

International Students, Inc., 18 June 2021

Learn about LGBT issues facing ministry leaders in the broader culture, in ministry and in the family – and how to respond with grace, truth, courage and wisdom.

I. Intro – Thank you for having me. I appreciate your addressing this issue with management, leadership, and staff, and I appreciate the ministry you do with people from all tribes, tongues and nations. I will send you notes and a resource list, in case I don't get through everything in this 45 minutes.

II. My story and what I do at Focus

- Christian home, San Diego, believed in Jesus at 4 years old, Plymouth Brethren church, emphasis on knowing the Bible, priesthood of all believers, doing right
- Growing up – Outwardly – good kid – very involved in Sunday School, Youth group, choir, student government, Speech and Debate, good grades
- All that time - Struggling with pornography, sexual issues, same-sex attractions, shame, guilt, fear – I prayed for years that God would change me and set me free ...
- After a year of Bible and missions training, two years in Australia as missionary, came back to San Diego, working with youth group at church, invited to conference in 1986, “Hope and Healing for the Homosexual”
- First time – heard people talk about how they'd left homosexuality and that there might be some reasons for same-sex attractions –
- For me, those included early exposure to sexual activity with other young boys, disconnection from my father and from other boys growing up, over-connection and identification with my mom and sisters; and pornography and masturbation struggles
- Began process of finding help: counseling, books, conferences, support groups – about two years in, on verge of giving up faith, tired of doing the right thing, slept with guy from group, then started having sexual encounters with guys I didn't know, deeply conflicted
- Decided I need to make a choice – Christianity or homosexuality – decided to follow Jesus even if I never changed –
- Went back to church – a different one with a large singles ministry – and focused on building healthy relationships with men, counseling, conferences, support group, interned at church, gradually, freedom from sexual sin,
- Changes in many areas: relationship with God and people, changing my view of God, forgiving others, receiving forgiveness, developing a heat of gratitude, confession, repentance, changing thoughts and behaviors, and more. A lot of this entailed normal spiritual and personal growth.

- Met Judy, dated, broke up, dated, married, three sons, Nathaniel 23, Aidan and Brendan, 20
- Ministry in Baltimore – exhausted – 3-year break
- Work at Focus on the Family almost 15 years now, first in Government and Public Policy, now, *The Daily Citizen* – research, write, and speak about issues related to sexuality, family, marriage, education and culture.

III. LGBT Issues in The Culture

First, some key terms and cultural beliefs.

1. “Sexual Orientation”:

- Widespread Cultural Beliefs
 - **“Sexual orientation”** is typically used to refer to heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality but, more recently, this is broadening to include a wide variety of “orientations,” such as pansexuality, polysexuality, and others.
 - **It is a recent, broad, ill-defined concept** that may refer to a wide range of human characteristics and behavior, depending on who is defining the terms. These include: romantic, emotional and/or sexual: feelings, thoughts, desires, intentions, interests, choices, beliefs, relationships, community, fantasies, actions and identity – in the past, present, and future – one time, sporadic or ongoing.
- Researchers – studying this issue often look at three areas: behaviors, identity and attractions.
- **There are a variety of “sexual orientations.”**
- **Sexual orientation is the essence of a person and defines personhood – it has become an identity.**
- Widespread, false belief that **attempting to change these – identity, thoughts, feelings, behaviors**, in order to live according to a Biblical view of identity, relationships, sexuality, and marriage – is **harmful and does not work**.

• Christian Response:

- **The biblical world view**, on the other hand, says there are two types of persons, men and women. Two types of humans, male and female – created to reflect God’s image, distinct, different, but similar and both valuable and good. Not, “gay and straight” or “heterosexual and homosexual.”
- **Marriage is the union of a man and a woman in a covenant, life-long, exclusive relationship. Male and female come together to form a family and to reflect the image of God and our relationship with God.**
- **Scripture** talks about sexual activity – what people do sexually – including homosexual activity. Never labels someone “gay” or “homosexual” or “lesbian.” A verb or action, not a noun.

