

Harvest USA | 15-Session Video Curriculum

G O D'S
DESIGN
for
SEXUALITY
in a
**CHANGING
CULTURE**

GOD'S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY IN A CHANGING CULTURE

LEADER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE

OVERVIEW

THE MAIN IDEA FOR THIS VIDEO SERIES

This entire video series, *God's Design for Sexuality in a Changing Culture*, is geared toward helping churches think and talk through the orthodox, historical, and Scriptural views on sex, sexuality, and gender in light of the impact of our secular culture's viewpoints. Increasingly, Christian beliefs on sex, sexuality, and gender are being reshaped—and in some places turned upside-down—and Christians are more confused about how to live with God's gift of sexuality than ever before.

The church is making two errors today in dealing with sexual issues: One is to not talk about the subject; the other is to talk on the subject without engaging in a discussion. Both these approaches weaken God's people because, unless the issues are thoroughly explored, most Christians today don't know how to think through the ways they are being influenced by the culture. Getting the issues of sexuality out on the table and discussing them in open, safe settings is critical to help people begin to understand why God's design for sexuality is good and why it remains relevant for our lives today.

That's what Harvest USA's video series, *God's Design for Sexuality in a Changing Culture*, intends to do. Its objective is to help Christians better grasp biblical thinking (what God's Word says and what it means for us), and how God's design for sex, sexuality, and gender contrasts with the way our culture thinks. Understanding and faithfully following God's Word in how we ought to live with the bodies God has given us will only take place when we better understand how Christian belief contrasts with current cultural thought. That distinction might seem obvious, but far too often the believer barely knows why Scripture proclaims a particular point of view. In the meantime, he or she is being enticed by the onslaught of personal stories and media situations that argue that what the church has long believed is no longer relevant nor healthy for the individual and for society.

This intellectual weakness is leading people in the church to follow unbiblical ideas. Christians are struggling to follow God in this area of life. Much of that struggle is because the church hasn't helped them to fully think through their functional beliefs—unbiblical ideas that have infiltrated their minds and hearts and that have provided justification to live in ways that dishonor Christ and hurt their own lives and others.

Although Christians live by God's grace, grounded in the total forgiveness of sins we receive in Christ's death and resurrection, we are also called to live faithfully in the ways he calls us to live—as a demonstration of how his mercy has changed our life!

So, let's get the discussion going!

HOW DO WE TALK?

First, here is the format for the discussion.

The format for this video series is for a group (Sunday school class, small group, men's or women's group, etc.) to watch about a 30-minute video on a given topic. Following the video, use the rest of your time to talk about the particular issue.

FORMAT

Each video (approximately 30 minutes in length) comes with the following:

1. A participant handout that has an outline of the video talk. Print the handouts and give one to each participant so he or she can take notes.
2. A Leader's Discussion Guide that has the following directions:
 - a. Each Leader's Guide will briefly discuss the need for open and safe discussion. Each video has the same set of instructions, so if your church will have different class or group leaders for showing some of the videos, each one will know how to conduct the discussion.
 - b. Each guide has a "Big Idea" summary so that the main point of the video and the discussion is kept in view.
 - c. Each guide has a list of online and print resources (most are free) so that a leader can do some studying on the topic before leading a discussion. By reading the PDF on your computer or mobile device, click on the resource hyperlink to easily access the resource online.
 - d. These resources are also listed in the class Participant Guides, so that those in the discussion can learn more after the class. So please make the Participant Guides available to everyone as an online PDF, so the hyperlinks can be easily accessed.
3. For the discussion time, the questions in each guide will be more than what can be discussed in a typical 30-minute discussion (if, for example, you are using a typical one-hour Sunday school class, with the video taking up about half that time).
 - a. If you only have a discussion time right after the video, pick those questions that you think would best generate a good discussion. You don't have to choose the questions in the order they are given.
 - b. If you have a longer discussion time or you are able to schedule a second meeting for more discussion, then you might be able to get through all the questions.
 - c. Of course, if you come up with questions that are different than ours, that's great!

d. The important thing is not to get through the videos as quickly as possible; it's important to get the discussion going.

Second, here are some pointers for facilitating a good discussion.

