

Pastoral Care to Individuals Who Confess to Experiencing Same-Sex Attractions and Practicing Homosexuality

Stephen Mwendia Francis

He holds a Master of Divinity from Africa International University and a Bachelor of Education (Mathematics & Biology) from Kenyatta University.

Email: stevemwendia1@gmail.com

Abstract

Recently, there has been a rise in the discussion surrounding same-sex sexuality. Terms like homosexuality, LGBTQ (an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer), same-sex attractions, and many others are employed. An increasing number of people (both Christians and non-Christians) have come out claiming they are experiencing these attractions. Some advocate for acceptance as “they are,” while others seek help navigating the challenge. Now than before, pastors need to engage in this discussion when preaching or when approached by individual members struggling with same-sex attractions. However, many pastors are ill-equipped to respond to this discussion in biblically true and culturally relevant ways. The result is that many who the pastoral ministry could have helped end up being pushed away from the church. The article examines God’s vision for human sexuality in the Old and the New Testaments and concludes that sexual relations are to be expressed in a marriage relationship that is heterosexual. It also explores the biblical prohibitions on homosexuality and scientific and psychological research. The study argues that the pastor has much to learn from science and psychology, especially how nature and nurture influence peoples’ sexualities in complex ways.

Keywords: Pastoral Care, LGBT+, Homosexuality, same-sex attractions, Sexuality



Introduction

Homosexuality has been an issue of discussion for many years. Scholarly works have been published seeking to determine its prevalence, origin and even its ability to “end.”¹ Others have written on how one can find freedom from homosexuality, detailing stories of countless men and women.² Still, others have recounted how their same-sex attractions have persisted even after being brought up in Christian homes and seeking counselling. Leading them to come to terms with their attractions while still holding the biblical sexual ethic (sexual relations between a man and woman).³ Others take on a revisionary view (which argues that Scripture can also affirm same-sex committed monogamous relationships).⁴ African scholars have produced insightful publications interweaving stories from around the globe and seeking to show that homosexuality is an issue that the African Church cannot ignore and thus needs a biblical and social response.⁵ Still others, like the late Binyavanga in Kenya, have come out in their writings and sought full acceptance.⁶

The issue of how pastors can better respond to this discussion is ever-increasing. On one side, we have a generation of young people who are very open to all types of discussions and even exploration regarding sexuality. The other day, a teenage girl in our church approached me and said, “Pastor Steve, I think I am bisexual, my parents do not know this, and I dread telling them. On the other hand, I cannot stop thinking about this beautiful girl in our class.” On the other hand, adults in church sound unprepared to engage in this conversation meaningfully with their children in case it comes up. Frequently you will hear comments like, “If my child comes and tells me they are gay, I will denounce them as my child. I would rather have a dead child than one who identifies as LGBT+.” Others have said, “If my child ever comes out as gay, I will beat the gay out of them.” These are but a few.

¹ Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (InterVarsity Press, 2009).

² Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel, *Coming out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women*, Text (IVP Books Downers Grove, Illinois, 1993).

³ Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010), 61.

⁴ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (Convergent, 2014), 13.

⁵ Gyang D. Pam and Gyang M. Chuwang, *If Your Father Was a Homosexual!* (Bariga, Lagos: Chipat Graphics, 2012), 30.

⁶ Binyavanga Wainaina, “I Am a Homosexual, Mum,” *Africa is a Country* 19 (2014): 2014.



For this reason, we ask, “How can we offer pastoral care to individuals who confess to same-sex attractions/LGBT+?” This work aims to introduce a way of engagement that empowers pastors to respond to the question above. It will do this by briefly exploring God’s vision for human sexuality. Then briefly discuss the various scripture texts prohibiting homosexual practices. We shall also discuss the state of the LGBT+ discussion today, even as we offer some helpful pastoral responses to some of the issues raised. Finally, this study will equip the pastor to respond to three frequently asked questions: cause, change, and persistence in attractions. The aim of all this is to equip the pastor to minister to the believers in their pews who are seeking to obey God’s will for their lives but are wrestling with same-sex attractions. Also, the pastor can faithfully witness those lost in the LGBT+ community.