- **God is powerful and is able to bring change to many aspects of what we call “sexual orientation.”** Even researchers and secularists are admitting that this can be fluid for some people.
- **We encourage people not to view this as their identity and to move in the direction of God’s design for personhood, sexuality, relationships and marriage.** It’s reductionist to make this a person’s identity. And, people have choices in how they will act and identify – even if nobody chooses their attractions.
- At Focus, when writing about sexuality, we tend to talk about attractions, behaviors, and identity. Even the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, when studying this issue, have to look at behaviors. They write about “men who have sex with men” – closer to the biblical term, actually. Why? Because not all “men who have sex with men” identify themselves as gay or homosexual or even bisexual.
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2. “Gender Identity”

- **Cultural Beliefs:**
 - **“Gender” is a social construct, different from biological sex.**
 - **“Gender” is fluid and changeable.**
 - **There are a multitude of “genders.”**
 - **“Gender” is different from biological “sex”;**
 - **Gender is learned; it is a social construct; and, therefore, it may be assigned and taught – or it may be reassigned; and**
 - **“Gender Identity” is what people think, believe and feel about themselves.**
- Many cultures have recognized that some men struggle or fail to embrace their masculinity and may act more effeminate. Likewise, some women seem to act more masculine or even take on a male persona.
- But the contemporary “transgender” movement really originated in the 1950s when Dr. John Money coined the term “gender identity.” He used the term to differentiate between sex (*being male or female, a biological reality*) and gender (*a psychological or spiritual condition, including a person’s thoughts, beliefs and feelings about being male or female.*)

- Money believed “gender” was socially determined and learned by people. He thought children were blank slates and could be brought up to be either gender—regardless of bodily sex.
- The term “gender” also came to describe the *identity* a person has inside, the *roles* men and women take, and the ways they *express* their gender through language, dress and behavior. Some of his terms and ideas were appropriated and developed further by feminists and philosophers and postmodern thinkers.
- “**Transgender**” includes a wide variety of gender identities, such as trans, male to female, female to male, drag queens and kings, androgynous, grrrl, agender, bigender, genderqueer, queer, etc . Clinically it’s called “gender dysphoria” and only considered a psychological issue if it causes distress to the individual.
- Newer terms include “gender expressive,” “gender gifted” and “gender expansive,” “non-binary,” and more.
- **Here’s the place we’ve come to today: What’s in a person’s head – their “gender identity” now trumps biological reality in many areas of life.**
- **Christian Response: God created mankind in His image – male and female. There are two sexes. Clothes, hormones and surgery cannot change one sex into the other.**
- Courageously and kindly we point out the truth to people: there are two sexes; sex is *recognized*, not “assigned” at birth; humans are sexually dimorphic.
- Continue to point toward truth about “gender identity: Point to solid teaching and research on this issue. In my speech and writing I try not to use the word “gender” when I mean “sex” – being male or female.
- Clothes, hormones and surgery cannot change a person from one sex into the other. We continue to point to the gospel: God loves you as you are – even with gender confusion; and the gospel has power to change and transform your life.
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Implications for the culture:

- **The culture believes that while “gender” is fluid and changeable, “sexual orientation” is innate and unchangeable.**
- **General society believes it is harmful to try to change “sexual orientation or gender identity – not only is it damaging, but it doesn’t work.**

- Activists and allies believe these views/ideas must be promoted and celebrated. Politics, laws, regulations and the courts; education; business and advertising; news and entertainment; medicine; and religion must all conform and promote these views.
- Activists and their allies try to shut down counseling help, books and other resources for those with unwanted homosexuality and transgenderism by making what they call “conversion therapy” illegal. This threatens counselors and clients free speech and religious freedom, as well as client autonomy and self-determination.
- Activist and allies believe that if “sexual orientation” and gender identity” are who a person is – their core identity – than rights should be granted to those individuals based on orientation and identity, and non-discrimination laws should protect them, just as they do race, sex or ethnicity.
- They also believe that opposition must be silenced. Those who believe differently are labeled bigots, intolerant and haters.
- LGBT activists and allies believe “sexual minorities” are victims and oppressed – even though they are a politically powerful group.
- This “gender ideology” has become linked with Critical Race Theory through the concept of intersectionality – as ethnicity, language, religion, color, and now sexual orientation and gender identity, define a person and are used to tell us who are oppressors vs. those who are oppressed.

