

If Your Child Says, “I’m Gay” by Tim Wilkins

"Mom and dad, I'm gay" are possibly the most painful words a parent can ever hear. A flood of emotions overtakes the parents and spills over to their son or daughter. Their initial and subsequent responses will accomplish one of two things – push the child away or pull the child toward the parents. The parents would do well to emulate God's response to Adam and Eve's eating binge in the Garden of Eden. God went looking for them! (Genesis 3:9)

Express grief with, not anger toward your child! Two immediate emotions parents often experience are anger and grief. Both are natural and healthy.

Avoid angry outbursts. I have heard parents tell their daughter, “you’re going to hell!” or “you know homosexuality is an abomination!” I wondered if their precious daughter knew what an abomination was. One set of parents interrogated their confused son by shouting furiously, “how could you do this to us?” as if he had planned for years how to blind side his parents with the new of his homosexuality. A father made his position clear with these words, “If I even suspect you are involved in that activity, pack your bags. You’re out of this house.”

Ephesians 4:26 reads "Be angry, and do not sin." Grief and anger are natural; where parents need help is knowing when to express each emotion. A parent's grief is typically expressed alone, while anger is often expressed directly at the son or daughter. I suggest that parents switch these.

Exhibit genuine empathy. Surely a parent can weep alone, but weeping with the son or daughter is more beneficial than an expression of anger. Paul wrote in Romans 12:15 "mourn with those who mourn." Let your child know that you hurt with him, not because of him. Express your anger not at your son but at the sin and deception involved in homosexuality. Remember, in most cases he has been fighting this battle alone much longer than you have known about it.

Ask open-ended questions—“How long have you been struggling with these feelings?” or “what can we do to help?” Reassure him with the words, “Let’s work on this together.” Temptation of any kind generates intense suffering and the suffering that accompanies homosexual feelings can be debilitating. Hebrews 2:18 reads, “Because (Christ) himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matt 5:4)

Secondly, display encouragement, not embarrassment! Embarrassment frustrates the healing process. A preoccupation with “what will people say” takes the focus off the issue at hand. If you as a parent find it difficult to discuss this issue with him, pray for the ability to be transparent. Richard Lovelace writes in *Homosexuality and the Church*, (p.129) "Persons who are compulsively uneasy, fearful, or filled with hatred when relating to persons involved in sexual sin, either homosexual or heterosexual, need a releasing work of the Holy Spirit, freeing their own sexual natures, building in them a sense of security which will permit them to express Christian love while standing firm against impurity."

Whereas embarrassment frustrates the healing process, encouragement promotes the healing process. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Jesus' dealing with sexually broken people. Jesus spoke freely with the woman at the well, the woman taken in adultery, and the sinful woman who anointed Him. (John 4 & 8, Luke 7:37ff) He initiated conversation with the woman at the well. Christ did not write her a long letter as some parents do when they first hear their child is gay. He met her on her turf and looked her straight in the eye. Nor did He send a message to her via another person. Jesus spoke truth in love to her and the account concludes with the woman leaving her water jar, racing through the city unashamedly declaring, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29)

Communicate love physically, not just verbally! First, a word to fathers about their sons. Do not recoil from your son; rather, embrace him physically. The worst thing you can do is to keep him at arms' length. It is unfortunate that men are often reluctant to express love for each other. The Apostle Paul did not hide his affection for male companionship. Paul wrote, "Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there- So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia."(2 Cor. 2:12-13) Paul missed his buddy Titus.

I like the bumper sticker "Real Men Love Jesus." It is a genuine Christian father who can bear-hug his adult son without reservation. In his book, *Why Parents Disagree*, Ron Taffel recounts a father's question, "Is it all right if I hug and kiss my two-and-a-half-year-old son goodnight? I'm afraid it will turn him into a homosexual." (p. 59) The very opposite may be true; physical affection between a father and son is appropriate whether the son is a small child or an adult.

As I have said on many occasions, when I see Christ face to face I am not going to extend my hand in business fashion and say "pleased to meet you." Rather I will throw my arms around Him and testify as did the Apostle Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Fathers particularly need to verbally express love and admiration for their sons. I have heard dozens of fathers say, "I don't need to tell him I love him. He knows I do." If the heavenly Father can publicly, boldly, and personally say about His son Jesus during His baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" you can do it. And remember, the heavenly Father spoke those words when His son was 30 years old. (Matthew 3:17; see also Matthew 17:5) A son is never too old to be told "I love you!" If a father says, "I feel uncomfortable expressing my love; I can't change", he has unconsciously given his gay son permission to also say, "I can't change."

Now a word to mothers about their sons. Oftentimes the gay son has unconsciously identified with his mother rather than his father. An inordinate closeness may characterize the mother-son relationship. If so, mom may need to communicate her love in a less demonstrative way; after all, what the gay son needs to learn is how to relate appropriately to the same sex.

How should fathers communicate love to their struggling daughters? If the daughter has been a victim of male sexual abuse, she may recoil from her father's embrace. Sensitivity is of the utmost concern; a gentle display of affection, reinforcing her femininity, is appropriate. Mothers should model biblical

femininity to their daughters; hugging and touching communicate unconditional love, which is not to be confused with condoning love.

Cultivate an “open-door policy” versus a “case-closed mentality”! If a parent states their disapproval, ending it with “and I don’t want any more discussion on the matter,” he or she is essentially telling the child “I don’t want to hear about your pain and confusion.”

Buy some good books on the subject and read. You may be tempted to give them to your child, but don't, unless you get his permission. A son or daughter who has "come out" resents having books dumped on them. If your child asks you to read some literature supporting homosexuality, do it. It won't hurt you. What better way to help your son or daughter than to know the arguments that condone homosexuality and be able to respond to them biblically, rationally, and compassionately. Your reading this literature will communicate to your child that you are not afraid to meet the issues head on. And he or she will be more receptive to reading literature you recommend.

Talk with, not to, your child. Barbara Johnson writes “secrets are to disease what openness is to healing.” A dialogue creates candor while a monologue creates rancor. Your relationship with your child must be a two-way street; you must create an atmosphere where he could tell you anything and everything and you never blink an eye--unless you are weeping with him.

Recently, I hosted a television program on homosexuality. A day later a pastor who had seen the show called to ask me a few questions. “Do you find homosexuals in the churches where you speak?” I replied, “I find homosexuals in all churches.” The pastor’s immediate and self-assured retort was, “Not in mine!” I asked the hypothetical question, “If there were homosexuals in your church, would they tell you?” After a brief pause he said, “I guess not.” Then I asked, “Why wouldn’t they feel open to telling you?” The pastor with all the answers had no answer. His conspicuous silence said it all. If a person with unwanted same-sex attractions knows your response will be contemptuous, he will never tell you his story.

Continue to keep the lines of communication open. I've heard some people advocate alienating the son or daughter. I disagree. Homosexuality is a relational issue and thus the great need is healthy, same-sex, non-sexual relationships, both with family and friends. If you ostracize your child, he or she will surely find companionship elsewhere.

Focus on your child’s broken image versus sexual activity! His or her attraction to the same sex, as well as any homosexual activity, is secondary. Is an anorectic’s primary problem a dislike for food? No! She likes food; her primary problem is a broken or distorted image. Although emaciated from self-starvation, she looks into a mirror and sees herself as overweight. Don’t major on minors!

Rebuild your son or daughter’s broken image remembering that masculinity and femininity are more often caught than taught. Refuse the knee-jerk responses that often accompany this “news.” Gather prayer warriors around you. Give your child what he desperately needs – undiluted truth, unconditional love and unceasing prayer!