God’s Vision for Human Sexuality

The Bible offers us God’s vision for human sexuality. Beginning from creation narratives, we see humanity, both male and female, as being made in God’s image (Gen 1:27). Here, humanity is not differentiated by “its kind” as were the other being (1:20 – 25) but by their sexes, “male and female.” It is only later in the flood narrative when animals are differentiated by their sexes (6:19). Here, we note the differentiation of sexes even at creation, and as we observe in verse 28, it is to enable procreation. Sexuality here, therefore, is a gift of God. As Hamilton observes, it is not an accident of nature or just a biological phenomenon but is part of what God has willed for his image bearers.⁷ Genesis 2 helps us see how the two sexes were to complement each other. Man is said not to have a suitable companion when he is among all other created beings (2:20). God, thus, makes a woman from man’s rib (v20). When presented to the man, he recognises her as being of the same flesh. Then the narrator helps us understand it is because of this that a man “leaves” and “holds fast” to his wife, even though they become one flesh.⁸ Man thus finds a “suitable helper” in a woman, and their union is said to complete the one flesh. This is the basis for heterosexual marriage.

Even after the fall in Genesis 3, heterosexual marriage is not erased rather, the man-woman relationship is affected. The woman’s desire will be for her husband, she will bear

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17*, New international commentary on the Old (William B. Eerdmans Publ, 1964), 138.

⁸ “Therefore a Man Shall Leave His Father and His Mother and Hold Fast to His Wife, and They Shall Become One Flesh.” (Gen 1:24, ESV).



children in pain, and the husband will rule over her (3:16). As a result of the fall, the corruption of the human heart complicates the God-established institution. In the community of Israel, we see adultery, fornication, incest, rape, homosexuality, and bestiality being considered sins and even crimes, hence attracting punishment (Exod 22:15–16, Lev 18:6–22, 20:10). The enjoyment of male-female sexual relation was to be something wonderful with marriage union as its proper context.⁹ Hence, in the Old Testament, opposite-sex marriage is seen to be divinely instituted and intended for God’s people. The prophets used the marriage metaphor to illustrate the relationship between Israel and God. The Lord is pointed with descriptions such as husband (Isa 54:5) and bridegroom (Isa 62:5). While Israel/Judah is seen as married to the Lord (Ezek 16:20–21), also a daughter (Isa. 52:1–5), a queen and bride (Isa 62:3, 5) among others.

In the New Testament, Christ affirms the creation accounts in seeking to understand marriage and sexuality. In the Gospel of Mark 10:2–9 (Cf. Matt. 19:3–11), Jesus restates God’s design for marriage and family.¹⁰ God is said to be the engineer of it all; by his design, he made them male and female. And his will is that one of the sexes (the man) would “leave” to “hold fast” the other (woman). This is then said to lead to “one flesh.” Sam Allberry, in his Book, *Is God-anti-gay?* explains that sexual difference is the reason we have a marriage, and without sexual difference between men and women, then marriage would not exist.¹¹ Thus the concept of marriage is not rooted primarily in “positive motives and traits like faithfulness, commitment, mutual love, and self-sacrifice”¹² but in gender difference. It is a one-flesh union of a male and a female.

Apostle Paul further explains the marriage relationship between the husband and wife as a mirror of Christ’s relationship with the church (Eph 5:22–33). The sex difference, the mutual love, submission and continued sanctification are pointed out as a profound mystery of Christ and the church. As Rachael Gilson summarises, “Paradoxically, marriage is about love but not necessarily about romance. Marriage is a picture. It’s not that romance

⁹ Robert L. Brawley, *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, First edition. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 59.

¹⁰ “But from the Beginning of Creation, ‘God Made Them Male and Female.’ ‘Therefore, a Man Shall Leave His Father and Mother and Hold Fast to His Wife, and the Two Shall Become One Flesh.’ So, They Are No Longer Two but One Flesh’ (10:6–8 ESV),” n.d.

¹¹ Sam Allberry, “Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and Same Sex Attraction.” (n.d.): 11.

¹² Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 20.



necessarily has to be out of the frame. It's just that the love which marriage points to is even richer than that."¹³ Thus, we find male-female marriage as one founded in God from creation, and it is one too that God has intended to point to something greater, a reflection of the union between Christ and the church. This marriage relationship, between a man and a woman, is seen as the proper context for sexual relations (1 Cor 7:1–7). This is God's grand vision of marriage. In this, the Bible rejects all sexual relations outside the marriage covenant between one man and one woman. Thus cohabitation, polygamy, casual sexual encounters, adultery and all homosexual sexual relations fall outside God's design for human relations and attract his judgement.

