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CARING FOR SEXUALLY-HURTING PEOPLE IN JESUS' NAME

ON THE ROAD:

Difficult Questions That
Need Good Answers

Dan Wilson

WHAT TO DO?

Responding to an Invitation
to a Same-Sex Wedding

R. Nicholas Black and
John Freeman



CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE BETWEEN FAMILY AND FAITH

Supporting parents whose children have come out

Chris Torchia



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HARVEST USA brings the truth and mercy of Jesus Christ by:

- Helping individuals and families affected by sexual struggles
- Providing resources that address biblical sexuality to individuals and churches

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: GOD REALLY DOES UNDERSTAND OUR SUFFERING AND STRUGGLES

From the earliest years of HARVEST USA's existence, we've ministered to parents of children in the gay life, or children struggling with same-sex attraction. Fathers and mothers living with the hard providence of their child's struggle have turned to us, often because they perceived there was no other safe place to turn for support, answers and a listening ear.

The situations of those parents have changed, however, and changed remarkably — even over the last eight years. Up until just around 2007, most of the parents who came to us for help were parents in, or approaching, middle age. Their children were, generally, in their late twenties or older. And, largely, the children were out of the house.

Since 2007, we've seen a different demographic for most parents coming to us. Many are in their forties, or younger. The ages of their children are younger, as well: in their teens and early twenties. Many of these children are in school or living at home, and many of them have younger siblings who are being influenced by their behavior and lifestyle. For this newer population of parents, the questions are different, and the potential for conflict between parent and child—and sometimes, between mother and father—is more intense.

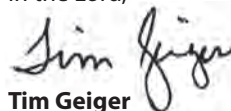
We minister to these parents the same way we've ministered to thousands of their counterparts over the last 33 years. We listen, and we point them toward the God Who Understands.

Many parents feel utterly alone, utterly unable to conceive that anyone else understands their heartache, their fear, their particular form of suffering. Yet we have these words from God himself, spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Isaiah 1:2). *God understands.* "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? ... This I know, that God is for me" (Psalm 56:8-9). *God understands your suffering in particular, and is with you.* Like the stronger brother or sister, we take weary and anxious parents by the arm and gently lead them, in confidence, to the throne of grace, to "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

One new way we're reaching out to parents (and leaders of youth groups) is through The Student Outreach (thestudentoutreach.org), a ministry of HARVEST USA dedicated to parents and others ministering to students ages 12-25. The Student Outreach helps them think through, from a cogent biblical perspective, the increasingly difficult task of parenting and discipling the young people they love to live out their sexuality in relationally-healthy and God-honoring ways.

Please pray for the parents to whom we minister. There are more and more of them each year. Pray that we would be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that we would hear well the tossings and cries of these moms and dads whose worlds have been turned upside down. And, please pray that we would lead these hurting men and women to find their confidence and hope for the future, and for their children, in Jesus alone.

In the Lord,



Tim Geiger
Executive Director

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Caught in the Middle

BETWEEN FAMILY AND FAITH

SUPPORTING PARENTS
WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE COME OUT

By Chris Torchia



Ryan and Jen's kids have always been active in church and school, involved in extracurricular activities, and have great friends. Their parents have modeled godly living to their children from a very early age. Like most parents, they hope to see their kids finish school, start a career, and raise a family. They don't expect anything out of the ordinary since the children have never given them cause for worry.

Their son, Bobby, just finished his junior year of high school. He has always been a quiet kid but performed well academically and is naturally obedient. One day, when Jen asked to use her son's phone, she discovered that Bobby was visiting gay porn sites. When Jen asked Bobby about the porn, Bobby became very withdrawn. After more questions, he finally confessed, "Mom, I'm gay . . ." Jen was in disbelief.

Jen wondered how her son could possibly be sure that he was gay. She thought he must simply be a confused teenager. The truth is that Bobby has wrestled with these feelings since middle school. He tried to ignore these desires but always found himself longing to be in a relationship with another guy. Ryan and Jen hadn't the slightest clue that their son struggled in this way.

Many Christian parents share Ryan and Jen's experience of a child self-identifying as gay. Cultural messages about sexuality are influencing young people to define their sense of self and identity with their feelings and emotions. When a child embraces the identity as a life direction, in contrast to Scripture's view of sexuality designed by God, parents and family members are thrown into crisis. They feel caught in the middle between their love for their child and their convictions to stand firm in what God says. Living in the middle is a place filled with tension. Parents want to help their child, but often the message they hear is that they must affirm their child's decision. Anything short of that feels like a crushing rejection to their child.

