



**AGAPE FIRST MINISTRIES**

**FREEDOM UNITED**

**MINISTRY GUIDE**

*A collection of teachings from Agape First Ministries*

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# Understanding Homosexuality: How Sin has Impacted Our Sexuality

*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

*Ephesians 5:31-32*

## Introduction

Every good story ends with a wedding. It is the ultimate consummation of love and devotion. Our desire for a wedding is built into the very fabric of our DNA. Why is this so important? This is our story. This is our destiny. As God's people, we were created by Love for Love to love. We were created for a wedding, to be Jesus' equally yoked partner for all of eternity. What a high and lofty calling!

However, for every truth there is a counterfeit; and the devil, the enemy of your soul, is working overtime to distort and destroy the high calling of God for your life. *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy"* (John 10:10). Homosexuality is one of the significant ways the enemy is trying to destroy the destiny of this generation. As homosexuality distorts our understanding of sex and gender and God's desire for a wedding, it keeps God's people from embracing the fullness of His destiny for them as the Bride of Christ.

## The Beginning of Understanding

To understand homosexuality biblically, we must go back to the very beginning. Genesis 1:26-27 says, *"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* Men and women are called to bear God's image here on the earth. Individually, both men and women equally reflect unique aspects of God's image. God's design for His people is communion, so when man and woman come together in marriage, they bear the fullness of God's image here on the earth. It is in the context of heterosexual marriage that we have the fullest picture of who God is and how He acts in relationship. It is the great dance of the masculine and the feminine on full display.

We were also created for intimacy without shame. Genesis 2:24-25 says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."* In God's original design, Adam and Eve were completely known and yet, felt no shame about who they were. Life in the garden was perfect. Adam understood what it meant to be a man created in God's image. Likewise, Eve understood what it meant to be a woman created in God's image. They understood that when they came together in marriage, they formed a more complete picture of who God is. There was no confusion or disorder.

Yet despite their intimacy with God, Adam and Eve entered into a conversation with darkness (Gen. 3:1). Dialogue with darkness *always* ends in darkness. Adam and Eve were deceived. They sinned. They forgot who they were and to whom they belonged. This led to fear, shame, hiding, confusion, and disorder. The results of this conversation are still seen today.

At the core of the homosexual struggle is identity confusion. Each of us—regardless of whether or not we struggle with homosexuality—is struggling to figure out who we are. There are powerful voices all around us—the enemy, the world, our flesh—that try to name and speak identity into us apart from the reality of who God created us to be. Homosexuality is just one more way to try to find what was lost in the garden: identity. Deception leads to identity confusion, which leads to gender confusion, sexual confusion, and marriage confusion. There is a disconnect between the goodness of our given identity and our self-understanding of that identity. As Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, a leading therapist for the treatment of homosexuality, puts it,

*Self-deception about our gender is at the heart of the homosexual condition. A child who imagines that he or she can be the opposite sex or be both sexes is holding on to a fantasy solution to his or her [gender] confusion. This is a revolt against reality and a rebellion against the limits built into our created human natures*  
*A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality, Nicolosi, 22*

## A Basic Understanding

Regarding the issue of homosexuality, God's Word is very clear: homosexual behavior is always sin (Lev. 18:22, 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Period. That being said, whenever homosexuality is referenced, the Bible always addresses the behavior of homosexuality, not the person. This is a crucial distinction to make. While God clearly condemns homosexual behavior, He honors the reality that even those who struggle with homosexuality have been created in His image and have intrinsic value and worth. In other words, you and I are not simply the sum of our sin and brokenness. **We are not named or identified by our fallenness. This means also that there is no such thing as a homosexual person from God's point of view, only broken heterosexuals in God's heterosexual creation.**

The development of homosexuality is a very complex issue. It would be unfair to generalize how and why different people develop homosexual attractions. Each one struggling is an individual with a unique story, and there are a multitude of factors that may set someone up for a struggle with this issue. While the particulars of a struggle may be different, ultimately homosexuality is not really about sex; instead it is a confused desire for love. We were made with a desire to love and be loved at the core of who we are. Yet when that deepest longing of the human heart isn't met, it can become confused and even sexualized.

Before we go any further, let's look at some oversimplifications about homosexuality:

**"People choose to be homosexual."** People do not choose to have homosexual attractions. In fact, for many the revelation of these attractions can be a terrifying discovery. That said, one always has the choice of what to do with homosexual attractions and whether those attractions will become a part of one's identity (i.e. gay).

**“Homosexuals are demon-possessed.”** Whenever there is a stronghold of sin and brokenness in one’s life, the presence of demonic strongholds must always be considered. However, the presence of homosexual attractions demonstrates a breakdown in personal, spiritual, and relational development. Thus, homosexuality should not simply be understood as a spiritual stronghold in need of deliverance.

**“People are born gay.”** There is no scientific proof that homosexuality is inborn. None. However, homosexual attractions are often the result of longstanding relational patterns, and thus have been developed and reinforced over a significant period of time. In other words, while homosexual attractions may not be inborn, in many ways they may feel “natural” to those who experience them.

At the core of a homosexual struggle (or its variants) is attachment loss. For whatever reason baby boy or girl was not able to attach to mom or dad and their same-sex peers in a way that their identity was fully informed. (Remember our attachments inform our identity.) The Good News is Jesus has made a way for us to once again experience attachment to the Heavenly Father, and the Father has all the information needed to inform our identities.

A breakdown in healthy bonding can be caused by many factors:

- Physical, emotional, or spiritual absence of the father
- Emotionally engulfing mother
- Abusive parent
- Illness in baby or mom after birth
- Early childhood exposure to pornography
- Positive reinforcement of same-sex sexual experiences
- Teasing / bullying
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Generational sin

Generally, it is not usually one of these factors, but several, that add up over time. When baby, or little boy/girl, does not form the necessary attachments to inform their identity, the little one will struggle to develop a healthy sense of belonging. Foundational truths such as, “I belong to a family; I belong to the world of my same-sex peers;” or simply, “I belong;” never take root. This lack of sense of belonging can make it really hard for a same-sex attracted person to assimilate into a Church body.

### **More Specific Understanding Regarding Men and Women**

For men, a struggle with homosexuality is indicative of a **disconnection** from the masculine (a core sense of strength.) It is through little boy’s attachment to dad (or a father substitute) and the world of men that he comes to understand who he is as a man. Men learn how to be men by being with other men and doing what they do.

Disconnected from the true masculine, little boy will instinctively look for a solution to repair the deficit in his soul. The enemy is quick to offer sex as a solution to little boy’s attachment

loss and sense of gender emptiness. The lie being, “maybe if you attach to another man sexually you will get the missing information about who you are as a man.”

For women, a struggle with homosexuality reveals a **rejection** of femininity. Many women struggling with same-sex attractions report experiencing some form of abuse as a little girl, or they witnessed mom experiencing abuse. Femininity becomes a vulnerability and is rejected as a way to self-protect from further hurt (usually from a man.)

Nevertheless, little girl remains disconnected from a vital part of her identity as a woman. And, once again, sex is offered as a solution to said disconnect. Attaching to femininity in another woman through sex soothes the pain of being internally disintegrated from the good the feminine.

But sex can never put back together the fractured parts of our identity. For this, we need a Savior. Through the cross, men and women alike can reconnect with the Heavenly Father. And, rightfully bonded to our Creator, the broken person can finally receive the Truth that will heal the gender disintegration hindering their capacity to love and be loved rightly.

Ultimately, homosexuality is an affront to the image of God and His created intent for His people. The enemy knows this and is using this issue to plant deception in the hearts of God’s people about who they are and how they should act.

### **How God Heals**

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ has life-changing power. He has power to heal and restore. The power of God, made available through the finished work of the cross, is a reality available to all believers, even those struggling with homosexuality. God is in the business of healing and transforming lives affected by homosexuality!

Ultimately, the foundational work of healing is about receiving a new identity. For those who are in Christ, that new identity is one that is bestowed at salvation:

*Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

*1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV)*

Jesus has been in the business of healing homosexuality and giving new identity for over 2000 years!

Healing means that homosexuality no longer has the power to name you. Often a struggle with homosexuality can be life-dominating. Rooted in stunted emotional, spiritual, and relational development—it feels very natural. Though it is a broken attempt at receiving love and identity, much of its power comes from the fact that it does, in some ways, meet those needs. It gives

meaning to one's pain and often provides the struggler with a sense of belonging (i.e. the gay community). Nevertheless, because of the new identity bestowed on all believers at salvation, we have been given a new identity and the power to live beyond the pain of our unmet needs. In fact, God can meet those very needs!

