



# HOPE MIDDLE SCHOOL MINISTRY

## DATING + SEXUAL INTEGRITY

### SMALL GROUP LEADER PACKET

**Hey awesome middle school Small Group Leaders!**

During the teenage phase, what's repeated is what's remembered. This is why Student Ministry provides an annual series on temptation with an age-appropriate emphasis on dating and sexual integrity. **The goal of this series is to empower students to navigate attraction, dating and sex with a foundation in God's Word.** Integrity means doing the right thing in all circumstances, even if no one is watching. God calls His followers to sexual integrity, which means choosing to respond to sexual attractions, feelings, thoughts, and desires in a way that respects God, others, and ourselves. This is too influential and important a topic to skip.

#### **PURSUING SEXUAL INTEGRITY**

- We encourage staff, leaders, and parents to use the language “sexual integrity” over “sexual purity” because the term “sexual purity” can have a lot of baggage associated with it. What if a student has crossed a line and sexually or lustfully sinned or does so in the future? There is grace, redemption, and power when they turn to Jesus in repentance! Sexual integrity is about saying, “YES!” to living a faithful, abundant life as a sexual being according to how God has designed you.
- Our students need to know God’s love them first and foremost. A goal for these conversations is not simply behavior modification or for students to try to self-will themselves to stay virgins, but for students to connect with the transformational work of Jesus in their lives and live in His design for them. All of our obedience, all of our ability to pursue sexual integrity, is a response to God’s love for us and through His power working within us.

#### **WHAT DO MY STUDENTS NEED FROM ME?**

- Your students don't need you to have all the right answers. They are in a phase where an important part of owning their faith means discovering the right answer themselves. They simply need you to be a safe place to have conversations, seek answers, and guide them in the right direction.
- Your students don't need you to teach your opinion but for you to help them understand God's word. **Read the included materials, study and prepare for your Small Group in advance.**
- You don't need to have a perfect past-record in this area to lead, simply a heart that has repented towards God and is strongly seeking to take steps in the right direction. Letting students know some of your past struggles may even help them relate to you and trust your advice, but remember to keep conversations age-appropriate. Be cautious when you share, speaking generally and avoiding specifics or graphic comments. If you question if sharing would cause a student to struggle, then hold off sharing.

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## AWKWARD SERIES OVERVIEW

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### TEACHING THEME: DATING + SEXUAL INTEGRITY

It's that time of year again, Valentine's Day is coming, love is in the air, and we are talking about dating and sexual integrity in Student Ministry. Integrity means doing the right thing in all circumstances, even if no one is watching. God calls His followers to sexual integrity, which means choosing to respond to sexual attractions, feelings, thoughts, and desires in a way that respects ourselves, others, and God.

### AWKWARD SERIES OVERVIEW

We are calling this series AWKWARD because we are fully embracing that yes, talking to middle school students at church about dating and sexual integrity – it's awkward. But we also believe church is the best place to have Biblical discussions about important areas of our lives – and that dating and sexual integrity are too important and influential discussions to skip. We will talk about how God created sex and He created each of us to have sexual desires, how what we do with those desires matters, and how God calls His followers to live with sexual integrity.

### WEEK BY WEEK BREAKDOWN

#### WEEK 1: FEBRUARY 6, 2022

- MAIN POINT: What we do with our desires matters.
- MAIN SCRIPTURE: Romans 12: 1-2 NIV
  - *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's **mercy**, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*
- SECONDARY POINTS:
  - Our sexual attractions and desires are a part of how God designed us.
  - TRUTH: God created and designed sex to be enjoyed by 1 man and 1 woman committed to each other in marriage. (Genesis 2:24 NIV)
  - GRACE: God loves all of us and this is a safe place for us to discover who God created us to be.
  - Sexual integrity means choosing to respond to sexual attractions, feelings, thoughts and desires in a way that respects God, others, and ourselves.
- JESUS CONNECTION: Sin separates us from God, but God had mercy on us. He sent Jesus to save us and bring us back into a relationship with Him.

#### WEEK 2: FEBRUARY 13

- MAIN POINT: Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should.
- SECONDARY POINTS:
  - We can navigate our sexual desires with integrity.
  - We can start living the free and full lives God has for us by:
    - Recognizing any obsessions
    - Creating boundaries
    - Turning to God
- MAIN SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 6:12 & John 10:10
  - *"I am allowed to do all things, but not everything is good for me to do! Even if I am free to do all things, I will not do them if I think it would be hard for me to stop when I know I should" (1 Corinthians 6:12 NLV).*

- *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10 NIV).*
  - JESUS CONNECTION: God wants you to have a full and exciting life. That is why He sent Jesus to save us and bring us back into a relationship with God.
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### WEEK 3: FEBRUARY 20

- MAIN POINT: How you treat others and yourself matters to God.
  - SECONDARY POINTS:
    - We have value simply because we are made by God.
    - Both respecting others and living with sexual integrity can play out in our lives by the music we listen to, the things we watch, the pictures we post, the friends we try to make, and the way we talk to and think about other people.
  - MAIN SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:30-31 NLT
    - *"And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." The second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31 NLT)*
  - JESUS CONNECTION: Because of your value to God, God has paid a heavy price for you by sending Jesus to die on the cross to rescue you from your sins.
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### WEEK 4: FEBRUARY 27

- MAIN POINT: Focus on becoming love before looking for love.
  - MAIN SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT
    - *"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT).*
  - GOSPEL INVITATION + RESPONSE WEEK
- 

## SERIES EXTRAS

### BOX OF QUESTIONS:

Each campus will collect questions from your students and pick a few to answer on stage.