The Bible and Homosexuality

In the Bible, six scripture references (Gen 19:1–38; Lev 18:22, 20:13; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10; 1 Tim 1:9–10) appear to reference homosexuality or same-sex sexual relations directly. In the narrative of Genesis 19:4, “the men of the city” sought to “know” the men in Lot's house. Now, the verb used here, יָדָע, has different meanings. When used with a person as the direct object, it has a sexual innuendo (Gen 4:1, 4:17, 4:25, 24:16, 38:26; 1 Sam 1:19; Judg 19:22, 19:25; 1 Kgs 1:4).¹⁴ Thus in this scene, the men were seeking for a homosexual sexual relation. Sodom is later destroyed because of this sin, among others (19:13). In both Leviticus 18:20 and 20:13, same sexual relations are prohibited amongst others, like incest (18:9) and bestiality (18:23). The author refers to the act as an “abomination.” It invites a terrible punishment, death (18:23).

In the letters of Paul, specifically in Romans 1, Paul condemns both men having sexual relations with other men and women having sexual relations with other women (vv. 26–27). By him referring to them as ἄρσενες (male) and θήλειαι (female), he is focusing on their gender differentiation.¹⁵ And following the earlier argument, where human beings are seen to “exchange” the creator for creation (v.23), so do both men/males and women/females also exchange their “natural” relations for “unnatural ones” (vv. 26–27). The use of the words

¹³ Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way Coming out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next* (Epsom, United Kingdom: The Good Book Company, 2020), 81, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2683608>.

¹⁴ John H. Walton, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Background Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 93.

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 92.



“according to nature” (παρὰ φύσιν) points to the order which is manifest in God’s creation, the intention of his creation.¹⁶ Here thus, Paul views the acts of same-sex relations as a departure from what God had designed from creation (Gen 1—2), indicating a departure from God’s true knowledge and worship.¹⁷ And in Paul’s situating his argument from creation, we can argue that his prohibition of same-sex sexual relations transcends culture.¹⁸ It is thus applicable to every audience as it was then. For this reason, progressive arguments are false by stating that Apostle Paul’s words here are not to be considered a universal law for Christian ethics because he only has in mind the exploitive excesses of the Romans and that he does not fully understand the concept of sexual orientation.¹⁹

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, men who practise homosexuality (μαλακοί and ἄρσενοκοῖται) are listed among other unrighteous people, including the idolaters, thieves, greedy, drunkards, swindlers, revilers and the sexually immoral. Paul explains that those whose lives are marked by these lifestyles will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–10). Here too, Paul emphasises his prohibition of the act of homosexuality, among other sins. In the letter to Timothy, he lists it among other vices and argues that the moral law is put to repudiate such (1 Tim 1:9–10). In both letters, Paul characterises it as a vice and a barrier to the kingdom of God and against the moral law.²⁰

Thus, looking at all these six scriptures points to the fact that the Bible considers the practice of same-sex sexual relations as a sin. We see that in the Old Testament, the punishment for such was death, showing the seriousness of the act (Lev 20:13). While in the New Testament, those who engage in the same acts miss a place in the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–10). Those devoted to the same should find salvation in God and experience his power even in sanctification (1 Cor 6:11).”

When these Scripture references about homosexuality are viewed in the light of God’s vision of human sexuality, we notice that his “NO” on same-sex sex is offered because he

¹⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: T&T Clark International, 1981), 125.

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New international commentary on the New (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 115.

¹⁸ Preston M. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 86.

¹⁹ Stanley H. Gundry et al., *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Preston M. Sprinkle, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 102.

²⁰ Peter Everard Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality* (London: SPCK, 1980), 101.



has a greater good for humanity in the stewardship of sexuality. Worthwhile pastoral care involves more than presenting verses about God's prohibition of homosexuality. Rather, it entails presenting God's grand vision of human sexuality as in the scriptures without fearing to acknowledge that all sexual relations outside the marriage covenant between a male and female fall short of God's intention. As John Stott observes, these prohibitions only make sense with a wholesome, positive teaching of the Bible regarding both sex and marriage.²¹

Understanding the State of Homosexuality/LGBT Discussions Today and its Pastoral Implications

According to the world population review, by 2021, people identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer were approximately eight percent of the world population.²² So far, there has been no identified research in Kenya regarding the exact number of LGBT+ persons. This can be explained by the fact that the same sexual acts remain illegal according to the Kenyan constitution and is punishable by the law. However, the prevalence of homosexuality in Kenya is a common phenomenon, just as in other countries. This can be attested by the existence of national bodies like the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (galck+) and Bold Network Africa, among other grassroots organisations which seek to advance the rights of LGBT+ individuals. Early 2023, the Kenyan Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the High Court, agreeing that LGBT+ have a right to freedom of association and can also form organisations of any kind.²³

Globally, the discussion around homosexuality has had many shifts since 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) voted to bring out homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Thus, homosexuality was no longer considered a disease or mental disorder.²⁴ This move, especially in the US, enabled the normalisation of homosexuality, laws against Sodomy were repealed, laws were put in to protect the rights of

²¹ John Stott, *Our Social & Sexual Revolution: Major Issues for a New Century*, Text, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 197.