DISCUSSION LEADERS

Someone needs to lead the discussion. Although the leader or leaders can watch the videos at the same time as others, and then launch into the discussion using the guided questions, we strongly recommend that the leader do a bit of study beforehand. Each video lesson will recommend a few resources that the leader can read beforehand, most which are online and free, and some that can be purchased (either in print or e-book format). Clear directions are given for how to obtain these resources.

It's important for the discussion leader to be as familiar with the material as possible because that will help facilitate a good discussion. It's also important that he or she holds to a Scriptural view on sex, sexuality, and gender, and is able to articulate it. Ideally, a class such as this, or a small group meeting, will have a wise man and woman leading, so that they can address specific issues that might be more relevant along gender lines.

However, the person leading the discussion needs to allow for an open discussion format, inviting class participants to say what they think or believe regarding the topic of each video.

A discussion is important because of what we just said; talking about these matters in only a lecture-type format does not get at the hidden struggles and questions many Christians have.

It will also be important for the leader to make the discussion safe for everyone. The issue of sex, sexuality, and gender—and how we ought to live faithfully before God with our bodies—is an emotional topic. Everyone struggles to live well with God's powerful gift of sex, sexuality, and gender. There will be people in your class who struggle here, and some will have had painful sexual histories that make this discussion difficult. Some may have come to different conclusions about what a biblical view of sex, sexuality, and gender is. Having a safe and open conversation about these topics includes having a discussion about why people choose to interpret the Bible in different ways. There may be a temptation to assume a person who thinks differently is not really committed to the Bible, but such is not necessarily the case. It is important to understand why a person interprets the Bible in specific ways and to engage in nonjudgmental dialogue about why you disagree. This is the only way to build the trust that is needed when engaging in conversation about such personal and vulnerable topics. A willingness to listen to each other is critical in order that everyone understands the ways Christians are being influenced by our culture.

While some perspectives and opinions may not be biblical, it will nevertheless be important that respect is given to what everyone says. Always. That doesn't mean you have to agree with someone's perspective or opinion. It may be necessary to say verbally that such

a view is outside of Scripture and/or outside of the historical understanding of the church. There is no intent here in these discussions to affirm or suggest that multiple viewpoints on sex, sexuality, and gender are just fine, or that how we live our lives as sexual and gendered beings is open to any interpretation that is at variance with Scripture and Christian tradition. It does matter that biblical principles for faith and life are affirmed and encouraged.

We do, however, need safe and open discussion to help people learn and come to want to obey God. Calmly giving the reasons why God wants us to live lives of sexual integrity, in the context of the discussion, can help someone grow into understanding and obedience. We need to help one another thoroughly know what we need to learn, and then encourage each other to grab hold of God's revealed will on this matter and assist one another to live it out faithfully, in the grace-strength that God gladly gives to his people.

Third, what happens after the class/group is over?

Growing in Christ in all areas of life is not merely an intellectual process. We need others in the body of Christ to walk along with us, encouraging us to apply the gospel to our life.

If you are the leader for this class/group, pray. Pray for those who will attend. Pray especially for those to attend who struggle with believing and following Scripture regarding sex, sexuality, and gender. Ask the Lord to give them a willingness to listen and then engage his Word.

Pray, as well, for those who struggle to follow Christ in this area of life but want to. As this video series will say over and over, we need others in the church to help us walk in obedience.

After the class, be available to those who might need to talk with you personally. Ideally, a class such as this, or a small group meeting, will have a wise man and woman leading, so that they might be able to talk with someone of their own gender. Continue to be sensitive to those who struggle in this area of life, either with their behavior or believing in what Scripture says. Lovingly pray with them to ask the Lord to help them believe and follow what Scripture says, and then help them find ways to learn how to do this.

SESSION 1

WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT SEX?

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant's handout for those who desire to study further.

- » Sex and the Silence of the Church: How It Is Crippling God's People—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/sex-silence-church-crippling-gods-people/#.WdJJahNSxAY>)
- » Is Yours a “Yeah, We Can Handle This” Church?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/is-yours-a-handle-this-church/#.WdJJnBNSxAY>)
- » Three Stories of Struggle, Addiction, and the Role of the Church—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/three-personal-stories-abaout-struggle-addiction-and-the-role-of-the-church-to-help/#.WdJJrRNSxAY>)
- » Leaders and the Minefield of Discussing Sexuality and Gender—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/real-life-conversations-leaders-must-enter-the-minefield-of-sexuality-and-gender-discussions/#.WdJKLhNSxAY>)
- » Living Faithfully with Our Bodies: It Still Matters—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-faithfully-bodies-still-matters/#.WdJKWRNSxAY>)
- » Living in the Shadows: Life as a Game-Player—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-shadows-life-game-player/#.WdJKkxNSxAY>). Read also the personal testimony that follows: “Stepping into the Light after a Lifetime of Shadow Living.”

