

ADVENTIST EDITION

GUIDING FAMILIES

OF LGBT+ LOVED ONES

FOR ADVENTIST FAMILIES,
MINISTRY LEADERS, AND
ALL WHO CARE

FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

If you are the parent, family member, or friend of a young person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT+), this guide is for you. If you are the pastor or teacher of a student navigating sexual orientation and/or gender identity concerns, this resource has been created with you in mind, as well. This booklet is not designed to address the finer points of theological, biological, social, or legal issues. It is written to increase your understanding of and care for LGBT+ young people, so that you can nurture their well-being and faith identity without condemnation or exclusion. We pray that this resource will greatly improve your ability to demonstrate the love of Christ to those in your Adventist home, church, or school who are of another orientation and/or identity.

PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND FRIENDS

Whether your child, family member, or friend just came out or did so some time ago, our hope is that this resource will equip and encourage you. It all starts with what some have called a posture shift. The LGBT+ population has been misunderstood and mistreated for decades, resulting in a great deal of emotional and spiritual harm. Against this backdrop, Adventists must shift our behavioral posture to ensure that our actions, attitudes, and words reflect those of Jesus.

FOR PASTORS AND TEACHERS

As an Adventist church or school leader, you will no doubt come into contact with students who identify as LGBT+. Your leadership and influence can make a significant difference in their lives. This guide will help you provide relational care for these young people and offer much-needed guidance to their family members, friends, and fellow believers. Use this material to educate yourself and others on how to generously engage and thoughtfully care for LGBT+ individuals.

WHAT IS POSTURE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

When taking up a new sport, it is necessary to learn the correct posture. You cannot simply step on to a snowboard or swing a golf club and expect results. You have to learn how to use your body to carve the board across the slope or drive the ball squarely down the fairway. Even the slightest shift in posture can determine success or failure. The same is true of the gospel. God has entrusted us with Good News, but our posture—the way we communicate it to others and live it out in our own lives—can make all the difference. Many Christians think the gospel can be compromised only by a loss of biblical truth. In fact, the gospel can also be compromised by a loss of biblical love. To love others is to live out God's truth. When we fail to love, we misrepresent God (who is love) to those He desires to reach.

CARE—NOT COMPROMISE

Teaching others to love and care for LGBT+ people can trigger concerns about biblical compromise. **Nothing in this resource will dishonor God's Word. We encourage you to maintain the biblical position of the Adventist Church (see page 71), while adjusting your posture to love others like God has loved you. We are all sinners and regularly fall short of God's glory.** Yet Jesus has saved us by His amazing grace. We did not earn it or achieve it—let alone deserve it. Those who have received such mercy must not mistreat others or place roadblocks in their path. We are called to remove obstacles and consistently reveal the love and kindness of Jesus to others—no matter where they may be in life. Sadly, many Adventist LGBT+ young people have left the church due to family rejection or church exclusion. What might happen if we learned to love and nurture our LGBT+ young people instead?

We pray that this resource will help you live out the gospel.

Prayerfully in Christ,

NAD Commission on Human Sexuality

Working with Bill Henson, author of *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones*

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WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

It is important for family and friends of LGBT+ young people—along with the pastors and teachers who support them—to have a resource that can guide them. In this booklet we draw on recent research with more than 300 Adventist LGBT+ young adults, ages 18 to 35 years (VanderWaal, Sedlacek, and Lane, 2017). Based on the findings, we offer the following waypoints for the journey ahead.

1. You are *not alone*—family resources (such as this guide) are available.
2. It takes *strength and courage* for an LGBT+ young person to come out.
3. Your reaction to a young person's disclosure has a direct impact on their emotional and spiritual *well-being*.
4. Even if you feel confused or uncomfortable with the sexual orientation or gender identity of your family member or friend, your *support* and care is key for their welfare.
5. You need to seek *knowledge and understanding* of LGBT+ issues (this resource is a good start).
6. Your responsibility is to express your constant *love and care* for a struggling young person, not to contest or try to change their orientation and/or identity.
7. It is essential to communicate to LGBT+ young people that *God loves them unconditionally* as you come to terms with their orientation and/or identity in the context of your own religious beliefs.
8. It is important to understand that your LGBT+ family member or friend may be a deeply religious person and that they can have a *happy future*.

We will share insights and quotes from these research participants in the pages to follow.