²² "LGBTQ+ Population by Country 2023," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/lgbtq-population-by-country>.

²³ *Win for LGBTQ Community as Supreme Court Clears Way for Gays and Lesbians to Be Registered*, 2023, accessed May 22, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viUWvW_C62g.

²⁴ Jack Drescher, "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality," *Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 4 (December 2015): 565–575.



LGBT people, and many other demands continued to be made.²⁵ There has also been a language shift, leading to a movement towards identity-based language in the description of sexuality. The discussion encompasses terms like “orientation” and “identity.” Hence, when one describes themselves as gay, they are not just talking about their sexual attractions but also their emotional and physical attractions²⁶ leading to the dislike of the term ‘homosexual’ among LGBT+ persons since it is said to carry a baggage of association with mental illness and social stigma.²⁷ It is around these sexual identities that now LGBT+ movements have been formed.

Understanding the above shifts and development is essential for the pastors seeking transformational engagement with the LGBT+ identifying persons. For example, if a youth comes to a pastor and admits they are “gay”, it is wise for the pastor to ask them to explain what they mean. Are they saying that they are sleeping with the same sex? Or that they are simply experiencing attraction towards the same sex? This needs to be clarified,

We may not blame people for what they are, though we may be for what they do. And in every discussion about homosexuality, we must be vigorous in differentiating between this ‘being’ and ‘doing’, that is, between a person’s identity and activity, sexual preference and sexual practise, constitution and conduct.²⁸

The pastor can guide the one trying to sort out their attractions, even though not engaging in them, without demonising them. While to the one actively engaging in their same sexual lusts and sexual activity, the pastor can see how to respond in ways that embody both the truth of God’s word concerning those activities and the compassion of God even upon all sinners. Understanding the development is helpful, too, even as pastors seek to respond to the different discussions in our society, especially regarding LGBT+ rights and associations, or even between sins and crimes.

²⁵ Drescher, “Out of DSM,” 8.

²⁶ “Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality,” <https://www.apa.org>, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>.

²⁷ Mark A. Yarhouse, “Same-Sex Attraction, Homosexual Orientation, and Gay Identity: A Three-Tier Distinction for Counseling and Pastoral Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing theory and professional practice through scholarly and reflective publications* 59, no. 3 (September 2005): 201–211.

²⁸ Stott, *Our Social & Sexual Revolution*, 191.



The Emergence of Progressive Theology

Over time, some churches have shifted to “progressive theology.” This theology states that we should engage the issue of homosexuality as we have done with issues such as slavery and women.²⁹ Where we have had Christians abolishing slavery and even calling the practice of the same sinful, though we see many Old Testament verses upholding it (Lev 25:44; 1 Cor 7:21). One proponent of this theology argues that we can respect the view of biblical writers and why they held those prohibitions about homosexuality, and then go ahead to acknowledge that we have grounds to make changes due to new understandings driven by Jesus’s love. This view calls for the acceptance of homosexual persons living in monogamous same-sex relationships and marriages.³⁰ In support of the same progressive theology, Matthew Vines explains how he is not elevating his experience above Scripture, then argues that “Jesus’s test is simple: If something bears bad fruit, it cannot be a good tree. And if something bears good fruit, it cannot be a bad tree.”³¹ He thus cannot understand why Christians should condemn loving same-sex relationships when all they do is spread love. We should never set aside Scripture for our human experience in responding to progressive theology. As Holmes states

We will sometimes be forced by experience to reexamine our understanding of Scripture and discover that we read it wrong; we always have to read Scripture well, in context, in the light of the whole story of the Bible, through the lens of Christ; we always have to be careful not to invest our own interpretations of Scripture with the authority that only the text itself carries; but we must never set it aside.³²

Thus, context is vital, and if we do not allow Scripture to have its authority, then the progressive argument can mislead. For example, the one who steals to feed the poor can also try to justify that their act is fueled by a desire to do good in the end. However, this way of reasoning will end up making us miss God’s authoritative word for our living, and instead, we will end up with words of our own making which can only lead us to destruction. The pastor needs to be at least aware of these theologies and guide members of his congregation

²⁹ Gundry et al., *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, 54.

