A Process for Problematic Scenarios: Same-Sex Attraction and the Gospel

Hendricks Center for Christian Leadership and Cultural Engagement
Introduction

With the recent Supreme Court decision on marriage, many DTS students and graduates have been asking how they can guide their churches and ministries in thinking through the new questions they are facing. How can I proclaim the truth that was handed down through the Scriptures while also heeding Jesus's call to love sinners of all kinds?

One of our aims at Dallas Theological Seminary is to model for our students how to be ministers of the gospel who balance truth and love and do so with grace and humility. In this spirit, the Hendricks Center for Christian Leadship and Cultural Engagement has put together a process for walking through the decision making process of a difficult scenario. Our goal is to create a process that leaders can have on hand and apply to any number of problematic scenarios that they encounter in ministry (and perhaps, even in life). Below is our proposal for steps that you can take as you lead difficult discussions and work through problems on your own.

Below you will find the process itself, which consists of four broad questions followed by nineteen scenarios related to same-sex attraction and same-sex marriage that you can use to lead a discussion within your church or ministry using the process. The first seven of these scenarios were introduced at a pastors’ gathering on the Dallas campus on September 1, 2015. The remaining twelve scenarios were a part of our original list. The vast majority of these scenarios are not hypothetical but are real-life examples our staff was aware of from their pastoral or church experience or through people they know.

Particularly important in this topic is wrestling with how to preserve sacred space for the community while also keeping an extended hand for the gospel stretched out to those who may be uncomfortable with that sacred space. How does one invite such folks to consider such sacred space and how it can lead to a better life with God? This is why the fourth question is especially important. A preference for sacred space risks creating a community that appears closed to sharing the gospel with those not yet believing, just as a decision for mission may risk the appearance of being unconcerned with holiness and sin. This process is designed to make sure all the factors are seriously considered, and that the community consequences of the choices are taken into account and worked through in order to reflect a biblical balance of truth and grace.
The Process

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

Consider all possibilities on the table, even those further on the extreme that you don’t feel you would ever really consider. You never know middle ground options you might discover!

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

Here is where you filter out those options that don’t fit your convictions, community culture, or the realm of possibility for one reason or another. Be sure you have good reasons here and aren’t just choosing the “comfortable” options. You want this to be a short list, so be sure to rule out all options except two.

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

Now it is time to check yourself with Scripture, the example of Christ, and the Gospel. You may have chosen comfortable options, but for the sake of being a responsible Christian leader and later defending/explaining your decision, you must be sure to account for whether those preferences present the Gospel clearly or whether Christ’s message has been muddied by your preferences.

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]

Similar to the Gospel step, this final step allows you to consider and prepare for the impact of your decision on your community’s values. What values are upheld for your community, contributing to corporate sanctification? What values are put at risk and need to be directly addressed, in order for your community to maintain the tension in both values?
Scenario #1

Membership, Discipline, and Service
A same-sex family, including the children, comes to your response area and wants to become members. Are they accepted?

If so, are there any conditions to their membership? If there are no conditions, how do you maintain truth in your community? Where in the church can they participate and serve (i.e. choir member, nursery volunteer, Sunday morning greeter, etc.)?

If you refuse them membership, how will you demonstrate grace in the content and delivery of your response?

1. **Possibilities** [What are your options?]

2. **Preferences** [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. **Presenting the Gospel** [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. **Prioritizing Values** [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #2

Pastoral Counseling Issues

A child (a member of your church) announced that he is gay and his parents (also church members) want the church “just to love” their child and allow him to remain in the church. How do you prepare your congregation to respond well to this situation?

Reverse: Those parents cut off this child. However, their church community group disagrees with that decision and comes to you, wanting the church to rally around the cast-out child in the name of love and grace for “the weak.” How do you respond to all three parties in each situation?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #3

Church Events

A married same-sex couple has been attending your church for about a year wants to come on your annual marriage retreat. Do you allow them to sign up? If so, are there any conditions? If there are no conditions, why not?

A lesbian couple wants to attend your women’s retreat. Do you allow them to sign up? If so, are there any conditions? If there are no conditions, why not?

Is there any difference between these two situations? Is a women’s retreat different from a marriage retreat?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #4

Weddings and Receptions
A church member manages a business in which she has a close worker who has recently married his long-time partner. Out of expressed respect for their friendship, that worker did not invite your church member to the ceremony, but has asked her to attend the reception. She comes to you unsure of whether attending this celebration would be support for same sex marriage or just support for this worker. What advice do you give her?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #5

Family Ministries
A married, same-sex couple who has been attending your church for a while adopts a baby and want to have him dedicated or baptized by the church. Do you proceed with their request? Is your responsibility to the couple or to the child? If you accept, are you accepting the marriage? If you reject, are you rejecting nurture of the child and penalizing the child for the parents’ choice?

1. **Possibilities** [What are your options?]

2. **Preferences** [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. **Presenting the Gospel** [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. **Prioritizing Values** [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #6

Evangelism and Visitors
Visitors begin showing up in your community small groups and start to raise issues and arguments to raise sympathy for the LGBT “plight” and the LGBT lifestyle. By plight is meant, understanding that LGBT people sometimes meet with hostile rejection as human beings or suffer from intense loneliness. Is there a difference between having same-sex attraction without having acted on it yet, moving toward acting on it and entering into the lifestyle (i.e, is all gay activity the same)?

