

## Pastoral Care and LGBTQ Questions

Dr. J. Alan Branch

What should a pastor do if a church member or attendee indicates he or she is considering an identity somewhere across the LGBTQ spectrum? What if a teenager or young adult says, “Pastor, I think I am homosexual” or “Pastor, I think I am transgender”? Stay calm, remain courteous, and move forward as a concerned pastor. Keep in mind, an LGBTQ identity is not just a *political* issue, it is a *personal* issue for the person with whom you are speaking. There will likely be someone within your church family for whom this temptation is a painful struggle.<sup>1</sup> I am not a therapist nor do I intend to present myself as one. My goal here is to develop pastoral adroitness and sensitivity which can guide my fellow preachers to stand for God’s word while trying very hard to help an individual considering an identity somewhere across the LGBTQ spectrum. I’ve included some questions pastors may consider asking in such cases. Remember, I am suggesting these questions for use by pastors intent on providing Christian guidance and not for professionals in a clinical setting.

### 1. The person talking to you has already been told by the culture to expect the pastor to respond with hate.

The person who approaches a pastor with questions regarding an LGBTQ identity has already heard from various people, whether friends or social media influencers, to expect a negative and hateful reaction from a Christian pastor. Of the many glories of Jesus Christ, one of the most amazing was His ability to speak clearly to matters of sin and yet the very sinners he was addressing often wanted to be around Him. Mark 2:15 – 17 says:

And it happened that [Jesus] was reclining *at the table* in [Levi’s] house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (Epsom, Surrey, England: The Good Book Company, 2015), 68.

and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?” And hearing *this*, Jesus said to them, “*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

The publicans like Levi were outcasts and the word “sinners” is an overarching term referring to people of ill repute who had not followed God’s law, people guilty of moral offense.<sup>2</sup> These were the type of company which no respectable religious teacher in Jesus’ day would keep.<sup>3</sup> Yet these outcasts and sinners wanted to be around Jesus. Why? Certainly not because he didn’t confront sin nor because He lowered God’s standard. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus raised the standard of morality, he didn’t lower it. I think sinners wanted to be with Jesus because he met them where they were at in their journey of life and told them of God’s power to forgive and change along with their responsibility to repent and believe.

Movies and television programs consistently portray pastors negatively and LGBTQ social media influencers reinforce the principle that pastors are evil. Because of these influences, the person talking to you may already have the conversation with you scripted in his or her mind. The imaginary script goes something like this: The person considering an LGBTQ identity is enlightened and loving while the pastor is far more like the Pharisees, a legalistic and vindictive person animated by hate and motivated by power. In their mind, the pastor responds by spewing out Bible verses and yelling at the person while the LGBTQ individual uses science, compassion, and cool, calm logic to reveal the hatred and insecurity simmering just below the surface of the pastor’s life. Pastor, your

---

<sup>2</sup> Summarizing here from Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1 – 8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34 a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 101 – 102,

<sup>3</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 133.

job is *not to let the conversation or relationship go according to Hollywood's script – get the conversation off script*. How do you do that? Talk about Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection. Also, be willing to risk your reputation by being known as a pastor who will talk to people considering an LGBTQ identity. If you don't talk to them, *the world most certainly will and the world will not tell them about Jesus, faith, and repentance*.

## 2. Ask open-ended questions and let the person talk.

A good pattern of pastoral care is to ask open-ended questions to discover what the person is thinking, and this is especially important when the issue at hand is an LGBTQ identity. Here are some possible questions you may consider using:

“Tell me, why do you think you are [insert the particular LGBTQ identity here]?”

“When you say, “I am homosexual / gay / transsexual / transgender, tell me what you mean by that term?” The category of descriptive terms for LGBTQ identities is quite broad in our current culture, so it is vital to understand what someone means by the terms he or she is using.

“How long have you believed you are homosexual / transgender? When did this thought first occur to you?”

“How has your experience in life been in the recent months as you are considering these matters?”

“Beyond the Bible, what sources have you examined concerning this issue? Can you tell me what social media influencers you have found interesting?”

“What do you understand the Bible to say about this temptation?”

“With whom have you shared your belief that you are homosexual / transgender? If you have shared this with other people, how did they respond?”

If the relationship is appropriate and there is sufficient trust, a pastor might ask, “I realize we are discussing something very personal to you and I want you to feel free to decline any questions, but so I might know how to encourage you, may I ask a personal question? Have you actually engaged in LGBTQ acts or have you only been tempted?” If the person acknowledges homosexual behavior, a possible follow-on question might be (depending on the nature your pastoral relationship), “How often have you engaged in homosexual behavior? Rarely, every now and then, or frequently?” The goal here is not to be nosy or to indulge prurient interests, but to get situational awareness about the degree to which the person has embraced an LGBTQ identity.

Frank conversations with a pastor regarding LGBTQ identities indicate the person trusts you as a pastor. It is terribly important not to violate that trust, so some follow on questions might include:

Thank you for your openness. What are you hoping from me as your pastor?

What do you understand the Bible to say about temptation and how Christians overcome temptation?

Some temptations are much stronger than others. Is your desire to follow God’s word regardless of the strength of the temptation?

How do you think this congregation will respond to you if you admit you are being tempted somewhere across the LGBTQ spectrum?