It's a difficult path for parents to walk, and they will need understanding and support, especially from their church community, to help them. Here are some ways pastors, church leaders and friends can do so.

Where to begin?

Parents in this situation struggle to know how to make sense of what they are feeling, much less what to do. Helping them to identify some common initial reactions and know what to do with them will help them move forward.

Anger

Many parents' first reaction is shock, which is often followed by anger. *Why is this happening? Why are you doing this to us?* Questions and strong emotions like these are understandable. Helping them to channel them well is critical.

The first thing is to encourage them not to direct anger at their child. It took a lot of courage to say what he or she said, and while it hurts, it's still better to know than to be kept in the dark. Healthy relationships require honesty. Help them to acknowledge their child's courage. If they have already expressed anger at their child, encourage them to go to their child and ask forgiveness, modeling humility and repentance. The relationship will need this healing.

Then help them deal with what might be anger toward God. *Why are you letting this happen to us, God? Haven't we been faithful in raising our children?* Encourage them to express such troubling questions to God, as their own relationship with him requires honesty, as well. Suggest that they read the Psalms, which can provide them with a God-given language to voice their powerful and tumultuous emotions in a way that still directs faith back to him. This will be a safeguard against bitterness taking root. God is strong and loving enough to hear our words of pain, and even to identify with them.

Grief

Parents will grieve over the fear they have of losing the life they anticipated for their child. They will grieve the loss of the son they thought they knew, along with the hopes and dreams they attached to him. Because the child's revelation feels like a deathblow to the family's future, give them space to grieve unreservedly and without judgment. Weep with them (Romans 12:15). Validate the pain and loss they feel. Having the support of friends in their moments of grief will help them to move toward their child, learning to love him as he is, in this new reality, but with new eyes of faith. Adjusting to this new reality will be difficult to do. Help them to see that continuing to love their child, just as always, will be an important connection to God that can give hope for the future.

Guilt and Shame

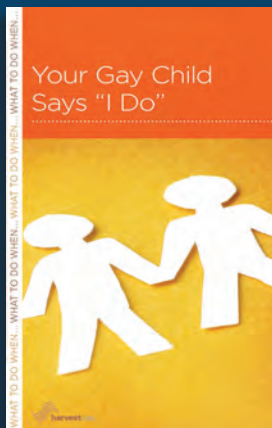
Almost every parent will think that they have failed in some way, asking where they went wrong. Ryan and Jen began to believe that maybe they could have done something, if only they had known how Bobby felt when all of this began – but they didn't realize what was going on, and now they feel like terrible parents for missing it. The feeling of guilt may be consuming. It will be helpful here to listen to their anguished questions, and point out that such questions, though legitimate, may have no answer, nor could they have known what was kept secret. To get stuck here will only hurt them further. What counts now is to live in the present and release these questions to the One who does know all the answers.

Because parents fear others' opinions and judgement of their parenting, shame will often accompany guilt. There

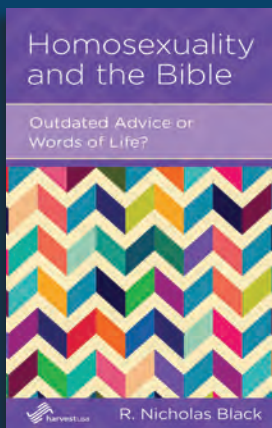
Living in the middle is
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is a feature to sin and suffering where shame attaches not only to the individual, but also to those who are associated with him. It is not uncommon for parents to feel marked by their child's decision or actions. Invite them to speak their emotions and not feel ashamed for wrestling with such thoughts and feelings. Shame pushes us to hide in the shadows and stay away from others. But isolating from others is spiritually dangerous, so help them to remain connected to their church community. Sadly, families that keep silent and isolate themselves over this situation are more likely to resolve the tension they live in by changing their view of Scripture and affirming their child's gay identity. Staying in the middle is very hard to do, and faithful friends are critical in helping them find a measure of peace in the midst of that tension.

MINI BOOKS THAT SAY MORE ON THIS ISSUE



Explores and gives practical advice on how to navigate the difficult situations parents find themselves in with their son or daughter, along with ways on how to decide if they can attend their child's wedding.



A concise examination of how post-modern interpretations distort the meaning of Scripture, and what the major passages really say (and don't say). An excellent resource for churches to give out!