BIG IDEA

The silence of the church about sexuality sows confusion and doubt.

The silence of the church hurts faith and life. When the church doesn't talk about issues of sex, sexuality, and gender, it allows the prevailing culture to step into the vacuum with its

unbiblical voice. Believers then become increasingly confused about what the Scriptures say, and some will begin to think that living in ways that are outside of God's design is permissible, if not affirmed. The result is a weakened body of Christ. The solution: Get real about these issues and start talking about them.

DISCUSSION

Nicholas Black opens up the class by mentioning that the culture thinks Christians spend way too much time focusing on sex. By contrast, he says we are, in fact, talking very little about it in the church.

- » What do you think? Is your experience in the church one in which sex and sexuality is excessively talked about, or is it rarely discussed?
- » He then goes on to say that when the church community fails to talk about sex, sexuality, and gender “well and persuasively enough,” Christians struggle in two ways:
 - One, Christians are becoming confused about what the Bible says about sex and its proper expression.
 - Two, Christians who struggle sexually live “double lives,” hiding in fear of being caught. Silence about sex leaves strugglers feeling hopeless and defeated over their own hidden struggles.
- » Do you see these things happening in your church? Where is the confusion the greatest? Who do you think struggles the most?

Nicholas lists three reasons why people and the church find it hard to talk about sex and sexuality:

- 1. It's too personal.**
- 2. It's too shameful.**
- 3. It's too fearful a topic.**

- » Do you identify with some of these reasons? What are the major reasons why talking about sex, sexuality, and gender might be so difficult, either for you or, especially, your church?

Nicholas then lists four ways the church's silence is negatively impacting the faith of believers. Discuss each point. Is this happening to you, your friends, or your church as a whole?

1. “I don’t know what to believe anymore.”

- Where are you confused about what the Bible teaches? What do you need to learn about what the Bible says about sex, sexuality, and gender? Where are you weak in biblical knowledge? Be as specific as you can with your answers.
- How do the personal stories of others confuse your understanding of what Christians have historically believed regarding sex, sexuality, and gender? What arguments are you hearing about same-sex relationships that seem persuasive to you—or if not to you, persuasive to others?
- How are you responding to the culture’s distortion and intimidation of what Christians believe? Nicholas says he feels pressure at times to change his views on what the Bible says about same-sex relationships. Do you feel that pressure? How do you deal with that pressure? Do you find yourself giving in, becoming angry, or do you fall somewhere in the middle?

2. “If I struggle here, I must not be a Christian.”

- Pornography has become a big sin and struggle among Christians. Do you believe that? Do you think it’s as big a problem as Nicholas says? Why?
- Nicholas mentioned that pornography is about more than just looking at sexual images; it’s about a worldview that shapes the way you look at people and relationships. What do you think porn “teaches” about life and relationships? (Hint: This worldview discussion of pornography will be taught in “Session 10: What’s Wrong with a Little Porn?”. But for now, see what people might be thinking at this point.)

3. “My life is a lie.”

- Do you think it’s easy to live in “two worlds?” Can you understand the struggler’s fear of being found out? Is it difficult to admit your own struggles with someone else? What does it feel like to admit your struggles or sin to someone else?

4. “I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to help.”

- Share any times you have been in a discussion with someone and you found yourself unable to give a good argument for holding to a biblical position.

SESSION 2

SEX, LIES, AND CULTURE

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant's handout for those who desire to study further.

- » **Voices That Confuse: Reclaiming Biblical Truth from Interpretative Distortions**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/voices-that-confuse-reclaiming-biblical-truth/>)
- » **Gay Marriage: What the Church and God's People Need to Do Now**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/gay-marriage-what-the-church-and-gods-people-need-to-do-now/>)
- » **Facing the Hard Questions**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/on-the-road-facing-the-hard-questions/>)
- » **My Mixed-Orientation Marriage**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/mixed-orientation-marriage/>)

BIG IDEA

To grasp biblical truth, you also need to understand what the culture is saying.

