations about these areas.

- 1. The proliferation of apps: Checking to see which ones are safe**
- 2. Search engine dangers: do you use safe search settings?**

3. Social media: do you monitor your children's usage?

4. Other media, like TVs, game consoles, online streaming services: do you restrict or monitor?

- » If there is time, ask the group/class how they can help and support one another to begin taking these steps. Would the church be open to a series of classes to teach the how-to's of tech protection?

In the last section, "Walk," discuss how Nicholas's view of giving grace is different than the way many families approach failure and sin.

- » How does giving grace help you to take all steps necessary but still recognize that you cannot totally protect your family?
- » What might be some specific and practical examples of giving grace to a child, a teen, a spouse, or a friend when it comes to failure and sin?
- » Nicholas says that the most important thing you are doing for your family in taking these protective steps is to help your kids learn to be open and honest about their struggles, and about how to ask for help. What might be some specific and practical examples of giving grace that would lead someone to be open and honest?

SESSION 13

RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY KIDS

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are some resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » Your Children Are Looking at Pornography. How Are You Responding?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Your-Children-are-Looking-at-Pornography>)
- » God Gives the Best Sex—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/God-gives-the-best-sex>)
- » Take Courage! Parents and the Dreaded Conversation—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Take-Courage>)
- » A Father’s Story: My Child Hooked on Porn—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/a-fathers-story>)
- » A Person. Not a Problem—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/person-not-problem>)
- » How Do I Talk about Sexuality with My Kids?—video blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/sexuality-and-children>)
- » How Do I Tell My Children about My Sexual Past?—video and blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/tell-children-sexual-past>)
- » Sexual Sufferers. Not Just Sinners—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/student-are-st-just-sinners>)
- » Just What Is Godly Sex? (Parts 1-2)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/just-godly-sex-part-1>)
- » Youth Culture Issue—harvestusa magazine, Spring 2017 (https://www.harvestusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Harvest_Fall_2017-HUSA-Magazine.pdf)

- » **iSnooping on Your Kid: Parenting in an Internet World**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses not just technology protection strategies but also how to talk to your family about healthy sexuality and the need for accountability. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/isnooping-on-your-kid-parenting-in-an-internet-world>.
- » **Raising Sexually Healthy Kids**—minibook by Harvest USA Dave White, New Growth Press, 2014. Discusses how and what to say to your children regarding sex, sexuality and how to address cultural expressions of sex and sexuality with biblical wisdom. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/raising-sexually-healthy-kids>.
- » **When Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”**—Minibook by Harvest USA, Tim Geiger, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses how to talk to your child (or help parents to do so) when they come out. Practical do’s and don’ts for parents in keeping their relationship with their child healthy while maintaining a biblical stance. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-child-says-im-gay>.

BIG IDEA

It is imperative for parents to disciple their children in key biblical truths about sex.

It’s never been easy for parents to talk about sex and sexuality with their children. Personal issues, one’s own sexual past, and the subject itself is just so private. But the Bible talks about sex and sexuality openly and publicly. It’s never going to be easy to do this, but Dan Wilson lays out clear principles and steps to take to get this critically important conversation going. If parents don’t talk this out in an ongoing way with their children, then their children will listen, learn, and follow the culture’s voice on sex, sexuality, and gender.

DISCUSSION

Dan Wilson opens the video by mentioning that the culture is always talking to—and teaching—our kids about sex and sexuality.

- » How aware are you of this reality, particularly if you are a parent? How is the culture having a different impact on your kids than it had on you growing up (assuming you grew up before the Internet)?
- » Dan cites fear and shame as the biggest barriers when it comes to talking to our kids about sexuality. How do you see fear and shame playing a role in your own life as a parent when it comes to talking about sex with your kids?

- » Does it encourage you to know, as Dan stressed, that regardless of our struggles and failures, we as parents are qualified to disciple our children about sex, sexuality, and gender? Does being qualified exist within each person, or does it happen collectively, by the community helping one another?

