Part 0 of 1: The Same-Sex Attracted Christian
with
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Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at The Hendricks Center, at Dallas Theological Seminary.

And my guest is David Bennett who joins us via Skype all the way from Oxford, England.

Hello, Darrell.

Well, good day to you.

Hey.

I just want to begin by letting you tell people what you do there in Oxford and then we have a fascinating story to walk through.

Definitely. So, yeah, I work here doing adjunct speaking at the Zacharias Trust, which is part of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. So, I do everything from telecommunications work but also do speaking engagements with the ministry on topics of sexuality.

Yeah, so, that's kind of where I come from. I studied here in Oxford two years ago. And yes, it's to be with you, Darrell, today.

Well, it's a real pleasure. Well, let's start from the very beginning. How does a nice guy like you end up in a ministry with Ravi Zacharias? Tell us your starting point. I mean did you train for this all your life?

To be honest, it was completely something that was unpredicted for me. I mean if you asked me seven years ago whether I'd be working for an international Christian ministry, I would have scoffed and laughed, because I come from a background very much in the gay rights movement.

When I was younger, I came out when I was 14 years of age. I was a very strong kind of advocate for gay and lesbian rights. So, that was quite a – it's like a big journey for me coming out. And it meant that I was quite, you know, anti the Church and anti what I thought was a very oppressive religion called Christianity.
Darrell Bock: Now where did you grow up?

David Bennett: I grew up in Sydney, Australia.

Darrell Bock: Oh, so you're Australian, an Aussie, huh?

David Bennett: Yes. Yeah, you know, us Australians are just always kind of traveling around the place and working overseas and things like that. So – and that was a natural fit to be part of the ministry here.

And yes it's – growing up in Australia, it was really a context where I was very much – you know, growing up in Sydney, which has the second largest gay and lesbian population in the world. And grew up in a Christian school, which was morally the conservative end of the spectrum.

So, already in the atmosphere for me was Christianity very strongly, but also my internal struggle with my own sexuality. And so, I think God brought me to Oxford in kind of the most incredible way.

And I wasn’t a Christian at that time. So, it was only until I was about 19 that God brought me to Oxford to study here at the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics and to work with – then I also worked with Ravi through that kind of connection and studying here –

Darrell Bock: So, you came to Oxford to study what?

David Bennett: Theology.

Darrell Bock: Oh, you came to study theology. So, you – you had – your experience of coming to the Lord predated your trip to Oxford?

David Bennett: Yes.

Darrell Bock: Okay.

David Bennett: So, I was a complete atheist/agnostic up until about the age of 19.
Darrell Bock: Okay, so, why don't you tell us how you came to the Lord?

David Bennett: Sure, yeah, absolutely. So, I came to the Lord in a very radical way. The Lord really is great; He just crashed in on my life and kind of seized me out of nowhere. So, I was actually – when I was 19 years of age, I was in a love triangle with one of my best friends and his boyfriend. His boyfriend fell in love with me. So, this was the start of the kind of collapse of that friendship, the collapse of that situation.

And I basically had the revelation that I was sinful of that. Somehow I needed salvation. But I wouldn't have put it in those terms then. And then about three months after that, I found myself in a pub in central Sydney, in the gay quarter of Sydney. And I was sitting in the pub, and I met this girl there.

She opened up the conversation about God and Jesus. And I had a very strong and virulently and – like a negative reaction to her bringing that up. But then she, through the conversation, ended up offering prayer to me, and I said, "Yes, you can pray for me, but I don't think anything's gonna happen."

And it was at this point that she actually laid hands on me and prayed for me, and I actually had the most incredible encounter with Jesus Christ and just felt this – what I describe as kind of like an oil on the top of my head, a tingling sensation. But like just – it came all the way over and down.

And I heard a voice say to me, "Do you want me defined?"

And then I said, "Yes."

And then I saw a veil over my heart, a pinprick of light through the veil. It just felt like this brass entered me. Now, I had no comprehension what was happening to me. I didn't know the Bible. All I knew was the text in the Bible that –

Darrell Bock: So, this was all happening in a pub?

David Bennett: All happening in a pub.
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**Darrell Bock** Yeah, okay.