Healing is about coming into agreement with God regarding who He is and His original intent for humanity. This means renouncing lies about who you are. This includes false names and labels spoken over you such as "gay," "queer," "girl," "dyke," and "lezzie." Renouncing these labels means taking authority against the lies of the enemy through the power of the blood of Jesus.

Healing also involves moving beyond lies and embracing the fullness of your true identity in Christ. As men and women, each of us has been given the honor of bearing God's image in our bodies and in how we relate to others. For your part, you must choose to come into agreement with God's Word about who He has created you to be as a man or woman. Regardless of feelings, this is an essential part of the healing process, and one that must be walked out daily. Just as false names and labels often form identity and self-perception, so the process of renewing your mind and bringing it into alignment with God's mind is just that—a process. Say yes to the process, and God will be faithful to daily meet you and strengthen you as you come into agreement with His heart. He is for you!

### **Journeying Toward Wholeness**

God's healing work in your life is a process. Healing can be an event, but it is also something you must walk out daily. Ultimately, God heals the homosexual the same way He heals everyone: through the finished work of the Cross. Through relationship, we are filled and empowered to live differently. Healing is about relationship.

This means healing isn't about getting a quick fix. God isn't interested in "zapping" you so that you can simply go back to living a selfish, narcissistic life. Instead, He desires that in the place of your wounding, you will experience healing. Although we are all wounded in relationship, our healing comes through relationship as well. Healing comes in learning to live in relationship with God.

Homosexual attractions may not simply disappear after six months (or ever, for that matter). In calling us into relationship with Himself, God does not take away our past. He doesn't give us a frontal lobotomy. We must cooperate with Him in doing the hard work of living differently, making different choices about who we are, and determining where we will look to for love, life, meaning and purpose.

Ultimately, the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, it is holiness.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus wants a wedding. Revelation 19:6-7 says,

*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."*

Jesus is returning for a pure and spotless bride. The real question this generation must ask is *not*, what is my sexual identity? Am I gay, straight, or bisexual? The most important question you can ask yourself is, am I ready for Jesus? Is my heart ready to meet Him? Am I prepared for eternity?

### **Some Pastoral Care Helps:**

1. **Attachment.** *"At the core of a homosexual struggle (or it's variants) is attachment loss."* Helping the struggler attach to God in a meaningful way should always be first and foremost in our pastoral care. This includes helping the struggler learn to have a life-giving prayer life as well as how to connect with God in worship and through acts of service. This is a time to model unconditional love and grace to the struggler. They will not be able to attach to God and the body of Christ if they do not first feel safe, and their sense of safety is bolstered by building trust over time with a pastoral caregiver.
2. **Identity.** *"Our attachments inform our identity."* Providing a healthy diet of truth to the struggler regarding who they are as a man or woman created in God's image is essential. It is paramount that the struggler grows in their understanding of their intrinsic value and worth simply because they are created in God's image. Truth about our identity is a powerful force against shame and fear. Knowing that they are known by God and others (e.g. the pastoral caregiver) is another means of building trust and establishing a sense of safety.

**Belonging.** *"When baby, or little boy/girl, does not form the necessary attachments to inform identity, the little one will struggle to develop a healthy sense of belonging."* The struggler may need lots of help integrating into your church body. Again, time and grace are of the essence. It is important here to major on the majors and minor on the minors. Some things, while they may be off putting to some in church culture, really aren't worth correcting on the front end.

## Confronting "Gay Christian" Theology

I have been in ministry to people with unwanted same-sex attractions for over 20 years. During this time, I have watched the cultural landscape shift radically in regard to the issue of homosexuality. Nowadays, the "gay lifestyle" is embraced, accepted, and even celebrated in all spheres of life. It is normal to see gay couples get married or engaging in sexual behaviors on primetime television. This was not the case all that long ago. The shift came quickly and took many in the Church by surprise.



Now I am watching the landscape of the Church change in this regard as well. In the same way, the shift is coming quickly and is taking many by surprise. Most mainline denominations more than tolerate—they ordain gay clergy, marry gay couples, and encourage same-sex attracted youth to embrace their “gayness” as a gift from God and a blessing to others. What is even more shocking is now, once-stalwart evangelical churches and organizations are falling prey to “gay Christian” theology—the thinking that it is okay to be a Christ-follower and embrace a gay identity. While there are different expressions of the “gay Christian” (some choose celibacy while others marry their partners), the bottom line is clear: to embrace the gay identity in any way is an affront to the image of God in men and women, and it is contrary to what God has commanded in His Word.

God’s creation is heterosexual (Genesis 1:26-27). Within God’s heterosexual creation, there are two sexes: male and female; and two genders: masculine and feminine. (“Sex” is the unchangeable biological reality of being male or female. In this article, I am using the traditional/Biblical definition of the term “gender” which speaks of spiritual realities found in the Image and character of God.) In God’s created order, there is always one and then the other. In the macro understanding of this principle, we have God who, in the masculine, initiated a love relationship with the Church, His Bride. We see the macro played out in the micro: married love between a man and a woman (Ephesians 5:31-32).

“Hetero” is different from the prefix “homo” which means “same.” There are, not two, but one. The good news for the same-sex attracted is that in God’s creation, there is no such thing as a homosexual, only heterosexuals, however broken he or she may have gotten in this world. We all have to live in the flow of the reality God has established, regardless of our feelings or attractions.

Gender is a way of categorizing characteristics. The historical meaning of gender is “things we treat differently because of their inherent differences.” Biblical gender is the compilation of characteristics that make up who God is (the feminine) and how He acts within relationships (the masculine.) It includes the distinction between God’s being and His activity. Right away in Genesis 1:1, we see God as a gendered being—In the beginning God (being) created the heavens and the earth (activity). God continues to make distinctions as He creates: light and dark, day and night, land and sea, the heavens and the earth. God solidifies distinction within Himself—He IS and He DOES. He creates for six days (activity) and on the seventh day He rests (being). Distinction is important to God.

God continues to make distinction in Genesis 1:26-27: Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

In God's creation, unity or union does not do away with distinction. There will always be a distinction between God and man, man and creation, and male and female.

Paganism always tries to do away with distinction. The goal of paganism is that all would become one; God and man, man and creation, male and female, etc. are simply "one with the universe." We see this lack of distinction being played out in human culture's many sordid expressions of sexuality. It seems anything goes these days! Culture wants to do away with any gender distinction or the gender binary. Dr. Peter Jones, author of *The God of Sex*, says that when the primary binary (God and His creation) is eliminated, all other binaries crumble.

Homosexuality has its roots in paganism. This is why the movement to promote homosexuality is so powerful. It is not just about sex, or even whom you choose to love; it has a spiritual component. When the creature is worshiped rather than the Creator, demons are present. Our sexuality is a reflection of our spirituality.

To take on a gay identity is to step outside of God's created order and out of the flow of reality. It is to reject one's sense of belonging in God's creation. Taking on a gay identity essentially shuts down the healing process and hinders receptivity of future blessings the Lord has in His heart for the struggler. It is letting the "old man" remain and refusing to walk in righteousness and holiness. God will never ask you to be or do what He forbids in His word.

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:20-24).

These words may seem bold or even harsh, but now is the time for boldness and courage, Church! I believe that "gay Christian" theology (in all its varied forms) is the greatest danger to the Western Church today. It threatens the very foundation of our understanding of God, His creation, and our place within His creation. It is an assault on the image of God and the distinction He has established between Himself and creation.

Let me conclude by clarifying a couple of issues. First, one's temptations and life-dominating issues do not determine salvation. There are many individuals who are born-again believers, yet they still struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions. We are saved by God's grace available through Jesus Christ, not by our ability to keep His Law or to avoid temptation.

Second, God loves everyone within the "gay community." His heart is burning to see His children return to Him. Many individuals have been wounded and rejected by the Church's poor response to their struggle with same-sex attractions. A compassionate, biblical understanding of homosexuality within the Church has been needed for a very long time.

With that said, the current “gay Christian” conversation and shift that is now taking place within the Church is not based on a biblical understanding of homosexuality. The Church is sorely lacking a scriptural understanding of biblical gender and the image of God.

We must be firm in our convictions in this hour. We must dig deeply into Genesis 1:26-27 and seek the Lord for wisdom and understanding of His image. There is great clarity that comes from returning to the Word of God and beholding His character. Let us make haste to see God rightly for only then can we truly see one another as He intended.