In the section, “Who Should Do the Talking?”, Dan laid out three positive talking points that we should be teaching our kids:

- 1. Sex and sexuality are about glorifying God (1 Corinthians 10:31).**
- 2. Sex and sexuality are wonderful gifts to be enjoyed.**
- 3. God has a great design for sex: a lifelong marriage between a man and a woman.**

- » Which of these three points is most significant to you? Are any of these points new to you?
- » Growing up, were you taught about sex and sexuality from a positive viewpoint? If not, if you heard from your parents (or church) about what was wrong with sexual behavior, how do you think that influenced you as you grew up—as you became an adult, as you entered marriage, or as you continue being single?

Dan then discussed three negative talking points about how sex is misused.

- 1. The world says love is a feeling, but God defines love as giving and serving.**
- 2. The world says that sex is an ultimate thing, but God is ultimate above any good thing.**
- 3. The world says that sex and sexuality define our core identity, but personhood is defined differently by God.**

- » How can you help your child believe that real love is more than a feeling?
- » Dan cited King David’s affair with Bathsheba as an example of when sex or the expression of one’s sexuality becomes an idol that harms and destroys. Can you think of other examples from Scripture or from current life that you can share with your kids?
- » Our secular culture argues that if one is not “sexually active”—but chooses chastity and celibacy—one is living a tragically repressed life. How do we help our kids have different basic beliefs about what makes a significant and fulfilled life?
- » While the world says people are defined by their sexuality, how does our union with Christ counter that perspective? What place should our sexuality have in our life?

Dan discussed a strategy for having age-appropriate conversations about sex with our kids (two categories and three principles).

1. Two kinds of talks

a. “As you go” talks

b. Intentional, topical talks

2. Three principles

a. The grammar stage: young children (toddler to age 6)

b. The logic stage: older elementary children and tweens (7-12)

c. The rhetoric stage: teens (13-18)

» Dan gave an example of seeing a fitness club billboard becoming an opportunity to talk about sexuality with his kids in an “as you go” moment. Can you think of other “as you go” opportunities that you seized or ones that you think could offer an occasion to talk with your kids?

» Dan spoke about the benefits of practicing conversations as a couple before talking to your children. What do you think of his idea? What do you think of his suggestion that single parents ask for help from others in the church? How could your church assist single parents in talking to their children about sex, sexuality, and gender?

In the “three principles” section (talking about the grammar, logic, and rhetoric stages), Dan spoke about imparting a basic sexual vocabulary to very young children in an affirming, positive way. He mentioned using phrases like, “God loves you so much that He made you/gave you. . . .”

» What benefits can you see in talking this way about these things with young children?

Dan said that older children and tweens move into the logic stage and want to know both how and why things work.

» Make and share a list of the topics you think your tweens need to know about, from God’s point of view.

Gone are the days of lectures with teens (as if they really worked in the first place!). Dan said this is the age for dialoguing with them to discover what your teens believe about sex, life, and God.

» Can you share about a significant conversation you have had with a teen, in which he or she revealed where his or her head and heart were about sexuality?

Dan next shared encouragement for parents who have not talked to their kids about sex and sexuality.

- 1. Admit it, repent, and ask for forgiveness from them.**
- 2. Find out what they know already (from peers, media, etc.).**
- 3. Connect what they know with a biblical perspective.**

» What do you think of his ideas about how to begin this conversation? Can you think of other steps that might work as well?

In the last part of Dan’s talk, he shared six points for what to do when we discover that our child is struggling with sexual sin.

- 1. Don’t freak out in front of your children.**
- 2. Stop and pray.**
- 3. Have an initial conversation with your child.**
 - a. Reaffirm your love and God’s love.**
 - b. Ask good questions that go for your child’s heart.**
 - c. Empathize from your own experience.**
 - d. Point him to the nature of God and the gospel.**
- 4. Set up safeguards.**
- 5. Pray with your child.**
- 6. Keep checking in.**

» Talk about Dan’s six points. Which ones do you think you would struggle with the most? The least? Why?