**David Bennett** I mean it just – you know, completely, really for me out of the blue. But little did I know my family were praying for me over an 11-year period, that the girl at the pub went to my family's church and was part of the same church movement, and that God really had set up this kind of conspiracy to save me now and, I think, has crafted an incredible story, from that point, of salvation.

**Darrell Bock** Now, I heard a version of your testimony that you gave at Trafalgar Square, this kind of very private corner of London.

**David Bennett** [Laughs]

**Darrell Bock** And I think I remember hearing correctly that your mother had come to the Lord just before.

**David Bennett** Yes.

**Darrell Bock** Is this also in Australia?

**David Bennett** It's all in Australia. The three years before, my mother became a Christian through the same Christian family who was praying for me. And it was at this point that actually I was quite angry at my mother for becoming a Christian.

Because I told her, "You have to choose between the God that hates me and me. You're choosing a God that, as far as I'm concerned, is an illusion over your son that is right in front of you and who He says, categorically, is sinful and can't be part of His kingdom. So, how can you choose God over me, Mom? That makes no sense."

And so, I was just so angry at her really. And it actually divided us, and it was a really horrible thing, actually, to feel that division with your mother, someone close to you.

**Darrell Bock** And so – and how long was the separation between the time she became a Christian and you had this experience in the pub?

**David Bennett** So, this is three years.
Three years, okay.

And it was actually three months before this point that I was in the pub that I was having a debate with my uncle over the Christmas family lunch table. And I said to him, "You Christians think you have the absolute truth. There is no absolute truth. I've studied postmodern philosophy; I know there isn't one. You can't produce one with language. That is not possible." This kind of thing.

And he came back to me, and he said, "Well, actually, the truth is a person. The truth – if you say there's no absolute truth, that is an absolute truth." And he kind of shared apologetics with me actually. And I was quite disarmed by what he was saying and quite angry and kind of stormed out of the room.

And it was at this point that he bent over to my aunt and – the same aunt that brought my mother to Christ and said, "David will be saved in [break in audio]. I see the Holy Spirit over him.

And my aunt said, "Did you just see that reaction? He is not going to be saved in –"


You know? And just amazing, amazing. And it was exactly three months after my uncle said that, that I was saved in the pub.

Okay. So, you got saved in the pub. What happens next? I mean you obviously got completely relocated. So, what – how did you – how did you get nurture after this experience?

So, the girl that I had met in that pub, she said, "Why don't you come to the film competition," that she was part of. And I saw her film, and that film competition ran down actually for – when I saw her film on the screen, I looked up at a star in the sky, and I said, "All right, God. If you're real, I need a rational sign that you exist. I need something direct, 'cause I've got to give up a lot if I'm going to follow you."

And so, it was at that point that ran down to the red carpet with Genevieve. She was there, and she turned around for me and said, "David, I just feel like God is – He keeps reminding me to tell you that He exists, that He's real."
And it was just this direct answer to my prayer. So, she invited me to the church on that Sunday after the competition. And it was then that really I encountered God in a very deep way. And it was through the church, really, that my faith was growing deeply in Christ but also struggling culturally to belong and struggling to understand the kind of alien culture that I had never been part of before and that didn't make a lot of sense to me and the experiences that I had outside of it – the Church.

So, it was quite a struggle for me really, especially the first three years of coming to Christ, to reconcile my sexuality and my faith.

*Darrell Bock*  
Okay. So, this is a three-year journey. How – what's the distance of time between your experience in the pub and the time you get to Oxford?

*David Bennett*  
Yeah. So, Oxford happened around five years after I came to Christ.

*Darrell Bock*  
Okay.

*David Bennett*  
So, there were a lot of experiences along the way. I think when I was three years into my walk with Christ, I moved to Strasbourg, France. And it was in France that I really had a reckoning over the issue of having sexuality. And it kind of came to a front where I think, "God, you've created me to need intimacy, to need love. I need an answer on this sexuality issue."

And to which He replied, "I'm sending you a birthday present." So, in the mail I got one book on my birthday, and it was the book *Washed and Waiting* by Wesley Hill.

*Darrell Bock*  
Oh, yeah, sure.