IV. LGBT Issues in Ministry

Broader aspect of ministry:

Everything I discussed – including those beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity – has permeated the church, too. These are beliefs that some of your students, staff, fellow church members and family members may have. You'll have to address these in ministry. There is deep confusion in the church on these issues.

Some key issues we look at, here at Focus, re. biblical orthodoxy on homosexuality and transgenderism.

- **Holding to the biblical world view on identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.** The idea that homosexual and transgender identities and behavior are biblical – that God approves of them – has only developed in the past 70 years. Before that, the church spoke with one voice on these issues – as did Judaism before that. This is a serious theological error that changes God's design for relationships, identity, sexuality and marriage.
- **The question of identity is key. Many Christians today are adopting and using terms like “gay Christian,” “gay, celibate Christian,” “genderqueer and gospel-centric,” “trans Christian,” “sexual minorities in the church,” and the like.** We strongly believe that these are false identities and not to be adopted or used by believers.
- **The question of growth out of homosexuality and transgenderism is also key.** Christians should be moving toward holiness and wholeness, finding healing and transformation and growth, and pursuing chastity in their sexuality and relationships.
- **The question of victimhood is also important.** Yes, many LGBT-identified individuals and strugglers have been victimized – but this should not be their identity or status, either. Individuals should be working through to forgiving others sins against them – as well as learning to receive forgiveness. And, as a whole, LGBT activists and their allies are well-funded, supported and celebrated in every sphere of life in Western culture, and are hardly – today – an oppressed, impoverished minority.

Threats to ministry:

- **As cities, counties, states and the federal government pass non-discrimination laws that include “sexual orientation” and “gender identity,” Christian ministries, churches and individuals have been threatened with lawsuits, loss of jobs, loss of reputation, and other attacks.**
- **A couple recent threats, on a national level that could affect their ministry:**
 - **If you’re working in a school, the Department of Education just defined Title IX sex discrimination to include “sexual orientation and gender identity.”** School campuses are becoming less safe for ministries, which often have to fight lawsuits to remain on campus. This move

- threatens privacy and safety in school restrooms and locker rooms; girls and women's sports; religious freedom and free speech; and parental rights in education.
- **The Equality Act, House Resolution 5, would add “sexual orientation and gender identity” to all federal non-discrimination laws,** again, threatening the areas I listed above, as well as Christian schools, ministries, churches and individuals in other areas.
 - **It would be wise to get good legal counsel and connect with Christian legal groups,** like Alliance Defending Freedom, First Liberty, Thomas More Society, the Becket Fund, and Liberty Counsel to create policies to deal with these issues in your ministry on campus.

On the personal level, in direct ministry to staff and students:

As I said earlier, everything I discussed – including false beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity – has permeated the church, too. So these are beliefs that some of your students, staff, fellow church members and family members may have. You'll have to address these in ministry.

Many nonbelievers and believers will have been inculcated by the entertainment and business worlds, the media and social media, our education and political systems, to believe that homosexuality and transgenderism are good and you are a bigot if you don't agree.

This will involve clear teaching and discipleship about God's design for us as male and female individuals, on the body and its meaning, and on relationships, sexuality, marriage and family. When discussing this with groups and individuals, I suggest starting with God's clear design for humanity, rather than with the 7 or 8 passages that condemn homosexuality.

It will also involve ministry to individual struggling with these issues. A couple thoughts:

- On the culture and policy issues, I encourage people to lead with truth – courageously, with wisdom, and with grace.
- On the personal level, I encourage people to lead with grace – courageously, with wisdom and truth.
- Don't work alone with an LGBT individual – encourage others on your team or among your solid students to connect with an LGBT-identified or struggling individuals.
- Christian hospitality is a powerful tool to draw people to God.
- I'd encourage you to get acquainted with general books on healing and transformation, including books on healing prayer and listening to God, as well as books on healing and transformation on this issue.
- Pray.