### TEENAGER HACK

Teens already feel a social pressure to date. Every week, let your students know: **This series isn't an encouragement to date, it's an encouragement for students to use godly wisdom when they date and experience attractions.** Some students in your group may not be dating yet, and that is ok! In fact, Paul says it's better to stay single (1 Corinthians 7:10)!

# FREQUENTLY ASKED STUDENT QUESTIONS AND WISDOM TO HELP YOU ANSWER

## WHEN CAN YOU HAVE SEX?

Officially, sexual immorality is used in the Bible to describe sex outside of marriage, including lust. God created and designed sex to be enjoyed by 1 man and 1 woman committed to each other in marriage. (Genesis 2:24 NIV) Sex is beautifully designed to bring together a man and woman in marriage. If you married, the wise thing to do is to create healthy boundaries in your life so you are staying far from sexual sin.

## HOW FAR IS TOO FAR TO GO BEFORE MARRIAGE?

“How far is too far” is a BIG question that comes up a lot, but really it can be the wrong question if we are just asking “How far can I go before I sin?” It’s like walking up to the edge of the cliff, putting one foot over the edge, and hoping not to fall. Not the wisest. The wiser thing to ask is, “Is this wise to do? Is this tempting me to go farther?” If it’s tempting you to go farther, then STOP!

Relevant Bible verses:

- Ephesians 5:15-17: “So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.”
- 1 Corinthians 6:18-19: “Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Or don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?”

## BUT CAN’T WE SLEEP TOGETHER IF WE ARE IN LOVE?

God’s healthy boundaries for sex isn’t love, it’s in marriage. Love may “feel” right, but there are negative consequences of having sex outside of marriage. In God’s definition of love, love is patient and kind; it does not seek to please itself, nor does it delight in evil, but is always hopeful (1 Corinthians 13). True love would be patient in waiting for the proper time for sex. It would be kind to future spouses by not harming marital intimacy. True love would be unselfish in placing God’s desires and the needs of others above itself. It would not delight in the evil of disobedience, nor would it force another to disobey God. Love could never be a reason for premarital sex; rather, it should be one of the greatest reasons to avoid premarital sex. “But we’re going to be married anyway.” This is another common excuse. Along with being presumptuous, this stance will almost certainly leave one question unanswered: If one gives in to moral temptation before marriage, what’s to stop him or her from giving in to moral temptation once married?

## WHAT IF I’VE ALREADY GONE TOO FAR?

Good question! Certainly a person cannot reverse the past, but there are a number of steps one should take to keep from further damaging his or her intimacy with God and others.

**First, acknowledge your actions as sin.** For those who have accepted Christ’s payment of the penalty for our sins, He asks that we confess - agree with God that they are sinful.

**Second, maintain purity from this moment forward.** Jesus told the woman caught in sexual sin to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11). You cannot change what’s been done, but you can keep yourself and others from any further damage by avoiding situations which might cause you to compromise your commitment to sexual purity. Paul advised Timothy to run away from temptation (2 Timothy 2:22), and Joseph is famous for running from moral danger (Genesis 39:7-12).

## WHAT IF I’M DATING SOMEONE AND I KNOW THEY ARE NOT THE BEST FOR ME OR CHRISTIAN RIGHT NOW?

This is a tough place to be because you likely care deeply for the person. We encourage you to break up with them. The longer you wait, the more you are wasting your time and theirs. You can be kind when you break up with them, but be clear. The purpose of dating is not to be on the mission field; the purpose of dating is not to be someone’s support system. You shouldn’t feel pressure to date for either of these reasons. Pray for God to guide you in breaking up with them.

## IS MASTURBATION AND/OR PORNOGRAPHY A SIN?

One can not point to a verse in the Bible and read that masturbation is wrong. However, what accompanies the act of masturbation is usually something visual—whether only in the mind or by viewing pornography in pictures or video. Those things would fall under the category of immorality since giving in to immoral thoughts is sin—masturbation is enacting sex with an object (woman or man) in mind. Jesus even said that a married man commits adultery when he thinks lustfully after a woman (Matthew 5:27-28). So to masturbate—enacting sex—while thinking of a man or woman who is not your spouse is sinful because it is immoral. Sex is meant to be between a man and a woman in the context—and only in the context—of marriage. This is saying nothing about masturbation creating an emotional guilt that is hard to relieve until the act and/or habit is stopped. Sin produces shame in our lives, but Jesus’ saving grace and redemption brings healing and freedom in our lives.

## I'M STRUGGLING TO STOP, HOW CAN I STOP?

If you are struggling with masturbation and/or pornography and want to stop, several things are helpful.