*David Bennett*  
And I read that. And I just felt God just speaking to me through his story and through what he was saying in the book. And that's when I made a reckoning to really follow Christ and to give up my sexuality.
And I even say to people, you know, "Christ – Jesus Christ bought us on the cross. He bought our body; He bought the whole being – all of us, everything, our sexuality. And so, if we're not willing to give up one aspect of our being, for God, have we really – have we really entered into this relationship with Jesus if we're not willing to give everything up for Him?"

And I think I had to come to that in my own way through a long journey over those three years. So, that's just to give you a little snapshot.

And then going to Oxford was an incredible story really. I was working in Sydney, Australia, in a communication store up there. And I just said, "Lord –" I was offered a five-year contract, and I said to the Lord, "Is this really what you want me to be doing?"

And He said to me, "No, I have something else for you."

And so, I obeyed that. I was unemployed for three weeks and received a call from the U.K., from a businesswoman who actually said, "You need to do this course in Christian apologetics that's being offered by Ravi Zacharias International Ministry and also at the University studying theology."

And so, I applied, got in, and God provided, miraculously, some scholarship funds to get me here as well. So, it's been an amazing journey, and God has just been so faithful. And I really think it comes down to my relationship with Jesus, to be honest. I think even with all of the cultural difficulty and all the internal struggle, it's that grace from Jesus that has kept me on the path and made it possible to live the life I live now. So, yeah.

**Darrell Bock**

Well, that's a wonderful story, and I appreciate you telling it, and telling it so crisply. Let – I've got kind of two angles I want to go at this from. One is what advice would you give to someone who comes out of the background you came out of?

And then secondly, what advice would you give to people who attempt to minister to people out of that background, and particularly the mistakes and sensitivities to have – the mistakes to avoid and the sensitivities to have as you do that? So, let's try and segment this into those three parts.
And so, first, let's talk about what advice you would give to someone who was kind of where you were? And obviously, one of the elements is their view of God and the Church and the way they come into that and perhaps the thought about how to be open to what it is that – who it is that God is and what He does for people.

Yeah, thank you, Darrell. Yeah. I think my advice to anyone who is ______ ______ effected or have a friend that's gay or lesbian, I think it's really, you know, you're no different than anyone else. There's no discrimination in the kingdom of God, and Jesus doesn't see you as your sexuality. Even if the world does, Jesus doesn't, and He sees you as a unique person that He's made.

And I think you have to start with that really strong understanding that you're actually made in the image of God and that God sees you as a whole person. So, I would start there. And I think it took me a while to really understand that by calling myself gay or making – building my life on my homosexuality as an identity, I was ac reducing myself down to a very small part of who I was.

And I think, actually, coming to know – you know, so, one of the pieces of advice I often give people is just to give God some time to communicate with you, to be physical therapy, to let him into your heart, to let him into your mind and let him show you.

You know, one of the things that I found really hard was I'd read the Bible, but it made no sense to me. It just felt legalistic. And it wasn't until I said to God the Holy Spirit, "Could you just – could you reveal to me why this is in Your Word? Why You have this issue with homosexuality," and actually really pursued Jesus in relationship and said just, "Why can't I be with a guy and have those desires fulfilled?"

So, I think that's one piece of advice I'd give is just to be theologically patient with God and to know that God can provide for your needs for intimacy and friendship and love, that love isn't just an erotic desire; love much greater than that. And to reduce love to an erotic desire is also a big issue.
So, to really see that, your need for love, is really important, and that only God can truly fulfill that. And allowing Him to reorder what you value, allowing Him to change you from the inside out, I really think that's the biggest piece of advice I give. You know?

And I've been saying to people practically, "Just give God a year. Give God a year to really get – you know, if you've come to Christ, and you've met Him, and you're coming from kind of the gay rights background, give God time to reveal why He says what He does in His words. And He, at every instance, really, communicated with me and helped me through that, through people, but also through the Holy Spirit and through the communicate of the Church.

Now, you said something I think is pretty profound that I want to probe a little bit, and that is the idea that the picture of your identity tied to your sexuality is actually a reduction of who you are. It's not the whole of who you are.

And really, my sense has been, in these conversations, that the issue of identity in the sexuality discussions becomes so big that it almost is like – I'll use the image – it's almost like a wall that gets in the way between you and God and really you and yourself in many ways.

