

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(February 15, 2015)

Building Faith at Home Series, Part Three

Jeff Harrison

Relating Well

Luke 6, 10, and 15; 1 Corinthians 15

Introduction:

A. Brief review of last week's sermon

We're continuing our Building Faith at Home series this morning, and the sermon will discuss homosexuality. Parents, if you'd prefer to take your younger children to Sunday School at this time, our volunteers would love to serve your kids. Now building faith at home is one of our church's core values. God's Word makes it clear that home is an important place of spiritual growth. And we want all of our homes to engage well with our culture. And that includes relating well with our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, and questioning neighbors, co-workers, students, friends, and family, as well as training younger generations to do the same.

Now Pastor Dave did a great job starting our conversation on homosexuality last Sunday. If you missed the message, check it out on our website, nwchurch.org. Dave showed us from Scripture that sexual intimacy is a gift that God designed only to take place between a man and woman in a monogamous marriage. That means premarital sex, adultery, same-sex sexual expression, and anything lustful are all wrong and will not lead to flourishing. Dave also showed us that we are all polluted by sin and desperately need the forgiveness and life found in Jesus.

B. How should we relate with people who are same sex attracted?

Now this morning we will consider the question, how should we relate with people who are same sex attracted? Now I know this topic can bring up all sorts of uncomfortable feelings, both for you and the preacher. After all, it is a challenging, controversial subject that greatly impacts us and those we know and love. Now I do not consider myself an expert in the subject. But I pray that we will invite God to help us embrace His life-giving truth and love.

C. Video clip of Debrah

Now before we look to the Scriptures, I'd like for you to hear from Debrah Goodman, a precious image-bearer of God who defines herself as a proud lesbian. The clip comes from the documentary *Compelling Love*, which we will show tonight at 5 in the worship center. I hope you'll join us tonight as we think about connecting in a loving way with everyone whose sexual practices are contrary to Scripture. Please show the clip ([8:16 – 10:16](#)).

I. Love in light of the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-5; Luke 10:25-37, 6:41-42)

A. Gospel explanation

So, how should we relate with people like Debrah? First, we should love in light of the gospel. Now to love in light of the gospel, we need to understand the gospel. So if you've got a Bible, please turn with me to the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. 1 Corinthians 15. Please follow along with me as I read, starting in verse 1.

“¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.”

These verses show that the gospel is an invitation to trust in the incredible news that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. The Bible tells us that because of our ancestor's rebellion, and ours, we changed God's perfect creation into a broken world, and made ourselves His enemies. Now God could have left us in a hellish judgment. But with great love our Heavenly Father instead sent His precious Son Jesus on a rescue mission for us.

Jesus lived the perfect life we should have lived, took the horrific punishment for all our sins on the cross, and then rose from the dead. And now Jesus invites us to come to Him in faith. And as verse 2 says, when you believe this gospel, you are saved. The Scriptures tell us that salvation includes being forgiven of every sin, being restored in relationship with God, receiving God's Spirit and people to help you love and serve God, and being given an indescribably wonderful eternity with God and His people. Praise God for the good news of the gospel and for how it can help us to relate well with all who experience same sex attraction.

B. Relate with humility

First, the gospel helps us relate with humility. For the gospel shows us that we are all in need of God's grace. Imagine if we played a video with all of my worst thoughts and actions, and yours. None of us would come off looking good, especially in comparison to God's perfect standard of holiness.

Yet despite our many shortcomings, we are tempted, whether Christian or not, to think we are better than some. It can be based on your beliefs, your actions, a group you are part of, your finances, your sexual orientation, or other things. Thankfully, God has given us a resource

to reject this pride. If you are a Christian and straight, there is no room to act or think as if you are better than anyone. For the gospel shows that we are so messed up in our sin that only the death of God's Son could solve our problem. As one of my seminary professors, Dr. Gary Barnes, says, "You've never met someone more in need of God's grace than you were and are." Let me personalize it. "I've never met someone more in need of God's grace than I was and am." And when we enjoy God's grace towards us, it frees us to humbly relate to everyone.