³⁰ Ibid., 55.

³¹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 22.

³² Gundry et al., *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, 77.



accordingly. Also, churches that have sought to bless same-sex marriages should be called to the centrality of Scripture and asked to repent.

Pastoral Care on Frequently Asked Questions

This section will address three questions that pastors may encounter as they engage the issue of homosexuality/same-sex attractions/LGBT+. First is the question of cause, second is the question of change, and third is the question of the persistence of same-sex attractions.

(i) Pastoral Care on the Question of Cause

A question that is often asked, and one that pastors wrestle with when offering pastoral care to people experiencing same-sex attraction or are LGBT+, is that of cause. Is it *nature* or *nurture*, they ask? Regarding *nature*, people ask whether homosexual orientation is inborn. On the other hand, *nurture* explains homosexual orientation as being caused by either childhood experiences or environmental factors.

In view of nature, different research on biology has been done to ascertain the hypothesis. Mark Yarhouse lists several of those studies; they include research on twin studies, fraternal birth order and handedness, animal models, genetic scanning, brain symmetry and even neural connections.³³ Of all the above research, none of them is conclusive. For example, on fraternal birth order, the research is done to ascertain whether there is any relationship between sexual orientation and the number of brothers a male has. It flows from the idea that mothers produce extra antibodies to a substance that male fetuses produce. Thus, the more male children a mother has, the more likely the brain will develop in ways that are more typically that of females, which could translate to a homosexual orientation later in life. This has been said to account for a large percentage of those who are homosexual.³⁴ Again, this research has been disputed as biased and such that the samples used are geared towards supporting the particular hypothesis. It is thus inconclusive and can only account for a small number of people, 15% to be specific.³⁵ Some other studies that have been done included one on twins, where research sought to determine the likelihood of one identical twin being homosexual if the other twin is homosexual, or a fraternal twin or even a sibling of a twin being homosexual when the other one is homosexual. The study showed that

³³ Mark A. Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, ed. D. A. Carson, Questions for Restless Minds (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), Page 14

³⁴ Ibid., 66.

³⁵ Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 67.



the likelihood of that happening was higher in identical twins than in fraternal or even in other siblings.³⁶ However, this study has been criticised for gathering their samples of twins from ads placed in pro-gay magazines, which, as we would guess, would make it biased.³⁷ These are, but a few of the studies made. However, when we analyse most of them, we realise they all have their downside. When a pastor is presented with this argument about nature, it is worth considering the argument and seeing if there is any contribution that it can make to our knowledge. For example, maybe this research may show that people who experience same-sex attractions have difficulties understanding the cause of their attraction, and maybe, many may have had little choice in how they came to experience them. However, even in assessing this, the pastor should be clear that our truth about sexuality is not hinged on science. As Preston Sprinkle states it,

Even if all the medical research showed that same-sex desires were biological (which it doesn't), this still wouldn't mean that it's okay to act on those desires. Biblical Christianity has always taught that people are born with a sin nature, which affects our whole being: our intellect, bodies, emotions, and desires.³⁸

Therefore, the pastor can minister to the individuals who come with questions of nature as the reason for homosexuality without brushing it aside but also offer the necessary pushback. The insights from the research can inform the pastor of the difficulty some face in trying to understand their sexuality and can see how to guide them in compassion and the truth of God's word.

Regarding nurture, research has been done on whether childhood experiences such as being raised by an absent, distant, or critical father and an over-involved mother could lead to a male feeling insecure in his maleness, resulting in attraction towards the same sex. In one of these particular studies, one hundred homosexual men and one hundred heterosexual men were told to describe their family relationships. It was found out that fathers of homosexual men were said to be more distant and detached, and others had even rejected their sons.³⁹ The sample has been criticised, though to have been from patients seeking help for their

³⁶ J. Michael Bailey and Richard C. Pillard, "A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48, no. 12 (December 1, 1991): 1089–1096.

³⁷ Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 65.

³⁸ Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 122.