- Make sure you have a solid biblical view on these issues – and answer for apologetics questions.
- Students may have questions about change and transformation through a relationship with Christ, as well as change and transformation through counseling and support groups. You may have to understand the questions surrounding so-called “conversion therapy,” a made-up term for a non-existent methodology. We have some good online resources for this.
- Don’t feel like you have to fix people – let go of any savior complex: encourage, love, listen, pray with, bless, speak truth to, and care for people struggling with these issues – as you would people with any sexual or relational brokenness.
- You may need to find counselors and churches and ministries who agree with you on these issues, to steer strugglers toward.
- It can be good to learn about some contributing factors for those who struggle with these issues, and to understand how healthy sexuality develops and gets derailed – but don’t feel like you have to become an expert on these issues. People want to know that you love them – even if you don’t approve of everything they do.
- Expect some of those you minister with to be angry, hurt, bitter, confused, and/or ambivalent about their relationship with you – many view Christians as the enemy or have been hurt by a believer. They will need a lot of love, grace and care.
- The same applies to their relationship with God. Let people be where they are, God can handle it.
- Keep in mind, the goal is to move people toward Jesus and bring them into the kingdom – not to change them from homosexual to straight.
- Be encouraged: God is drawing people out of homosexuality and transgenderism and to himself.

IV. LGBT Issues in the Family

Given the growth of the LGBT activist movement in the past 50 years, and its impact on every facet of our culture, this is a serious spiritual battle – and family and friends will be affected. Polls show that LGBT identification is increasing with each younger generation.

Here are some ideas for handling the issue when it hits home. I can't cover every scenario, so I'll talk mostly from the perspective a parent who discovers a son or daughter is LGBT-identified, but the principles apply to other family members and friends

- **Define your goals for yourself and your relationship with your child.** What would you like to see happen: marriage and family? 180 degree shift from gay to straight? Our desire should be greater than that our children leave homosexuality or transgenderism: **We want our loved ones to come to Christ for salvation and to follow Him. We want them to experience Christ's life and God's love and the Spirit's power.**
- **However, this is something we can't make happen.** You can't force faith and salvation on your child.
- At Focus on the Family, **we suggest two goals to parents: Maintain a relationship and maintain a godly influence with your son or daughter.**
- **Offer compassion and grace, while maintaining your biblical world view.**
- **Trying to fix, control or change loved ones doesn't work.** In fact, it may push them away from us.
- **Your child may have been struggling with homosexual attractions, behaviors and identity for years.** It will take you time, as well, to understand his or her thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and build a deeper relationship with your child – ask them for this, to help you adjust.
- **Allow yourself time and space to grieve.**
- **Pray:**
 - Pray your heart will remain open to your loved one so you can be a channel of God's grace.
 - Pray that God will continue to work in your own mind, heart and life, so your prayers can become even more powerful and effective in your loved one's life.
 - Pray that your loved one will become aware of the consequences of sin, so he or she can be led to a change of heart. Remember, God's ultimate goal is not punishment, but repentance, and His kindness leads us toward it (Romans 2:4).
- **Invest in your own recovery and support.**
 - **Connect with God.**

- **Connect with the body of Christ** – find safe people to talk with and pray with. Often, this may be other parents with prodigals.
- **Find professional or pastoral support and counsel.** Please be cautious with this, as there are wolves in sheep's clothing. Many therapists and some clergy (and churches and denominations, too) have revised their views of God, Scripture, and sexuality, and now approve of homosexual relationships. Ask the therapist or pastor what they believe about the Bible, sexuality and homosexuality.
- **Get equipped and learn about this issue.**
- **Cling to faith and hope. God is powerful, loving and good. Remember this and meditate on God's character, and know that salvation comes from His goodness, not our own (or our loved one's). Our hope and faith are in Him.**
- **Be encouraged!** There are many who once embraced a homosexual identity, only to find it didn't satisfy the deepest longings of their heart. Many return to the Christian faith. Some come to Christ for the very first time, and as they grow in faith, they seek to follow God's design for their sexuality and relationships—whether through chastity in singleness or through marriage to a spouse of the opposite sex.
- **I'm not alone in leaving homosexuality** – there are many other stories like mine out there.

Conclusion:

Again thank you for letting me speak with you. I pray that this has been helpful. And again, there are lots of helpful resources.

Pray.