To get these resources for you or your church, go to www.harvest-usa-store.com

Fear and Despair

A child's coming out takes a parents' normal fears to another level. Ryan and Jen fear what their son's declaration means for his future and how people will treat him. They fear that their son has fallen away from God, or never truly knew God. Fear loses sight of God's sovereignty, and can give way to despair. Parents of gay children struggle to see a sovereign and righteous God on the throne when the "wisdom" of the world's view of sexuality infiltrates their homes. They need an anchor, so keep pointing them to images that describe God the way David saw him, as one whose "way is perfect," whose "word...proves true," and who is a "shield for all those who take refuge in him" (Ps 18:30). God remains on the throne even when everything in life feels out of control. God is still at work in this situation. Their child is not beyond the reach of God's arm, as Isaiah proclaimed to rebellious Israel (Isaiah 59:1). Remind them that the timing of God's work is perfect. So, encourage them to acknowledge to God all that they fear, and to patiently hear God speak to them through his word and his people.

In all these ways, patiently listening to how they process this experience will give them a lifeboat in a tossing sea. Their responses may not be pretty. Especially in the early stages, remain unruffled at the parents' raw emotional responses, leaving gracious room for what they are experiencing. Consider the Psalms as you ponder *your* response to them. God does not rebuke his children for expressing the breadth of their suffering to him, so neither should we chastise parents in their anger, grief, guilt, shame, fear, and despair. Rather, it is much wiser and more profitable to help them explore what they are feeling, and learn to see how God is cultivating their faith in the midst of their turmoil.

Ongoing Care

Once the initial storm subsides, parents need help navigating questions about how to love to their child while standing true to biblical convictions.

It will be difficult for parents to know how to have conversations with their son or daughter. Typically, parents will either want to make this the primary topic of conversation with them, or they may ignore the issue altogether, hoping their child's struggle will quietly disappear. Parents in the first category can unknowingly slip into relating to their child solely on the basis of this issue. Parents panic and want to change their child because they realize the seriousness of sinful sexual behavior. Just as parents mistakenly fear that they caused their child to become gay, they can also erroneously believe they can somehow change their child, which becomes their chief focus. But they need to be reminded that the work of sanctification belongs to the Lord. We *do* influence our children's lives, and we want them to live faithfully before God, but our faith must acknowledge that God is the one who is sovereign over our



child's life. God is not just after our child's behavior; he is after their heart.

Those who fall into the second category believe that "keeping the peace" and not talking about it is better than speaking the truth in love. This may be out of fear to keep a close relationship with their child at all costs. Speaking into their child's life, or keeping quiet, will be a tough balancing act. Help the parents to move beyond their fears to seek wisdom and wait for opportunities to speak, even if it may be upsetting. But remind them that to make this issue the primary focus will seriously hurt the relationship. Let God lead the way in this.

Most importantly, remind parents of their child's greatest need: the gospel. A child's sexual orientation/behavior can consume a parent's vision, but parents should remember that their child's fundamental need is for them to see and embrace God's love and redemption in Christ. The goal for our children is not heterosexual happiness, but grasping an identity in Christ that becomes their chief focus in life. Looking at the situation from this perspective helps the parents see that what their child needs is no different than what everyone needs: to live by faith in Christ and learn how to follow him in obedience, and glorify him even in the brokenness of life (see Philippians 2:12).

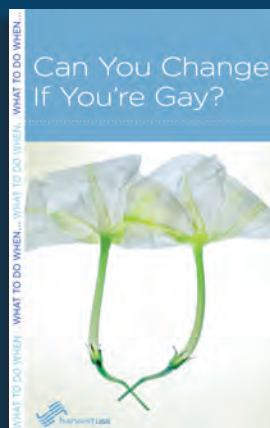
Finally, we can remind them to continue in the assurance and hope of Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This may not be the best passage to give when parents are really hurting at the beginning of all this, but over time this glorious truth will resonate with them. In the midst of our confusion, God is faithful to draw us closer to himself, make us more dependent on him, humble us in our need for grace, and strengthen us in our faith that he does care for our families. When we embrace

this reality we have eyes to see that God works his redemptive purposes most powerfully in the midst of brokenness and suffering. Waiting on God and praying for a child is no guarantee that God will cause him to turn away from a gay identity, but it does guarantee the cultivation and deepening of patience, faith, and love in the parents' hearts and lives—and isn't that how God reaches the world, displaying his love through the transformed lives of his people?

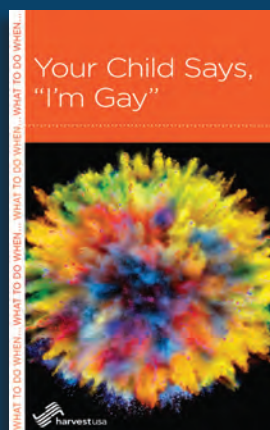
If you want to comment on this article, you will find it on our blog at harvestusa.org. If you want to connect with Chris, you can reach him at chris@harvestusa.org.