C. Never mistreat others

Now the second way we can love in light of the gospel is to never mistreat others. Every person who is same sex attracted is sacred, made in God's image, and important enough for Jesus to die for them. And if you or I mistreat anyone who is same sex attracted, we defame the very image of God and fail to follow in our Master's footsteps.

Authentic, biblical Christianity does not make gay jokes, bully the same sex attracted, or remain silent when others bully. Authentic biblical Christianity does not gossip about the same sex attracted or paint LGBT activists in the worst possible light. It does not callously think that it serves him right that he got AIDS. It does not assume that someone must have had a bad father or been abused if they have same sex attractions. It does not deal in an uncharitable way with Christians who face same sex attractions. It does not blame all of society's problems on the relatively small LGBT population while minimizing the failures of heterosexuals and the church. However, authentic, biblical Christianity does apologize and repent of sin. So if you are a person who has same sex attractions and have been mistreated by Christians, please accept an apology from this pastor, a flawed man from a flawed church.

D. Seek everyone's good

Now loving in light of the gospel does not mean we merely avoid evil. It means we seek everyone's good, including those we disagree with, like Jesus did. Please turn with me now to the gospel of Luke, chapter 10; Luke chapter 10. Here Jesus agrees with an expert in the law who says he is called to love God and love his neighbor as himself. But this expert, wanting to justify himself, then asks Jesus "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with the story of the Good Samaritan. A Jewish man is beaten and robbed, and both a priest and a Levite pass by and do not help. Next a Samaritan comes by. Now the Samaritans and Jews were very different and did not get along. Let's pick up the story in verse 33.

³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he

put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Now Jesus did not only tell stories about serving those different from you, He sacrificed His very life on behalf of us all. And Jesus calls His followers to be a community of Good Samaritans. A community that takes advantage of every opportunity to bless and serve and pray for those around us who experience same sex attractions. And if a person shares about their same sex attraction with you, I’d like to think a Good Samaritan would give them ample room to share their story, thank them for entrusting it with you, and be an even better friend after they shared. For every single person with same sex attractions matters deeply to God, and should matter deeply to us too.

E. Seek to live a godly sexual life

Now the next way we can love in light of the gospel is to seek to live a godly sexual life. Please turn with me back to Luke chapter 6; Luke chapter 6. Please follow along with me as I read the words of Jesus, starting in verse 41.

⁴¹ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Jesus warns us here of the danger of hypocrisy. We don’t want to encourage people with same sex attractions to remove the speck of sexual sin from their eyes while we have a plank of sexual sin in ours. And we don’t want to be the kind of church that makes a big deal about homosexual sins while minimizing heterosexual sins. Now I am not suggesting we have to be perfect before we encourage others towards holiness. If that was the case I would never preach or encourage again. Thankfully, God’s grace includes the use of very imperfect people.

However, we want to make sure we seek to live godly sexual lives so we are a credible witness. In a sex saturated culture like ours, let’s be sensitive to the fact that we are inviting the same sex attracted to a costly form of obedience in Jesus. And how are they going to receive that

challenging call if we are looking at porn, sleeping with our boyfriends or girlfriends, and failing to take our marriage vows seriously? How are they going to receive that call if they do not see us modeling costly obedience for Jesus somewhere in our lives? Our lives tell an important story. Let's tell the story that following Jesus is wonderful and worth it.

F. Live as God's family

Now another way we can love in light of the gospel is to live as God's family. Jesus died so that we could be brothers and sisters, fellow children of our Heavenly Father. And Jesus notes that everyone will know that we are His disciples if we love one another.

Yet in our individualistic, busy, consumer oriented society, it is easy to stop living as if we Christians are family. Our relationships can become shallow. And if we stop really living as the family of God, it makes harder for our singles, regardless of orientation, to live chastely for Jesus. Pastor Corey Widmer captures this reality well, saying,

“I believe one of the most serious callings of the church in our age is to create new, countercultural plausibility structures that make the demands of the gospel plausible, practical, and attractive. If a gay friend is going to embrace a life of chastity for Jesus Christ, she must be able to look into the future and see not only the loss and pain but also the possibility that a real fulfilling life can be lived... For this change to happen churches have to be actual communities, not just buildings people enter once a week. Jesus calls individuals into a new family that lives out the joys and demands of the gospel together, bearing burdens and cheering one another along the Calvary road. Jesus even promises that those who take up the hard demands of following him will be given a new community to support the consequences of the losses they endure: Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life. ([Luke 18:29–30](#)). Christ's consolation to those who follow him isn't new religious activity; it's a new family.”¹

Now I praise God that I have seen single people within this church enjoy deep friendships with other singles and be invited into the life of families within this church as they eat together, support one another, and celebrate holidays together. But there is room for us to excel more and to help the same sex attracted among us to really experience God's family.