## Understanding Biblical Gender: How Men and Women are Created in God’s Image

*Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

*Genesis 1:26-27*

*While the biblical witness is clear that the living God transcends sexuality, that he is neither male nor female, it is equally clear that he encompasses masculinity and femininity within himself. Indeed, we are created in his image as male and female. (See Genesis 1:27; 5:1,2)*

*Donald Bloesch, The Battle for the Trinity*

*Gender is a reality and a more fundamental reality than sex.*

*C.S. Lewis, Perelandra*

### Introduction

You were created to bear God’s image. Your spirit, soul, and body were meant to reflect the nature and character of the One who created you. This is a privilege that has only been given to human beings. Think about it: the God of the universe not only *allows* you; He *calls* you to demonstrate who He is to the world. This means something to God, and it means something to the enemy as well.

Before we get too far, let’s start with some definitions. In this resource guide, the terms sex and gender will be used *differently*. Biblical gender is the characteristics that make up who God is and how He acts in relationship. This is different from the term “sex,” which refers to the physical characteristics that distinguish male and female. Biblical gender is about spiritual

realities found in the image of God which we discern through the Bible. Sex is about our bodies. Culture would say gender is a social construct or something that originates in the mind; but God is the source of gender and the goal of this resource is to point you to Him.

As Sam A. Andreades, author of *enGendered*, wrote, “Gender is hard to understand because God is hard to understand.” But, we are praying for a great release of wisdom in the body of Christ—that the knowledge of the Holy would once again be among us. For, it is only when we understand our relationship to our Creator that we can truly relate to one another in love and truth.

### **God—the Source of Gender**

God has gender. That is to say, He is fully masculine and fully feminine. Within the Image of God we see the power to act (the masculine) and the capacity to be (the feminine.) In fact, we see God as a being with gender right away in Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning God (being) created the heavens and the earth (doing).* God IS and God DOES. Understanding gender within the Image of God helps us understand ourselves as men and women and it points us toward our eternal destiny as Image Bearers. Andrew Comisky, founder of Desert Stream Ministries and pioneer in ministry to the sexually and relationally broken, writes, “Gender difference—and harmony in that difference—points beyond itself; it offers us a glimpse of heaven. Rightfully ordered, the dance of [masculinity and femininity]—desire and restraint, initiative and response, fruitfulness and frustration—gives us a window to our cosmic destiny.”

When we lose a right view of the Image of God, we lose touch with who we are as Image Bearers. The wisdom of righteousness is interpreted as chains and shackles that bind instead of truth that sets one free to truly love (See Proverbs 29:18; Psalm 2.)

And, in knowing this proverbial reality we can clearly discern the enemy’s strategy: systematically remove the good of gender distinction from society so that men and women do not order their lives in such a way that they get to the marriage supper of the Lamb. First, he sought to undefine marriage and now gender is in his sights. Beloved, it is time for the Church to rise up in strength and declare the truth. Time is of the essence. This guide will help you.

### **Understanding Gender—Spirit, Soul and Body**

God is spirit. Therefore, to be “created in His Image” goes much deeper than just our physical bodies. Your human spirit is the deepest part of who you are. It is the place you were meant to have union with God—His Spirit and your spirit communing together. Your human spirit reveals the Image of God, as does your soul and your body. Your body (the physical) reveals something about your spirit (the unseen part of you.) This means your biological sex (the body you were born in) matters in light of eternity.

Your body denotes the gender to which you *belong*—men to the masculine and women to the feminine. This is not to say that women do not possess the power to act and men are not able to simply be. Quite the contrary. Men are made to be as well as do, but they must do it as men

in a male body. And likewise, women are made to act as well as be, but they must do it as women in a female body.

Mario Bergner, author of *Setting Love in Order*, writes, “Clearly, it is correct for a man to say that his is a masculine gender identity and for a woman to say that hers is a feminine one. We not only possess masculine and feminine qualities, but also by our sex we belong to one gender or the other. A secure sense of belonging to one’s gender is central to having a healthy personal identity.”

*Our Creator, holding all that is true and real within Himself, reflects both the masculine and feminine, and so do we. The more nearly we function in His image, the more nearly we reflect both the masculine and the feminine their proper balance—that is, in the differing degrees and aptitudes appropriate to our sexual identities as male and female.*  
Leanne Payne, *Crisis in Masculinity*

As we walk out the truth of who we were created to be (spirit, soul, and body) we are walking in radical holiness. And this holiness is available to all who make Jesus Christ Lord of their lives—no matter how marred God’s Image is within them. Jesus died to set those bound up in unrealities regarding their sex and gender free. And, there is power in His blood for the hurting to make peace with his or her sex and gender. Through the cross, Jesus has made a way to bind up the *disintegrated* parts of who we are and fully transform us into His likeness. For, *by His wounds we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5d).

### **God’s Heterosexual Creation**

God’s creation is heterosexual. The prefix “hetero” means, “different or distinction.” This is opposed to the prefix “homo” which means “same.” In God’s creation there are always two—one and the *other*. This is the foundation for gender distinction or the gender binary. Culture wants to do away with the gender binary; but such an action would be doing away with the image of God as revealed in male and female, masculine and feminine.

God’s image cannot be seen or experienced within homosexuality (or its variations) because there is no binary—there is no other. This is why so called “gay marriage” is so destructive to society. Again, no right vision of God, no restraint in our behavior.

“Our sexuality is a reflection of our spirituality” (Dr. Peter Jones, *The God of Sex*.) The issue of homosexuality is not just about who one chooses to love, it is about our view of God who is Love. Despite what culture may say, “love” is not always Love.

## Understanding the Divine Order

*What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.*

*C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength*

In God's heterosexual creation, both the masculine and the feminine are needed, as each represent aspects of who God is and how He acts in relationship. One isn't better than the other. In fact, they complement one another. Biblical masculinity and femininity highlight different characteristics of God's heart. That being said, in God's design there is an order: the masculine comes first and the feminine follows.

In relation to God, we are all feminine. According to 1 John 4:19, God, the Great Initiator, first loved us, and this selfless love has awakened our hearts to respond to Him in love and adoration. "...All of humanity, males and females alike, are in the feminine position of responding to God's acts of initiation. Moreover, when we refer to the church as she (or as the Bride of Christ), we do not mean that it is composed of females. Nor when we refer to God as He (or to Christ as our Bridegroom) do we mean that God is male (Mario Bergner, *Setting Love in Order*).

This Divine Initiative and human response are at the heart of our understanding of creation and our place within it as gendered people. God is the Creator and we are His creation. He is the Potter and we are the clay.

### The Broken Image

In Genesis 3:1, Adam and Eve were invited into a conversation with the serpent, "Has God indeed said ...?" With one simple question, the enemy attacked the True Masculine and the True Feminine. As the serpent came into the garden, Adam, who was called to embody the True Masculine, was meant to protect Eve from the deception of the serpent. He did not act. Unprotected, Eve responded to the serpent by simply operating in her natural capacity for relationship, True Femininity. Her protector was not present to keep her from deception, and as a result, gender has been disordered ever since.

We live in a fallen world. We are wounded by the presence of sin and brokenness, hindered in our ability to give and receive love. Ultimately, we are hindered in our ability to bear God's image in and through our bodies. As men and women, we are all created to uniquely bear God's image. But as we pursue life and relationship apart from God, that image in us is distorted.

Dialogue with darkness ends in darkness. We were never meant to have conversations with the enemy. It didn't end well for Adam and Eve and it won't end well for us. Our attachments (securely formed relationships) inform our identity. In the garden, the enemy called the character of God into question which caused Adam and Eve to doubt the goodness of the Lord. The enemy attacked Adam and Eve's secure attachment to the Lord. Disconnected from their Source and walking in unbelief, Adam and Eve were disempowered to walk in the good of their gender.

Enter fear, shame, and disorder. But, we must remember this was not God's original intent. We cannot deny the reality of sin's impact on creation in the face of the massive gender confusion present in society. As the Church, we must lovingly and gracefully correct the unreality of the sexually and relationally broken. For, "love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth"(1 Corinthians 13:6).

### **A Call to Action**

We are living in a Psalm 2 crisis. The people are plotting in vain and the rulers have set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." Culture desires to cast off the restraint of gender difference and sexual boundaries set forth by our Creator to protect us and free us to love rightly.

Our first course of action as a Church must be to REPENT.