For a deeper examination of these issues, a few of our popular mini books (listed on these pages) give further insightful and practical help for parents, pastors, church leaders and friends.

MINI BOOKS THAT SAY MORE ON THIS ISSUE



No subject is more misunderstood than this contentious issue, and this mini book provides a new, fresh way to look at this question.



This mini book probes deeper into how parents can relate to, speak with, and engage their child after coming out. A valuable resource for parents and youth groups!

To get these resources for you or your church, go to www.harvest-usa-store.com

FINDING SUPPORT

One family talks about HARVEST USA's Parent Support Group

We were directed to the ministry of HARVEST USA from a counselor shortly after finding out about our child's struggle with same-sex attraction. Like many parents hearing such news for the first time, we were confused and shocked. We felt like our lives had been turned upside down. We didn't know where we should turn for help or what we should do.

What do we "get and give" while being a member of this group?

We learn a great deal, about God, about ourselves, and about what our children are going through. It was so hard at first to comprehend that one of our children could be struggling with their sexuality. We wished that our child's sexual identity could change with counseling or reasoning from God's word. We came to understand that simple or easy changes were not going to happen, but in the fellowship of the group we are reminded that God is sovereign over us and our child, that he is in control, and that our world is not collapsing around us. God is our deep comfort, and one way he does this is through our brothers and sisters in the group.

We feel connected, no longer alone. We are able to talk with other parents as well as get God's perspective as we look into his word. To be hurting in isolation is so painful. To have other brothers and sisters in Christ come alongside and share their stories and experiences with their own children gave us hope and strength during a difficult time.

We feel safe. The group is a safe place to cry, to be able to release our feelings and not feel like we're the only ones dealing with such feelings.

We pray and are prayed for. It feels good to know that others are praying for us and our child, and that we could pray for them too. Praying for others in the group and coming alongside them helps us to get our attention

off of our own child and to engage with others who need prayer and support too. In the entire group experience, but especially during prayer, we come to live out what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

We learn how to love with Christ's love. The staff at HARVEST USA has helped us see how God wants us to respond to our children, and how we should engage the culture on this issue with compassion and truth. We've gained new insight into how to demonstrate God's grace and love to our children.



We... are reminded that
God is sovereign over us and
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is not collapsing around us

We are changed. God has used this group to change us as parents. Scripture teaches us that God uses everything that happens to a believer for his or her good. Our struggle with our child's same-sex attraction has deepened our love for our children, and has made us more sensitive to this issue that is so much a part of our culture today. We have learned that we all struggle with sin and that sin originates from idols that we hold dear to us. Homosexuality is no different from any other sin; it originates in our hearts. Understanding the frailties of our own heart and also our child's heart helps us to respond to our children and our culture as Christ would.

We find God to be a deep refuge. The Parent Support Group at HARVEST USA is a refuge, a conduit of God's grace in a culture struggling to understand and deal with sexual identity as God intended it to be. As it says in Nahum 1:7: "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; He cares for those who trust in him."

To find out how our Parent Support Groups can get started in your church, or if you want to consider joining ours in Philly, contact Chris Torchia at chris@harvestusa.org. For more support for parents and churches, contact Brooke Delaney at brooke@harvestusa.org to find out how your church can host our Shattered Dreams/New Hope one-day seminar.

ON THE ROAD: DIFFICULT QUESTIONS THAT NEED GOOD ANSWERS

Dan Wilson on speaking to
RUF student interns in Atlanta

"I know in my head what Scripture says about homosexuality, but in my heart I sometimes struggle with that because I see students who are quite happy being gay. How do I reconcile that?"

At the end of talking to 140 ministry interns, that's the question someone asked me. It was June, in hot Atlanta, where the Student Outreach of HARVEST USA spoke to Reformed University Fellowship interns about how to help college students with sexual struggles. They all participated in RUF ministry while they were students, and were now working with RUF as graduate interns. Ahead of them was a ministry with a student population in the thousands. This kind of question typifies the ones these interns will need to know how to answer.

The struggle this intern had is the same that many in the church face today, especially among our youth. Our society has normalized same-sex relationships, and it's becoming easier to accept it and go with the flow. The biblical position on sexuality is now the one that looks out of place. RUF is a solid, evangelical student ministry organization, and yet as we travel to speak to lots of student ministers we are not surprised at how they are wrestling with the impact of today's swiftly-changing sexual mores. Their struggle shows how much they care about trying to connect the power of the gospel to the lives of those who are embracing our post-Christian culture.