In today's culture, the Christian principles regarding sex, sexuality, and gender are not just seen as being dated and irrelevant—they are increasingly seen as being harmful to society and individuals. Christians need to articulately respond to this challenge. The main way to do so is by understanding the underlying worldviews that our secular society communicates about this issue. We need to respond to our culture with humility, grace, accuracy, and truth.

Christians must also strive to understand the underlying worldviews that buttress the culture's views on sex, sexuality, and gender. Only when understanding the cultural issues can we best speak into the culture about the relevance and beauty of God's design for sexuality.

DISCUSSION

I. A deeply divisive issue

II. Everything is different now

1. Living in the world of marriage equality

David described the challenges facing the church as Christians hold onto biblical sexuality in our current cultural climate.

- » Have you experienced ridicule and misunderstanding because of your Christian stances on sexuality? In what way? And where (workplace, extended family, etc.)?
- » Do you feel a sense of pressure to conform to what others believe? What have you heard that sounds compelling to you? Is it easier to just “go with the flow” or not?

2. Worldviews in conflict

David mentioned that the deeper worldview issue behind secular sexuality is radical autonomy—a belief that the individual should determine what is best for him/herself. The individual no longer looks to God to shape his or her life according to his will. What matters is my freedom and my personal fulfillment.

- » Do you see this worldview in action? Where and how?
- » Do you see this foundational worldview in the church today? What about in your own thinking?

3. How should Christians respond?

David points out that Christians have not always had the godliest response to cultural issues and declining morality.

- » Describe relationships in your life with family, friends, and neighbors with differing worldviews. Do you avoid “hot button” topics like politics and religion? Have you engaged in good conversations on these issues, or have you realized that you have said things that are inaccurate or defamatory?
- » What are some ways our church can grow in humility toward others with a radically different worldview?

4. Remember! Scripture is authoritative.

David said that believing in the total authority of Scripture is essential for understanding this issue.

- » How do you view Scripture as you consider God's design for sexuality? David mentioned that the Bible was not a "book of rules," so how do we view Scripture as showing us how to use our bodies in the way God calls us?

III. The sexual scripts of the twenty-first century

David talked about the "Three Taboos" of the secular sexual worldview.¹ Go over these again with the class and see if they ring true for how people view sexuality in our culture.

- 1. One may not coerce or cause harm to another.**
- 2. One may not engage sexually with someone without their consent.**
- 3. One may not criticize or restrict another's life choices or behavior.**

- » What can we affirm about the "Three Taboos"? How do they differ from a biblical perspective?

1. Cultural lie: Sex = Life

Sex is a good gift, but life is only found in living for the Giver (worshipping God) (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Christianity differs significantly from other world religions/philosophies by celebrating the goodness of God's creation.

- » Do you see this worldview as being predominant today, that sexual freedom is one of the highest values to life?
- » But sex is only one place we're tempted to go looking for "life" outside the giver. What are more "acceptable" ways you're tempted to find meaning in life?

2. Cultural lie: My personal freedom must be guarded at all costs.

True freedom is living by design as an image-bearer of God (Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

- » Have you previously considered the idea of freedom as living according to your

¹ Dale S. Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationships Beyond an Age of Individualism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 71.

design, according to the way God calls humanity to live? How does that view of freedom subvert the typical view of freedom in our society?

- » Dave spoke about our culture's idolatry of personal freedom as leading to personal, family and societal breakdown. Do you agree?

3. Cultural lie: Love is what really matters.

Biblical love encompasses more than emotions or desires.

Our culture proclaims that one's personal experience and emotions determine "truth"—"my truth." But the Bible says love is not the same thing as one's emotions or one's fleeting affections.

- » How do you love biblically while being influenced strongly by your emotions for another person?
- » In what areas are you most prone to listen to your emotions more than Scripture or the wise counsel of others?

4. Sex is just a physical act.

Humanity is created in God's image, so there's a spiritual reality behind sexuality.

- » David talked about how this cultural perspective on sex can lead one to think that it's no big deal how I use my body. How would you argue to someone that sex is something that is profound and points to God?

SESSION 4

UNDERSTANDING OUR SEXUAL STRUGGLES

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant handout for those who desire to study further.