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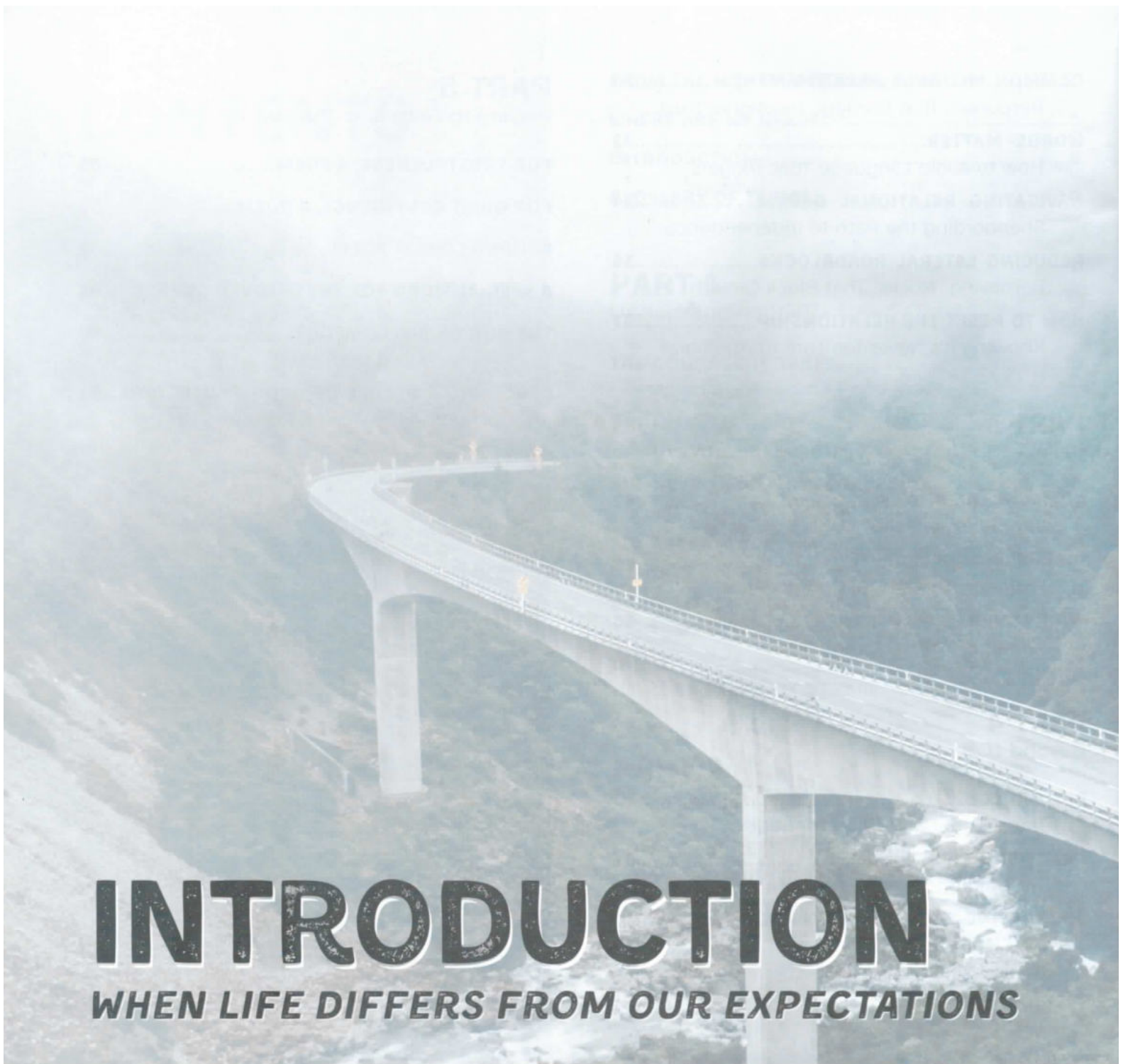
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INTRODUCTION

WHEN LIFE DIFFERS FROM OUR EXPECTATIONS

WATCHING OUR CHILDREN GROW from babies into toddlers and from adolescents into young adults is one of the greatest privileges and miracles that a parent can experience in life. By the time our kids reach adulthood, they will have made us cry tears of joy and filled our lives with much laughter and love.

Finding out unexpected things about our children begins early on in parenthood. Some things that we discover involve their propensity to sin. We may be shocked to find out that our son lied to hide a bad test result. Or maybe he stole something from his friend or the neighbor. Possibly, we overhear our daughter using language with her middle school friends that betrays the person we know her to be.

No doubt, our children are sinners. Just like us. They need God's grace. Just like us.

Other unexpected discoveries involve developmental gifts or vulnerabilities: We may discover that our daughter is particularly brilliant, artistic, or athletic. Or that our son struggles with learning. Maybe our child struggles to maintain attention. Or maybe they lack the initiative or drive it will take to succeed.

Some of our children's weaknesses are related to character flaws, but many of their failures and mistakes arise from vulnerabilities they face. More broadly, every child is growing up in this world for the first time and trying to figure out how life works.

These realities apply to every human being. As parents, these realities apply to all of our children.

When the unexpected discovery involves our child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, we can suddenly feel very alone. Maybe shocked. Possibly fearful. For some, shameful. For many, big questions arise: *Why did this happen? How did this happen?* Lurking under these questions is often a deeper question that we may not want to face: *Did I cause this?*

Is this my fault?

As parents, this question can hit us hard. Our minds may be flooded with memories of our worst mistakes. Maybe I am a mother who became exhausted and neglected my child. Possibly, I am a father who worked too many hours. We may remember yelling at or exasperating our children with overly high expectations. Our thoughts may go something like this:

Impatience. It's every parent's struggle, right? Oh, how many times I was impatient and demanding! Did my lack of gentleness cause my child to be gay? Did our divorce cause my daughter to be transgender?