¹ Quote from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/traditional-sexuality-radical-community>. Accessed 2/12/15.

Julie Rodgers is a Christian who is same sex attracted and lives a celibate life to honor her Savior. I watched a video this week where she expressed how much encouragement she received from the multiple Christian families telling her, “You know what Julie, if you ever reach a point where you’re feeling like your needs for intimacy are not being met, you’ve got a room in our home forever. You can be Aunt Julie to our kids and share life with us.”

Now whether or not you could make that kind of offer, Julie invites us to find ways to share everyday intimacy with the celibate people in our midst. For it can be a gift to everybody involved when God’s family starts acting like we are really family.²

II. Share gospel truth in love (Luke 15:11-32)

A. Sharing God’s truth is loving

So far we have considered what it means to love people in light of the gospel. Praise God that He lavished love on us so we can love our LGBT friends. And love is a great place to start, for it is at the heart of what life is about. Further, our culture often puts forth the uncharitable idea that you automatically harm LGBT people if you do not agree with their views on same sex relationships. Because of our cultural climate and the sins of the church, I can understand why a person who is same sex attracted might not be ready to consider God’s Word until you have genuinely shown them love.

Yet there is still a time and a place to share gospel truth. John Stott, in his commentary on the book of Ephesians notes that, “Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself ‘the spirit of truth,’ and his first fruit is ‘love.’”³

Theologian Richard Mouw tries to paint a picture of what this looks like in our culture by using the term “convicted civility”. That we should always be very civil with those we disagree with, while holding on to and expressing our convictions. For like our master Jesus, we are to embody grace and truth. And it is important to realize that it is never loving to call something good that Jesus says is wrong. It is never compassionate to deny God’s Word. For a Savior who loves us enough to die for us loves us enough to give us good commands. Everything Jesus calls

² Story from <http://www.faithit.com/christian-woman-present-much-powerful-approach-homosexuality-pray-gay-away/>. Accessed 2/12/15.

³ Quote found at <http://www.challies.com/quotes/unity-and-maturity>. Accessed 2/13/15.

us to is not easy, but it is all for the flourishing of ourselves and those around us. And when we disregard God's commands, we miss out on God's best and harm results.

GLMA is the world's largest association of LGBT healthcare professionals. Their mission is to ensure equity in healthcare for LGBT individuals and healthcare providers. Now I read a heartbreaking article on their website this week. Sadly, it shared that problems with body image are more common among gay men, that gay men are much more likely to experience an eating disorder, that gay men use substances at a higher rate than the general population, that depression and anxiety appear to affect gay men at a higher rate, that gay men have increased rates for one type of cancer, and that STDs occur in sexually active gay men at a high rate, including ones with no cure like HIV, Hepatitis, and HPV.⁴

Now sadly, the harm is not only to our friends who practice a same sex lifestyle. More sociological research needs to be done, but some studies in the U.S. and in countries with great acceptance of LGBT lifestyles have shown that kids of same sex parents have worse outcomes on average. And listen to Katy Faust, who grew up with her lesbian mother and partner.