Dan pointed out that the sixth point—keep checking in—was after the initial conversation occurs, when we lovingly confront our child about an episode of sexual sin.

» What do you think would be hard about consistently checking in with your child? What helpful plans could you make to avoid letting this practice slip or become legalistic?

SESSION 14

SEXUALITY AND THE SINGLE PERSON

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are some resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » **Being Single and Tempted: Where Is God in This?**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/single-tempted-god>)
- » **Being Single and Tempted: How Can I Avoid Sexual Sin?**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/being-single-tempted-can-i-avoid-sexual-sin>)
- » **How Can My Church Minister to Singles?**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/how-can-my-church-minister-to-singles>)
- » **How Does the Church Help Us Live with Sexual Integrity? (Parts 1-5)**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/sexual-integrity-its-hard-now-it-was-hard-then-too>)
- » **Sexuality and the Single Christian: Godly Answers in a Confusing World**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Sexuality-and-the-Single-Christian>)
- » **Protecting Desires: God Cares about Your Longings**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/protecting-desires>)
- » **Is Our View of Masturbation Outdated?**—video blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/view-masturbation-outdated>)
- » **Sex and the Single Girl: Smart Ways to Care for Your Heart.** Minibook by Harvest USA, Ellen Dykas, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses practical ways for single women to manage their sexuality within God’s design. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sex-and-the-single-girl-smart-ways-to-care-for-your-heart>.
- » **How to Say No When Your Body Says Yes: Finding True Satisfaction.** Minibook by Harvest USA, Dan Wilson, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses practical ways for singles to

address temptation and what benefits we receive when we obey God. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/how-to-say-no-when-your-body-says-yes-finding-true-satisfaction>.

- » **Living Together: Why Marriage Is the Best Choice.** Minibook by Harvest USA, Ellen Dykas, New Growth Press, 2016. With the trend increasing toward cohabitating rather than marriage, Ellen discusses why marriage, as a promise-based relationship, is superior to casually living together; and she gives practical steps on backing out of a cohabitating relationship for those who wish to follow biblical boundaries. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/living-together-when-marriage-is-the-best-choice>.

BIG IDEA

Living as a single person without sex is possible, but you need to be honest about the struggle, and invite others to help you.

Being Christian and single is a difficult life journey (whether long or short) in a culture that says sex is of the utmost importance. The culture comes at the single person proclaiming that a life without sex is a tragedy. Our hearts and bodies make it an equally difficult battle to live a life of sexual integrity according to God's design for sexuality. Living honestly with these struggles—with God and with Christian brothers and sisters—provides the healthiest way forward.

DISCUSSION

Ellen opened up this session explaining how singleness is not a “one size fits all” category for people (single through divorce or death of spouse, single parent, single and never married, singles in their twenties, singles in their eighties, those who are content being unmarried, those who deeply desire marriage, etc.)

- » How is it helpful to see singleness as a diverse category of people, rather than lumping all singles together into one category? Does it help you to get more clarity on how to relate to someone by understanding their singleness category?
- » For those who are single, would anyone share how being single at different periods of life is either more challenging, or more helpful?

After Ellen gave a brief overview of the Christian worldview of sex (“signpost realities”), she launched into a discussion of three major areas where singles can struggle:

1. Beliefs

2. Desires

3. Past

In her section on false beliefs, Ellen talked about two beliefs that singles can particularly struggle with:

a. The belief that God is has not given them enough (the thing in life they feel they must have—marriage).

b. The belief that sexual activity outside of marriage is no big deal in God’s eyes.

c. Faith disconnect: God is no help here

» How do you think these three beliefs (what are often called “functional beliefs,” as opposed to one’s doctrinal beliefs) can manifest themselves in the life of a single person? (Let the class think about this, but here are some examples: The first belief may enable a single person to resist sexual activity with someone, but she lives her life in utter misery and joylessness; the second belief may begin to slowly numb one’s conscience about what is right or wrong, not just about sexuality, but about other behaviors and lifestyles; and the third belief may make that person’s heart angry, bitter, and hopeless.)