- » How Does the Church Help Us Live with Sexual Integrity? (Parts 1-5)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/sexual-integrity-its-hard-now-it-was-hard-then-too/>)
- » Finding Your True Self in Feelings and Desires?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/finding-your-true-self/>)
- » Identity Theft! Who Are You in Christ?—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/identity-Theft>)
- » Women: Running the Race Well (Parts 1-4)—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/women-running-the-race-well-integrity-part-1/>)
- » Lust—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Lust>)
- » Protecting Desires: God Cares about Your Longings—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Protecting-Desires>)
- » Questions about Sexuality Need Good Answers—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/on-the-road-did-good-answers/>)

BIG IDEA

Understanding behavior is complex, and it starts with understanding the whole person.

The concept of understanding our behavior has not only captured the attention of great thinkers and writers throughout history, it's also something everyone wants to know. Two of the greatest questions we can ask about life are, "Why do I do what I do?" and "How can I change?" The answers to those two questions will reveal our worldview about human behavior and hope.

The Scriptures readily answer those two questions when we apply them to sexual struggles. A Scriptural understanding of human behavior involves the central place of the heart, which is the locus where intellect, will, decision-making, and emotions all converge. As Ellen said, “The heart is our volitional center, the place from which we make decisions to obey or disobey God as well as to love or not love him.”

In order to understand behavior, however, we must also understand all the factors that influence and impact a person’s heart. That’s the essence of what Ellen discusses in explaining the Harvest USA Tree Model.

In Part 1, Ellen discusses the fruit of the tree (behavior), the seed (the heart), and the soil (factors generally outside of one’s control that impact the heart and influence behavior).

DISCUSSION

Ellen says that the issue of understanding why we behave as we do is important and that a biblical worldview differs significantly from cultural worldviews.

- » Let the group read the two biblical passages Ellen read (Luke 6:43–45 and Matthew 5:19), and discuss some current worldviews that try to explain human behavior (such as brain chemistry, parenting and upbringing, social environment, poor self-image, etc.) Ellen uses broad strokes here, mentioning how other explanations of behavior describe the problem as being “outside” the person (meaning, that the individual’s responsibility is diminished, if not erased).

The soil influences discussed in the video refer to dynamics outside of our control which exert strong shaping power on our hearts. They are: gender, physical characteristics, personality and natural talents, our brain, family dynamics, the culture, peer pressure, trauma, and spiritual warfare.

- » Ellen says that the key idea about soil factors are that they are influencers, not determiners (i.e., they don’t force us to act a certain way) in our responses to life. Her example was the typical response we have to someone who “makes me angry.” Ellen points out Scripture says that’s not true; rather, that one’s behavior flows from within one’s own heart. Do you agree with this or not?
- » Although Ellen hasn’t yet finished talking about the entire “tree” in Part 1, do you think the emphasis on the heart, along with understanding a person’s soil factors, is a balanced approach in understanding our behavior and the sin struggles that we all have? Yes or no?

Two key soil factors Ellen talked about were culture and peer pressure.

- » Discuss how these two work hand-in-hand, especially today in a culture where it can be detrimental to speak your opinion if it's not the culturally accepted one.
- » How much of a shaping influence do these two factors have in your own life?

At the end of the video, Ellen says that if all sin is birthed in our sinful hearts, then we really are much more alike than different! Oftentimes men and women who struggle with sexual sin feel condemnation because these sins are often referred to as “worse” than others. Ellen quoted Jeremiah 2:13, which says, “my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

- » If this is God's diagnosis of our problems, then how can this influence the way Christians view brothers and sisters who have engaged in sexual sin? How is it true that we are much more alike than different from others who have particular sin patterns and struggles that we don't have?

SESSION 9

CAN YOU CHANGE IF YOU'RE GAY?

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion, as you deepen your own understanding of this issue. These resources will also be listed in the class participant handout for those who desire to study further.