Yeah.

So, elaborate on that a little bit, 'cause I think this identity thing is a huge conversation point when you're talking about this topic.

Yeah. I think that any identity that isn't really about being in Christ, it essentially can become a false idol or a god – a little g god. And I think that's why it's so important that you – we, as Christians, need to be willing to give up any of those idol, any of those identities, and to give them to Christ, and to let Him give it back to us.

So, whether that's our sexuality, whether it's our desire to be married, whether it's our desire to do ministry, whether it's money – anything, any of those desires that Jesus talks about that are coming out of the heart, you know, and they often get twisted, is – it's about giving your heart, giving your desires over to Him and letting Him change you.
And I think – you know, I haven't – Jesus hasn't changed my sexuality. I don't believe in that kind of – but what He has done is He's changed the way that I see myself. And I see myself in relation to Him. And I think that's a really profound transformation that Jesus does through His grace, that ultimately it's about becoming a new creature, a new being. You know?

And so, I think you have to give up – be willing to give up that identity. And you look at Abraham; He gave up Isaac. You know, he gave up the most precious thing to him. It's like that with your – for us today with our sexuality. It's like our Isaac. You know? Are we willing to give that up to God?

And God will always come through. He will always bring the ram; He will always bring something else in its place that will fulfill us deeply and satisfy us. So, we really don't lose anything in this. It's not like God is cruel, and He's trying to kind of oppress us. He's trying to bring us into that narrow path that Jesus talked about.

Darrell Bock And so, there's a reconfiguration that shows that who I am as a person is bigger than the way I previously thought about it?

David Bennett Exactly, yes. Yeah, precisely.

Darrell Bock There's – this is a difficult conversation for a lot of people in terms of people who say, "I'm gay. God doesn't change my sexual desires, but He has changed the way I view them." I think that's another profound observation. Help people with that, particularly people who haven't – who aren't same-sex attracted and who just don't get it.

Darrell Bock Yeah, yeah. Yeah, great.

David Bennett Elaborate on that a little bit.

Darrell Bock One of the things I often say to Christians is, "You know, when you say to someone homosexuality is a sin, if you say that to a same-sex attracted gay or lesbian person, what you're essentially saying is the two greatest forms of transcendence in our society are a relationship with God and romantic love. They're the two things that we live for. And now we've gotten kind of rid of God, and now we just have romantic love. So, if you don't have romantic love, then you have no transcendence."
So, when you're saying to a gay person, "Homosexuality is a sin," what you are saying is, "You can't have access to any of that transcendence. You can't have access to what makes life worth living."

So, how then the gay or lesbian person reacts to that is, "You've just deleted me. You've just completely removed me. I can't live a life that's meaningful. Why should I even exist then? What's my purpose? Why am I here then?"

And it's that kind of virulent reaction a lot of gay and lesbian people have to the Church, 'cause the Church has said, "Well, it's a sin; well, it's a sin; well, it's a sin," without actually pointing to a positive vision of what it means to worship God and love God and live for Him and be willing to give up anything.

I hope that helps, but that's often what I say is we need to be careful when we say these things. That way we're really communicating first the love of God for people, and second of all, you know, God's standards and God's kind of view of sexuality.

**Darrell Bock**

So, is the conversation to go in a direction that, in effect, offers something more to the person who is – who you're interacting with? I mean I imagine there are lots of ways it could go, but basically you're saying, you know, there's more to life than the life that you're living right now?

**David Bennett**

I mean that's precisely it. I think that what Jesus offers us is so much more than a reduction; it's so much more than you and your sexuality. It's about being a whole human being and being restored by Him. So, yeah, that's precisely it. There is this greater vision of living a human life than just marriage or romantic love.

**Darrell Bock**

M-kay. So, it puts us in a larger world with a larger purpose to life, in which this becomes a piece, but it's not the whole. We're coming up to the end of the first segment here, and so I'm going to summarize a little bit.
'Cause you've taken us through a nice introduction to one, how someone – how God can grab hold of someone literally out of the blue, and then secondly, how to think about our identity in relationship to the conversations that we might have, and how we might offer an invitation that opens up a bigger world and a different kind of world to someone who oftentimes really is searching in life.