1. First, **acknowledge that it is sin** and that it brings emotional guilt.
2. Second, **make a decision to stop**.
3. Third, **have a plan not to do it again**. It is this third and final step that most people don't do. Good intentions without a solid plan inevitably leads to repetition.

**A good plan always includes accountability.** Find a God centered adult, maybe a parent or guardian or small group leader; that you can tell in confidence who will follow up and ask you if you are victorious. A good plan also includes what action you will take when you are tempted. Maybe get up and go hang out with someone else, pray, memorize Scripture, sing praise songs. How can you lean into God to help you fight in the moment of temptation?

Be aware of when you are most susceptible to masturbating: Stress? After you are away from your boyfriend or girlfriend and begin thinking of them in a sexual way? Pornography? The books you read? Once you determine the contributing factors, tell your accountability partner. Knowing the factors and telling someone trustworthy are ways to break the cycle of repetition.

## ACCOUNTABILITY SOFTWARE RESOURCES

- Ever Accountable: <https://www.everaccountable.com/>
- Accountable2you.app: <https://www.accountable2you.com/features>
- Covenant eyes (better for computer): <http://www.covenanteyes.com/>
- Net Nanny (gives deeper parental controls): <https://www.netnanny.com>
- Triple X Church (free but limited): <https://x3watch.com/>

## LEADER TIPS

### IS IT TOO EARLY TO HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS?

- Crushes, new feelings, attractions, urges and even pressures to date are becoming more and more of our students' worlds as they grow up. **We want to have age-appropriate conversations that prepare students.**
- We intentionally have it built into the first message for the speaker to say "sex" on stage because it's a word that carries a lot of weight, and we will break the ice from stage that church is a safe place to talk about sex.
- Did you know the **average age of exposure to porn is 8-11 years old?** 80% of this happens within the home. Our goal is to equip students to know how to respond Biblically when sexual temptations occur.

### CREATE A SAFE PLACE FOR STUDENTS TO SHARE

- Leading in Grace and Truth: Students may share times where they've crossed Biblical lines or even things that shock you. Remember, Jesus offers grace and forgiveness to all of us. As you lead and share God's truth, also reflect His grace to your students.
- Remember that you may have students who have experienced sexual abuse on some level. This conversation could lead them to eventually open up to you about that, so be prepared to follow up, support, and point them toward help if and when they do. **We've included the Safe Zone procedures for you to review** and refresh your memory on what to do if a student shares something that may potentially be abuse.

### WHAT THIS SERIES IS NOT:

- It's not an encouragement to date.
- It's not a sex education class.

### WHAT THIS SERIES IS:

- **An opportunity to open communication channels** and encourage students to seek Godly wisdom and advice in an area they may not feel comfortable to bring up on their own.
- **An opportunity for students to build some Biblical foundations** in a pivotal area of life that can have huge impact on their future.
- **An opportunity to partner with parents** by not only sharing what we are talking about with them in advance, but consistently encouraging our students to have conversations with their parents on this topic at home.

## ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCE FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

- Rethinking Youth Ministry Podcast Episode: [Why You Should Never Talk About Purity Again](#)
- Rethinking Youth Ministry Podcast Episode: [How To Talk About Sex And Dating With Middle And High School Student](#)



# awKward.



Week 1  
2.6.21

## LEADER PREP

### MAIN POINT

**What we do with our desire matters.**

### SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1-2 NIV

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students recognize that God has a plan for sex and their sexual desires and to encourage them to choose to honor Him with their choices.

### THINK ABOUT THIS

Leading a conversation about sex and dating with your middle schoolers can be challenging, and that's not just because it's awkward. Your middle schoolers will come to this conversation from all kinds of places: embarrassed or grossed out, uninterested, curious, eager to learn more, beginning experiences with sex and dating. **Whatever their perspective, remember that this conversation is important. It's planting seeds** that will hopefully help them develop healthy habits when it comes to sex and dating. So, **make sure you are creating a safe space for students to share without fear of judgment.** Finally, remember that you may have students who have experienced sexual abuse on some level. This conversation could lead them to eventually open up to you about that, so be prepared to follow up, support, and point them toward help if and when they do.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### THE CHECK IN

- How was everyone's week? Share Highs & Lows.
- Someone recap the main point of the message.
- What's the funniest awkward moment you've seen or experienced?
- Show with your fingers, On a scale of 1-10, how awkward do you feel talking about desires and attraction?

### THE WORD

- READ Romans 12:1-2 NIV.
- What are some things that make it hard to live differently than others?
- What are some good things that come out of us living the way God calls us to?
- How does it make you feel to know that God created things like desires and attraction?
- What does it look like when somebody has integrity?
- Why does sexual integrity matter?

### APPLICATION

- Please know you can always talk to me more about this - I'm here for you. Who are other adults in your life you can talk to about this?
- DO THIS: Give out paper + pens. Have students write down any questions they have on this topic. Over the next few weeks, we will try to answer these questions. If you don't have any, just write you don't have any so everyone feels comfortable writing.

### COMMUNITY BUILD

- How can we connect outside of small group time and have fun together?

### PRAY

We are going to close in prayer.  
Anyone have any prayer requests?