» What are some other erroneous beliefs that could make singleness more of a struggle? (Let the class think about this, but here are some examples: If I can just get married, then my sexual struggles will be over; marriage will make me whole; God will bring just the right person to marry and I need to wait till he makes that clear to me; as long as I love someone, sexual activity before marriage is not sinful; etc.)

» Ellen said that singles can think that “God just doesn’t get what this struggle is about.” Are there other areas in life where we can think this way, where we feel or begin to believe that God just doesn’t understand the uniqueness of our struggles?

In her section on dealing with desires, Ellen spoke about desires (physical, mental, emotional, sexual, and spiritual) not being neutral.

» What do you think she meant by desires not being neutral? Why is that an important Christian perspective when understanding and responding to our sexual and relational desires? (One way to grasp this important point is to ask how our culture views desires. The culture says that desires are what we really are, that they define us, so we should act on them; therefore, desires are positive and morally right.)

- » Ellen said that God is able to “reorient our desires towards faithfulness.” Do you believe that? (This could be a rhetorical question that you want to raise, as it might be difficult for people to answer or give examples).

In her section dealing with one’s past, Ellen mentioned that this is a crucial area that can increase the struggle for singles.

- » Ellen gave an example of a couple living together who separated after being convicted that living together apart from marriage was wrong. The steps they took in obeying God would be considered outrageous by our culture today. What do you think about their decision?
- » Ellen talked about past memories or experiences, especially traumatic past sexual experiences that can deeply affect how one views sex and sexuality. If you are helping someone struggling with sexuality and they share such information, how might knowing this impact the way you help them?
- » Here is another faith statement that Ellen makes: “Our hope in any of these areas is that Jesus Christ knows us, and is able to meet us in any of these struggles, and can bring us under his loving lordship and his loving reign.” Do you functionally believe that? (This could be a rhetorical question that you want to raise, as it might be difficult for people to answer or give examples about.)

Ellen spoke about the consequences of misused sexuality. She talked about a few consequences related to engaging in sexual activity outside of God’s boundaries: It nurtures selfishness in our lives; it produces a “faith disconnect,” where one walls off an area of life that they do not give over to Christ’s lordship; and it pollutes one’s thought life in a way that can greatly influence one’s current and future behavior.

- » What do you think of those three consequences Ellen mentions? Do you agree or disagree?
- » Our culture today insists that consensual sexual behavior of any kind is loving, non-harmful, and mutually beneficial. Here is where Christian faith is decidedly different. How might you dialogue with someone for the reasonableness of the Christian position here?

There are more consequences for misusing our sexuality than Ellen had time to discuss in the video. If there is time, ask the class to give additional examples. Again, not to cast guilt or shame, or to feel self-righteous, but to honestly face what happens to us when we live outside of God’s design. (Possible answers: Continued sexual sin might lead to abandoning one’s Christian faith; it can lead to minimizing sin in other areas of life; it can lead to accepting unbiblical beliefs, and proclaiming that certain behaviors are really OK in God’s eyes, etc.)

Ellen mentioned three key ways singles can faithfully live out their singleness with wisdom and grace:

- 1. Honestly address your real-life struggles.**
- 2. Receive God's care.**
- 3. Allow your singleness to draw you to Jesus.**

In her section on honesty, Ellen mentioned two important points:

- 1. Take steps to be very honest: with yourself, with God, and with trusted other people regarding your struggles. Everyone is wrestling in one way or another with their sexuality. This is one of many aspects of our humanity that has been impacted by the fall.**
- 2. Our struggles are within the reach of Jesus Christ. Here Ellen implies that being honest about your struggles is connected to having God work in your life. What do you think of that? Can you be honest that this is an area of your life that God wants to speak to, and that you need his help to walk in godliness as a regular way of life?**

Ellen also says that obedience in this area is not a call that insists on immediate obedience, but is a steady movement or trajectory toward increasing conformity to God's commands. She says, "The process nature of transformation is very important."