**David Bennett**

Exactly. And, you know, jumping off the back of that, I think what we've seen in our society is the aggrandizement of it. You know, we've made romantic love so absolute. You know, I think about popular culture today, and every single song you listen to, every single film you watch, there always has to be a love and romance scene.

Now, that doesn't mean that romantic love is bad, but when it's made ultimate, when it's made the most important thing for you flourishing as a human being, then that's where it becomes dangerous, because it's kind of taking the place of God.

And in my own personal experience, as a same-sex attracted person, becoming a Christian and following Jesus has actually really set me free from making that romantic love the thing that completes me, the thing that makes me whole. Because it never did, but I kept trying to make it my god. And actually, that damages you. I think that's the worst thing about kind of making something ultimate over God is it doesn't fulfill you in the way that you're needing to be fulfilled.

And so, I think jumping off the back of that, I think we need to see a shift in the culture and a reformation, really, in the Church about what is ultimate to us. Like in our everyday, nitty gritty lives, what are we really making important? Is it, "I need to be married to be complete," or, "I need to have a romantic relationship," or is it, "I need to worship the Lord Jesus and give Him everything"?

And I think that's a big, deep, personal thing, but also something we need to be pointing to when we're in the Church and showing culture that actually living as a disciple of Jesus and giving everything up for Him is actually where you find freedom and satisfaction.
**Darrell Bock**

And I like to do this when I'm teaching in Romans 1. You come to the end of Romans 1, and Paul goes through a long list of things that different people do that show their separation from God. And sexuality is only one very small piece of that very long list.

And at the end of that passage, when he's issuing his rebuke, he says, "You know, people who do these things are the ones who are separated from God." An the point is, we're not just singling out one sing here. We've got a whole list of things, including things like gossiping, being disobedient to parents, that kind of thing, which Paul says disqualifies one or separates us from God.

So, let's just start there. I think that sometimes people put sexuality in kind of a special category of sin. And I suspect that one of the ways into the conversation is to recognize that, although it gets a lot of attention, it's one of many, if I can say it that way, in terms of sin.

**David Bennett**

Darrell, I think that that's a really good distinction. I think one of the things that's always great is coming back to the fact that we're all in the same boat, regardless of who we are and what we've experienced with the Lord; that He doesn't discriminate at all. That He loves every individual; He loves every person that He's made, and that He's so longs to have a relationship with us, and He's so willing to show us the way back to Him. You know?

And I think it's really, as you were saying previously, but it's us – we put up these walls to Him. And it's our job, really, to let – be willing to let them come down. And so, just coming back to what you were talking about, I think I agree with what you're saying, but I also think there's a counter – there's two sides to that coin of what you're bringing up.

I really think that on one level, it's completely like all the other sins. You know? But then in a nother sense, it's very different to all the other sins. And so, when we talk about it, we have to be really careful because it touches a deep vein of who we are as human beings. I think –

**Darrell Bock**

Back to this transcendence idea that you were talking earlier, that there's a certain kind of thing that's going on with sexuality that's not like other kinds of ways we relate.
Exactly. And in a sense it is like every other sin. It's about putting something else above God. I mean when you're talking about Romans, it's about really ____ , about worship there. What do you see as the most worthy life for you to give yourself to?

And I think – but when we come to this sexuality question, in our culture we have just been told so much that it's that romantic love makes us complete, as I was saying before, and that – and I do believe, on some level, that comes from a Christian root, that love is the ultimate. But it's how we've defined this love.

And I think what's happened is as human beings, people made in the image of God, we've subtly changed the definition of love from the love that Jesus gave us on the cross to this romantic love which isn't bad, necessarily, but it just needs to be brought under the love of Jesus Christ and redefined by living with Him.

And I think that's the thing, coming back again to what you were saying. I think that sexuality is different in the sense that it comes back to that image-bearing aspect. The Lord made them male and female, and He brought them together as one flesh.

And so, there's that giving up of a very, very deep thing that I think is a special sacrifice that I've walked through and many other same-sex attracted Christians have walked through. And I think that there's many other sacrifices that a lot of people make for the Gospel. But whenever you give something up for the Lord, He always will give it back to you in a way that truly satisfies you.