## **ROMANS 12:1-2 NIV**

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

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## **NOTES**



# awKward.



Week 2  
2.13.21

## LEADER PREP

### MAIN POINT

**Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should.**

### SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 6:12 NLV +  
John 10:10 NIV

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students recognize obsessions and encourage them to set healthy boundaries and turn to God in those areas of their lives.

### THINK ABOUT THIS

Keep in mind that this conversation is about more than just helping students recognize what obsessions they might have; it's also about helping them see how these obsessions might be motivating them to act in ways that aren't healthy or helpful. Remember that self-awareness is still developing in this phase, so recognizing an obsession or a response to it may be difficult for them to do. Be careful not to dismiss or downplay any of the things your students share with you that may feel like obsessions to them. Even if it seems like not a big deal to you, it certainly is to them. In the same way, be careful to not overreact to anything they open up about. How you respond to what they say is key to your students feeling safe to continue sharing.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### THE CHECK IN

- How was everyone's week? Share Highs & Lows.
- Someone recap the main point of the message.
- What's something you love and are passionate about?
- What's the difference between passion and obsession?

### THE WORD

- READ 1 Corinthians 6:12 NLV.
- What are some things that we can do that may not be good for us to do?
- READ John 10:10 NIV.
- What kind of life does God want us to have?
- **8th Grade Question:** How do you think us saying no to certain things and us living the full life God has for us are related?

### APPLICATION

- DO THIS: Pass out the "Obsession or Passion" quiz. Since this can be personal, encourage students to be honest and that you won't look at each others paper. This is for them, to help them grow and recognize any areas they can make healthy changes.
  - Did your results surprise you?
- DO THIS: Scatter out the scenario cards. Boundaries help us keep things from becoming obsessions or going too far. Have a student pick a card and read it. As a group brainstorm a few healthy boundaries for this scenario.

### COMMUNITY BUILD

- How can we connect outside of small group time and have fun together?

### PRAY

We are going to close in prayer.  
Anyone have any prayer requests?

### **1 Corinthians 6:12 NLV**

"I am allowed to do all things, but not everything is good for me to do! Even if I am free to do all things, I will not do them if I think it would be hard for me to stop when I know I should."

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### **John 10:10 NIV**

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

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### **NOTES**

# OBSSESSION OR PASSION?

*It can sometimes be difficult to know whether something you're really passionate about is turning into an obsession. Help figure it out by completing this quiz. Circle the answer that best describes your passion.*

**Yes / No** – Do I think about this constantly?

**Yes / No** – Do I spend most of my free time doing this?

**Yes / No** – Do I talk about this all of the time?

**Yes / No** – Do I have trouble sleeping because I think about this so much?

**Yes / No** – Is this the last thing I think about when I go to sleep at night and the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning?

**Yes / No** – Do I feel better or worse when I take part in this?

**Yes / No** – Do I feel really upset, anxious, or angry if I'm not able to take part in this?

**Yes / No** – Do I do this for longer periods of time than I had originally planned?

**Yes / No** – Do people in my life make comments about how much I talk about or spend time doing this?

**Yes / No** – Do I tell myself that I'm not going to spend time doing this anymore, but end up doing this anyway?

**Yes / No** – Does this thing impact my life and relationships with others in negative ways?

*If you answered "yes" to more than five of these questions, your passion could actually be turning into an obsession. While that doesn't necessarily mean you have to cut this thing out of your life altogether, it does mean you should start finding balance and setting boundaries. Start by asking a trusted adult, Small Group Leader, or parent/guardian to help you figure out ways to create limits and boundaries for yourself. Then, figure out a first step you can take to begin changing your behavior so that you can live the free and full life God intends for you to live.*

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Lily

**constantly checks**

her likes and comments  
on Instagram, and it's

causing her to

**ignore her family members.**

Octavio

**plays video games non-stop**

all weekend and only  
takes a break to eat.

Alex has been

**breaking house rules**

with his girlfriend by

**staying up late**

to video chat and

**lying to his parents**

about spending time alone  
with her in his room.

Imani only wants

to hang out with

**her new boyfriend**

and has been

**canceling plans**

with her friends.



# awkward.



Week 3  
2.20.21

## LEADER PREP

### MAIN POINT

**How you treat others and yourself matters to God.**

### SCRIPTURE

Mark 12:30-31 NLT

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To encourage students to consider the way they value themselves and others and to point them toward finding their worth in God.

### THINK ABOUT THIS

A conversation about sexual integrity is about so much more than just sex and dating. This is key for middle schoolers, as many of them aren't interested in dating or not allowed to date yet. Do your best to help them think about how they can show value and practice sexual integrity in other areas of their lives. Point them toward things like the music they listen to, the shows they watch, the pictures they post, and the way they talk to and think about other people. Sexual integrity can work in all these areas and more!

Finally, remember that you may have students who have experienced sexual abuse on some level. This conversation could lead them to eventually open up to you about that, so be prepared to follow up, support, and point them toward help if and when they do.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### THE CHECK IN

- How was everyone's week? Share Highs & Lows.
- Someone recap the main point of the message.
- How do people know when something matters to us?
- How do people know when something doesn't matter to us?