"...If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

I want to highlight 5 areas where the Church of America needs to repent regarding the LGBTQ issue:

1. **Passivity**—Like Adam in the garden we have allowed the serpent to walk right into our congregations and inform the people on issues of sex and gender. "Did God really say homosexual behavior was sin? Did God really say a man dressing like a woman (or vice versa) was sin? After all, Jesus didn't have a sexual ethic, He only had a love ethic." Our passivity has led to a great deception in the Church and the only cure is to turn to God. Like the Laodicean Church (Revelation 2:14-22) we must anoint our eyes with eye salve so that we can clearly see the wave of delusion sweeping across the Body of Christ.
2. **Fear of Intimidation**—One of the main strategies of the LGBTQ activists is intimidation. They threaten lawsuits, defamation of character, and the destruction of businesses that uphold Biblical values. And, to be fair, the gay lobby *is* powerful and well-funded. But, have we forgotten our Lord Jesus is far more powerful and far more well-funded? It is time for the strength and courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (See Daniel 3). We know our God is mighty to save, but even if He doesn't, we must no longer bow down to the god of this age.
3. **Agreement with Culture**—The Biblical witness is clear. God is never found in agreement with the understanding or expression of sexuality promoted by culture. In fact, He sent prophet after prophet to exhort His children to turn from the worship of Baal and Asherah—worship which included homosexual practice and temple prostitution.

Sadly, many churches are now walking in agreement with the witness of culture instead of the Biblical witness on LGBTQ issues. We must break our agreement with this present darkness and come into agreement with what God says regarding sex and gender.

4. **Denying the Transforming Power of the Gospel**—Jesus Christ has life-changing power that can radically transform the core of the repentant sinner. Unfortunately, many in

the Church no longer believe this truth for the LGBTQ person. Instead, they encourage gay and lesbian men and women to wear the label “gay Christian.” “It’s OK to be gay, just don’t act it.” WRONG!

Jesus Christ is able to transform anyone who humbly turns to Him—homosexuals included (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We must have a higher vision of Jesus and His ability to perfect our faith. The process may take a lifetime, but nonetheless He is able to complete the good work He began in us. (More on this later...).

5. **Not Having the Lord’s Heart for the LGBTQ Community**—Jesus longs for those lost in the LGBTQ lifestyle to return to Him. They are dear to Him. He died for them. Those in the LGBTQ community are precious to the Lord and we must share His heart as we seek and save the lost.

We must make a place for LGBTQ people to belong in our congregations, even while they are still being sanctified. They are not going to do the process perfectly, but no one does! They need grace, and safety, and lots of love if they are going to learn the trust they will need to attach to the Lord and His body in such a way that they can heal and overcome their brokenness.

And so, let us make haste to the place of prayer. Let us repent deeply that we might shine brightly. And let us hold out the word of life to a world desperately in need of True Love.

## Maintaining Hope

*...those who hope in Me will not be disappointed (Isaiah 49:23)."*

Upon the heels of the US Supreme Court legalizing “gay marriage” in all 50 states, the transgender movement exploded on the scene, further muddying the waters of sex and gender. Now parents are raising their children “gender neutral,” allowing for time for them to decide their sex at will.

As strangers in this world, we don’t understand such episodes and examples of nonsense, wickedness and evil. As believers we should be ever growing in our comprehension of love. Darkness makes less and less sense to those living in the light. It’s true that we too once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air and were, therefore, sons of disobedience (see Eph. 2:1-3). But, now we have been made alive. The curse has been reversed. We are sons of God. And we see things very differently now. We have hope.

But how do we maintain this hope in the midst of growing confusion, darkness, nonsense, and evil?

To hope is to desire with expectation of obtainment, to expect with confidence. The biblical concept of hope is not mere expectation and desire, as in Greek understanding, but includes trust, confidence, and refuge in God.

For Christians, hope is supernatural. It is the result of the Holy Spirit empowering our desire for God and His great and precious promises. This supernatural hope empowers the soul to trust in the character of



God even, as Corrie Ten Boom says, “when life gives you reasons not to.” Our hearts can be confident in love before God.

God is the source of our expectation—He gives us vision. We begin to hope. By hoping we are coming into agreement with God—He is the God of all hope. Where there is agreement with God there is blessing and empowerment. There is unity with the Holy Spirit in our souls. We walk by faith.

Life in this fallen world is hard. It can be discouraging to be surrounded by so much evil. But, in the midst of the difficulty, we must maintain our hope. Hope is the basis of our faith in God. It is an expression of our love. And it is a powerful weapon of righteousness. The enemy of our souls desires to destroy our hope! But we must not lose heart.

A hopeful soul is an empowered soul. A downcast soul is a disempowered soul. Beloved, in this hour of human history we must hold onto hope for dear life!

The key to maintaining hope (and joy for that matter) is to choose to see Love and the opportunity for togetherness in every situation. It is the attitude of relationship.

The despairing soul is not able to see Love in every circumstance. It is the attitude of abandonment. With no hope of togetherness all that is left is the lonely task of trying to do the impossible by oneself. Talk about depressing!

If you have lost hope in a particular area of life, you need a fresh vision of Love in this matter. New vision gives new opportunity to choose hope. Remember, the Holy Spirit will be quick to empower you in the hard work of hope!

I’ll never forget a scene one month after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre when 26 people were murdered by pure evil. Some of the parents of the murdered children spoke out at a press conference. A mom whose little girl, Anna, had been tragically ripped from her life, talked of how her faith in God had been a sustaining factor in the midst of unthinkable tragedy. Her closing statement was this: “We choose love. Love wins in Newtown and may love win in America.” WOW! She maintained hope because she could see Love in the midst of evil!

Hope does not disappoint. There will be justice for this precious mom and the many others who lost loved ones in this tragedy. Ultimately, there will be justice for those who choose to stand for the truth of God’s image in the midst of great sexual immorality. Evil does not win. Terror does not win. LOVE wins! WE WIN!

Very soon “The kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). There is much to hope for in this hour. Jesus is soon returning and He will make the wrong things right. He brings judgment to those who refuse Him and reward to those who love Him.

I hope for that day of victory. I hope for the fullness of my salvation—a new, resurrected body. I hope for justice once and for all—evil driven off of the planet forever. I hope for eternity with my Bridegroom—the One who loved me and gave Himself for me. I hope for the Father making His dwelling place, His resting place, with me eternally. I will not be disappointed. And neither will you, my friend.

My hope is a powerful weapon. It sustains my heart through trial and tribulation. It supports my faith in times of suffering. It drives my heart into joy. Hoping in the Lord renews my strength and guards my soul against weariness (see Isaiah 40:31).

As you seek to grow in hope, pray Ephesians 1:17-19 for the opening of your eyes of faith.

Do not be downcast. Do not be disturbed. Learn to see love in every situation. Look for the opportunity for relationship with God in every circumstance. Choose to walk and to love in every situation. Watch mountains move and see that relationship with God works every time.

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*

*Romans 15:13*

## God's Strategy in the Midst of Persecution

Overcoming the life- dominating aspects of unwanted same-sex attractions (SSA) is difficult. Homosexuality is rooted in deep woundedness and driven by pain and anger; it can feel like the prison door will never open. Add to that the shifts in our culture and freedom can seem even more elusive. Nearly all spheres of life are now supportive of embracing a gay identity, including much of the Western Church. Someone who chooses to walk away from unwanted SSA in this day and age is a target for much persecution. We at Agape First Ministries are very much a hated entity by the world in which we live.

But we do not lose heart. Jesus warned us of such hatred and persecution. In fact, His counsel was to not be surprised by such things—the world hated Him first because He testified that its works are evil (John 7:7). “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18). We are in good company. Furthermore, He went on to say, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you (John 15:19.) The hatred of the world is a testimony that we are not of the world. We have been chosen OUT of this world! Hallelujah! Therefore, we do not marvel at the world’s hatred of us but at the reality that we are now God’ children by His love. We do not fix our eyes on hatred, but on love.

The key to moving well through persecution is where we fix our gaze. The devil loves to pull away our focus. In many ways, his primary goal is the persecution of the saints—to get their eyes off of Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith.

King David understood the importance of gazing upon the beauty of the Lord in times of trouble. Psalm 27 is a prime example of his warfare strategy. In verses 1-3, he declared that the Lord is his light and his salvation in the midst of impending war. His confidence came from what he saw in the light: a strong God who was fighting for him. What did he have to be afraid of? God was on his side.

In 27:4 he proclaimed, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.” David did not want to be caught up in what he could see or hear in the natural realm. He wanted to behold the beauty of the Lord and talk to God about the many issues he was facing as the new king of Israel. What a profound strategy and life vision!

When I fail to see God in my circumstances, I quickly lose hope. I mean, let's face it, no one wants to experience hatred. We certainly weren't created for such an experience. Persecution for the Christian faith is happening in our country and will most likely increase in the coming years. I refuse to let self-pity or fear rob me of my glory as a son of God.

King David made good on his life vision. After he was anointed king over all of Israel and established his throne in Jerusalem, he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Zion and established a worship center. The sacrifices offered in this tabernacle were very different from the tabernacle of Moses; they were not just animals, but ones of praise, joy, and thanksgiving (Psalm 95:2, 100:4, 141:2). David hired, and paid out of his own pocket, for singers and musicians to worship the Lord day and night. David and his kingdom were blessed and protected.