While it is tempting to focus on causation, I want to resolve this question up front: **the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity are highly complex, multi-factorial, and likely rooted in both nature and nurture.** For any one person, it can be impossible to

know the exact cause. For this reason, we propose that we shift our focus from *causation* to *compassion*. Your LGBT+ loved one, regardless of their age, needs your faithful presence, understanding, and compassion in their life.

**"WE PROPOSE THAT
WE SHIFT OUR FOCUS
FROM CAUSATION
TO COMPASSION."**

You deserve the same compassion. In that spirit, *Guiding Families* is designed to help you increase understanding and build a trustworthy relationship with LGBT+ loved ones. To accomplish this, we have to address common mistakes that many parents make. This is not about shaming or blaming you. It is our heartfelt intention to help you.

Our resource will not "fix" sexuality or gender identity, but it *will* equip you to lay down your life for your LGBT+ loved one.

As you move through our resource, you may discover ways that you've damaged relational trust with your loved one. Please remember: even loving parents make many mistakes. *Guiding Families* offers action steps you can take to begin the process of repairing trust and healing relational wounds.

We pray that you find this resource to be comforting. May God give you hope that He will bless your family.

*"REMEMBER [FERVENTLY]
THE WORD AND PROMISE TO
YOUR SERVANT, IN WHICH
YOU HAVE CAUSED ME TO
HOPE. THIS IS MY COMFORT
AND CONSOLATION IN MY
AFFLICTION: THAT YOUR
WORD HAS REVIVED ME AND
GIVEN ME LIFE."*

- PSALM 119:49, 50

GLOSSARY *OF* TERMS

ACCEPTANCE

An honest and full acknowledgement of the reality of a situation; a love toward someone as they are, not as one would like them to be. Acceptance does not inherently mean approval of a situation or of other people's dealings with that situation. Acceptance also does not mean feeling good about a situation. It is a state in which each person (loved ones and self) can move forward owning their respective roles and responsibilities in a situation—no more, no less.

BAIT-AND-SWITCH

Occurs when intentions, beliefs, or attitudes are initially misrepresented and later found to be different from expected. An example would be vaguely expressing a love for LGBT+ people, only to later disclose a significant aspect of belief that was not clearly communicated earlier. A bait-and-switch can leave someone feeling hurt, betrayed, or lied to. While the purpose of a bait-and-switch tends to be avoiding difficult confrontation, it can ironically end up being more hurtful than an honest disclosure.

COMING OUT

When a person shares with other people their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, as well as the process that individual goes through to discover and understand their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Originated from the phrase "coming out of the closet." Coming out does not necessarily mean "living it out"—a person may share about their experience without an intent to date the same gender or transition their gender. Conversely, a person may come out while they are already in a relationship or in the process of a gender transition. When someone's sexual/gender identity is announced by someone else without consent, it is called being **outed**.

TRAUMA

A psychological shift resulting from a distressing event or series of events. Trauma may result from a one-time occurrence, such as a death of a loved one. Trauma may also result from (often seemingly "smaller") distressing events occurring repeatedly over a long period of time, such as repeated physical or verbal harm at home or at school. The latter form is often called **complex trauma**, **developmental trauma**, **historic trauma**, **traumatic stress**, **toxic stress**, or "little t" trauma.¹

LESBIAN

Adj./N.

(A woman who is) attracted exclusively or most significantly to other women.

"She is lesbian." "She is a lesbian woman."

GAY

Adj.

Attracted exclusively or most significantly to the same gender. Historically used only for males, but increasingly used also for females.

"He is gay." "He is a gay man."

BISEXUAL

Adj.

Attracted to more than one gender, but not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

"She is bisexual."

TRANSGENDER

Adj.

Refers to those whose gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex at birth. In some persons, this can cause deep and persistent distress known as gender dysphoria.

"He is transgender."

¹Paynter, Michael L. (2017). *Exploring a School Culture and Climate Where Students Can Flourish: Using Focus Group Methodology to Capture Key Stakeholder Perceptions About School Culture and Climate in an Alternative Education High School*. San Jose State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 10635374.

²Yarhouse, Mark A. (2015). *Understanding Gender Dyshporia: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. InterVarsity Press.

QUEER/NONSTRAIGHT

Adj.

Umbrella term referring to individuals who are not **straight** (exclusively attracted to the opposite gender) and/or who experience a level of discomfort with their birth gender. Queer is a formerly derogatory term that has been presently reclaimed as an empowering identifier.

"He identifies as queer."

QUESTIONING

Adj.

Unsure of the exact nature of one's own gender identity and/or sexual identity, and thus unable to confidently identify by a particular sexuality/gender label in the present.

"She is questioning her sexuality."

INTERSEX

Adj.

Having been born with sex characteristics (ex., genitals, gonads, chromosomes, endocrinology) that do not correspond with the typical notions of male or female bodies.