“When a child is placed in a same-sex-headed household, she will miss out on at least one critical parental relationship and a vital dual-gender influence. The nature of the adults’ union guarantees this. Whether by adoption, divorce, or third-party reproduction, the adults in this scenario satisfy their heart’s desires, while the child bears the most significant cost: missing out on one or more of her biological parents... I am not saying that being same-sex attracted makes one incapable of parenting. My mother was an exceptional parent, and much of what I do well as a mother is a reflection of how she loved and nurtured me. This is about the *missing* parent. Talk to any child with gay parents, especially those old enough to reflect on their experiences. If you ask a child raised by a lesbian couple if they love their two moms, you’ll probably get a resounding “yes!” Ask about their father, and you are in for either painful silence, a confession of gut-wrenching longing, or the recognition that they have a father that they wish they could see more often. The one thing that you will not hear is indifference.”⁵

B. Share complete gospel truth

Now as we share gospel truth, it is important to share the full picture. We have to do much better than merely saying, “Friend, your same sex expression causes harm and should

⁴ Information from <http://www.glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=690>. Accessed 2/12/15.

⁵ Quote found at <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/02/14370/>. Accessed 2/13/15.

stop.” Pastor Sam Allberry is same sex attracted and lives a life of celibacy as He follows Jesus. Allberry makes a very important point when he says, “What the Bible says about homosexuality does not represent everything God wants to say to the homosexual person.”⁶

i. God’s heart is for all types of sinners

So let’s turn to Luke 15, where we will see something vital to share with friends who are same sex attracted. Luke 15. Jesus tells the story of a Father with two sons. His younger son demands his share of the estate, a very shameful act that means he wishes his Father was dead. This younger son then leaves his home and its values, setting off for a distant country and wasting his illegitimate wealth in sinful living. After losing his money and friends, the son hits rock bottom. Filthy and starving, he decides to return home and ask his Father to hire him as a servant. Let’s pick it up in verse 20.

²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Notice here how the Father’s heart is for all types of sinners. He is filled with compassion for those with more obvious struggles, sexual or otherwise, like the younger son. He

⁶ I heard this quote in the audio edition of Allberry’s book *Is God Anti-Gay?*

welcomes him home with great joy and invites him in to celebrate. But notice that the Father is also filled with compassion for the prideful, judgmental older brother. Here at the end of the story we see the Father come out to plead with his older son, inviting him in as well.

You see, God's heart is for all types of sinners, and He lovingly invites all of us in. And it is so important that we share about God's compassionate heart for all of us and that our Father has plenty of love and grace to receive all kinds of sinners that come to Him.

ii. Identity does not have to center on sexuality

Second, you may want to lovingly share that while our sexuality matters, one's identity does not have to center on it. Pastor Sam Allberry believes it makes no more sense to define himself as "gay" because he experiences same sex attraction than it does to define himself as a "carnivore" because he desires meat.⁷ Before our modern culture there has never been a time or place where people have defined themselves by saying, "I am gay" or "I'm lesbian."

And because we are all broken, it is not helpful for any of us to define ourselves based on our sexual desires. They are part of us, but not our defining characteristic. As author Michael Hannon notes, defining yourself based on sexual desires leads to a greater focus on lustful temptations and discourages you from resisting them. Further, it can tempt you to feel entitled to act on your temptations because you think they are core to who you are.

Michael Hannon invites us to imagine your typical married man. He loves his wife and is attracted to her, but he is also sexually attracted to many other women. Imagine if that man made his sexual desires his core identity. Just as some say "I am gay" he could say, "I am a straight polygamist". Or to state it another way, he could think of himself as a "sexually unfaithful". Now if he walks around all day thinking he is a "sexually unfaithful" will that help or harm? As Hannon said, it is not difficult to see someone who defines themselves by their sexual desires begin to dwell more on those desires and give in to them. And it is not hard to imagine that person eventually getting a sense of entitlement around those desires and saying things like, "If you tell me not to act on my natural sexual desires, you are repressing me."⁸

How we label ourselves really does matter. To give another example Dr. Mark Yarhouse invites you to imagine a Christian man who is married and experiences same sex attractions. Imagine the man says, "I'm a gay man stuck in a heterosexual marriage." Imagine instead that

⁷ I heard him make this point in the audio edition of Allberry's book *Is God Anti-Gay?*

⁸ Hannon's article found at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/03/against-heterosexuality>. Accessed 2/13/15.