In this evil age, I have taken a page out of David's playbook and established a House of Prayer with the goal of offering the sacrifices of praise, joy, and thanksgiving, as well as our petitions to the Lord day and night. I am convinced that this is the only way to operate wisely in the changing culture. Like David, we believe we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13). We will be blessed and protected.

Fixing our eyes on the Unseen can be difficult. It definitely takes practice. I have learned to quiet my heart at different points throughout my day and simply ask the question, "Jesus, where are You?" I am not doubting He is with me, but reacquainting myself with the reality of His presence. This has been called "practicing the presence of God" by saints of old. Ultimately, it is about doing my day with God, from the mundane to the serious.

Practicing God's presence has been a saving grace for me on many occasions, especially during various forms of persecution. Knowing God is with me and for me truly is, like David said, the strength of my life.

Practicing His presence, it is also the key to my working with mentees. Oftentimes, the issues of opposition they report are quite overwhelming. One can wonder how in the world they will overcome. But as I remember that not only is Jesus with me but He also lives in me, I have hope. Christ in me is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)! If Jesus lives in us, there is always hope for overcoming unto glory.

Times have changed. Persecution is beginning for Christians in this nation, but God is still on the throne. He is still sovereign and still beautiful. If the shifting culture has gotten you down, turn off the news, open your Bible, and gaze upon God's endless beauty. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14).

## Discipleship Matters

As believers, we have the wonderful comfort of the instruction of the Word of God; but to those who depart from it, there is little hope (see Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18). Isn't it reassuring that we have received instruction from our Lord and Savior? He instructed us to, "Go make disciples." Scripture is unmistakably clear on this issue (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18).

Our goal in discipleship is the maturing of a believer into the character of Jesus and helping them make additional disciples.

Often, as it was with Jesus, we must go up to the mountain with the Lord and seek Him on who we will disciple and allow Holy Spirit to hover over our hearts. (Luke 6:12-16) Discipleship often begins with intercession as we go to God on behalf of another. The discipler must divest themselves of any agenda and fully surrender to the Lord. With the guidance of Holy Spirit the discipler must be prepared to be humble, a good learner of people, able to model and practice the fruit of the Spirit as well as Christlike character. It is important to recognize that we are not trying to make converts. When trials or difficulties come, converts fall away. Disciples are willing to die for the One whom they love.

To the extent that we allow Jesus to transform us, lead us, teach us, and correct us, we will be used in the discipleship of others. In our obedience to the Lord's commission, we are either modeling Christ for them, or we are modeling ourselves to them. Therefore, people will either be growing in Christlikeness because of our relationship with Jesus Christ, or they will be becoming disciples of us and our own imagination of who Jesus is. Their progression in discipleship will reflect our maturity in Jesus Christ (John 15:1-17).

Parenthood is a wonderful illustration of discipleship. For many people, their children may have been their first experience with discipleship. In the same way we don't leave a newborn to fend for itself, we also should not leave a new believer to fend for themselves. They may come into The Kingdom loud, messy, disruptive, needy, etc. and requiring a great deal of kindness and patience. We will need to teach them to worship, pray, study their Bible, love, serve, and so on. Most of this they will need to see in action. When guiding individuals out of the LGBTQ community to become a disciple of Jesus, we must have both a father's heart and a mother's heart toward them.

The disciple maker has the authority of Jesus Christ to disciple from any tribe, tongue, or people group, including the LGBTQ community. We are called to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teach them everything Jesus has taught us. We are to teach the disciple all of Scripture, and to build in them the fullness of Christ until the end of the age.

In making disciples, we must always remember that the divine instructions given by God in Genesis 1:26-28 applies to all disciples. Affirming the individual that they have been given the authority and divine empowerment to accomplish these instructions is critical to the development of the identity of a disciple. Those coming out of the LGBTQ community to be disciplined, often come with doubts that they are part of God's Kingdom and that the Genesis 1 mandates cannot, or do not, apply to them.

These mandates are to:

- Have authority to rule (have dominion over) the earth
- Be fruitful and to multiply
- Tend to and cultivate (bring out the best in) all of God's creation
- Continue living out our commission until death

Finally, remember this model for discipleship as it is demonstrated in Acts 42-47:

1. Disciple maker does, disciple watches
2. Disciple does, disciple maker watches
3. Disciple does (goes and make disciples)

### **Relationship Building Ideas For Discipleship**

Healthy discipleship exists in relationship between Jesus and the disciple; as well as the disciple maker and the disciple. Here are some key ideas to help you build relationships that will lead to productive discipleship in Jesus Christ.

### **Practical Considerations**

- Get their contact information, full name, cell phone number, email address
- Talk to them about the next time you will both meet to do discipleship, and then immediately send them a follow-up communication
- Schedule regular meetings with them (no less than once a week, no less than 1 hour)
- Let them be part of you everyday life. Include them in special events like holidays, birthday parties, family outings. Take them with you as you disciple others, go to the grocery store, go to the gym. Find out what they like to do and do it with them.
- Avoid pairing disciples and disciple makers who struggle with the same relationship sins; such as addiction to porn or acting out sexually in any way
- Meet in public places such as at church or at a coffee shop
- Agree to an appropriate Bible translation, but be mindful of where they are, not where you want them to be. Understanding and comprehending the content of some translations as well as literacy in general is still a common issue for many. Use a children's Bible or audio version if needed.

### **Holding Disciples Accountable**

- Hold them accountable to reading Scripture and to times of prayer:
  1. Plan mutual times of reading and praying together with you
  2. Have them plan times of reading and praying on their own
- Watch for forward progression in their maturity, if there isn't there may be a number of reasons (religion, lack of being in the Word, an area of freedom needed, misbeliefs, heart issue). Inquire of the Lord how to proceed.

- Cultivate humility and teachability by modeling it. It is prudent for us to take the learners chair and ask questions that will encourage the disciple to look to God's Word as their source for truth. Character issues will resolve in a community focused on joy and connection with a strong group identity. Insisting they fully engage in a faith community is crucial.
- Teach them about God honoring relationships and to discern which friends or relationships are edifying to their spiritual growth, maturity, or walk with Jesus Christ

### Discipleship of the LGBTQ+ community

In regards to the discipling those coming out of the LGBTQ Lifestyle, there are several areas of awareness that will be of importance:

1. Community-the LGBT Community is know for its acceptance, sense of belonging, hospitality, lack of judgement, etc. In most cases the church currently fails at meeting the need for community. In order to be successful as a discipler, one must be willing to let people be part of your life.
2. Most individuals with LGBT history struggle with toxic shame and a lack of relational connection. This will require empathy and compassion to navigate them through.
3. Resources and testimonies of transformed ex-gays is vital as the disciple will benefit from a sense of being related to, knowing they can still be different and belong, as well as find comfort and hope in knowing someone else has overcome.

**Remember:** Our goal in discipleship is to help them become who God created them to be in order to fulfill their God given purpose in life and encourage them to follow the model laid out in Scripture. If we model discipleship as Jesus did our disciples will make disciples.

## The Biblical Basis For Transformation

*"Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*

*1 Corinthians 6:11 NASB95*

"Such WERE some of you" -this indicates a change, which is transformation.

The definition of transformation according to the Oxford Dictionary is, "A thorough or dramatic change."

According to Webster's, the definition is, "The act or process of changing completely."

We see a lot of examples in the Bible of people struggling in sin, but then being transformed by the power of God. In the book of Hosea, Gomer, who was an adulterer, was reconciled to her husband, Hosea, and transformed into a godly wife. In the book of Exodus, Moses was identified as a murderer and hid from Pharaoh because of what he had done. Yet, this murderer

was later transformed by God into the leader of His people, and would stand up to Pharaoh rather than hide from him. In the Gospel of John, chapter 4, the woman at the well was transformed from adulteress into an evangelist because of Jesus' kindness and authority. Saul of Tarsus went from being known as the one who persecuted the Church to being transformed by Jesus into the Apostle Paul who wrote 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament.

*"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."*

*John 15:4-5*

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23*

When a sinner turns from their sin, towards God in true repentance, we begin to see the manifestation of transformation within them. We see this by way of the fruits of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5; and in John 15 it mentions, "remain in me" and we will produce fruit. This shows us that we cannot make this change on our own. To achieve transformation, our part is repentance and obedience, His part is the sanctification\*and transformation. Our part is faith, His part is grace.