### THE WORD

- READ Mark 12:30-31 NLT.
- What are ways we can love God?
- What are ways we can love and value others?
- What are ways we can love and value ourselves?
- What does sexual integrity have to do with the way we value others and ourselves?

### APPLICATION

- **Love God. Love Others. Love Yourself.**  
Let that be a motivating theme for you this week. Write it down somewhere you will see or take a screenshot and make it your wallpaper.
- What does choosing sexual integrity look like...
  - In the songs we listen to?
  - In the videos we watch?
  - In the jokes we tell?
  - In the way we talk about others?
  - In the way we think about someone else?

### COMMUNITY BUILD

- What are ways we can show we value and care for one another outside of small group time?
- How can we connect outside of small group time and have fun together?
- GET TO KNOW YOU: If you could have a YouTube channel about anything, what would you want it to be about?

### PRAY

We are going to close in prayer. Any prayer requests?

### **Mark 12:30-31 NLT**

“And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

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### **NOTES**





# awkward.



Week 4  
2.27.21

## LEADER PREP

### MAIN POINT

**Focus on becoming love before looking for love.**

### SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To get students thinking about what kind of person they want to become and to take steps toward developing the qualities they want in themselves.

### THINK ABOUT THIS

It's a lot easier for middle schoolers to talk about others than themselves. That's why talking about the qualities they want to find in someone else first is important. They'll be able to identify those things in others and doing so will help them shift their thinking back to themselves. Do your best to help your students understand why it's important to focus on themselves. We don't want to give them a false hope that simply becoming the kind of person they want to be will magically equate to a happy dating life. Rather, we want them to understand the value and peace that comes with becoming the kind of person God wants you to be. Finally, remember that you may have students who have experienced sexual abuse on some level. This conversation could lead them to eventually open up to you about that, so be prepared to follow up, support, and point them toward help if and when they do.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### THE CHECK IN

- How was everyone's week? Share Highs & Lows.
- Someone recap the main point of the message in your own words?

### THE WORD

- READ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT.
- In your own words, how is this verse describing love?
- **8th Graders:** How might your middle school, your home, and the world be a better place if we all loved each other this way?

### APPLICATION

- DO THIS: Pass out the 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 handouts with blanks. Have your students write in their own name, reading each sentence in their mind as they do so.
- Look back at your sheet. What are some qualities that are harder on this list for you to live out? Why do you think that is?
- Circle a quality or two you'd like to develop more in yourselves.
- This week, what's one way you can work on developing one of these qualities?

### COMMUNITY BUILD

- How can we connect outside of small group time and have fun together?
- GET TO KNOW YOU: Who is your favorite famous couple (real or in a movie/book/etc) and why?
- We did it! We finished the most AWKWARD series of the year (see what I did there?). How can we celebrate together? (Go for ice cream, etc.)

### PRAY

We are going to close in prayer.  
What prayer requests do y'all have?

### **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT**

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”

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### **NOTES**

\_\_\_\_\_ is patient and kind. \_\_\_\_\_ is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. \_\_\_\_\_ does not demand [their] own way. \_\_\_\_\_ is not irritable, and \_\_\_\_\_ keeps no record of being wronged. \_\_\_\_\_ does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. \_\_\_\_\_ never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

(1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT)

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(1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT)

# Leading in Grace and Truth

**With an LGBT emphasis**  
(lesbian - gay - bisexual - transgender)

## Main Goal: Create a Safe Place to Belong

Lead your group to value acceptance, confidentiality, and honesty. Also, know what you can and can not keep confidential.

**Atmosphere of Grace:** An atmosphere begins with the heart but it is reflected in speech. Even casually using the phrase "that's so gay" in a derogatory manner shuts down an atmosphere of grace. Do not speak this way and immediately correct students who do. All students belong in

our ministry - no matter their beliefs or behavior.



## *What do I do if a student shares they have a sexual identity struggle?*

First, remember the A.T.A.'s (below). Then, mentor and resource.

**1**

### ACKNOWLEDGE

Acknowledge their **COURAGE** in sharing such personal information with you

**2**

### THANK

THANK them and show your **GRATITUDE** for their **TRUST** in you

**3**

### ASSURE

Assure them that if it's best to share with others you will let them know and give them a chance to do so first

**Great resources for further information and help:**

#### Is God anti-gay?

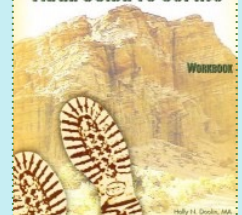
And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction



#### **Is God Anti-gay? By Sam Allberry**

A Biblical look at homosexuality and same-sex

#### TRAIL GUIDE TO COPING



attraction

#### **A Trail Guide to Coping**

A workbook for teens struggling with sexual identity



## What does the Bible say?

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." - 2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

- ▶ God created us male and female (Genesis 1:27 & 5:2)
- ▶ Homosexual behavior is a sin (Leviticus 18:22 & Romans 1:18-27)
- ▶ We are ALL sinners in need of Jesus' forgiveness and grace! (Romans 3:23)
- ▶ We are called to speak the TRUTH IN LOVE (Ephesians 4:15)