How do you prepare your teachers and lay leaders for this situation and these variations in involvement in discussing the topic? Is your community open to discussing such topics and issues or not? Why or why not? If yes, you are open to such discussion, how do you keep this conversation from being divisive? If not, how does shutting down such conversation help your community engage with this topic?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #7

Church Staffing
A beloved youth leader comes out as a being gay, but as one who has vowed to remain celibate before the Lord and supportive of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Do you allow him to continue in ministry without restriction? Do you apply new restrictions but still allow him to continue in the church? How do you explain your choice to your community?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #8

Membership, Discipline, and Service
A heterosexual couple in your church divorced because the husband (a Sunday morning greeter) was in an extra-marital relationship with another man. However, a couple months later, he repents of that same sex relationship and wants to begin attending and serving once more in the church. Can he serve right away?

1. **Possibilities** [What are your options?]

2. **Preferences** [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. **Presenting the Gospel** [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. **Prioritizing Values** [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #9

Membership, Discipline, and Service
A heterosexual couple, both prominent congregation members, becomes engaged in extramarital same-sex relationships. They do not repent or think anything is wrong with their new life choice, merely that they are embracing who God has made them to be. However, they have come to you because they want to stay in the church where their teenage kids have grown up and still attend. Would you exercise church discipline? Would you only exercise it in this area (i.e. if this were adultery, would you handle it the same way)? How do you address the area of the spiritual development of the children while addressing the spiritual health of their parents?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #10

Pastoral Counseling Issues
A married same-sex couple begins attending your church and comes to the point of repentance of their lifestyle. They approach you for help in how best to proceed. Do they get a divorce? Do they continue in their monogamous relationship? Do they continue in their marriage but remain celibate? What direction do you give them?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #11

Pastoral Counseling Issues

A heterosexual couple (both church members) divorces because the wife has realized she is attracted to women. In the divorce proceedings, an agreement to joint-custody of the couple's children was reached as long as the ex-wife does not have a partner living with her. During one of his weeks with the children, the son tells the father that someone has moved in with his mother. The father approaches you with this situation and asks you what to do. How would you proceed? What advice would you give him: to report on the wife, thus exposing the child as having reported on Mom, or leave the situation and back off of the agreement?

1. **Possibilities** [What are your options?]

2. **Preferences** [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. **Presenting the Gospel** [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. **Prioritizing Values** [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #12

Church Events
A same-sex couple has been attending your church for about a month and on the Sunday you celebrate communion, they approach the table to receive the elements. Do you serve them communion? Do you withhold it? Do you give it to them then, but speak with them afterwards about communion in the church?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #13

Church Events
On a Sunday morning, someone reports a male walking into a women’s restroom. When confronted, the individual who entered the restrooms says that though she is a man on the outside, she considers herself a woman. What do you do?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #14

Weddings and Receptions
A prominent congregation member and donor wants his child’s same-sex wedding at the church that he grew up in and also wants them to be married by the pastor he grew up with. How do you respond? Would it change your response if he, sensitive to your convictions, just requested the facility but not your performance of the wedding? Would it change your response if he asked you to preside over a civil ceremony not in the church or at another church?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #15

Family and Youth Ministries
An openly gay high school student wants to go to youth camp. Parents of other teenagers are uncomfortable with him attending. Do you allow him to attend? Are there any restrictions?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #16

Evangelism and Visitors

A same sex couple that has been attending your church for several months and like what they hear, all the while knowing what you stand for as it relates to sexuality and marriage. They approach you, wanting to give a sizeable donation to the church’s building campaign. Do you accept or reject the donation? How do you relate to them and their intent in the gift?

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #17

Evangelism and Visitors

Each year, the week before Easter Sunday, your church has a door-knocking campaign to invite community members to your Easter services. Everyone in the church is exhorted to participate. A regular attending, same-sex couple shows up to join in. Do you allow them to participate?

1. **Possibilities** [What are your options?]

2. **Preferences** [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. **Presenting the Gospel** [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. **Prioritizing Values** [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #18

Church Staffing
Does the surfacing of a same-sex child in the family of an elder or staff member disqualify them for service because they don’t have "their own house in order?"

1. Possibilities [What are your options?]

2. Preferences [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. Presenting the Gospel [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. Prioritizing Values [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
Scenario #19

Church Staffing
Besides positions of teaching and leadership, would you consider hiring a partner of a monogamous same-sex couple for any of your staff positions, including non-teaching roles or janitorial roles?

1. **Possibilities** [What are your options?]

2. **Preferences** [What are your preferences out of those options (max. 2)? Why?]

3. **Presenting the Gospel** [How does your preference demonstrate the Gospel?]

4. **Prioritizing Values** [What values are gained and risked by that preference?]
The Table Podcasts

The links below are episodes of “The Table,” a weekly podcast from the Howard G. Hendricks Center for Christian Leadership and Cultural Engagement. These podcasts treat key topics related to God, religion, Christianity, and Culture. The episodes can be found at www.dts.edu/thetable.

- Homosexuality in the Context of Christian Sexual Ethics - Stanton Jones, Darrell L. Bock, and Michael Brown
- Controversial Same-Sex Texts in the Bible - Jay E. Smith, Joseph Fantin, Darrell L. Bock, and Robert B. Chisholm
- Engaging with Sexual Identity Issues - Gary Barnes, Mark Yarhouse, and Darrell L. Bock
- A Biblical View of Sexual Intimacy - Gary Barnes, Darrell L. Bock, and Debby Wade
- Engaging the LGBT Community - Darrell L. Bock and Caleb Kaltenbach
- Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse at Church - Darrell L. Bock, Jay L. Sedwick, and Greg Love

Additional Resources

- DTS Statement on Marriage and Sexuality
- Compelling Love and Sexual Identity - Gary Barnes