"My child is intersex."

ASEXUAL

Adj.

Experiencing minimal to no sexual attraction to other individuals. Asexual people can experience a range of romantic inclination, from none (**aromantic**) to some (**gray-romantic**) to full (**romantic**).

"He is asexual, but not aromantic, so he still enjoys going on dates."

ALLY

N.

A person who is not LGBT+ but who affirms progressive LGBT+ social, political, and/or theological causes.

"His best friend is an LGBT+ ally."

PANSEXUAL

Adj.

Attraction to people not limited by the people's biological sex, gender, or identity. Whereas "bisexual" tends to denote two gender categories ("bi" = "two"), someone who is pansexual may not view gender as limited to two categories ("pan" = "all").

"She identifies as pansexual."

GENDERQUEER

Adj.

Not conforming to or identifying with typical notions of masculine or feminine appearance, roles, traits, or identity. Synonymous with **gender non-binary**, **genderfluid**, **gender non-conforming**, **pangender**, **androgynous**, or **androgyne**.

"They are gender nonbinary, or 'NB' for short."

GENDER DYSPHORIA

N.

The experience of distress associated with the incongruence wherein one's psychological and emotional gender identity does not match one's biological sex.² A person with no or low gender dysphoria is said to have **gender coherence** or **gender congruence**.

"She experiences gender dysphoria."

TRANSITION

N./V.

A process of bringing one's gender presentation and/or sex characteristics into accord with one's internal sense of gender identity.

"My son has announced plans to transition."

HOMOSEXUAL

Adj./N.

A person who is attracted to the same sex/gender. Generally considered an outdated or offensive term to LGBT+ individuals.

SAME-SEX ATTRACTION (SSA)

N.

(Or **same-gender attraction**) This term is common for those who consider attractions toward the same gender to be a sin struggle, yet it is offensive to many LGBT+ people because it has "behavior" connotations and diminishes the "identity" aspects of sexual orientation. (Many LGBT+ people prefer the term **same-gender loving**.)

"He experiences same-gender attraction."

STRAIGHT/HETEROSEXUAL

Adj.

Attracted exclusively or most significantly to the opposite sex/gender.

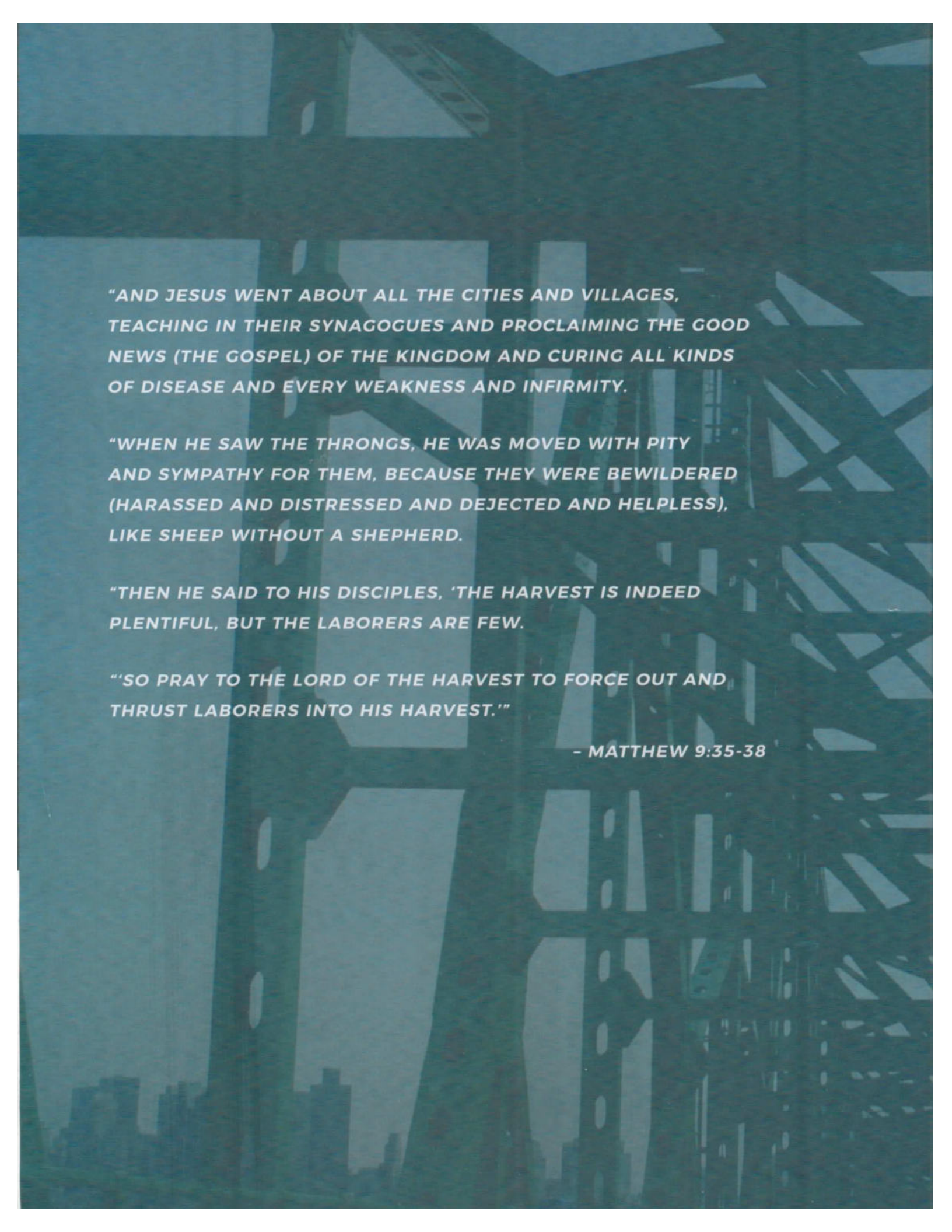
"She is heterosexual."