*Ephesians chapter 2 tells us, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved."*

*Later, the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:8-10, "For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord."*

The Bible clearly tells us that transformation is a changed life, and that life will bear new fruit. One who once lived a life contrary to what pleases God, bearing evil fruit, will change into a life that no longer conforms to the ways or the "pattern" of this world (Rom 12:2). This transformation occurs through the renewing of our mind and our flesh, and will then manifest itself through new actions, which is the bearing of good fruit. John 15 tells us that Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches, IF we remain in Him, and He in us, we will bear much fruit—apart from Him we can do nothing. It is Jesus who causes fruit to bear.

More examples in the Bible can be found in places such as Colossians 1:9-10, which shows us that it is the Spirit that gives us wisdom and understanding in order that we may bear fruit in **every good work**; and this is a life that pleases the Lord.

### **Sanctification is a process**

Philippians 1:6 says, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” God never stops working within us. Those who were once in darkness and now are light in the Lord, the Spirit is constantly working in them to make them more in the likeness of Jesus. The veil in the temple was there to protect the people from the holiness of God; but when Jesus died, that veil was torn and that makes it so that we can come into His presence. We who come with “unveiled faces” are being transformed into Jesus’ image. This happens because of the Spirit and “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:12-18). No chains. No condemnation. Freedom. Transformation. Hope!

If God is constantly at work in us, then this is a continual process until the day of Christ Jesus. This process starts with the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16). It is in the Gospel that we see that we need to put off the old nature, which belongs to our former way of living, and now put on our new nature (Eph 4:22-24). Other places, it says we are to “walk in the Spirit.” Transformation in the Bible is very much described like taking off old clothes. We take off, or as the Bible says, “put off,” or do away with our “old self.” If the old self has died, we cannot put it back on. We can only “put on” the new and learn to live in that new self.

Paul tells us that the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, My power is made perfect in weakness” (2Cor. 12:9). We cannot be changed or transformed on our own. WE cannot “will” it in our own strength. It is by the power of the love of God through the constant work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a repentant heart that we will experience transformation.

## How the Church Has Hurt the LGBTQ+ Community

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

***John 13:34-35***

*“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’”*

***Mark 16:15***



Every day, headlines across the world mention the LGBTQ+ community. This topic is overwhelming our news outlets, our clothing stores, our advertisements, our places of employment, our doctor's offices, sports, and even our schools, colleges, and universities. So, why is it that all we are getting from the American Church on this topic is nothing but crickets?

According to a NBC news report done in 2020 by Dan Avery,

*"The vast majority of religious LGBTQ Americans are Christian — split fairly evenly among Catholics (25 percent), Protestants (28 percent) and other Christian denominations (24.5 percent). Only about 2.5 percent identify as Jewish and 2 percent as Muslim."*

Even with these numbers, the American Church continues to conduct *business as usual*. What is it that has made such a large group of people leave the Church in preference of the LGBTQ+ community? Or, to put it more plainly: *How has the Church hurt the LGBTQ+ ?*

When it comes to LGBTQ-identifying members of the church, we typically see two extreme approaches. On one hand, we have a watered-down gospel approach, full of acceptance and even an unchanged message. On the other hand, we see the opposite approach—they preach a message of condemnation, creating a hierarchy of sin, which leaves no hope.

Neither of these approaches follow what God's Word says the Church should do; and both of these approaches hurt the LGBTQ+ identified individual. Even more than this, it makes the challenge of sharing the need to repent an even more difficult task. We are Christ's ambassadors and, therefore, have *His* message to bring—not our own. We have hurt LGBTQ+ identified individuals by not bringing them the message of Jesus Christ. Instead, we have sent *our* message, and have become a stumbling block to those who are lost.

*"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

**2 Corinthians 5:20**

The world around us is changing; but if the Church focuses on being *progressive* and *inclusive*, instead of being doctrinally sound, we are bound to have some problems. All of the churches that desire to be inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ+ individuals may be coming from a place of wanting to show Christ's love, but they have lost sight of the truth. They have conformed to the thought process of this world—they have lost sight of what God's Word says; and that His Word is the highest authority.

*“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

*1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

*“Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.”*

*Romans 6:6*

*“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, [excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”*

*Ephesians 4:17-24*

When we preach a message of acceptance rather than that of repentance, we are preaching a false sense of security, and that is not love. This message gives the lost the sense that they have no need for a Savior. They have nothing to be saved from because they can remain unchanged. There is nothing that they need to die to, and nothing to “put off.”

*And He was saying to them all, “if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”*

*Luke 9:23*

Would we say that it is love to allow our child to run through a burning building? It's what they want to do, and that is how they express themselves. However, I think that we would all agree that love in that case is to do whatever we need to do to protect our child from harm, or even death. This is what we are doing when we preach a message of acceptance rather than that of repentance; we are allowing others to run to the flames while we stand there and tell them you are loved.

Example: *“This is what the Church is doing when it preaches a message of acceptance rather than that of repentance. This false gospel affirms people in their current state—standing by and watching them run into the flames while the Church just stands by and loves them to death.”*

In addition to this fallacy, there is yet another error the Church clings to:

*“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.”*

*Leviticus 18:22*

It is from this word *abomination* that many churches use as a launching pad into a hierarchy of sin. This is the other extreme. Instead of being progressive, they are more legalistic. Their practice is led out of fear and leads to a lack of compassion as well as a lack of hope.

When we are led by fear it cripples us so that we are unable to move. If we are unable to move our lips, that makes us silent on issues that we should address. If we are unable to move, our hands we are unable to embrace the hurting. If we are unable to move our feet, we are not able to go to those who are so very lost. If we are unable to move our minds, from the things of this world to the things above, we will lack compassion. All of this breeds a lack of hope.

*“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”*

*2 Timothy 1:7*

These churches have lost sight of the fact that mankind is made in the image of God. To be made in the image of God means that, in the eyes of God, each of us are worth saving. All of us are in need of a Savior; and Jesus is willing to go get the one while leaving the ninety-nine. He does this so that each one can have a relationship with Him.

*“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*

*Genesis 1:26-27*

It is also here that we see a lack of understanding to what Jesus has commanded us to do— love! This may stir up some people who stand on this point, believing that to love is to accept everything and everyone just as they are. But is that what the Bible instructs?? What is it really that drives churches to say, *“I don’t want to compromise the doctrinal stance of our*

*denomination by showing the LGBTQ+ Community love.” Couldn’t one even argue that not showing love IS compromising your faith?*

If these two sides are not what the Bible tells us, then what is the solution? The American Church has hurt LGBTQ-identifying individuals by watering down the message of Jesus, as well as poisoning the Gospel with a lack of compassion for the lost.

When Jesus commanded us to love, He wasn’t telling us *anything goes*. He was telling us that love is selfless. Love is costly. Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love is not harsh. Love rejoices with the truth, but does not delight in evil. All of this tells us that to love is not easy; but loving one another is how the world will know that we are His.

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with everything we have so that means everything stems from that commandment. If we first must love God and to do so we must keep His commandments, then that should lead us right to proclaiming what Jesus proclaimed, “Repent!” and that message is to who Jesus came for. Not the healthy but the sick. Sinners, not the righteous. He came to seek and save the lost. As His ambassadors, shouldn’t it be that we are to do the same? As His disciples, shouldn’t we be preaching that same message to the ends of the earth and walking as He walked?

God loved us—each and every one of us—while we were of least value. It was while we were there that He died for us. Not when our value increased, but while we were of least value. He did it all so that we could come to Him. That is love. It is that same unconditional love that we are to have as we encounter the LGBTQ+ community in order that we may share with them the message of hope found in repentance. If we remain silent, we only bring death, rather than life. If we continue to bring a false security, we allow them to be burned for all of eternity.

*“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”*

*John 15:13*

In order for the American Church to show the love of Jesus to the LGBTQ+ community, we are going to have to start by humbling ourselves, and then ask God for the grace to love the way He wants us to love them. We need to understand that no matter where we have come from, or what we have done, nothing is so great that our God can’t handle it. No sin is so heavy that Jesus’ blood can’t cover it.

We need to come to a place of seeing that the hierarchy of sin is man made, and that every sin was bought at a price—the same price. Do we really want to show anyone that Jesus’ blood was not great enough to cover their sin?

We have created an atmosphere of hate rather than that of love. We are not to love the practices, but the people. Hate their practices, but to the people, we are to show love. Our

battle is not against the LGBTQ+ individuals, but we—the American Church—have forgotten this. Our battle is against the principalities and powers of this dark age.

We need to put on our armor of God and get rid of the spirit of fear. It has no place amongst God's people! This spirit of fear has caused us to be silent far too long. It has caused us to show a lack of compassion far too long. It has caused us to accept sin far too long. It has caused us to allow a lack of accountability far too long. But love . . . casts out fear.