he says, “I’m a follower of Jesus who deals with same sex attraction and is trying to make my marriage work.” His identity label will make a big difference. And when it comes to followers of Jesus, it is never appropriate for us to make our sexual desires our identity. You are no longer defined by your sin or what tempts you away from God. God’s Word tells us that our identity is in Christ. We belong to Him. And there is no better place to be than where God’s love is most potent, in His Son.

iii. Following Jesus is hard but worth it

Now the third way we can share gospel truth is to affirm that following Jesus is hard, but worth it. The person who follows Jesus and deals with same sex attraction is not unique in having struggles. All of us were born in sin and find ourselves tempted to do things that will harm ourselves and others. We all face the same challenge, to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus, even when we really, really want to do what Jesus calls sin. For the same sex attracted, as well as heterosexual singles, one of the challenging calls of Jesus is to avoid sexual relations and be open to the possibility of a lifetime of celibacy.

Now there are testimonies of men and women who were same sex attracted, and then Jesus helped them change their orientation. And some are even now married with kids. However, there are also many Christians who have prayerfully sought to change their orientation and it has not happened. Is Jesus only telling these Christians to be celibate forever?

Jesus calls them to that, but He also invites His same sex attracted followers to a life and an eternity of blessing. For Jesus lived the most glorious life of all time while single and celibate. Jesus not only legitimized the path of singlehood, He showed that it can be a rich, full life. For our ultimate identity is not found in our marital status or sexual attractions, but in Jesus. And despite what some say, our greatest need is not a fulfilling sexual relationship. As Dave noted last week, we can live without sex, but we cannot flourish without love and intimacy. That is why the Bible tells us that sex in marriage is a good gift, but that sex is a metaphor that points to something far more important, intimacy with Jesus and His people. And that is why is the apostle Paul, also a celibate single, could say in 1 Corinthians that it is actually a higher calling to remain single.

For to live a self-controlled sexual life is not about missing out on the lesser thing of sex. Rather, it is about the freedom to focus on the most important thing, loving and serving Jesus and people. In the words of Pastor Kevin DeYoung, “In the Christian vision of heaven, there is no

marriage in the blessed life to come (Luke 20:34-35). Marital intimacy is but a shadow of a brighter, more glorious reality, the marriage of Jesus Christ to his bride, the church (Rev 19:6-8). If sexual intimacy is nothing up there, how can we make it to be everything down here?”⁹

Following Jesus includes great challenges for all, but Jesus loves to open a path of blessing to everyone willing to lose their life to find life in Him. And for the single who is same sex attracted, there is freedom to pursue a richer, deeper prayer life with Jesus, and freedom to pursue intimate relationships with many brothers and sisters, and freedom to be a unique blessing to the church and a unique witness to the world as you live a counter-cultural life, and freedom to focus wholeheartedly on passing along God’s love as you engage in His glorious mission, and freedom to look forward to perfect intimacy with Jesus and His people for all eternity.

And like all Christians, our brothers and sisters who are same sex attracted need the church to be the church if they are to fully flourish. Listen to how Christian social activist Ron Sider invites us to dream of it, saying, “Imagine the impact if evangelical churches were widely known to be the best place in the world to find love, support, and full affirmation of gifts if one is an openly, unabashedly gay, celibate Christian.”¹⁰

Conclusion:

A. Relating well includes loving in light of the gospel and sharing gospel truth in love

This morning we’ve seen that relating well with people who are same sex attracted includes loving in light of the gospel and sharing gospel truth in love.

B. Keep seeking Jesus

Now as we pursue this high calling, we must keep seeking Jesus. For it is only by His gracious empowerment that we can live this life. Dr. Gary Barnes, notes that Romans 15 tells us to receive others as we have been received by God. So how were you received by Jesus? Well, when you were different from Him, alienated from Him and doing nothing whatsoever to move towards Him, Jesus took the initiative at extreme cost to Himself to move towards you. And as you experience the depth of the grace you have received in Jesus, it frees you to show the same kind of extravagant grace to all who are same sex attracted. Let’s pray...

Dismissal - Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

⁹ Quote from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/02/03/putting-sex-in-perspective/>. Accessed 2/14/15.

¹⁰ Quote from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/november-web-only/ron-sider-tragedy-tradition-and-opportunity-in-homosexualit.html>. Accessed 2/12/15.