So, you don't really lose out, ultimately. You don't miss out on the intimacy that you were created for. The Lord can fulfill that. And He did that with Jesus. He did that with Paul. You know? They were both people who completely – you know, Jesus was whole and complete. He had complete shalom, complete peace. There was nothing in Him; He didn't lack anything, and He was celibate.

So, I think we can see that it's actually cruel to say to someone, "You need romantic love to be complete."
So, I take it that, in the background here is kind of the approach that Wesley Hill has written about, which is that your identity in Christ is so profound that it ends up defining how you view sexuality on the one hand. And the Christian who recognizes what Scripture says about sexuality, who has same-sex attraction, their option – or at least an option is to basically make the decision to be celibate. Is that what you're alluding to here?

Yeah. I mean I think I came to a point in my journey, and I can really only point to my story with the Lord, where I really felt Him saying, "I'm not calling you to be in a same-sex relationship, but that I'm calling you to remain single and remain celibate until further advice."

And I've never had any other advice any other way. And I see that the Word of God has been discussed saying that it's not okay, but also in experience it's proved itself over seven years of walking with Jesus. So, I think, really, that it's a difficult thing for a lot of same-sex attracted people. It is really hard, and I think it's a unique struggle, a unique call that Jesus has in our lives.

But I just wanted to bring up a passage of Scripture that I think counteracts that in some sense as well. And it says – and it's in Isaiah 56, and it says:

For thus sayeth the Lord:

To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,

who choose what pleases me

and hold fast to my covenant –

to them I will give in my house and within my walls

a memorial and a name

better than that of sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name.
that which will not be cut off.

So, I see here, in the Word of God, God is wanting to give a name that even better than having a romantic relationship to people like myself, that there is some blessing that the Lord has for us that counterbalances what we lose. We get a name that's better, in some sense.

And so, I want to focus on that as well, that actually I have an intimacy – and actually, a colleague here, oddly, recently said to me, she said, "David, I envy the intimacy you have with Christ. I'm a married woman. I have a great relationship, but you just have this joy that is so deep in you, that, you know, you walk this unique path. And without what you've gone through, you wouldn't have that closeness to Christ."

So, for me, the greatest thing you can have is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. To me, it's worth selling everything for to get that. And if it means being celibate, great. You know? And I don't eliminate the option of also being with a woman.

If the Lord, by His grace, somehow, you know, gave me that attraction, then I'd be open to that. But it would have to be real, and it would have to be from Him. And that's not something that you can just change; it's something that I think has to be given by grace, and it's a deeply personal thing between you and Christ.

Now, it strikes me that what this asks of the Christian community is an awareness and a sensitivity and a need to be supportive in many ways. Let's talk about that some, 'cause I think that's another difficult part of this conversation. People don't realize what it means.

I think the Church struggles with people, generally speaking, at least in the West, with people who choose to be single or are single for a significant period of time. But you add this on top of it, and my goodness, look at what you're looking at.

Yeah.

So, how can the Church be supportive?
David Bennett: Darrell, I think you bring up something that's really important in this discussion. I think that the Church needs to shift the way that it sees our lived-out lives. And I often think – you know, I want to do more ministry on this topic. I want to talk about it, but I also want to embody the response.

And I think we've lost a lot in His Church and the Church relating to living in peace together and living out what I call kind of like a semi-monastic existence, where prayer and worship and intimacy with Jesus is kind of put on a bit of a higher – you know, on a pedestal a little bit more. You know?

Darrell Bock: Mm-hmm, made it more of a priority.

David Bennett: Yeah, a priority is better, yeah.

Darrell Bock: Yeah.

David Bennett: And so, I think that, for me, I'm really interested, actually, in the moment at Oxford. I want to start a community here of disciples that live and that are kind of, yeah, modeling that semi-monastic way of living or a mission or community where that can happen.

But I have to say it's been – it's been a huge struggle for me, especially in certain churches where marriage is put on a pedestal in an unhealthy way, and where I just don't feel like I can access that.