How has the Church hurt LGBTQ+ individuals? In so many ways, but in short, we have made it so difficult for them to come to the feet of Jesus. We need to ask God to help us show them love, and be armed with the truth, seasoned with grace, in order that we may share with them the message Jesus has, Today is the day of repentance!

*"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."  
1 John 4:18*

Finally, I want you to consider that these two extremes that we, the American Church, display are a fantastic comparison of the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were very focused on the law. They were all about the law! The Gentiles were all about loose living. They lived the total opposite of what God required. They were the progressive type. It was Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection that bridged the chasm between the Jews and the Gentiles.

In the same way, Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection bridges the gap between the Church and the LGBTQ+ Community. It is not either extreme that God calls us to, but rather something more in the middle. He calls us to love with a love that demands change or rejection. This is the love that God showed us by sending Jesus to die when we were of least value.

Lord, please help the American Church show your love for the LGBTQ+ we pray!

*"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."  
Romans 5:8*

## Agape First Ministries Hallmarks

### Connection verses Change

At Agape First Ministries, we stress connection with Abba Father rather than simply changing sinful behavior. We believe that as you connect with Abba, the change will happen in His timing. Our Heavenly Father meets us right where we are at. Jesus hung out with the broken, the sinners, tax collectors, drunkards, and prostitutes. His relational connection with them transformed them. Jesus died for us while we were sinners so that He could attach to us in that place of death and make us fully alive.

### **Made to Love verses Betrayal of False Identity**

We each were made fully in God's image, and we were made to fully love. Sadly, the enemy has done much to confuse those with sexual brokenness about their immeasurable worth to Abba Father. Toxic shame can easily make us feel like we are deformed, an abomination, or our attempts to love God are wrong. Combine that with wrongly-applied Scripture, and toxic shame becomes enforced—giving us a false identity that yields betrayal. Deeper on the inside, beyond that false identity, we find the "Image of God" we were created in. This image remains unblemished regardless of how much trauma, abuse, or brokenness we encounter. Jesus sets us free to bring out the beauty of who He created us to be—Lovers of God that love others well. This forges us deeply into the identity He sees us as, not the identity the world, others, or that we ourselves would assign to us. Furthermore, we have been made expressly to worship God, and to love Him in a First Love capacity. As we grow in our true identity, being Lovers of God becomes our primary desire.

### **Freedom to Walk in the Spirit verses Right Behavior through Rules**

Many of us make the mistake of just crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires, but never walking into the resurrected life on the other side of that cross we each bear. As Jesus transforms us from the inside out, we learn the freedom His Father created us to have—a vibrant life of walking with the Holy Spirit, who gives us grace. Simply trying to follow rules only ends in failure and further mars our hearts in comparison with the deep healing touch only Jesus can bring. As we learn to walk in the Spirit, we learn to guard our hearts and minds in such a way that the workmanship He is making us into comes forth; and every work becomes His work through us.

### **Immaturity verses Rebellion**

There is a huge difference in the eyes of the Lord between rebellion and immaturity. Even as we struggle with habitual sins, if we have a sincere desire to follow Jesus' lead, we are not in rebellion, and we are not His enemy. We are beloved sons or daughters and there is grace to learn to love Him fully by doing what He commands—to love God fully and love others. There is grace to grow into everything Abba has designed and desires for us to be. The Lord is very patient and kind—He disciplines us as children, He doesn't judge us as He does His enemies. He fights against anything that would hinder us from fully encountering His love.

### **Fully Integrated & Alive verses Suppression**

Suppressing our struggles, locking them away in the depths of our souls, and pretending they are not there is not healing. For most, sexual brokenness is an arrested development. When we have encountered trauma (an overwhelming situation we cannot overcome) we become stuck emotionally, mentally, spiritually, even possibly physically—thus not being able to grow. This suppression begins to fragment who we are in our internal world, causing more rules to follow, more addictions to act upon, more over compensation, all while not being able to return to joy, or to the image of God we were created in. As we begin to bring our trauma in connection with Jesus from a safe place, as we allow Him to unburden the fragments that exile us, and as we find our Abba Father enjoys being with us, even while walking through brokenness, integration releases fullness of life upon the undeveloped parts of us. We begin to actually live fully alive!

### **Self Acceptance—Seeing Glory & Discerning Identity by the Spirit**

A huge part of walking out who God has created us to be is to stand outside of our struggles and let the very Mind of Christ inform us. As we become informed, taking every thought captive, renewing our mind, and guarding our heart and mind, becoming grace-filled—it simply flows naturally from the very presence of Immanuel (God with us.) As the Holy Spirit leads us deeper in our healing journey, the encounters of Jesus speaking our true identity takes place, resulting in transformation. As we begin to discern our true identity from the Word and our encounter, we begin to behold greater glory—we are children (sons or daughters) that have been made free by abiding in His Word, being His disciples!

### **We never overcome through religion**

Having the "will power," striving, legalism, "just stop it," condemnation, and trying harder, are self righteous and only yield religion. This will never bring transformation. A deep, vibrant, relational connection with Abba Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit bring a yielding of our will to His design, resting as He fights our battles, Christ's righteousness fulfilling the law so, we walk in the Spirit, true healing and deliverance and deep abiding intimacy with the One who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves! What a joy-filled life journey that lies ahead of us. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus), the word of our testimony, and not loving our own life; but being willing to lay it down. We serve the Faithful Witness, He cannot lie about us. He is leading us into deeper trust, belief, and obedience to His way—LOVE. Welcome to Agape First!

## Connecting with God in Hessed Community

How do we walk with each other in a hessed community that fully engages with God? The most practical answer is connection with Him in praise, worship, prayer, and intercession that keeps going back to hessed. A deeper look at the center of God's holiness is His mercy seat. The center of manifestive presence is loving kindness, a place where forgiveness flows; but there were also the tablets containing the 10 Commandments. The fellowship of believers dwelling in hessed is identically modeled: a place of love; but also purity. This mercy is not just functionally the way we treat each other's weaknesses; but it is who we are aspiring to be by walking out the life He has called us to—holiness!

Holiness was made possible by one Man (who is forever God) coming and fulfilling the Law by being sinless (perfect in keeping the righteous requirement) but also taking our punishment (for our disobedience to that Law). In light of Jesus' hessed, our own righteousness would still be filthy rags. Even a strong attempt to "keep or perform" the Law would still pale in comparison. So, what does the Lord require, especially in the light of hessed?

A proper way of understanding the Law Hebraically would be to actually "guard" the Law. I guard the Word of God by loving what it says, agreeing quickly with its truth (even if I have disobeyed); and I begin to see that abiding in His word has made me free of my bondage. I now guard that truth by continuing to abide in deep relationship with Him...(His name is The Word of God).

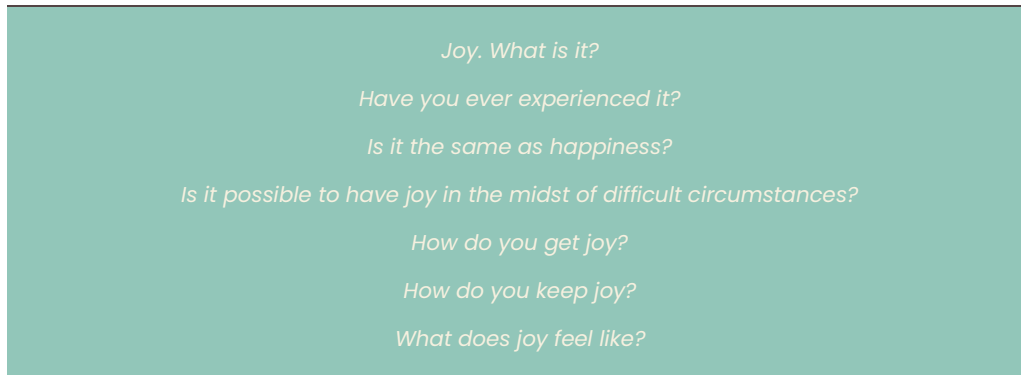
As Jesus was in the garden praying with His disciples, He admonished them to be on guard — “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Jesus’ prescription to temptation is to be on the guard. What a beautiful way to guard His ways He has fulfilled for us, that we would be free to follow Him fully!

We are also told to “Keep (guard) your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The reality of not sinning isn’t to just do more good things. Psalm 119:11 tells us, “Your word I have hidden (guarded) in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” The Scriptures are clear that guarding the places His Word/Law dwell is of utmost importance.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace (Shalom) of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). This is how hessed works when engaged with our Abba who created us! We guard the way He has asked us to walk in, and He meets us with grace to overcome.