Context, the age of the person you are addressing, and the leading of the Holy Spirit should guide which of these questions, if any, a pastor will ask

in any given situation. The answers to these questions can help the pastor gauge the degree to which an individual is considering an identity on the LGBTQ spectrum. A plan for pastoral care can then emerge after you have better situational awareness.

### 3. Don't treat the person talking to you like a political activist.

Don't treat the person approaching you with questions about an LGBTQ identity as a political activist. This is unusually important if a teenager or young adult admits to you that he or she experiences same-sex attraction. Do not respond to the person as if they are a gay activist marching in the local pride parade. We sometimes wrongly assume someone approaching us about LGBTQ matters has adopted the entire worldview of sexually libertine activists. That a church member trusts you enough to share with you his or her struggle regarding same-sex attraction is a good sign, indicating the person believes you are a trustworthy pastor who perhaps can be of help. Don't abuse this trust by yelling or immediately assuming the person wants to enter into a gay marriage. If time reveals such things, there is an appropriate moment for a Godly rebuke, but be patient. The individual is probably terrified when speaking with you. Remember, *don't let the relationship go according to the script the world has told them to expect.*

### 4. Don't just talk about LGBTQ identities.

As you develop a pastoral relationship with someone considering an LGBTQ identity, talk about more than LGBTQ issues. Talk about the cross, Christ's substitutionary atonement, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His imminent return. This will place all of your counsel within the broader Christian narrative and worldview. While pastors should strive to create an environment where church members feel safe discussing trials and temptations, we should also see to it that someone's major temptation is not the only thing we ever address with the person. This is especially true for people experiencing same-sex attraction or transgender ideation. We

can become so mono-focused on this issue that we overlook matters important to all Christians such as practicing spiritual disciplines and being involved in Christian service. Sam Allberry suggests:

[Christians experiencing same-sex attraction] may need to be asked about how things are going from time to time, but to make this the main or only thing you talk about with them can be problematic. It may reinforce the false idea that this [same-sex attraction] is who they really are, and it may actually overlook other issues they may need to talk about more. *Sexuality may not be their greatest battle.*<sup>4</sup>

This is very good advice. The person to whom we are speaking is more than the sum of the various temptation he or she has faced.

#### 5. Share the Gospel Message Early in the Relationship

Share the Gospel message early in the relationship. Explain how someone is saved by trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Let the person know very early in the relationship that if he or she is not a Christian, your hope is for them to believe on Jesus for salvation. Use your preferred witnessing method, whether that be the Roman's Road, The Bridge to Life, or a Gospel outline you have memorized. Share it from your heart and let the person know your goal as a pastor is for people to be saved. After sharing the Gospel, you might say, "There are many other things I believe, but everything I believe flows from the message I have just shared with you about how Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave. We are born again when we trust Him by faith and repent of our sins."

#### 6. Be Honest.

Always be honest and forthright about what the Bible says regarding sexual ethics. You will not help anyone by pretending the Bible doesn't teach sexual purity or by sidestepping the fact that Scripture clearly affirms

---

<sup>4</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 69.

heterosexual and monogamous marriage as the appropriate context for sex. Nor will we be helpful if we make vague comments about the gender binary. Look the person in the eye, affirm your compassion for them, and tell the truth. Remember, the ninth commandment commands us, "Do not bear false witness." Proverbs 12:19 adds, "Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment." In the context of ministering in this generation, pastors must remember that *truthful lips will be established forever*. If we share the truth compassionately and calmly, the person to whom we are speaking may not like what we say and may not agree with what we say, but they will remember that we were forthright and frank about Scriptural teaching. This will prevent surprises and false expectations in the future.

If the person responds in anger, then the pastor must not reciprocate with anger. We never have the liberty to be unkind. A better approach might be to ask something like this, "I realize what I have said is not what you are wanting to hear right now. Is there any point where you can see that I am saying these things out of principled, substantive conviction about what God says and what I believe is best for people and I am not merely acting of ignorance, hatred and intolerance?"

## 7. Stand on the Word of God.

I want to urge my fellow preachers to stand on the Word of God regarding LGBTQ issues. Scripture is clear: God's standard is for Christ-followers to embrace the gender binary and that sex is designed by God to be limited to heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Other pastors may compromise and other pastors may change, but let it be said of us that we stood on the Word of God. Share it compassionately and ask God to give you a love for lost people and backslidden Christians. *If anyone leaves our churches because we teach what the Bible says, may it be that the last thing they saw as they left was a weeping preacher with a Bible in his hand trying to point the person to Jesus.*

The Great Commission entails reaching people who have become convinced LGBTQ identities are the preferred course of action. In our modern context, Christians feel restrained from talking about faith in Jesus Christ to LGBTQ people because of the ubiquitous message that such identities are normal and good, a message reinforced on college campuses and in corporate settings. To suggest a person repent of an LGBTQ identity is said to be the height of intolerance and a backwards stance associated with the dark ages. But we cannot allow the world's confusion to keep us from speaking with Biblical clarity. We are called to share our faith in Jesus with all people, including the LGBTQ community. The *Baptist Faith and Message* says, "It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others."<sup>5</sup> If we are saved, we will have a love for others and want LGBTQ people to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Pastors who model frankness about their biblical stance tempered with love for hurting people can have greater influence than we can imagine.

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, "Article XI: Evangelism and Missions."