And often they're suspicious. They're all, "You know, do we want to put David in ministry?" Or how does it, "But yes, we do, and no, we don't." Or how to – all of those questions, I think, we really need to – really need to have a deeper conversation and one that's public and secure, and also one that's private and maybe more profound.

So, yeah, I think there's space to reform the Church on sexuality. And I think it's an exciting reformation, actually, for our generation as Christians to get involved with. And yeah, I don't know who is working as well in this issue.
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**Darrell Bock**

So, one way in which the Church can sometimes be insensitive without being aware of it, perhaps, is by so elevating the family and treating the family as if it is such the norm that people who are single, no matter how they're single, feel excluded in the process.

**David Bennett**

I think it's a very subtle thing. It's kind of why does the Church – does Church leadership share it's time? Who does the Church share its time with? And I think a lot of some of the same-sex attracted people often feel on the fringe, not in a central fellowship. And I think we need to change that.

And then out of that relationship and – I mean if I could just put in a word for Ravi Zacharias, he's an incredible man of God. And as I've gotten to know him more, he's taken a real interest in loving me and listening to me and hearing my story. I mean I think he could be a great example as well for how the Church can approach this and within ministry they just could approach this.

But – and also just generally the ministry here has just been incredible. But it's hard. I mean there's just this cultural sense that people don't understand; they don't get it. And I think that really is only gonna change when voices like mine and other people like me start to really be valued by the Church, which I think is happening.

So, I'm excited. I'm optimistic to see how really the Church adapts to this issue. Yeah.

**Darrell Bock**

But practically speaking, what that means is doing things in community that is, if I can say it this way, consciously inclusive of people who aren't a part of a family unit, in the traditional sense of that term, and make sure that people are included in the way people engage, in the way they minister, in the way they even talk about things in life.

**David Bennett**

I think you're right. And it's this idea of the family of God _____ is the nuclear family. And I think sometimes – I think the political landscape of a postindustrial world, it kind of elevates the family, to such a preposition the nuclear family, that it kind of knocks out the Christian idea of the family of God, which involves widows; it involves celibate people; it involves fathers that have lost their wives.
It's just—it's so varied; it so wonderfully diverse. And we need to make sure we've got that diversity, and that we don't try to make it uniform and just make it about the nuclear family, two kids, and a house. It really needs to be the Christian vision and not another one, you know, taking its place.

**Darrell Bock**

Okay. So, we've talked about kind of what this is for the person who has same-sex attraction. We've talked about how the Church can relate to people who have come into the Church out of that background and have embraced Christ, and some of the hurdles that need to be thought about there.

Let's kind of rewind back and ask the question. You're meeting someone who comes out of a same-sex background, and you're—and you yourself feel like, "I have no compass for this. I have no places to know where to start and have a conversation and how to approach this and what to be aware of and what sensitivities to have."

I know that's a wide open question, but what advice would you give to someone who's coming in to having these kinds of conversations kind of for the first time and kind of feels lost as to know how to proceed?

**David Bennett**

I think there's two things. One is that I don't think homosexuality is in any way an evangelistic issue. I think that, if I can qualify that, what I mean is that any person can receive Jesus Christ. And I think our first protocol is not to worry about someone's sexuality or—I mean we want to answer that question, but before we do, really talk about Jesus first, talk about God's grace, talk about—

**Darrell Bock**

The image of God is more important than a person's sexuality.

**David Bennett**

Yeah. And talking about how we're not under the lure anymore. And I didn't know any of that. All I knew is that homosexuality was a sin. I didn't know about grace in the Lord and all of these things. And I think trying to explain and just invite people into a relationship with Jesus first, before we had that conversation, and giving them space and time to process, was a very deep and difficult issue for them.
And like my aunt said to me, and it's really helped me, she said, "David, no matter what happens, I will accept you." She said, "I don't know what it's like to be homosexual. It's easy for me to read those verses in the Bible because I'm not homosexual. But, you know, you are, and you struggle with that. And that is, you know, really difficult.

"And so, I don't want to hold anything over you. I just want you to know Jesus and to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to – and for Him to teach you. 'Cause I can't teach you; no man can teach you." You know?