## Immanuel Lifestyle Overview



These are all really good questions. Joy, according to the Dictionary of Psychology, is a feeling of extreme gladness, delight, or exaltation of the spirit, arising from a sense of well-being or satisfaction; or a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. It would seem that joy is the same as happiness, but more intense. If that is true, it would be very hard to have joy in the midst of difficult circumstances, because who is happy with adversity? Getting joy would seem to be getting a lifestyle without conflict, and keeping joy would seem only possible when you maintain a lifestyle without conflict. One dictionary says it is a feeling of extreme happiness or cheerfulness, especially related to the acquisition or expectation of something good, like a child on Christmas morning.

In the book “Building Bounce,” one of the authors wrote, “Life is hard. We all get overwhelmed at times. But some people seem to be able to handle hardship better than others...Thanks to the latest brain science, we now understand that there is a secret to emotional resilience. It is joy. The more joy you have, the more hardship you can handle.” Dr. Wilder explains joy as, “someone is glad to be with me.” We recognize this joy visually in the emotional (or right side) of our brain before we recognize it in the left side (or cognitive side) of the brain. How do we recognize it? Visually, by seeing someone's smile, or the light in their eyes when they see us.

Joy is relational. The more healthy, strong, and safe the relationships we have, the more joy we will experience. The Bible declares again and again that the joy of the Lord is our Strength; He gives strength to the weak and power to the powerless; He is able to make us strong and steadfast; He is our joy. The Bible also talks repeatedly about how God makes His face to shine upon us. He connects with us emotionally. He smiles on us. He is glad to be with us.

Our brains have “circuits” that guide our relational connections with God and others. These circuits are formed and changed in relationships, and so they are called “Relational Circuits.” Relational Connection Joy (or Connection) is the experience of being in an attuned relational engagement with God, oneself, or another person, AND perceiving that they are glad to be with you.

Attunement is an especially important form of interpersonal, emotional connection that feels like “we are on the same page”--we feel seen and heard; someone correctly understands our internal experience, and joins us in the emotions we are experiencing. Someone genuinely cares about us and is glad to be with us.

Our minds and brains have been designed to live in a relational world where everything is in shalom; where everything is in the right relationship, at the right time, in the right place, at the right strength, and in the right amount for God and people. At the center of this shalom is our brain’s relational circuits. If we lose our peace, particularly in relationships, these relational circuits can start to shut down. With our vital relational circuits partly or deeply off, problems get bigger, and we can start to treat people like objects. Our cravings become monsters, and we can deeply hurt those we love. We feel alone, disconnected, and purposeless.

The easiest way to know if your relational circuits (or RC’s) are on or off is to ask yourself a few questions:

- Is the problem bigger than the person?
- Do I really want to listen to what they are feeling or saying?
- Is my mind “locked onto” something upsetting?
- Do I just want to get away, fight, or freeze?
- Am I more aggressively interrogating, judging or trying to fix others?
- Do I even want to be connected with someone I usually like?

We can turn our relational circuits back on and regain shalom by deliberately focusing on appreciation/gratitude or having someone else “tune in” to us and how we’re feeling.

The Immanuel Lifestyle is a process that helps us to grow our emotional capacity to withstand adversity by helping us to grow our relational strengths. How do we do that? By helping to increase each person’s capacity to have an interactive relationship with God. It is this experiential connection with God that is the foundation for deep and lasting spiritual growth and maturity; for healing from painful experiences and life events; and for developing relationships with others and unity in the Body of Christ.

We use:

- Knowledge-based teaching that is informed by an understanding of the brain
- Experiential exercises to discover how relational connection occurs with God and others
- Specific explanations and skills to intentionally increase understanding of and capacity for relational connection
- Practical examples, demonstrations, and reflection on Immanuel as a lifestyle, with the foundation laid for Immanuel as an intervention & Immanuel as a prayer ministry.

Immanuel Prayer offers a process that is very useful to help people connect to the Lord in a prayer ministry session. It is a process of connection personally and interactively with the Lord, and removing barriers and hindrances to an intimate, interactive lifestyle of connection with Him. The goal is to build and deepen a securely attached relationship with the Lord, one that increases our capacity to stay connected to Him even in difficult life situations or painful experiences.

## God's End Time Strategy is the Family

*"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers [a reconciliation production by repentance], so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse" [of complete destruction]. Malachi 4:5*

The moment that every parent anxiously waits for is the sound of their baby's first breath and its subsequent tiny wails. Sweet baby is immediately placed skin-to-skin with mom, which helps baby in many ways, such as: the regulation of body temperature, decreases crying spells, enables better digestion and food absorption, stabilizes heartbeat, helps baby breast feed, and reduces pain. This also allows mom to share antibodies with baby so baby begins to build a strong immune system. This skin-to-skin contact also enables baby's brain to begin to develop with positive sensory interaction with mom; and baby begins to experience safety in their new world. For mom, prolactin is released which is important for a strong milk supply; and oxytocin lowers risk of postpartum depression, stress hormones are reduced for both mom and baby, and both mom and baby form attachments to each other. These first close moments are critical for survival of baby, and often mom as well. This is just the beginning of a child's life, so, imagine what happens if secure attachments are well established throughout childhood.<sup>1</sup>

Attachments formed where we are enjoyed, comforted, cared for, and protected help us to feel safe and to feel affirmed; and they give us increased capacity and resilience to thrive in life. Part of our role and mandate as parents is to be this example of secure attachment for our children so that they can learn to securely attach to Jesus. There is something that the father brings and something that the mother brings to the child(ren) through covenant that reveals the nature of the relationship between Jesus and His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:32). We were created for love, to belong to the One who knows us, and Who chose us on purpose. It's God's heart for each one of us to develop from a place of joy, fully enjoyed, as we mature and become who He has created us to be,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.sanfordhealth.org/childrens/the-importance-of-skin-to-skin-after-delivery-you-should-know/>

*"Blessed and worthy of praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ, just as [in His love] He chose us in Christ [actually selected us for Himself as His own] before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy [that is, consecrated, set apart for Him, purpose-driven] and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined and lovingly planned for us to be adopted to Himself as [His own] children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the kind intention and good pleasure of His will"*

*Ephesians 13-5*

Unfortunately, many of us have not had healthy, secure attachments with our parents or caregivers. Sometimes, children come into the world amidst chaos and unrest in a family, or there are environmental stressors like an absent parent, poverty, homelessness, illness, and so on, that can cause this lack. Often, because of these difficult and painful things in life we look to fill that place, where we were created for love, with other things. No matter our story, Jesus is there waiting with the Father for us to respond to His call for us to come home to His loving arms.

*"But when he [finally] came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough food, while I am dying here of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; [just] treat me like one of your hired men.' So, he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly bring out the best robe [for the guest of honor] and put it on him; and give him a ring for his hand, and sandals for his feet. And bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let us [invite everyone and] feast and celebrate; for this son of mine was [as good as] dead and is alive again; he was lost and has been found.' So they began to celebrate"*

*Luke 15:17-24*

God desires reconciliation in all the broken places where we have known only rejection and betrayal; where we are terrified to hope or try because the disappointment is just too painful. The places where our trust has been violated, Jesus is waiting. In those dark places, He desires to bring life, hope, and joy. Jesus wants us to partner with Him in this ministry of reconciliation where we go to those who are lost and hurting on behalf of Him. As we are securely attached to Jesus, we show them, by our love, that He has lavished on us what it is to have family. This may be with our biological family; but it may also be with those He wants us to add to our family. With this family, bonded in love, we can go forth in boldness and strength as warriors and take back the land the enemy has stolen, and see captives released. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

*Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life]. But all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ [making us acceptable to Him] and gave us the ministry of reconciliation [so that by our example we might bring others to Him], that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them [but canceling them]. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation [that is, restoration to favor with God].*

*2 Corinthians 5:17-19*

We, as representatives of the family of God, have been commanded to go to people on behalf of God, securely attached to Jesus, while practicing safe and healthy attachments. Jesus set this example by spending three years traveling, preaching, teaching, caring for, eating, and doing life with His disciples. Yes, He preached on hill sides and did miracles, but He also slept near them, wept with them, shared meals, spent time in their homes, and went away alone to pray. As fathers and mothers in Christ we must live this out with people through secure attachment in order for reconciliation to take place. It is hard work and will cost us everything. This is the place where we are victorious in love through secure attachment with Jesus and others. This will sustain us and increase our capacity to remain faithful together until Jesus returns for us and brings us home.

Paul describes the faithfulness and trustworthiness required as a steward of the Gospel, and the example He set that is tested by many trials and tribulations. He lived like his sons were watching him, exemplifying for us that there is more required of us than simply offering people guidance. Paul suggests we imitate him and become like fathers to those we are discipling.

*"For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church"*

*1 Corinthians 4:15-17*