

# SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

## OPENING

Firstly, up front. SSA isn't something I have experienced myself. So this morning, I'm going to try to split the talk evenly between myself and the voices of some Christians who have that experience: we'll be hearing from Tracey, Anne and Peter.

There's so much to say on this topic. That's partly because sex is key part of our makeup as humans, partly because it's such a major topic of conversation in our Western culture, and partly because it's been tackled very insensitively in the past, with damaging consequences, so we want to be careful about our words.

On the other hand, it has sometimes been blown out of all proportion and made out to be "the big question" facing the Church today – which is equally wrong, so we don't want to spend weeks teaching through it.

So there's a number of things that it would be good to teach through today. I can't do them all well, so I've made peace with the fact that we're not going to cover all the ground. I'm going to lay out what I'm going to speak to today, and what I'm not – and there's a wide-open invitation to get in touch with me if you'd like to discuss any of the areas that I'm not going to cover in depth today.

Some of what we could teach on:

- **Homophobia and the Church**
- Key texts around sexuality and homosexuality (**briefly**)
- Should the Church be changing its traditional stance on same-sex relationships?
- Is Scripture a standard against which we measure ourselves, or a platform from which we launch ourselves in new directions?
- Why does God care who I sleep with?
- **Is it fair to ask people to give up their natural desires?**
- **How can I live as a Christian who experiences same-sex attraction?**
- **How can the church witness effectively to people who feel that their sexuality distances them from the church?**

What I'm going to cover are the ones in bold.

## RECAP: GRACE AND TRUTH

John 1 – **We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

- I said more on this last week – do listen. Today, just this: our aim is 100% grace, 100% truth.

## HURTFUL HISTORY – HOMOPHOBIA AND THE CHURCH

- We've got to start here – planks and specks – we need to look to our failings.
- The church and the homosexual community
  - For much of the last 100 years, the church has either been silent or extremely judgmental on the topic of sex, and in particular homosexuality. That's a failure in grace. At the same time, the church remained silent on violence against the gay community when we should have stood up for the oppressed. That's a failure in truth. Understandably, this has led to a fundamental mistrust of the church (and especially the evangelical church) in the LGBT community.
  - We are God's people, united with other believers – across the world, past, present and future – so this is our history. We have failed in this regard, and I put it to us that we need to think that through, and hold an apology ready for times when we encounter someone who has been hurt by our collective past failures. This silence or judgmentalism can still be found today.
  - However, things are getting better. Evangelicals are getting better at disagreeing respectfully and with grace, and are doing better at communicating that the Gospel is good news for everyone.
- This is not simply a clash of cultures – there is real human collateral.

- Suicides, depression, anxiety, fear. E.g. Lizzie Lowe, 14-year-old teenager.
- Damage of “conceal, don’t feel”
- So probably the first thing to say is that if you are listening to this, and have some ongoing experience of attraction to your own biological sex – whether or not you welcome it, whether you’d identify as gay, queer, bisexual, or none of those – you’re welcome here at WCC, and you can call this community home.
  - If as a church we’re asking, “What should we do if a gay couple comes to church?” the basic answer is the same with or without the word “gay”. We show love and hospitality, and we offer them the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we talked about last week, the longer you spend in this community, the more you should expect to open your life up to encouragement and challenge from other believers – and that includes all areas of life, including how we act on our sexual desires.
  - If you’re in the church and thinking, “what would it be like if I came out?” the basic answer is that you’d probably feel a weight off your chest and you’d still be as loved and as welcome as you were before. In fact, possibly more so because you’d have shared something deep, personal and vulnerable, and that builds relationship and trust in a community. As with any other area of your life, you should expect that those closest to you might, over time, not only show love, but also ask questions and encourage you to engage with what the Scriptures say about sexuality. In that sense, it becomes like any other area of the Christian life.
- There’s a goal here for us as a community – to be a place that doesn’t reject people or write them off for **any** reason.
- <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories/10/tracey>

## THE TEXTS

We can be that loving community without letting go of what the Scriptures say. This was Jesus’s approach – clear on the truth, and on moral teaching, but without rejecting or writing people off. I want to say just a few words about the texts in overview.

Marriage between a man and a woman is repeatedly used throughout Scripture to illustrate God’s relationship with his people – with Israel and with the church. In this image, the difference between man and woman is often a key illustration point of how God and his people relate. Marriage between a man and a woman is not just a wonderful thing for this life: it points to an eternal truth, an eternal reality. Marriage is about more than just two people being faithful to each other.

On the other hand – there are no positive statements anywhere in Scripture about sexual activity between men and men, or between women and women. In fact, in a number of places, in old and new testaments; in story, prophecy and teaching where it’s clearly laid out as forbidden.

Romans 1+ makes it clear that we’re all disordered, and all of us have broken everything – including broken sexuality. We have disordered desires, which is why – gay or straight – we all end up needing to exercise self-control over our sexuality, just like most of us need to exercise self-control over our appetite for food, or our laziness or workaholicism.

Looking at each text that explicitly refers to homosexuality and the wider term “sexual immorality”, which referred to any sexual practice considered unacceptable to Jews, would take a good hour – plus you’d not have the opportunity to ask questions, some of you would want to talk about Greek and Hebrew and others about philosophy and mystery – we couldn’t do that justice in a Sunday morning sermon. Instead, I want to say – if you want to take a closer look at the Biblical texts together, please drop me an email or a call. We can find a time to sit and look at them all, and talk over any questions, objections or concerns you have.

## THE PEARL

Instead, where I want to focus for the rest of our time is the parables we read earlier. The parable of the pearl, of the treasure in the field – both have the same message. There will come a time or times when there is a conflict between taking hold of God’s Kingdom and other things which we value. In those moments, we have a choice of what to do. Are the things we value more important to us than the Kingdom of God, or is the Kingdom really of such great worth that we’d give up anything for it?

Often presented: “a choice between my identity and my faith” – “I can’t compromise who I am, so I’m not welcome here.”

## 1. YOUR SEXUALITY IS NOT YOUR IDENTITY

- Our culture says that your sexual orientation is a key cornerstone of your identity. In fact, it's often presented as the single most important thing about your identity. "I'm gay" carries so much more weight than, "I'm a vegan" or "I'm Polish".
  - Pause a second and think about how sad it would be – for all of us – if that were actually true.
  - Mentioned in week 2: pretty much nobody has the amount of sex they want. For some their commitment to their partner means more sex than they'd like; for significantly more there's less sex than they'd like – because they're single, busy, flat out at work, or their partner doesn't want as much. If that's a cornerstone of our identity, a good amount of our identity will be theoretical for a good chunk of our lives – or perhaps all of it.
  - Thinking Scripturally, Jesus said that in the new heavens and the new earth we won't be getting married and having sex any more: so if that's a cornerstone of our identity, it's one that's destined to disappear in the coming age.
  - More than that – there's a difference between our preferences and desires, and how we choose to live. I think Peter will say this better than me.
- <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories/14/peter>

## 2. THE KINGDOM IS WONDERFUL

- This is what the Kingdom of God is like:
  - Forgiveness & peace
  - Knowing the Creator
  - Purpose, fulfilment – part of a Kingdom that's good through and through!
  - Power & life
  - Totally secure future hope
- <https://www.livingout.org/resources/stories/13/anne>