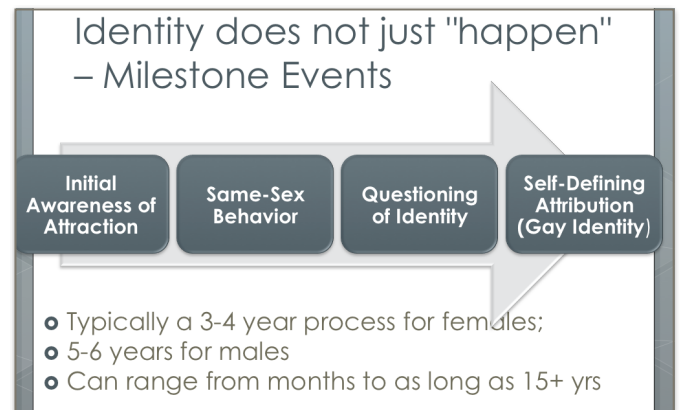
## What is a choice?

We are all tempted with various sins, some stronger to us than others. **Being tempted is NOT a choice but how we respond is our choice.** Having same-sex attractions or transgender feelings are NOT a choice. Claiming a same-sex/transgender identity label or participating in same-sex behavior IS a choice.

## Adolescent Development

### Sexual identity does not just happen

**instantaneously.** There is a progression of milestones that happen as a person wrestles with their inner storm. **Encourage your student not to label themselves but to seek godly wisdom and support.** Adolescence is a time of significant



physical, cognitive, and social development. Teens are in the Identity Role vs. Role Confusion Stage; The two main questions they ask themselves are, "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" It's important the church has supportive answers for both. Lots of shame, guilt, and depression can come with this storm, but **remind your students that Jesus came to set us free and overcome shame, guilt, and depression!**

### LAST THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- 1) CREATE A SAFE PLACE IN SMALL GROUPS
- 2) WE CAN NOT TEACH OUR OPINION
- 3) WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

*We don't have to have all the answers when we lead, we just need to walk alongside with the One who does!*

You, your student, and their family are NOT alone. Student Ministry staff are here to partner with you and your students in helping them discover and follow God's incredible plan for their life! **Talk to your campus staff ASAP if a transgender student wants to be in a different small group than their physical gender.** If you have more to talk through, contact Student Ministry Staff.

*References: Dr. Yarhouse, Sam Allberry, The Holy Bible, Lead Small*



## When a Loved One 'Comes Out'

By Hayley Mullins

Dear sister [or brother], perhaps you just received some surprising news.

It could be that your son just showed up at the front door and said, “I’m gay.” Perhaps your sister introduced you to her partner today. Or maybe the friend you’ve known for years tearfully revealed she’s struggling with same-sex attraction. It could be that someone you know is “transitioning,” going by another name and gradually changing their appearance to reflect the opposite gender.

If any one of the scenarios above resembles yours today, you may be feeling despair, ashamed, frustrated, wounded, confused, guilty, betrayed . . . or even angry with God. But in the midst of your emotions and uncertainty, God’s Word offers hope-filled answers for you today.

## Seven Truths to Consider

### 1. Being “quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry” is *always* a wise reaction.

It is easy, when emotions are high, to either lash out in anger or (in the name of love) to start throwing out Scriptures toward your loved one. Though sharing truth is right at its proper time, consider it may not be the *first* thing God is asking you to do. In the heat of the moment, the Bible gives us another way to respond—the way of wisdom:

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God ([James 1:19–20](#)).

The Lord, through James, tells us that a quick, emotional reaction will not change your loved one’s heart. Instead, your efforts to listen to them patiently may be what God uses to help them.

Their decision to tell you probably wasn't made overnight. It's more possible that they've been wrestling for a while . . . and have been experiencing some deep pain. They may even be expecting you to reject them. Letting them share honestly lets them know they are heard and loved—and will actually help you minister to them better. Their situation may not actually be what you assume, and the Scriptures you initially think they need may not be helpful for their struggle. Are you willing to wisely *listen* before you speak?

## **2. Regardless of their choices, your loved one is made in God's image and has value and worth.**

Here's some deep, beautiful doctrine: God has graciously placed the *imago Dei* (image of God) in every person ([Gen. 1:27](#)). From the Garden of Eden, each man and woman has been given the privilege of reflecting God and His glory in Creation. Yes, sin—including sexual sin—has caused that image to be displayed imperfectly. But every human being is endowed with the gift of dignity, value, and worth in the eyes of their Creator.

That's true for the ones who seem most violent and inhuman and the young baby who cannot yet consciously choose to disobey God's law. Our enemy wants you to forget this truth so you'll reject and disrespect your loved one . . . because Satan hates God and all who bear God's image.

Your son changing his name or your cousin coming to Christmas dinner with a same-sex partner doesn't mean their value before God has diminished. His Creation ordinance still stands—and with it, our need to show all people respect as bearers of God's image. Recognizing this does not mean approving of all your loved one's choices, but it does mean approaching them with an attitude of respect.