And allow a lot of people to explore God and explore their relationship with Jesus first. And then, when you come to the more difficult questions, being able to walk them through – and, you know, you don't have to have all the answers. I think that's the thing is – you know, if you're not one of the same-sex attracted, you're not going to understand that issue as intimately.

But I think that just your presence and just being there and not running away – and, you know, the girl in the pub that prayed for me, she wasn’t – when I said, "You know, I'm homosexual, and I don't want prayer," she said to me, "I don't really think that matters. Have you experienced the love of God?"

_Darrell Bock_ So, she was relating to you as a person, and the sexuality was just kind of this side thing over here that really didn't enter into the equation of how she was relating to you, 'cause she was gonna relate to you as a person no matter what was – the issue was on the side.

_David Bennett_ That's right. But she also, at the same time, could tell it was difficult for me and didn't force me. And she was just saying, "Here's an even more important thing. Have you actually heard about the love – have you actually experienced love? Do you really know what it means to be a Christian and to know the love of Jesus?"

So, I think she put – the priority in which we put things, I think sometimes we go to the morality first and the law first without having told people about –
Yeah, we connect it relationally.

Yeah, exactly.

Yeah. I mean I can't tell you how important I think that is, that the idea of trying to relate to someone and just sitting – in some cases just listening as a person and connecting with them is a very, very important starting point.

I often talk about allowing a person to give you – allowing the person that you're having a conversation with to give you kind of spiritual GPS. You know? See where they are, what motivates them spiritually, what drives their life. Let them talk for a while about themselves.

And in that process, you get to know about them. And in the midst of that, you're in a much better position, then, to interact with them on the other end.

Exactly. And I think trusting God and trusting Jesus, that knows about this issue, that God knows about that person and every intimate detail of their life, and just being confident in Him, that He can also minister to them, ultimately, and that you're there to serve and to love and to share an invitation, to share the best invitation anyone will ever receive in their life. You know?

And so, I think – and just to have that natural joy that my friend in the pub had, that natural love, that authenticity is so vital. So, I think, Christians, if we can just get rid of any of the masks we have, any of the prejudices we have, I think that really paves the way for people to encounter Jesus, whatever background, but particularly from the gay and lesbian community.

Now, you said there were two things. One, obviously, is to not make the homosexuality a wall that gets in the way of relating to Him as a person. What's the second thing that you had in mind that you said you would want us to reflect on as we raise the question of how to interact?
The second thing was that God said to me, "You know, the closer you get to Me, the more your desires become My desires, and My desires your desires." So that we – I think people need to first have a heart change before they can understand fully what God is calling them to.

So, I think letting that process actually happen of the true born-again experience, allowing people to actually receive from Jesus that new heart, the new desires. And then from that, they, over time, as they walk through it, as they live, as they enjoy their life in Christ, it works itself out. It works itself out.

And so, I think it requires patience and loving kindness, and it requires us really to be present and to really back up the words that we say with action.

Yeah, I'm hearing the word patience a lot and really giving time.
And what I'm also hearing from you, from your story and reflecting on it is there was, at one point, there was this radical change. It was like almost 180-degree turn. But working that out actually took a lot of time on the other end, that it wasn't just that everything just dropped in into place.

I think that's right, and I think that it took a lot of – if I didn't have the support from my family, and I didn't have the support from certain people in the Church that were faithful, it would have been really hard. And you know, that's why the grace of God is so crucial.

So, I think the more – we seem to really come alongside anyone that comes to Christ and help them and be there for them and bear their burdens, and I think that's such an important part of this. So, thank you, Darrell, for your time; I really appreciate this conversation, and I'm really looking forward to a future time together to talk about this.

Well, I agree, David. I really appreciate your taking the time to be with us, kind of walking you through what the experience is like and helping us get a glimpse of the transformation that Christ can really bring into life. I mean yours is just a sample in one area, but it's an area that gets a lot of attention and where a lot of people feel very awkward, in many ways, on both sides of the conversation.
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And being able to help us sort that out has really been a gift. So, I really appreciate your willingness to take the time to do that with us. We appreciate your being with us in The Table, where we discuss issues of God and culture, and we look forward to you coming and seeing us again soon.

David Bennett: Thank you so much, Darrell; it's been my pleasure. God bless you.

Darrell Bock: God bless.