- » What do you think of that perspective on repentance and obedience? Is she being soft here? Or realistic? How comfortable would you be helping a person who repeatedly falls and repents, to walk with them in such a process?
- » What Scriptures can you discuss as a class that talk about progressive sanctification?

In the section about receiving God's care, Ellen mentioned that shame is one of the most powerful emotions that keep us from asking God and others for help.

- » What is it about the experience of shame that keeps people stuck and isolated from others?
- » In being able to receive God's care (directly or through a brother or sister), what do you need to believe about God to approach him? (Various answers: We have complete forgiveness in his death for us; he understands our struggles; he is gentle with us; he gives us his Spirit to empower us to obey, etc.)

Ellen also spoke about the dignity of being single in Christ. (It would be good here to read Paul's revolutionary comments about being single in 1 Corinthians 7:6-8, 17-39, even though Ellen didn't talk about this.)

- » Do you hear much teaching in your church about the exalted state of being single and unmarried? If not, why not? How could we elevate the position of being single in the church in a way that helps the entire body of Christ? (Here you could ask singles to give input on how they can be assisted in living a faithful single life.)

In the section about allowing your singleness to draw you to Jesus, Ellen mentioned the primacy of prayer and reading Scripture, along with serving others. She says that in doing so, our desires are redirected within us.

- » What do you think about this advice? Do you believe that ongoing prayer and Scripture reading changes what we desire in life? Have you seen such examples in your life or others?
- » If you agree that prayer, reading Scripture, and serving others (rather than wanting others to serve you) enables you to redirect your desires to follow Christ, what do you need to do, or change, to begin doing this?
- » If you are single, do you feel pressure put on you by the church to serve, to do ministry, etc., because you have fewer relational obligations? If yes, what would you say to help your church help you in your walk of singleness?
- » As a single person, what changed behaviors would facilitate your resolve to follow Christ and his Word in this area of life?

SESSION 15

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF GENDER AND TRANSGENDER

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant outline for those who desire to study further.

- » Transgenderism: The Reshaping of Reality, A Compassionate and Biblical Response—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/transgenderism-reshaping-reality/>)
- » Gender Confusion: What Do We Say to Someone?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/gender-confusion-what-do-we-say-to-someone>)
- » The Great Transgender Case of Mistaken Identity—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/identity-the-great-transgender-case-of-mistaken-identity/>)
- » Talking to Millennials about Transgenderism—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/on-the-road-talking-to-millennials-about-transgenderism>)
- » Raising a Child with Gender Brokenness—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/gender-brokenness-raising-a-child-with>)
- » Children at Risk: Transgender Ideology (Parts 1-2)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/children-risk-transgender-ideology>)
- » Alternative Trans-Stories—blog at harvest usa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/alternative-trans-stories>)

BIG IDEA

Scripture’s view of gender cuts through the ideological confusion of the culture’s view of gender and transgender.

Gender and transgender are in the forefront of LGBTQ+ issues, impacting how society as a whole understands and adjusts to momentous changes in how we understand what it

means to be human. The erasure of gender and the belief that gender is changeable has great significance for Christian belief as well. The issues are complex and need great care in how we understand and discuss what it all means. We also as a church need to know how to help someone who struggles with their sense of gender in a body that they feel is not right.

Because the issue of gender and transgender has become so political, it will be important to talk about the cultural phenomenon of transgender issues and the personal struggles of those who experience gender dysphoria without getting bogged down by talking about political solutions. Try as much as you can to set discussion boundaries to keep the issue to how Christians can understand this issue more clearly and how we can respond biblically, with truth and compassion. This is not to say that Christians should not be in the public square about this issue; it's about keeping within the boundaries of this video teaching, which doesn't go in that direction.

Also, it will be important to mention at the beginning of the discussion, that this discussion of gender and transgender issues is more of an outline of the issues involved in this matter, as well as a *general overview* of the direction the church needs to take to help someone with gender dysphoria or confusion. This video does *not* talk about a detailed process of pastoral care, nor how to establish a long-term helping relationship with the person who struggles. That level of pastoral care is discussed in Session 6, "Ministry to the Sexually Hurting." It will be important to show and discuss that video before you show and discuss this video on gender and transgender.