The entire day was designed to address big questions like the one I got. Here's another one: *Why do we, as Christians, struggle with sexuality so much? Aren't Christians supposed to be different?*

Good question. The answer is that sexual struggles and sin don't just happen by themselves; they're connected to something deeper. We must look to the underlying factors that drive our behavior—the hidden motives of the heart. Even Christians struggle with a multitude of idols, good things we want in life that become things we feel

we cannot live without. At some level we begin to believe God cannot meet the desires of our heart, and we turn to find life outside of God. We all need to know our own idols in order to effectively turn from them.

Another question these student interns will face: *How can I help a student who keeps falling into sexual sin?* Here we advised the interns to move towards sexual strugglers with empathy



www.ruf.org

www.HarvestUSA.org

and compassion, in the same way that Jesus moves toward us. Good accountability relationships will be important for the struggler, but ground the relationship in grace and not legalism. Real change is not just about behavior, working hard to live differently; it's finding life in Christ where turning from sin is a response to God's amazing grace to sinners.

Here's the final question the RUF interns must answer today: *What's wrong with sexual behavior that is consensual and doesn't hurt anyone?* This is the post-modern justification for any and all sexual behavior (and is, frankly, what causes the struggle the student intern was talking to me about).



Here we tried to help the interns understand the worldviews that drive this postmodern understanding of sex, where truth is found only in your own personal life experience, and your sexual desires define the core of your identity. In contrast, the Christian worldview is that personal experience is not objective truth, but God's word is, and that word tells us about our broken condition, and of our desperate need for God. God has designed our sexuality for purposes greater than our own appetites, and love, without a moral standard, is too easily twisted into self-centeredness, even when two people want the same thing. Mutual self-centeredness as a core principle is brokenness, not health. But God's love, when lived out in a marriage relationship between a husband and wife, displays a growing other-centered-love that finds life in giving, as Christ demonstrated for us on the cross.

Cooper (my Student Outreach colleague) and I walked away from our time with RUF with a deepened sense of how today's students are bombarded with an anything-goes sexuality that looks appealing, but does not bring about the life God has for his creation. This necessity of our mission to equip churches to proclaim the goodness of Christ and his design for sexuality to emerging generations was only strengthened during our time with them.

Interested in getting Dan and Cooper and the Student Outreach staff to speak to your student leaders or parents? They can do that. Email dan@harvestusa.org.



SHATTERED DREAMS
new hope
A Compassionate and Biblical One-Day Seminar for Parents of Children In or Considering the Gay Life

YOUR CHURCH NEEDS THIS!

HARVEST USA offers a one-day seminar (or a Friday evening/Saturday morning format) to help parents and other family members learn to navigate family relationships when one member of the family comes out. As Chris' article points out, parents, siblings, and grandparents need wise and helpful pastoral and biblical input in this situation.

Email Brooke Delaney at brooke@harvestusa.org to see how to get your church to host this life-encouraging seminar. We recommend that a host church invite and coordinate with other church communities in their area as well. Among a number of churches, you'll find a number of families who need this kind of help!



SHATTERED DREAMS
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www.harvestusa.org

What to Do?

RESPONDING TO AN INVITATION TO A SAME-SEX WEDDING

By R. Nicholas Black and John Freeman

With the legalization of gay marriage, Christians more often find themselves invited to same-sex marriage ceremonies. This poses a dilemma for believers of whether to attend an event that celebrates a life-union that God nowhere approves of in Scripture.

Declining to attend seems like an easy solution. But because it involves friendships or family connections, the matter can be quite complex. The issue is more difficult if the wedding involves a child or other close family member (for additional insights, read our mini book, *Your Gay Child Says "I Do"*).

Reaching a decision will involve careful theological reflection, an understanding of your relationship with the one(s) getting married, and earnest prayer. Here are some things to think about that we hope can help you make a wise decision.

The space for this article is not sufficient to adequately examine the scope of Scripture on this matter, but here are three Scriptural principles that should guide you.

1. Be in the world but not of it. Knowing how to engage with the world is important for Christians. Being set apart from the world (who we are and how our lives reflect who we live for) is demonstrated by our *living in the world*. Loving and investing (time) in our neighbor is the means by which the world comes to know God.

Reaching a decision will involve careful theological reflection, an understanding of your relationship with the one(s) getting married, and earnest prayer.

2. Freedom in Christ. 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, and Romans 14, are key passages where Paul argues for the freedom of the believer to engage with others in society, centered around the contentious issue of that day: eating meat from an idol's temple. For Paul, (Christian) freedom involves examining issues of motivation, concern for the impact on other believers, and the context of the situation (see 1 Cor. 10:23-33 and Romans 14:20-23). Freedom in Christ enables us to think through how our actions affect others.