- » **Voices That Confuse: Reclaiming Biblical Truth from Interpretative Distortion**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/voices-that-confuse-reclaiming-biblical-truth/>)
- » **First Steps: Students and Same-Sex Attraction**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/first-steps-students-sex-attraction/>)
- » **Protecting Desires: God Cares about Your Longings**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/protecting-desires/>).
- » **The Dangerous Expectations of Reparative Therapy**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/the-expectations-of-reparative-therapy/>).
- » **Why Do People Fall Back into Homosexuality? (Parts 1-6)**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/Why-Do-People-Fall-Back>).
- » **Homosexuality and the Bible: Outdated Advice or Words of Life?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2014. A brief overview of the passages in Scripture that mention homosexuality directly, and an overview of both traditional and revisionist interpretations. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/homosexuality-and-the-bible-outdated-advice-or-words-of-life/>.
- » **Can You Change if You're Gay?**—minibook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses the issue of sexual orientation and what the gospel means by change, and includes practical steps for those living with same-sex attraction who want to follow biblical sexuality. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/can-you-change-if-youre-gay>.

- » **Your Gay Child Says, “I Do”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses how to maintain both an ongoing relationship with your gay-identified son or daughter and how to hold fast to biblical sexuality. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-gay-child-says-i-do>.
- » **Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”**—minibook by Harvest USA, Tim Geiger, New Growth Press, 2013. Discusses how to talk to your child (or help parents to do so) when they come out. Practical do’s and don’ts for parents in keeping their relationship with their child healthy while maintaining a biblical stance. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-child-says-im-gay>.

BIG IDEA

The Church has historically spoken about how people change in simplistic and unhelpful ways. Nowhere has this been more controversial and hurtful than when talking about changing one’s sexual orientation.

The idea of changing sexual orientation has long been a controversial notion. The Church’s view of orientation change continues to be misunderstood, even when the idea is grounded in a proper understanding of Scripture. This session examines what change means biblically for someone with same-sex attraction, and how God uses ongoing struggles for our good and his glory.

DISCUSSION

David begins this session describing some of the challenges surrounding the idea of “change” and sexual orientation. Pop culture has been adamant that sexual orientation is immutable (think of Lady Gaga’s song, “Born That Way”) even though neither secular mental health organizations nor scientific research have reached these conclusions.

- » What are the current messages we hear from culture about homosexuality and causation?
- » How do you respond to the statements by the American Psychological/Psychiatric Societies?
- » Does it matter whether the causation of sexual orientation is proved by science or research? Do you think the historic Christian position or the current secular perspective is dependent on such proof?

Although we tend to stratify sin, the Bible makes clear that all of humanity is in desperate need of redemption. And this is true regarding every area of our lives— including our sexuality. David discussed how all of us have a sexuality that falls far short of God’s creational intent.

- » Have you heard messages in the church communicating that homosexuality is worse than other forms of sexual sin? How do you think this impacts Christian men and women struggling with unwanted same-sex desires?
- » Do you agree with Dave’s position that same-sex attraction struggles are not inherently worse or more sinful than heterosexual sin struggles? Why or why not?

David described a current cultural position within the church: that some people embrace the identity of being a “gay” Christian. How this term is understood varies. For some people, this means they believe God approves monogamous, gay relationships; for others, it means being committed to living celibately. David cautioned that using an adjective (especially depicting an aspect of our brokenness) with the noun “Christian” is to put limits on the work of the Spirit in our lives.

- » Do you agree that it’s a problem to identify as a “gay” Christian? Why, or why not?
- » What are other “identities” we’re prone to embrace in our culture, of which we need to be cautious?

When people talk about homosexuality and the issue of “change,” they usually have in view the nature of one’s sexual attraction; that is, that they finally become attracted to people of the opposite sex. David counters that view, since all of sexuality is broken, including heterosexuality. The opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, but holiness. Further, God has purposes for us in all the ongoing struggles and trials in our lives.

- » If the opposite of homosexuality is holiness (not heterosexuality), how does that modify the perspective on what it means to “change”?
- » How does the call to “not live for ourselves” challenge all of us in our sexuality? How does it challenge you in other areas of life?
- » How is the Bible’s view of change different than our typical expectations?
- » How have you seen the value of temptation in your own life? How have life’s trials and temptations drawn you closer to God?

David concludes by discussing five aspects of what a changed life can look like. Look at each one of those on your participant guide. His perspectives here challenges the church and each one of us to identify what our life and relationships should look like in following Christ in a post-Christian culture.