## **3. Your and my sin (and need for the gospel) is the same, no matter our temptations.**

We will never fully value and demonstrate the beauty of the gospel until we recognize our own neediness before God. Paul writes about this in Romans. After explaining that God has given His people spiritual advantages, he writes this:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested . . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For **there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, and are justified **by his grace as a gift** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ([Rom. 3:21–24](#), emphasis added).

If you hold to the biblical teaching on sexuality and don't struggle with the same temptations, it can be tempting to look at your friend or relative with disgust. But do you look at your own sin and feel as repulsed? God has offered you grace in Christ—His overwhelming gift of love and blessing—*because you needed it and couldn't earn it*. Your sin, whether it's gossip or overeating or anger, needs God's forgiveness, mercy, and grace as much as your neighbor's—and that is true if they do practice homosexuality.

If you're thinking, *I do recognize my neediness . . . and it's overwhelming!*, here's hope: Your neediness is exactly what qualifies you to help others. As you experience your weakness and God's grace in it, you can then be a humble, effective vessel of God's mercy toward your loved ones.

## **4. According to Scripture, embracing their same-sex desires isn't God's best for them . . .**



This is one of the hardest truths of Scripture: God is not honored by sexual relationships between people of the same gender. If you're reading this post, you may already embrace this truth (or you're wrestling with it). You know verses like [Romans 1:26–27](#), where Paul describes these acts as “dishonorable” and “contrary to nature.” You’ve read the lists of sins elsewhere in the New Testament where the practice of homosexuality is listed as a mark of unrighteousness ([1 Cor. 6:9](#)) and “contrary to sound doctrine” ([1 Tim. 1:10](#)).

Yes, homosexual acts are sinful. This statement is true, but it's very tempting to just stop here. There's more to the story—and it requires more than simply throwing out Bible verses without love as grenades. (Do you see the ellipsis on the header above? Let the next truth finish the thought.)

## **5. . . . but obedience to God's commands and design can be a very hard road.**

Consider the implications for your loved one to follow Jesus in their sexuality:

- They may have to give up someone they are deeply connected with.
- They may have to give up their community and identity.
- They may face deep loneliness.
- They may have seasons of depression and feeling unloved.
- They may face misunderstanding in the Church and outside.
- They will probably battle desires that cannot be fulfilled obediently.
- They may never have a family or children of their own.
- They may not be able to enjoy the physical intimacy of sex.

Jesus said following Him would be difficult and full of self-denial ([Matt. 16:24](#)). You probably feel some of that “cross of discipleship” each day—praying for a prodigal, feeling rejected by friends who want to gossip, submitting to an unwise decision of someone in authority. Let your experiences give you compassion toward your loved one. If they're struggling against their desires, look at that list and be willing to ask questions about their fears and pain. And if they are pursuing a same-sex relationship, consider that those may be some of the reasons. Can you enter into the difficulty with them? Is there a way, as their mom or sister or friend, that you can help provide for some of those needs?

## **6. God desires and is able to restore what is broken by sin's curse—including our sexuality, but it may not happen in this life.**

After that last point, you may be feeling heavy-hearted. But there is hope. God “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” ([Eph. 3:20](#)). With this truth in your pocket, you can look at your loved one and think, *If Jesus is their Savior, He can change them.*

That said, while praying and hoping, we have to avoid creating an idol called “completely free from temptation.” God's plan for your loved one, even if He draws them to Himself, may not mean they'll experience automatic transformation. They will still struggle with temptation (probably even same-sex attraction). God may have marriage in mind for them; He may not. They could be on a long road of both victories and failings. But the goal is the same for all who follow Christ, whether they experience homosexual feelings or not. God's purpose for His children is always their sanctification and His glory—not attraction to the opposite gender.

The redemption of our bodies (and your loved one's sexuality) will not be complete until the day Christ returns. But take heart: In that day, there will be no sin, no temptation, no sorrow, no loneliness, and no

pain for all who belong to Him. So as you trust the Lord with your loved one's situation, remember that He is able to turn it to good, and for His people, He will.

## **7. Showing Christ-like love means sacrificially seeking your loved one's welfare while pursuing God's glory.**

This is where it gets practical and personal. Your loved one (like all of us) needs community, a family . . . and hope. Where better to experience these things than around your dinner table, in your church, and in the everyday stuff of life? This is especially important if they've already experienced rejection from others. As you long for their restoration and walk with them, your friendship and love are the most beautiful gifts you can give . . . because it reflects the heart of Jesus.

Our Savior ate with both the religious *and* the prostitutes and swindlers of His day. Remember that Jesus didn't make a distinction in welcoming people into His life based on their behavior, temptations, or lifestyle, as we're often prone to do. All sorts of people were welcome at His table, because that's where He taught and displayed the gospel. When the Pharisees questioned Him on the company He kept, He was bold and unashamed:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" ([Matt. 9:12–13](#)).

Consider this: If our meals are more of a meeting of self-righteous religiosity than a welcoming feast to a motley crew, are we really reflecting the heart of Jesus? When a loved one says, "I'm gay" or "I'm struggling," should we not do the same as Christ did—showing hospitality to those who need a family, making room at the table for the outcast, and demonstrating mercy toward sinners?