3. Faith/conscience. Paul's conclusion in Romans 14 is that after examining Scripture, we decide on issues such as

these based on conscience, and that if one remains unsettled, then it is wiser to not participate, because it "is not from faith." Christians can stand on both sides of difficult issues, so the freedom we have in Christ to discern how to live strategically in the world should move us to extend grace to those who decide differently.

After examining Scripture (which must be the basis for all decisions), here are some relationship issues that can guide you in making a decision.

1. What is your current relationship to the person getting married?

Are they a casual co-worker, friend or distant relative, or someone you have a closer relationship with (like a family member)? Has the invitation been given to everyone in your office, department or family? Or, has it been given to you because you have a closer relationship? These factors can help you determine how best to respond. For example, if the person is someone you have a good friendship with, then you are in a position to speak directly to him or her about the issue of attending. If your friend knows you are a Christian, then this becomes another opportunity (or maybe



the first!) to discuss your faith and how that influences your decision.

2. What would you be trying to convey by your attendance?

Some people make the distinction between supporting the person, whom they love and care about, and supporting the event, of which they don't approve. In making this distinction, it can communicate that attendance is not an implicit approval of their marriage. This is a meaningful distinction. We do this constantly in our other relationships, communicating our differences but remaining involved in each other's lives.

This distinction may depend on how vocal you have been about your faith. What kinds of conversations have you had? Do they know you are a Christian? Do they know your views about homosexuality? If so, your presence could actually "stun" them or really mess up the categories they may have about "Christians" like you. Christians, living intentionally by the gospel, can sometimes be confusing to people, causing them to rethink their positions and perhaps see new and bigger realities. That's a good thing.

If you feel that attending would lend weight to your Christian witness, then you might go. Your attendance would be in line with your desire to pursue a relationship because you care for them, and you want to keep the relationship open to have further opportunities to share the gospel with them.

3. What are you concerned about if you decide to attend?

Are you afraid that your attendance would communicate your approval? Or, are you afraid of explaining why you feel you cannot attend? Are you afraid you would not know how to act or how to talk with other guests, most of whom would support the marriage? There can be lots of fear involved in making this decision. Ask the Lord to guide you regarding all these issues. Fear or anxiety about disappointing someone is never a good motivator to make a decision. A better question is this: What response might cause further openness to the gospel?

4. If you decide you cannot attend, could you substitute something else?

If you reach the conclusion that you cannot attend, you might consider an alternative response. For instance, giving a card or gift would still show your care for them and acknowledge that this was an important day for them (it was, but you don't necessarily have to join in on the celebration).

If you are close to the person or couple, but still conclude that you cannot attend, then consider taking them out to lunch or dinner. Of course, this may be an uncomfortable get-together, especially if the person will feel hurt by your absence. But a quick follow-up may go a long way toward bringing understanding and another opportunity for you to share your faith. Another decision some people make is to not attend

the wedding (because of the nature of wedding vows) but to attend the reception (if this is, of course, agreed upon by the wedding couple).

5. Do one or both parties claim to be Christians?

Someone once said, "We shouldn't expect Christian behavior from non-Christian people." If the person or persons getting married are unbelievers, this doesn't mean you have an unhindered green light to attend—but if someone claims to be a Christian and yet is in rebellion to God's design and intention for how his people should live, and is celebrating it and inviting others to join in, then that is another matter.

Many would argue that even if one of the parties is a confessing Christian, attending would be entering into their delusion that the marriage union is fine with God and is sanctioned by him. But some will make the distinction that attending is not the same as approving.

As you can see, these are hard issues! Your decision must come from wrestling with Scripture, be drenched in prayer, and discussed with close friends or family members. But know this: that your wrestling with this is itself evidence of your heart wanting to do the right thing to honor Christ and to open doors for the gospel. Realize that there is no ONE answer to this, but there is one thing you can count on: like Jesus, you'll probably be misunderstood regarding the implications of any choice you make. So, when you make your decision, know that you have made it on the basis of what will honor God, and be at peace on that basis.



WHAT REALLY CHANGES US?

By John Freeman

At HARVEST USA we minister to people who know that their lives just aren't working well. We don't have to labor at convincing those who come here that they're a mess, spiritually and sexually speaking! Men and women come in, so often with their spirits crushed, either from a lifetime of failed attempts to manage their lives and struggles, or that of the person in their family who struggles. The joy in their life has gone out a long time ago.

Yet, I believe—and it's what's kept us ministering here these 30+ years—that Jesus longs to meet us in our despair, in our deepest pits. I'm convinced that only the broken receive the gospel. When that happens, when we are most aware of our deepest need of Christ, is when he often “shows up.”

