

Evangelicals and Same-Sex Issues: Some Practical Scenarios For Discussion

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Abstract

A few discussion starters for Evangelicals thinking through same-sex issues. It is unlikely that many of the following cases will be represented in any one church, but any of them could be. The discussion questions are aimed at leaders, but may be of more general application. For simplicity I have omitted examples involving direct family connections, and I've focused on cases involving young people; but feel free to adapt the questions to your needs. (Minor edits, 30 Sept 2014.)

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Contents

Common and general cases	3
Dave – young guy in your church	3
Nick – leader in your church	3
Kim & Jen – same-sex married couple with a family	3
Joe & Ken – next door neighbours	4
Some cases based on real-life stories	4
Susan – a defamed ex-missionary	4
Joan & Kelly – ministry colleague with a lesbian daughter	4
Ian & Sarah, vs. Kevin – experiences of therapy	5
Vicki & Todd – transgender relationship	5

Common and general cases

Dave – young guy in your church

A adolescent in your church, who is clearly nervous about speaking to you, tells you he is “pretty sure” he’s gay. He asks you to promise not to tell anyone, including his parents, believing he will lose his friends, family and church if they find out. A survey shows two-thirds of adults in your church think gay people mainly need to be told to repent of their “lifestyle”, and a third of those also think they pose a serious danger to children. On the other hand, a section of the youth group don’t see why “just being who you are” could be a problem.

- What factors might affect how you proceed? Would this situation be different for a young woman?
- What do you say to Dave, and how much agreement do you expect from the congregation and the leadership about your response?

Nick – leader in your church

A leader in your church is same sex attracted. He has been through many years of counselling, depression and loneliness, has persevered in ministry, at which he excels, and has remained celibate. However, he has experienced no change whatsoever, and sees no hope of changing. What he wants more than anything is love, a life partner and a family, but is not sexually or romantically attracted to women.

- What options does Nick have? Are they the same options Dave has, even though he has not been through the same experience?
- Is it different if he is employed in ministry?
- Would you recommend that he marries a woman in the church who likes him a lot, but whom he believes he could only see as a friend?
- “Nick” is a perfect person by every standard that matters to your congregation. He is absolutely faultless. In what ways would you, or others in your church, see his situation differently if he wasn’t?

Kim & Jen – same-sex married couple with a family

Two young women in your local community were legally married in Canada last year and are raising two children. They are a schoolteacher and a journalist by profession. They grew up in Christian families, have been thinking a lot about God lately, and have begun attending your church on account of a relative in your congregation.

- What series of events would need to occur for Kim & Jen’s family to become members of your church?
- Does your feeling or judgement change if they are a male couple, have no children, or have no Christian background?

- Does your position involves something you see as a concession? Does it create a kind of loophole in which a person just has to leave church, get married, and later return (or join another)? What do you say to Nick and Dave about that?
- At a BBQ at Kim & Jen's house, you are introduced to a dozen of their professional colleagues, who make several incorrect assumptions about your view of Christian scripture and LGBT issues. What is your 30 second summary of your position?

Joe & Ken – next door neighbours

A young same-sex couple (unmarried) have moved in next door. You have been friendly and welcoming, and see them now and then. While speaking one day, they are surprised to discover that you are an Evangelical Christian, and think that you must be only pretending to be friendly. Joe, who went to a Christian school where he was bullied by other students, says to you with visible anger, "Look, normally I wouldn't have this conversation, I'd just let it go. But I really want to know what you think here. Aren't you supposed to believe that we're evil and disgusting? Isn't that what the Bible says?"

- What is your *immediate* response?
- How would your response be different if an unmarried heterosexual couple asked "Aren't you supposed to think we're living in sin?"

Some cases based on real-life stories

Susan – a defamed ex-missionary

Susan is the daughter of an influential family in your rural congregation. She became a missionary to a third-world country, and was involved in church planting there for several years in a Muslim-majority region. She had been same sex attracted all through her teenage years without having told anyone, and finally raised the matter with her supervisors in the mission. They appear to have panicked, forbade her to have any further contact with her churches there, and sent her home. They had a letter distributed throughout their organisation which carried and fuelled speculation and rumour about her, which she fears has endangered her co-workers. She has returned to your church, in spite of family tensions, while she works out what to do with her life.

- What is your immediate concern in this situation?
- Amongst other concerns, it emerges that her family, the missions organisation and some in your church who supported her ministry, are angry about not having been told earlier. How important is this grievance?
- The organisation refuses to acknowledge lying about her, and will not correct their statements when confronted with them. What would it cost you to take the side of a same-sex oriented person who was wronged by a church or ministry?

Joan & Kelly – ministry colleague with a lesbian daughter

You went to Bible College with Joan, and remain good friends. With her husband, she now pastors a church several hours drive away, and seeks your advice about a family matter. She believes her daughter Kelly, now 25, has always

been same-sex oriented; she was not surprised when Kelly came out after moving away to attend university. Kelly is not presently aware of any church that fits her Christian beliefs that would accept or understand her, so only attends her parent's church when home. As soon as it is legal to do so, Kelly wishes to marry her best friend and girlfriend, whose story is similar. Joan knows that nothing would mean more to Kelly than for her parents to perform her wedding.

- What should Joan do?
- How does your feeling or judgement change if her daughter is an outspoken atheist and LGBT activist, who takes every opportunity to condemn the church-in-general's historical mistreatment of LGBT people?
- Both Joan and Kelly have, of course, been thinking through these issues for some years now, and have read widely on the subject. What ways of approaching the theological and pastoral questions would you admire, and which would concern you?

Ian & Sarah, vs. Kevin – experiences of therapy

Ian went through a reparative therapy program which encouraged him to be celibate or heterosexually married. Three years ago he met Sarah, and they are now married, but without children. Ian he says that nothing has changed for him, that his marriage was sincere but misguided, and that he is immensely sorry for his wife. Another man in your church, Kevin, went through the same program as Ian, but he believes that his attraction to men has been “much reduced” as a result, and that he could marry and be happy. He speaks to various groups on this subject, saying everyone experiences some degree of ‘sexual brokenness’.

- A group of people in your church point to Ian and Sarah as a sign that orientation can't really be changed, and that the expectation of change is unrealistic and cruel. How do you reply?
- A group of people in your church point to Kevin as a sign of God's faithfulness and say that Ian has given up on his faith and should be removed from church membership, citing Matt 18. What do you say to this?
- You bring members of both these groups together for dinner. What subjects would you like to see discussed?

Vicki & Todd – transgender relationship

A couple in their late twenties ask to enrol in your church's *Preparing for Marriage* course. They have been members of the church for six months, are very much in love, and you see them both as genuine in their faith. Vicki tells you that she was “designated male at birth”, but never saw herself as male, nor was ever comfortable with being male. She has lived as a woman all her adult life, and no-one in your congregation, except Todd, has been aware of any difference. She began hormone replacement therapy four years ago, and intends to have surgery in the United States next year, then change her legal gender to female and marry Todd.

- Does this affect their involvement in the course?
- Who do you think needs to know about this, and why?
- Would your feeling or judgement change if it were Todd who had transitioned, or if either person were intersex, having been born with both male and female characteristics, or having neither exclusively male nor female chromosomes?