CISGENDER

Adj.

(Or **Cis**, pronounced "/sis/") Describes a person whose internal sense of gender identity corresponds with their birth sex. (The prefix "trans" means "across," while the prefix "cis" means "on the same side of.")

"Being cisgender. I don't face the challenge of having to question my gender."



*"AND JESUS WENT ABOUT ALL THE CITIES AND VILLAGES,
TEACHING IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES AND PROCLAIMING THE GOOD
NEWS (THE GOSPEL) OF THE KINGDOM AND CURING ALL KINDS
OF DISEASE AND EVERY WEAKNESS AND INFIRMITY.*

*"WHEN HE SAW THE THRONGS, HE WAS MOVED WITH PITY
AND SYMPATHY FOR THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE BEWILDERED
(HARASSED AND DISTRESSED AND DEJECTED AND HELPLESS),
LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.*

*"THEN HE SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, 'THE HARVEST IS INDEED
PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW.*

*"SO PRAY TO THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO FORCE OUT AND
THRUST LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST."*

- MATTHEW 9:35-38

PART 1:

UNDERSTANDING LGBT+ LOVED ONES



THE COURAGE IT TAKES

FOR A LOVED ONE TO COME OUT

THE DAY YOUR CHILD COMES OUT is one of the most critical days of their life. On the following pages, you will learn just how scary this moment can be for young people. Imagine knowing that your parents are loving yet worrying that one disclosure could mean that you are rejected—or even disowned.

As a parent, it might seem unthinkable that your beloved child could possibly fear you or wrestle with anxious thoughts of being rejected.

Yet many *do* fear family rejection and disownment, which still occur today. Additionally, prior traumas (such as bullying) may be fueling some of your child's fears of being rejected.

For this reason, we must start with the premise that coming out may be the most risky and vulnerable moment of their life. What they are sharing with you often has been processing inside them for a long time, possibly for years. For them to share with you reflects deep cour-

age, which can be described as “trusting in the midst of fear.”

Your response is critical. It will determine the difference between safety or fear, peace or anxiety, secure love or sense of rejection.

Similar to how young people can fear their parents' response, some parents fear, *What will happen when our pastors and others in our church find out?* Sadly, this fear can disable a parent's natural inclination to radically love and demonstrate acceptance.

Families and friends may assume the Adventist Church and its leaders expect them to reject or respond harshly to a young person when they come out. To the contrary: many Adventist pastors and teachers would be deeply saddened by this outcome. We at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists join with these leaders in calling you to walk lovingly and patiently with LGBT+ young people—do not reject or withdraw from them. Keep reading to find out why.

In light of these things, we join your pastors/teachers in supporting you as you walk in love with your LGBT+ child. Your natural inclination to accept and love your child is God-given. At times, you might be tempted to withdraw in disappointment or grief, but it is a critical time to gently engage and assure your child of your love.

GROWING UP LGBT+

THE WEIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE CARRY

Young people do not decide to come out on a whim. They likely have been sorting out their identity for a number of years. Many experience isolation and depression as they look for answers on their own, with little or no support from others. The cumulative impact of the traumas listed on the right can result in lower self-worth, difficulties in academic performance, and greater risk of self-harm.

Understanding one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity can be a confusing and frustrating process that takes time. While young people may experiment sexually as they develop, they do not *choose* the enduring attractions or longings that come to make up their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. As a family member, friend, or church leader, you cannot demand that certain feelings go away or deny the reality of what a young person experiences. However, you can walk beside them, encourage them, and help them to bear the cumulative weight of the burdens they carry.

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"My life now is much better [since coming out] because I am not living in constant fear of my parents finding out about my sexuality. I am able to be much more open with my parents about my life now and feel more like I can trust them and come to them with any issue, not just those relating to my sexuality."

Come Out



Shame



Repression



Coming to Awareness?

THE WEIGHT THAT

MANY LGBT+ TEENS CARRY

IS TOO HEAVY. WE CANNOT

LIGHTEN THEIR BURDEN

IF WE ARE UNAWARE OF WHAT

THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH.

WRESTLE WITH:
SHOULD I
COME OUT?