People many times have asked us to tell them the one “key” thing we do to help others. There's no secret. God brings people to the end of themselves, and then into our office. For those who get serious about their situation, it's always a work of the Holy Spirit. It's here that they “sit with it” (everything that brought them here: the entire mess of their hearts and lives), and talk it through, with our staff, those in their support groups, and particularly the Lord himself. For however long it takes.

It's in the setting of a caring, confidential, Christ-centered, supportive environment that God begins a process of growth and healing. It's also the place where the love of Christ begins to capture hearts and where the other loves (the idols that capture our hearts) begin to dull in comparison!

What I'm talking about here is the unconditional acceptance of a community that doesn't hold back, but that speaks encouraging, life-giving, but that speaks encouraging, life-giving, and at times hard and serious words. Of course, the local church is God's ordained place that this can and should take place (and our mission is to see that churches establish these groups, so email me and I'll show you how it can be done!).

If you were to ask me what central thing most indicates that a person's life is beginning to change, I would say it's the presence of a renewed sense of joy. For the sexual struggler that often comes as a surprise. It doesn't, however, appear

suddenly without context. It's not even just the result of getting a handle on their sexual struggle.

It's the result of something else; it's a by-product of something greater.

Tim Keller said, in a sermon on Galatians, “When we obey God, out of a grateful joy, that comes from a deep awareness of our status as children of God . . . then the idols that control our lives can be disempowered and we're free to live for Christ.” This is an amazing statement in two ways.

First, it demonstrates that true obedience comes out of an awareness of joy-filled gratitude. But about what?

Our deep awareness of our status! He is talking here about our **union** with Christ. Our positional and legal status to God has changed because Jesus lived the totally obedient life we can't ever live, and he paid the price for our sin with his own blood. We are now part of a new reality where

everything about us is changed—who we are presently and even, especially, our future. In being united with Christ in his life and death, our standing and eternity are secure because of what he has accomplished.

Of course, the Holy Spirit initiates, joins and administers this new standing, taking up residence in us, bringing a new vitality to us. This is true even as we learn to struggle against sin. The driving force of any new vigor for Christ is this union between Christ and our souls, which the Holy Spirit both starts and continues.

Second, it's not just our union with Christ, which produces joy, but our ongoing **communion** with Him. Union and communion go hand-in-hand. Our communion with Christ comes out of our faith-driven striving to grow in grace, based on our knowledge of and our union with him. In other words, we want to change because he has loved us and given us the power to change. This energizes us to put off sin and to walk in godliness. It's an ever-looking to Jesus for all things.

Pastor J.C. Ryle, in seeking to describe the relationship between the two said this: “Union is the bud, but communion is the flower. He that has union with Christ does well; but he that enjoys communion with Him does far better... both place a heavenly seed in our hearts, that enable us to draw out of Him every hour.”

May this be so in your life, as you look to him, who first looked at you and mercifully loved you.



John Freeman

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Our Mission is **EXPANDING**

...AND OUR MINISTRY IS GROWING!



Just like other mission organizations, HARVEST USA's financial needs are provided by individuals and churches who want to see a redemptive ministry of gospel truth and mercy in these crucial times of sexual confusion and strife. Over the last year, about 80% of our income has come from individuals like you. That's more than ever before.

What do we do with the gifts that people faithfully give? Here are a few examples:

- Over the last 12 months, we've conducted 147 teaching and training events across the country, equipping thousands of Christians to think and act biblically
- We have eight biblical support groups that meet in our offices, ministering to an average of 110 individuals each month
- We have an expanding network of Partner Ministries in churches across the country, helping more people monthly
- We produce written and electronic resources to answer questions and to equip Christians to understand biblical sexuality and to disciple others in it
- We're working on an exciting new series of video and web-based resources to train many thousands of people we never could have reached before

Our mission is ambitious, and our needs are ambitious. But I think the Lord wants us to do more as we reply to the numerous requests for teaching, equipping and direct ministry that we receive each month.

HARVEST USA's Fiscal Year 2016 budget is \$1.99 million. That's about 24% larger than the previous year's budget--because the need for our specialized ministry is just that great. How can you be a meaningful part of helping us do this gospel work?