- » Do you still hear the church or individual Christians assert that a changed life necessarily involves a change in one's sexual orientation?
- » Do you agree or disagree with David's view that a too-high view of marriage and family by the church has problems? Are there ways your church communicates that it exists for married couples and families, to the (almost) exclusion of singles? How does your church need to grow in applying Psalm 68:6 (placing the lonely in families; NIV)?
- » How can your church be more intentional in fostering same-sex friendships? Do you think doing so is critical for those who live with same-sex attraction?
- » Is your church a place where people can be honest about living with same-sex attraction? If not, why not? Is your church a safe place to admit and talk about one's ongoing struggles with sin, struggles in their relationships, etc.? How do you need to grow in that area?
- » How does the hope of the new heaven and earth encourage you in the midst of life's trials? Does it have any impact at all on how you live your life here and now?

SESSION 10

WHAT'S WRONG WITH A LITTLE PORN?

PREPARATION FOR THE CLASS LEADER

Here are a few resources (short reads) that can help you prepare to lead the discussion. It's not necessary, but it can deepen your own understanding of this issue.

- » **Living Faithfully with Our Bodies: It Still Matters**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/living-faithfully-bodies-still-matters/>).
- » **Your Church: A Healing Community for Sexual Strugglers**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/your-church-can-be-a-healing-community-for-sexual-strugglers/>)
- » **Lust**—blog at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/lust>)
- » **Pornography and Injustice: The Social Impact of Sexual Sin and What the Church Must Do**—3-part blog series at harvestusa.org (<https://www.harvestusa.org/pornography-and-injustice-the-social-impact-of-sexual-sin-and-what-the-church-must-do-part-1/>)
- » **What's Wrong with a Little Porn When You're Married?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses the negative impact on the heart of a porn user, the impact of porn use on the marriage relationship, and how to move both the user and the relationship back to health. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/whats-wrong-with-a-little-porn-when-youre-married>.
- » **What's Wrong with a Little Porn When You're Single?**—minibook by Harvest USA, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012. Discusses the subtle and dangerous impact porn usage has on dating relationships and how to find freedom. Excellent resource for teens and young adults in particular. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/whats-wrong-with-a-little-porn-when-youre-single>.
- » **Your Husband Is Addicted to Porn: Healing after Betrayal**—minibook by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2013. Mini book version of her larger book (see below). Practical ways to heal your heart in dealing with your husband's porn usage. Available in five-packs for physical copies and e-book (single) at <https://newgrowthpress.com/your-husband-is-addicted-to-porn-healing-after-betrayal>.

Here are some book-length resources that can help you go deeper in understanding this issue, and in helping your church help those who struggle:

- » **Sexual Sanity for Men: Re-Creating Your Mind in a Crazy Culture**—a one-on-one mentoring or small group workbook by Harvest USA, David White, New Growth Press, 2012. A workbook for men to use with other men to find support and freedom from pornography and other sexual struggles and sexually addictive behavior. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sexual-sanity-for-men-re-creating-your-mind-in-a-crazy-culture>.
- » **Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Relational and Sexual Brokenness**—a one-on-one mentoring or small group workbook by Harvest USA, Ellen Dykas, Editor, New Growth Press, 2013. A workbook for women to use with other women to find support and freedom from sexual struggles and sexually addictive behaviors. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/sexual-sanity-for-women-healing-from-sexual-and-relational-brokenness>.
- » **Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex**—by Harvest USA, John Freeman, New Growth Press, 2014. Explores the heart issues that keep men in bondage to porn and other sexual struggles, and how the practicality of the gospel is the one thing to set them free. A great one-on-one mentoring book as well. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/hide-or-seek>.
- » **When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart**—(a devotional, one-on-one or small group resource) by Harvest USA, Vicki Tiede, New Growth Press, 2012. A daily devotional workbook to help wives assess and grow through sexual brokenness in their marriage. Available at <https://newgrowthpress.com/when-your-husband-is-addicted-to-pornography-healing-your-wounded-heart>.

BIG IDEA

Porn radically distorts the way we view God and all of life.

Pornography is not a harmless viewing activity (despite what some people believe). It's a behavior that points to a deeper struggle than looking at images or videos or reading erotic literature; it's a matter of what we desire at the deepest level – the level of our hearts. Like all behaviors, what we do points to what we live for, what matters to us the most, and that includes our relationship with God. When we look to something or someone other than God to find meaning and purpose in life, that's what the Bible calls idolatry. Idolatry damages everything – especially our relationship with God and others. Viewing pornography will alter and warp the way we look at relationships. In the long run, it will especially corrode the way we think about and relate to God.