11

10

CAN SHUT DOWN
EMOTIONALLY OR
MENTALLY

MAY HAVE
ATTEMPTED OR
CONTEMPLATED
SUICIDE

9

8

TEND TO "REPRESS"
TO A POINT OF
EXHAUSTION*

ANTICIPATE
JUDGMENT
AT CHURCH

7

6

EXPERIENCE ISOLATION,
LONELINESS, AND
DEPRESSION.

LIVE WITH FEAR OF
FAMILY REJECTION

4

5

WONDER IF GOD
HAS DISOWNED
THEM

**BECOME SELF-AWARE:
"I AM GAY"**

ARE BULLIED AND
TEASED FOR YEARS

3

2

POORLY INTE-
GRATE WITH
SAME-GENDER
PEERS

FEEL "DIFFERENT"
AT AN EARLY AGE

1

1

*Repression is the mental and emotional energy expended in an attempt to subdue or shut down unwanted feelings through self-effort. This process commonly leads to mental exhaustion, or even a psychological breakdown. This can lower hope, increase feelings of self-contempt, and increase suicidality.

SIX DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

HOW YOUTH PROCESS IDENTITY



Young people may be distressed to discover they are attracted to persons of the same gender or that their gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. For many this reality may not agree with what's going on with their friends or with their family's biblical beliefs. Because they want to be like others, be a "good Christian," and/or meet parental expectations, they often attempt to repress their experience. They may try to make it go away by asking God to change them, claiming Bible promises, or engaging intensely in religious activities. Those who are not spiritually inclined may try to repress using their own strength.

Often confused and uncertain of who they are, many LGBT+ youth struggle silently with their thoughts and feelings. They do not always understand how critical it is to have adult support. Some do, but they fear rejection or judgment. Many withdraw, isolate, and hide. Some hide physically for fear people will discover what they are experiencing. Others hide emotionally so their secret is not at risk.



After a period of denial, repression, and hiding, many young people conclude that their thoughts and feelings are not likely to go away. They accept this as their reality and begin to think in terms of identity, saying to themselves, "This is who I am." It should come as no surprise that young people consider sexuality and/or gender to be important aspects of their personal identity, as these are core elements of the human experience.

Not all young people who identify as LGBT+ are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Some inwardly admit they are gay or transgender, but live publicly in isolation and fear. Young people who let this stress build up without peer or adult support run the risk of increased depression and suicidal ideation. Mental, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion can overtake a young person when pain and distress from the past and anxiety about the future accumulate for too long.



Young people need to be genuine about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as they grow and develop. Those who remain closeted are often at an increased risk for self-harm. Those who choose to come out take a risk by disclosing very personal information about themselves to others and will only do so if they feel it is safe. If a young person comes out to you, it is generally with much forethought, and it is important to maintain confidentiality. Never "out" an LGBT+ young person to someone else without that young person's express permission. Keep in mind, coming out is a long-term process. A young person may come out to a trusted friend before doing so with parents, classmates, or church members. If they move to a different city, they will need to negotiate the disclosure process all over again with a new group of friends, acquaintances, or a new boss.

When young people come out, it is an opportunity to recover from isolation, bullying, and/or self-hatred. Hurt can turn into anger if people around them do not accept their identity. It is very important for parents, family members, and pastors to offer unconditional love and acceptance during this time. Save a life! Be a safe person when a young person comes out. In a later section of this resource, we discuss how to give an LGBT+ young person the support and care they need during this difficult time.



ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"When I first came out, it felt like I was walking on eggshells just being around my family and even closest friends. I felt like I was on display when I was in a room full of family and they would be quiet around me."

SIX ACCEPTANCE STAGES

HOW PARENTS OFTEN REACT

PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE COME OUT MAY EXPERIENCE NORMAL REACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SIGNIFICANT LOSS OR MAJOR LIFE CHANGE. THESE REACTIONS DO NOT OCCUR IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER. IN FACT, SOME MAY NOT OCCUR AT ALL, WHILE OTHERS CAN SURFACE MULTIPLE TIMES. EVERY PARENT'S JOURNEY IS UNIQUE.

**THERE IS NO
ONE RIGHT WAY
TO GRIEVE.**



It is often a shock for parents to learn that their child is LGBT+, even when they suspect it. They may feel as if their world has been turned upside down. Some parents readily adjust to their child's reality, while others take much longer to process it—if at all. No one can predict how they or other family members will respond.

Parents may try to hide from reality, feeling unprepared for what the truth might mean for them, their child, and their family. This can lead them to minimize or discredit their child's disclosure, in hopes that it is just an experimental phase or act of rebellion. Parents may say things like, "You are not lesbian. You have dated boys." Or, "I don't want to hear about it. We don't have gays in our family." Parents begin to face reality when they listen to their child and take them seriously.



Another common reaction is anger. Parents suffering from guilt may become angry with themselves. Those who are believers may become angry with God for allowing their child to be LGBT+ or with their church for not being more loving. Parents may even become angry with their child for disrupting the life of the family. Underneath that anger is hurt. Parents should deal with their pain and anger and be careful not to direct it at their child, as this will hurt their child even more. Patience, listening, and respect are critical to preserving relational connection and trust.