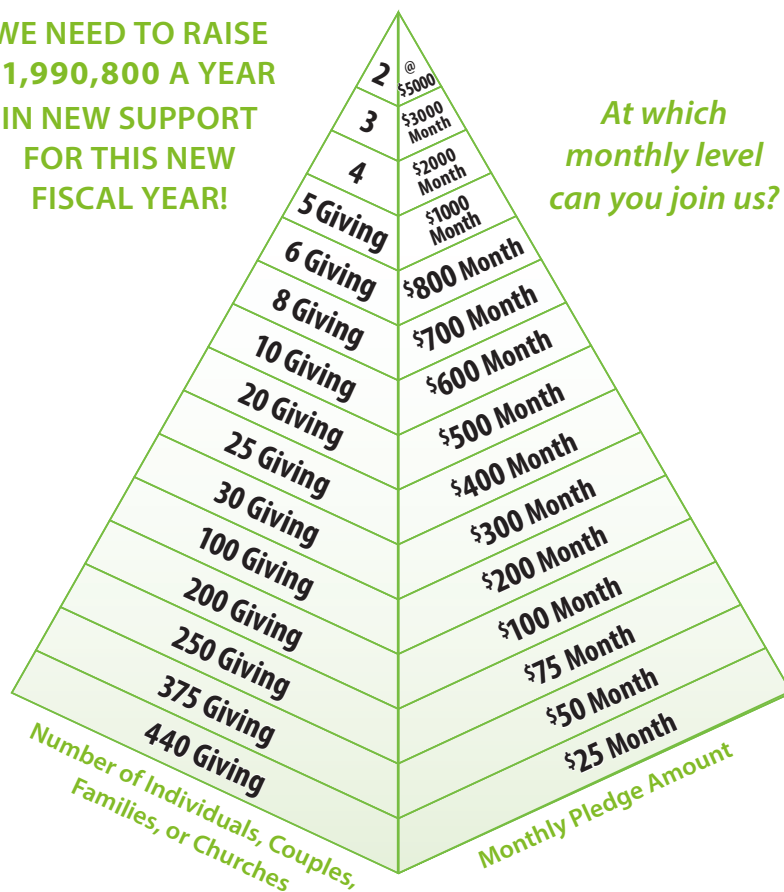
First, PRAY.

Second, GIVE.

You might think your gift might not make a big difference. But it does! Making a commitment to give a certain amount every month, through Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), or by check or credit card, makes a huge difference. A \$25 per month commitment adds up to \$300 per year — and it helps enormously with our cash flow. A \$100 per month commitment is worth \$1,200 per year.

Here's an illustration that shows how giving at monthly levels can fund the growing ministries of HARVEST USA this year:

**WE NEED TO RAISE
\$1,990,800 A YEAR
IN NEW SUPPORT
FOR THIS NEW
FISCAL YEAR!**



Will you prayerfully consider making a pledge of support to help us minister to the thousands of people who will seek our help this year? Visit our website at www.harvestusa.org and click on the "Donate" tab at the top of the page. Or, mail in your gift with a check or credit card, by using the response card and envelope sewn into this magazine.

Your help enables us to broaden our message and to continue helping the church to stand firm as a place of truth, grace, hope, and sexual integrity.

One final thing I want you to consider: the ten largest gay advocacy groups in the country, groups like Human Rights Campaign and Lambda Legal Defense, spent in excess of \$129 million last year. Ashley Madison, the web-based cheating hookup service in the news this summer, grossed \$115 million last year, according to Forbes.com. These organizations are having a decisive impact on the minds and hearts of many in the church.

The ministry of HARVEST USA is having a decisive impact as well. Please help us to be as impactful as possible.

Thank you!

Tim Geiger
Executive Director

THE STUDENT OUTREACH NOW HAS ITS OWN WEBSITE!

THIS WILL BE THE FRONT DOOR TO OUR MINISTRY TO STUDENTS, YOUTH LEADERS AND PARENTS.

Parents, student ministers, and anyone who works with students can find a wealth of vital information that is geared toward educating, equipping and encouraging students to live Christ-centered lives in the area of their sexuality. You'll find:

- ▶ Blogs, updated weekly
- ▶ Videos and curriculum as they become available
- ▶ Information on our seminars and presentations
- ▶ Where our upcoming events will be held
- ▶ And more... so keep checking in!

Our students grow up in a broken world that portrays God's gift of sex and sexuality in damaging ways — ways that wound them as individuals, mar their relationships, and break down the communities in which they live. We want to help you reach them in one of the most critical areas of their life!

Contact us through the website and let us know how we can help you and your church.



www.thestudentoutreach.org



CHRISTMAS IS COMING, AND THE END OF THE YEAR.

Like every other non-profit Christian ministry, we greatly depend on end of year financial support. Our direct ministry work is given freely, at no cost, to those who ask for help.

If the articles in this magazine have encouraged you, would you consider supporting us (especially if you have not done so before)?