It would be best, then, to review the key *relationship-building steps* of good pastoral process that Session 6 laid out, with the key points being:

- 1. The first step in helping is to enter fully into someone's life: Show Christ before you speak Christ.**
- 2. Three key principles for listening**
 - a. What is painful in their story?**
 - b. Where is there hope in their story?**
 - c. What are they living for?**

DISCUSSION

Start out by asking about what people are hearing (in the media, from others) about this issue of gender and transgender. In what ways are they thinking about this? (E.g., What's the big deal; let people be who they want to be; this is awful; there's nothing that is objective and real about this; this is so confusing; I don't know how to think about this at all, etc.)

- » Take just a few minutes here to get the pulse of how people are thinking and feeling, because this issue is so controversial.

Begin reviewing key points to make sure the class understands how the issues of gender and transgender are being discussed and how to understand the complexities of it.

1. What is the traditional view of gender?

(Binary, only two genders; fixed; static; connected to one’s biological sex; objective, reality based)

2. What did Tim say is the new view of gender?

(Male and female is on a continuum; gender is fluid; not related to one’s biological sex; it is not a mental disorder; subjective, ideologically based.)

3. What is intersex, and what are the different ways people are thinking about it today relative to the way it has generally been understood?

(Children who are born with ambiguous genitalia and genetic abnormalities. It has generally been viewed as a disorder of sexual development [a medical condition], but a transgender perspective sees it as evidence of multiple genders and the fluidity of changing genders.)

4. What are the different ways sex and gender today are being understood?

Sex	Gender
Genitalia	Psychological
Physical components of sexual identity	Self-awareness as sexual being
Incidentally related to identity	Primarily related to identity
Objective	Subjective

The biblical view of gender is similar to the traditional view, but Tim articulated how Scripture establishes a foundation for this view. Discuss the following points and ask how the class thinks about the key points Tim made.

- » God created gender generally (for all of humanity) and particularly (for every one of us), based on Genesis 1:27 and Psalm 139:13-16.
- » Deuteronomy 22:5 is saying something more than just about cross-dressing; it’s about adopting a persona or identity of being someone you were not made to be or supposed to be.

Aligning one’s sense of gender with one’s biological sex is conforming to God’s design; going against it is sinful.

- » Do you agree or disagree with Tim’s position that gender-bending (intentional behavior) and transitioning one’s gender is sinful?

(This view puts man in God’s place; we determine who we are independently of how God created us and sees us; it declares that authenticity is determined by one’s apparent freedom to be whoever they want to be, regardless of God’s created order for humanity, etc.)

Tim also said that gender roles have a variety of expressions, from one cultural period to another. He gave the example of Jacob and Esau as an example that gender role behaviors can be quite different, even in the Bible.

- » Regarding cultural gender roles today, how do you define what it means to be male or female, to be a man or to be a woman?
- » How does Tim’s discussion about how someone might struggle with their sense of gender contrast with the cultural narrative about it?

Tim describes how someone with gender dysphoria overwhelmingly desires to be valued or affirmed as someone else. Another way to look at this might be to see such a desire as being covetous—desiring to be an image of someone you are not and taking whatever steps one can to be that person.

- » Tim describes his How Desires Become Idols charts as a way to describe these overwhelming and dominating desires. Do you agree or disagree that they give a reasonable way of describing this struggle, in how it can begin and how it is carried out?
- » How might you argue a biblical position that accepting our God-given gender at birth is what every person needs to do? Why is that important for understanding who we are as human beings? What would be the key points you would want to make?
- » How do you think a church community might be able to help someone who struggles with gender dysphoria? Recall the specific points Tim made in helping the gender struggler.
- » What particular steps would we need to take in addressing their distress, keeping in mind that those with gender dysphoria have high rates of self-harm and suicide? What would you say to someone that speaks both the truth of God’s design for gender and mercy for their struggle?