When young people come out, they often emerge from years of isolation and effort to change their situation, either alone or with God's help. They risk even further isolation if family and friends do not accept them. Parents may attempt to negotiate their child back into silence by saying things like, "This is not you. Don't tell anyone. We'll find you help." Yet most children at this point have already accepted their reality and can no longer be untruthful about it. Attempts to bargain an LGBT+ child into continued isolation are often internalized as parental rejection.



When feelings such as loss, anger, fear, or anxiety are directed inward and not processed in a healthy way, major depression can result. Normal feelings of sadness can give way to symptoms such as a chronic loss of energy, frequent insomnia, persistent feelings of worthlessness, decreased interest or enjoyment in most activities, and a lack of concentration. Parents encountering these or similar symptoms should reach out to a professional counselor for assistance, if they have not already done so.

The path toward accepting a new reality is different for every person. Although parents may feel as if they have "lost" their child, their loved one is still the same person they were before coming out. What parents may need to grieve are some of the heterosexual or gender-conforming hopes and dreams they had for their child. As parents process these losses, it can help to reframe the situation. Know that many LGBT+ young people emerge from the coming out phase as strong and resilient individuals—especially if they have the love and support of their family. Ask LGBT+ children what they envision for their future, and support them in pursuing that. Parents who adjust their expectations and trust in God's ongoing plan may be better able to reimagine the future and reorient their feelings of loss.



ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"I was dealing with severe depression and even attempted suicide prior to coming out to my mother."

RISKS LGBT+

THE 2 LEADING RISK FACTORS

1 BULLYING

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"I have not come out to either of my parents because I am too afraid to make either of them uncomfortable."

COMPARED TO THEIR HETEROSEXUAL PEERS,
LGBT+ YOUTH ARE...^{1,2}

- 2-4X** more likely to attempt suicide (in accepting families)
- 4-8X** more likely to attempt suicide (in rejecting/disconnected families)

- 91%** more likely to be bullied
- 46%** more likely to be victimized
- 3X** more likely to miss school (out of fear of bullying and rejection)
- 2X** more likely to skip college

LGBT+ YOUTH HOMELESSNESS³

- 40%** of homeless youth identify as LGBT+
- 62%** have attempted suicide
- 59%** have been sexually victimized, and many being forced to trade "services" for food and housing
- 94%** of youth homeless shelters report serving LGBT+ youth in the last year
- 75%** report working with transgender youth in the last year
- 68%** of homeless LGBT+ youth report serious family rejection

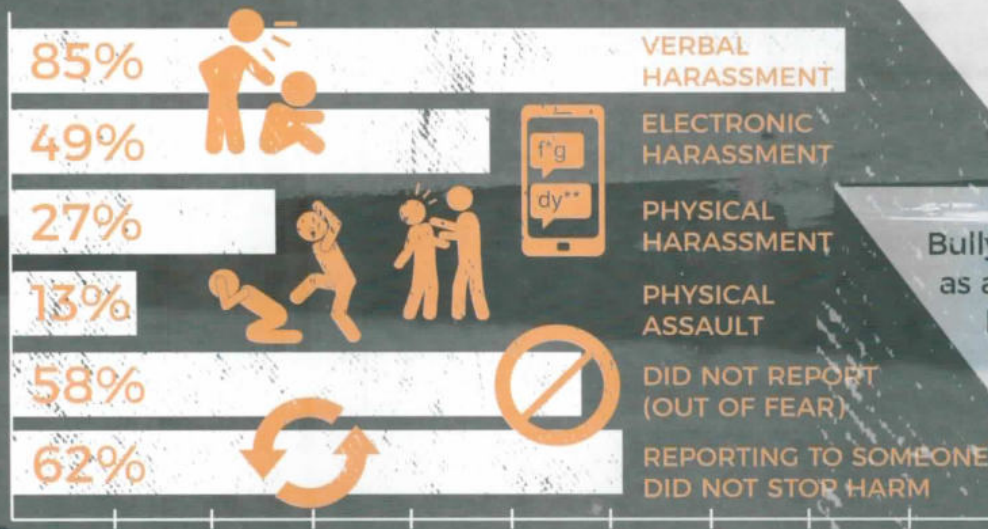
¹Schuster, M.; Bogart, L.M.; Klein, D.J.; et al. A longitudinal study of bullying of sexual-minority youth. *N Engl J Med* (2015); 372:1872-1874.

²Family Acceptance Project™. Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics* (2009), 123 (1) 346-352.

³Durso, L.E., & Gates, G.J. (2012). Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of service providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund.