³⁹ Irving Bieber, "Homosexuality—A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuality," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 111, no. 471 (February 1965): 195–196.



homosexuality, and there was no way to confirm what they reported.⁴⁰ Another study was done later, and it showed very little difference in how homosexual men remember their relationship with their fathers compared to heterosexual men.⁴¹ This change could be explained by the change in the culture, especially the Western world, in accepting homosexual people. Other studies have been done on childhood history of sexual abuse. Here it has been noted that there was more likelihood of men who were sexually abused by other men when they were young to report homosexual experiences when they were older.⁴² As much as this could be true, this research does not help to explain the story of many homosexual men who were never sexually abused when they were young. Thus, this study can only account for very few people. Again, we note that nurture does not fully explain the causation of same-sex attractions. It is wise for the pastor, thus, to process the studies with God's wisdom and see if they can attain valuable information which can aid in them offering realistic counsel and care.

When offering pastoral care concerning this question of causation, it is worth it for the pastor first to appreciate that both nature and nurture may play a role in causation in complex ways. However, this does not change our sexual ethics since they are not hinged on either of the two causations. Rather, this understanding should shape our posture, where we realise that whether it's nature or nurture, behind that, is an individual who most probably does not know how they got there. And that God wills that they receive the gospel.

And this is the gospel, that in Adam we all fell (Rom 5:12–21). None of us is as we were meant to be. We are all broken in many ways, both physically and morally. We have internal inclinations and external influences that push us to turn away from God. The individual experiencing same-sex attraction is not more broken than the one experiencing opposite-sex attraction in lust, fornication or adultery. As Wesley Hill states, “My homosexual temptations weren't any more (or less) tragic than temptations to greed, pride, or anger that Christians face on a daily basis.”⁴³ God's son has died to redeem us from our sins, and believing in him,

⁴⁰ Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*, 72.

⁴¹ Katarina Alanko et al., “Psychiatric Symptoms and Same-Sex Sexual Attraction and Behavior in Light of Childhood Gender Atypical Behavior and Parental Relationships,” *Journal of Sex Research* 46, no. 5 (2009): 494–504.

⁴² Helen W. Wilson and Cathy Spatz Widom, “Does Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, or Neglect in Childhood Increase the Likelihood of Same-Sex Sexual Relationships and Cohabitation? A Prospective 30-Year Follow-Up,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39 (2010): 63–74.

⁴³ Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 55.



we receive a new life in him, which is not without sin but a process of learning to say “no” to sin (Titus 2:12).

(ii) Pastoral Care on the Question of Change

The second question that pastors will wrestle with when offering pastoral care to people who experience same-sex attractions or are LGBT+ is that of change. Can a person’s sexual orientation be changed? And if yes, what does change look like? Now, again, popularly, there are two views on the concept of change.

On one side, we have those who are convinced that gay people were “made” by God that way and any attempt for change is destructive. Some claim that healthy living for people who experience same-sex attractions entails pursuing a romantic monogamous sexual experience with a person of the same gender. Matthew Vines, who makes a case for same-sex marriage in his Book. He remarks,

But as my dad came to realise, while gay Christians can choose not to act on their sexual desires, they cannot eradicate their sexual desires altogether. Despite the prayers of countless gay Christians for God to change their sexual orientation, exclusive same-sex attraction persists for nearly all of them.... After much prayer, study, and contemplation, Dad changed his mind.⁴⁴

This view is misleading in many ways. One is that failure to eradicate a particular condition does not make it acceptable. Also, the fact that something is underlying does not mean one cannot control how they respond to it. In Psalm 51, David acknowledges that he was sinful from birth, from when his mother conceived him. Yet, he notes that God desired faithfulness from him (v6). Also, even if something may seem to persist, believers are called to trust God’s word to speak into their experience and not to allow their experience to override God’s word. And as we know, no matter our attractions, God’s word calls us to holiness in him.

The other group includes those who advocate what is popularly known as the “ex-gay narrative.” This narrative explains that if one can find the answers to why they became homosexuals, they would also find answers on how to get out of homosexuality and become heterosexuals.⁴⁵ It is the view held by most Christians and non-Christians, even here in Kenya. Thus, they will call for one to address family baggage, believing they will be healed if

⁴⁴ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 25-27.

⁴⁵ Frank Worthen quoted in Nate Collins and Wesley Hill, *All but Invisible: Exploring Identity Questions at the Intersection of Faith, Gender & Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2017). 273



one does so.⁴⁶ Others recommend deliverance services since some believe it is a case of demon possession.⁴⁷ Others will enroll their children in counselling services, hoping it will completely change them. Still, others recommend one to try opposite-sex sexual relations or even force one into a heterosexual marriage in the hope that this will change them. The goal in all these is to change the one confessing same-sex attractions to a complete change where they are only experiencing opposite-sex attractions.

