

Bridging the Gap

Welcome to: Bridging the gap

This resource has emerged from hours of prayer, conversation, reflection, and a very unique assignment. To identify with and advocate for a particular group of people because the Triune God loves them and desires relationship with them is simply to join in the mission of God in the world. To identify with a group of people commonly viewed as not only sinners but potentially as enemies of the church by many Christians, adds a layer of complexity. And to advocate on behalf of a group of people whose common connecting reality is a point of much disagreement and a divisive topic in the church, adds not only complexity but controversy.

Homosexuality is not only the proverbial hot potato, it is also one of the lightning rod litmus tests for the church today. The way we engage our gay neighbours is one of the most important contemporary opportunities for followers of Jesus to model and live out the good news of the gospel of Christ. That doesn't mean it will be easy, simple, or comfortable. But it does mean that being intentional in this area of engagement will have a significant impact on our understanding of the gospel, the grace of God, and the manner in which he calls us to represent him in our world.

As you watch the interviews contained on the DVD segments you will encounter thoughtful Christians who have lived in the tensions that the realities of homosexuality can create. Their love for Christ, love for gay people, and love for the church will inspire you. As you engage the Bible study and discussion questions, you will encounter God's call to share his love with your gay neighbours and may experience the growth that such a call entails.



Segment 1:

Gay People Are Our Neighbours

For many Christians, the topic of homosexuality continues to be a controversial yet largely theoretical issue. Many do not have any close personal relationships with gay people and their perspectives and attitudes have been influenced by diverse but impersonal experiences.

Sonia, David, Justin and Brian have all experienced the challenges of growing up in the Christian community with the reality of personally experiencing same-gender attraction. This is not theoretical for them.

Greg has been a pastor in a parish that includes many gay and lesbian people. This is not theoretical for him.

In the ministry of Jesus we see him touch the untouchables, befriend those on the margins and fringe, and associate with those the religious leaders did not associate with. Jesus himself said, *"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"* (Luke 7: 34)

The stories on the DVD segment, "Gay People are Our Neighbours" offer the opportunity to hear the voices of those for whom realities of diverse sexual identity is a personal and real experience.

Reflection Questions within the screening:

1. *Welcoming Gay Neighbours:*
 - a. Would gay people be welcome in your church?
 - b. How has the church tried to listen to and understand the realities of gay people?
 - c. How can we address the prevalence of fear on this topic?
2. *Personal and Relational Engagement:*
 - a. What needs to be the primary attitude of Christ-followers toward gay people?
 - b. What is the primary barrier to adopting this attitude?
3. *Non-patronizing Pastoral Care:*
 - a. How comfortable do you feel relating to someone who is questioning matters of faith and sexuality?
 - b. What steps might you need to take to feel more prepared?

Segment 1: *continued*

Gay People Are Our Neighbours

BIBLICAL ENGAGEMENT: Read James 1: 26 – 27

Anyone who sets himself up as "religious" by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

Content:

- An overused cliché in the Christian community is, "Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin" as a catch-all response to gay people. In what ways might this fall into the "talking a good game" that James references? Have Christians deceived themselves with this easy, dismissive cliché?
- We say that Christians need to "walk the talk". What other stories from Scripture embody this concept of moving from talking about how to reach and touch the lives of others to actually being relationally engaged with our neighbours?

Application:

- Describe how you have experienced becoming aware of ways in which you'd been self-deceived – thinking that "talking a good game" was fulfilling God's call?
- What is most challenging about moving from *thinking theoretically* about reaching out and taking up the plight of those who are alienated and *actually doing it*?

Optional Activity 1

1. Can you recall conversations you have had with gay people?
2. What were some good things that came out of these interactions?
3. What may have been some challenges you faced in these interactions?
4. Did you feel free to speak about matters of faith? Why or why not?

Optional Activity 2

Watch the bonus interviews of "Gay People are Our Neighbours" DVD.

Discuss the following questions:

1. What insights were most applicable for you as you seek to grow in this area of engagement?
2. What comments are you uncertain of or would wish to challenge?
3. What specific application for your church do you take away from this segment?