DISCUSSION

Nicholas Black makes this opening comment about pornography: “Christians feel defeated because of our own hidden, personal struggles with sex. One word virtually sums this up: Pornography. Probably the most significant sexual struggle we face today is the epidemic of pornography and how it is impacting men, women and especially the younger generation—our youth.”

- » Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What is your own sense of this issue of pornography usage by Christians? Do you think the church is making too much of this, perhaps because of how sex and sexuality has been a taboo topic in the church? Or do you think it is even more of a problem than we are giving attention to?

Regarding the definition of pornography, Harvest USA locates the definition of it in the human heart, not in the various types of images found in media. Nicholas said, “Pornography is anything that the heart uses to find sexual expression outside of God’s intended design for relational intimacy. It is anything that tempts or corrupts the human heart into desiring sexual pleasure in sinful and broken ways.”

- » How do you feel about this definition? Do you agree with it? In what way is this definition of pornography unique, compared to how pornography is generally understood?
- » What do you think is the strength of this definition of pornography? (Hint: It has to do with the heart’s link to idolatry.)

If pornography is what the heart looks to for escape from the brokenness of living, then what gives it its habitual or addictive power is lust. Nicholas gives this definition of lust in the context of pornography:

“Lust is the strong desire (or “over-desire”) to possess something or someone that is not yours to have. Lust is a desire that is out of bounds (outside of God’s design for sex) or out of balance (where it becomes an idol that consumes your attention).”

- » How does this understanding of lust help us see other issues in our lives that seem to control or dominate us?
- » If lust is a strong desire that is all-consuming, regardless of its object, then how does this inform the way we understand sexual lust? Is sexual lust something radically different from other lusts, or is it no different from any other struggle?

- » How does understanding lust from the perspective of “love your neighbor as yourself” help us to better grasp the harm and damage lust does to us and to others?
- » Since lust and idolatry are linked together, how does that help you better understand that someone who struggles with pornography is simply not able to “just say no” to it?

Nicholas mentions six ways that pornography damages our hearts and relationships. Take some time discussing each one, with the goal being that the class begins to grasp the cumulative effect of pornography usage—on the user, on relationships, and on community and society.

- 1. It teaches a false view of sex and relationships—it teaches that what is of highest value is me and my needs.**
- 2. Porn slowly drains the life out of reality—and can lead to addictive behavior.**
- 3. Porn disconnects sex from love and respect—it encourages aggression and abuse.**
- 4. Porn teaches a lifestyle of lies and deceit.**
- 5. Porn normalizes perversity and diminishes human dignity.**
- 6. Porn participates in global abuse and injustice.**

Nicholas talked about godly and healthy relationships as the way out of addictive pornography struggles: one’s relationship with God and one’s relationships with others in the church community.

- » Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and then 2:11-12; then reread 4:1. Paul is generally viewed as being stern and combative, but Nicholas points out that his writings show how understanding and tender he was toward those in the faith (and keep in mind that this passage is one where Paul is talking about sexual behavior in the church). Is Nicholas’ view of the apostle Paul one that you have not heard before? How does this view of how Paul tenderly pastored his churches inform us on how to approach someone who is struggling?

Nicholas mentioned three things the church community can do to address pornography issues and to help those who struggle with it. This can be a good discussion about how we, as individuals, and how we, as a church community, think about struggles and how we help others who are struggling.

1. The church needs to be real about life.

- » How honest are you in letting people know of the things you deal with in life? Are you transparent, or more hidden and secretive? What makes it so hard to be honest about struggles?

- » Does your church community encourage you to be honest about what life is like, or do you think there is some level of pressure to look good?

2. The church needs to become unshockable.

- » How helpful is it to believe that God is not shocked nor disturbed by our struggles and sin? Do you believe that, or not? Why?

3. The church needs to give mercy.

- » Do you ask for help when you struggle? Do you ask for help when you are in a pattern of sin? What keeps you from asking for help?
- » How well (or not) does your church invite strugglers to come for help? What does your church community do well here? What could you improve?
- » Do you know the power, and the astonishment, of being forgiven when you expected punishment? What stories can you share to let others know how life-changing that is?