Now, the ex-gay narrative though quite appealing, has its downside. One is that they operate on what Greg calls an “underdeveloped theology of sin” and a “vastly over-realised eschatology,” which is inconsistent with Scripture or experience.⁴⁸ Concerning the underdeveloped theology of sin, the proponents of the ex-gay narrative fail to understand how deeply rooted indwelling sin is in the human person. No matter how informative they may sound, psychological exercises are not enough to fully address our sinful nature. In addition, opposite-sex attractions are not the final goal for Christians. Since, as we know, heterosexuality is greatly flawed as a result of the fall.

Further, the belief that a particular kind of faith is enough to enable one to get rid of sin in us at once tends to transfer the Christian hope of the coming age to the present age. The gospel will transform us and enable us to eliminate many of our sinful habits. However, the Christian truth remains that we will continue wrestling with some fallenness until Christ returns. Studies conducted in places like the US on ministries that propagated the ex-gay narrative showed the following negatives upon the participants. One was the hope to change to heterosexuality led many to despair when they struggled with their same-sex attractions year by year. Second, other than despair, and developed self-hatred since they had an elusive image of a perfect heterosexual whom they could not attain. Not many years ago, Exodus, the largest Christian ministry promising this kind of change, was closed down.⁴⁹

A pastor faced with a question of change must not be quick to embrace or even advocate a “cannot change” or “ex-gay” narrative. Instead, they need to foster a Gospel vision. That is, first, he should explain how deeply rooted sin is in all of us. Second, for believers,

⁴⁶ Greg Johnson, *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church's Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 63.

⁴⁷ Leanne Payne, *The Broken Image: Restoring Personal Wholeness through Healing Prayer* (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1981), 9.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Still Time to Care*, 134.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 85–110.



temptations will not always go away. As John Calvin said, “So long as you live, sin must be in your members. It must be. There is no cure.” Then he continues, “At least let it be deprived of mastery.”⁵⁰ Third is making it known that God is willing to meet people in their mess and provide salvation even to the unbelieving homosexual. And whether the attractions go away or not, his grace can strengthen one to put to death the misdeeds of the body, even lustful same-sex attractions. This gospel vision for those seeking change is hopeful and sustaining since our goal as human beings is not just a heterosexual functioning but a holiness rooted in God.

(iii) Pastoral Care to Believers who Continue to Struggle with Same-Sex Attractions

Apart from the questions above, one of the realities that pastors will face is when some believers in their congregation confess to struggling with same-sex attraction despite their best efforts to live for God and uphold biblical ethics. First, the pastor must affirm that what the believer is experiencing is a real and normal temptation. The second is to confirm that God sees them deep down, loves them, and wants to be in a relationship with them. The pastor will realise that many such people in their pews are ashamed; they only want to feel appreciated and loved. The third is for the pastor not to try ‘fix them’ through human programs or even judge them but to recommend intense discipleship they would to any other members struggling with sin. Fourth is to allow them to feel safe to struggle in a community of sinners who God loves. This is where we recognise that all of us are in this growth journey, and others are invited in no matter what they are struggling with. And fifth is to seek to support them in their quest to live for God, whether they embrace a life of singlehood or if they desire to be married to a member of the opposite sex, because both will come with their own challenges. In a scenario where the believer rejects biblical sexual ethics and embraces a same-sex sexual relationship, the pastor is to exercise discipline with grace, love, and hope of their redemption.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, n.d., 3.3.13