Perhaps this last truth is difficult for you—it may raise questions in your mind about the implications. Yes, it looks messy. But grace rarely comes in when things are washed-up and clean. You may end up sitting by your loved one's side in the hospital after a suicide attempt and making room for them in your home (as [Rosaria Butterfield](#) once did).

Let's be honest: Your church friends may judge and look askance at you when your daughter, in a short haircut and men's clothing, walks through the door. As you show love and share your table with your loved one, you may face the same rejection as Christ did from the Pharisees. But remember, our Lord says, "I came for the ones (including us!) who need my friendship and salvation." By sacrificing your comfort in this way, you can be God's means of showing Christ's grace in the world.

Also know that loving and welcoming does not negate any of the other truths above. We must seek God's best for our loved ones, which always means honoring Him first. We are never to sacrifice truth, but we also are not to sacrifice love. [First John 3:18](#) says it best: "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but **in deed and in truth**."

As you work through your own emotions and choose to show Christ's love, rest in the comforting truths above. And consider . . . our sovereign God is working behind your friend or relative's confession. They're sitting next to you for a reason; perhaps you are in their life "for such a time as this" ([Est. 4:14](#)).

*From: <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/blog/when-loved-one-comes-out/>*



## TRAINING

Students can experience very serious issues, and sometimes they'll share heavy news with you. **Even though you'd like to respect their privacy, you can't always promise a student you won't tell anyone.**

There are three specific situations in which you'll need to tell Student Ministry staff, parents and possibly the authorities the content of what a student has shared with you. Each situation includes the word **"harm."** After a student has divulged something, if you think there's a possibility they're being **harmed by others, harming themselves or intending to harm others**, you need to gather all the information you can and call a Student Ministry staff member ASAP.

### FAQ

**Q:** If a student shares this information in front of other students, what should I do?

**A:** We recommend thanking the student while other students are around and then asking him or her if you can move someplace where you can talk more in depth. You don't want to be alone with the student, but you could go to the side of the room or into an open space. Every situation is different. Do your best to read the situation and know God put you there for a reason. Ask Him to guide you.

**Q:** What if I'm not sure they're telling the truth?

**A:** It's best to assume up front they are telling the truth. We want to err on the side of caution, showing too much concern as opposed to too little.

**Q:** What if they're threatening to commit suicide in the moment?

**A:** In this case, getting the student immediate help is your first priority. If they're home, try getting their parents or guardians on the phone and tell them what's happening ASAP. If you can't reach them, call 911 yourself. If you're on the phone with the student at the time, text Student Ministry staff, asking them to call the parents and/or 911 (yes, you can text during a call on most phones). Once help is sent for the students, call Student Ministry staff.

### YOUR FIRST STEPS:

- First, **Thank the student** for trusting you enough to share and having the courage to speak up.
- Second, **Gather more information.** Ask the student questions to learn more and make sure you have contact information for them and a guardian. Top question to ask: "What do you mean when you say \_\_\_\_\_?"
- Third, **Inform the student** that because you care for their safety and well-being, this is something you need to share with Student Ministry staff. Informing the student that you will let them know beforehand anytime you have to share this information with others builds trust.
- Fourth, **Bring Student Ministry staff in the conversation ASAP.** Find a staff member onsite and walk with the student to pull them aside OR if a staff member is not present, call them immediately. That staff member can then walk alongside you and the student through next steps.

*Once you call Student Ministry staff, we will help walk you through the next steps.*



## DURING A CRISIS

These questions are for you, the Small Group leader, to immediately and directly ask a student when they share sensitive information with you. The answers to these questions will help you and Student Ministry staff to assess what actions, if any, need to be taken.

### Abuse (Being harmed by others)

- “WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Who has done this?”
- “What specifically did they do?”
- “When did this happen?”
- “Do you **still feel threatened**?”
- “Are you **still in contact** with this person?”
- “Do your **parents** know? Have you told anyone?”

### Harm to Self (Big Four):

- “WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU SAY \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “When was the **last time** you \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Do you **still** \_\_\_\_\_? Are you having thoughts/temptations to \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Do your **parents** know? Have you told anyone?”

### Harm to Others (includes intention to harm others as well as driving while under the influence):

- “WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Do you have a **specific plan** on how to \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “When will you be around this person? When will you see them next?”

#### IF THERE IS **CURRENT OR POTENTIAL DANGER OR HARM**, THEN **IMMEDIATELY**:

1. **Thank the student** for trusting you enough to share and having the courage to speak up.
2. **Gather more information.** Ask the student questions to learn more and make sure you have contact information for them and a guardian. Top question to ask: “What do you mean when you say \_\_\_\_\_?”
3. **Inform the student** that because you care for their safety and well-being, this is something you need to share with Student Ministry staff. Informing the student that you will let them know beforehand anytime you have to share this information with others builds trust.
4. **Bring Student Ministry staff in the conversation ASAP.** Find a staff member onsite and walk with the student to pull them aside OR if a staff member is not present, call them immediately. That staff member can then walk alongside you and the student through next steps.



## Safe Zone Procedure

The following flow chart guides you through the process of what to do when a student shares something that leads you to believe that they're being harmed, harming themselves or possibly harming others.