Conclusion

This study has argued that we cannot ignore the presence of people who confess to experiencing same-sex attractions or identify as LGBTQ in our society and Churches. Since pastors can minister to all kinds of people, the study explores ways of equipping them to reach this community. One is ensuring that the pastor presents a wholesome, positive teaching of the Bible regarding sex and marriage. Both sex and marriage are founded in God and initiated by him, even to point to something greater, the relationship between God and his people, Christ, and the church. All other sexual relations outside of opposite-sex marriage, including fornication, lust, adultery, and homosexuality, fall outside God's will for his people. The pastor also needs to be in touch with the current discussions on homosexuality/LGBT+. The current discussions are not primarily about same-sexual activities but identity, a foundation by which LGBT communities are formed and seek legal rights. Progressive theology, which seeks to revise texts that prohibit homosexuality from accommodating same-sex monogamous marriage, is on the rise, and the pastor needs to warn against upholding experience over Scripture. Lastly, in ministering to those who experience same-sex attractions, the pastor has to wrestle with the question of nature and nurture and appreciate how both may contribute in complex ways to the experience of same-sex orientation. However, they need to point the individual to the fall, where we are all broken but can experience God's redemption, despite our inclinations, either shaped by nature or nurture. Additionally, that same-sex attractions in the life of a believer may go away or not. That the response to this is not to advance a "revisionists affirming theology" or a "destructive ex-gay theology" but instead seek to uphold the tension of the "already but not yet" as found in the Scripture and seek holiness above all things. A

Bibliography

Alanko, Katarina, Pekka Santtila, Katarina Witting, Markus Varjonen, Patrik Jern, Ada Johansson, Bettina von Der Pahlen, and N. Kenneth Sandnabba. "Psychiatric Symptoms and Same-Sex Sexual Attraction and Behavior in Light of Childhood Gender Atypical Behavior and Parental Relationships." *Journal of Sex Research* 46, no. 5 (2009): 494–504.



- Allberry, Sam. “Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction.” (n.d.): 58.
- Bailey, J. Michael, and Richard C. Pillard. “A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation.” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48, no. 12 (December 1, 1991): 1089–1096.
- Bieber, Irving. “Homosexuality—A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuality.” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 111, no. 471 (February 1965): 195–196.
- Brawley, Robert L. *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*. First edition. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, n.d.
- Coleman, Peter Everard. *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality*. London: SPCK, 1980.
- Collins, Nate, and Wesley Hill. *All but Invisible: Exploring Identity Questions at the Intersection of Faith, Gender & Sexuality*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2017.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. London: T&T Clark International, 1981.
- Davies, Bob, and Lori Rentzel. *Coming out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women*. Text. IVP Books Downers Grove, Illinois, 1993.
- Drescher, Jack. “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality.” *Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 4 (December 2015): 565–575.
- Gilson, Rachel. *Born Again This Way Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next*. Epsom, United Kingdom: The Good Book Company, 2020. Accessed April 15, 2022. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2683608>.
- Gundry, Stanley H., William R. G. Loader, Megan K. DeFranza, Wesley Hill, and Stephen R. Holmes. *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*. Edited by Preston M. Sprinkle. Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich.). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016.
- Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010.
- Johnson, Greg. *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church’s Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Reflective, 2021.
- Jones, Stanton L., and Mark A. Yarhouse. *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate*. InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1988.
- Pam, Gyang D., and Gyang M. Chuwang. *If Your Father Was a Homosexual!* Bariga, Lagos: Chipat Graphics, 2012.
- Payne, Leanne. *The Broken Image: Restoring Personal Wholeness through Healing Prayer*. Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1981.



- Sprinkle, Preston M. *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015.
- Stott, John. *Our Social & Sexual Revolution: Major Issues for a New Century*. Text. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999.
- Victor P. Hamilton. *The Book of Genesis 1-17*. New International Commentary on the Old. William B. Eerdmans, 1964.
- Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*. Convergent, 2014.
- Wainaina, Binyavanga. “I Am a Homosexual, Mum.” *Africa is a Country* 19 (2014): 2014.
- Walton, John H., Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton. *The IVP Background Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Wilson, Helen W., and Cathy Spatz Widom. “Does Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, or Neglect in Childhood Increase the Likelihood of Same-Sex Sexual Relationships and Cohabitation? A Prospective 30-Year Follow-Up.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39 (2010): 63–74.
- Yarhouse, Mark A. *Homosexuality and the Christian: [A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends]*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010.
- . *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?* Edited by D. A. Carson. Questions for Restless Minds. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=3150316>.
- . “Same-Sex Attraction, Homosexual Orientation, and Gay Identity: A Three-Tier Distinction for Counseling and Pastoral Care.” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing theory and professional practice through scholarly and reflective publications* 59, no. 3 (September 2005): 201–211.
- “LGBTQ+ Population by Country 2023,” n.d. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/lgbtq-population-by-country>.
- “Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality.” <https://www.apa.org>. Accessed May 22, 2023. <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>.
- Win for LGBTQ Community as Supreme Court Clears Way for Gays and Lesbians to Be Registered, 2023. Accessed May 22, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viUWvW_C62g.