⁴Kosciw, J. G.; Greytak, E. A.; Giga, N. M.; Villenas, C.; & Danischewski, D. J. (2016). The 2015 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

Percentages of LGBT+ teens who have already experienced bullying and victimization:⁴



HIGHER VICTIMIZATION =

- Lower GPA
- Higher depression
- Higher self-harm
- Higher suicide attempts¹

Bullying for all students declines as age increases, but it **remains higher at every grade level** for LGBT+ students relative to heterosexual peers.¹

YOUTH FACE

FOR LGBT+ TEEN SUICIDE:

2 FAMILY REJECTION

HOW TO AVOID FAMILY DISCONNECTION

Avoid asking questions that convey you are trying to find a cause or a cure (more about this later).

Listen to their story and show your unconditional love.

Safe conversation conveys relational connection.

Absence of connection (silence) can lead your family member to perceive that you are rejecting them.

Remember that bullying and family rejection are the leading causes of LGBT+ youth suicide.

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"When I came out to my parents, there was a definite change in the closeness of the relationship. It felt like a wall had been put up and that I was now a different person."

FAMILY REJECTION

FAMILY DISCONNECTION

Imagine this family scenario. A young person comes out to her parents. They hug her. They cry. They say, "We love you no matter what." **But then the topic is never raised again**, because her parents are uncomfortable with her sexual orientation. Their silence leaves her **isolated, having to carry a load of internal stress** all on her own. Holding this stress in, rather than being able to verbalize it in safe conversations, **raises her risk of suicidal ideation**. Family disconnection—even in a loving home—operates similarly to active forms of rejection. **Although disconnecting from a sensitive issue may give the appearance of all being well, it can actually produce risks for young people comparable to rejection.**

IS THIS AN EMERGENCY?

Emergencies may arise when our loved ones show signs of severe helplessness and/or hopelessness. Thoughts of just "checking out of life" are seen as their best option. While many who think about suicide are not immediately in danger of acting on that thought, it is very important to assess what is going on. Four factors that indicate help is *urgently* needed are:

1. ACTIVE SUICIDAL THOUGHTS
2. SPECIFIC PLAN TO TAKE ONE'S LIFE
3. STATED INTENTION TO HARM OR KILL ONE'S SELF
4. ACCESS TO MEANS TO CARRY OUT THE INTENTION

**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE:
(800) 273-8255**

Stay close by your family member or friend for support, and contact a licensed counselor if any of the above four indicators are present. **If imminently suicidal, call 911 or take your family member or friend to the emergency room at your local hospital immediately.** If uncertain, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for further evaluation.

Be calmly alert about these risks. Stay present in your loved one's daily life.

Q & A

FROM THE 2017 RESEARCH BY VANDERWAAL, C.J., SEDLACEK, D., & LANE, L.* (2017): "THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION AMONG LGBT+ MILLENNIALS IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH." *JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK AND CHRISTIANITY*, 44 (1-2), 72-95.

AT WHAT AGE DO ADVENTIST YOUNG PEOPLE COME OUT TO THEIR PARENTS?

One-third (33%) came out during their teen years (mostly between ages 16–19 years). The largest group (40%) came out between ages 20–29 years, presumably after leaving home. A small percentage (6%) came out when they were 30 years or older. One-fifth (21%) have never come out to their parents.

ARE ADVENTIST LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE ALSO AT RISK FOR SUICIDE?

Almost one-third (32%) said they had thoughts of suicide during the last six months. Nearly one-third (29%) had made a suicide attempt at some point in their life. Of this group, almost a third (30%) said their suicidal thoughts or attempt(s) were closely related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

HOW HAVE ADVENTIST FAMILIES RESPONDED TO CHILDREN WHO COME OUT?

Less than half (41%) of LGBT+ young adults said their family listened attentively as they shared their sexual orientation and/or gender identity journey with them. Over two-thirds (70%) said their parents/caregivers were disappointed, and 43% said their parents forbade them to tell anyone else about their orientation. Only one-fourth (25%) of parents communicated they "loved me no matter what." Nearly one out of ten (9%) said they were kicked out of their house when they came out to their parents.

WHAT DOES REJECTION LOOK LIKE IN ADVENTIST FAMILIES?

Two out of five young adults (42%) said they were ridiculed by their family for the way they dressed or fixed their hair. Over a third (38%) said their family used demeaning language about their orientation or identity, with one-fifth (21%) saying their family called them names such as "fag" or "sissy." Almost a third (29%) said their parents' financial support was dependent on them complying with their parents' wishes about their sexuality or gender. Almost a third (28%) said their family blamed them for any anti-LGBT+ mistreatment they received.

HOW DO ADVENTIST YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT COMING OUT TO THEIR FAMILY?

Four-fifths (81%) said they were scared to come out because they knew their family would think they were sinful and/or disgusting. Three-fourths (76%) knew of their parents' prejudice toward LGBT+ individuals, making it hard to come out to them. Around half were afraid their parents would disown them (57%) or knew they would be rejected (48%) if they came out as LGBT+.

HOW MANY ADVENTISTS SELF-IDENTIFY AS LGBT+ INDIVIDUALS?

We currently do not have information about this. According to one study, national LGBT+ percentages is between 3.8% and 4.7%.

WHO DO ADVENTIST LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE RELY ON FOR SUPPORT?

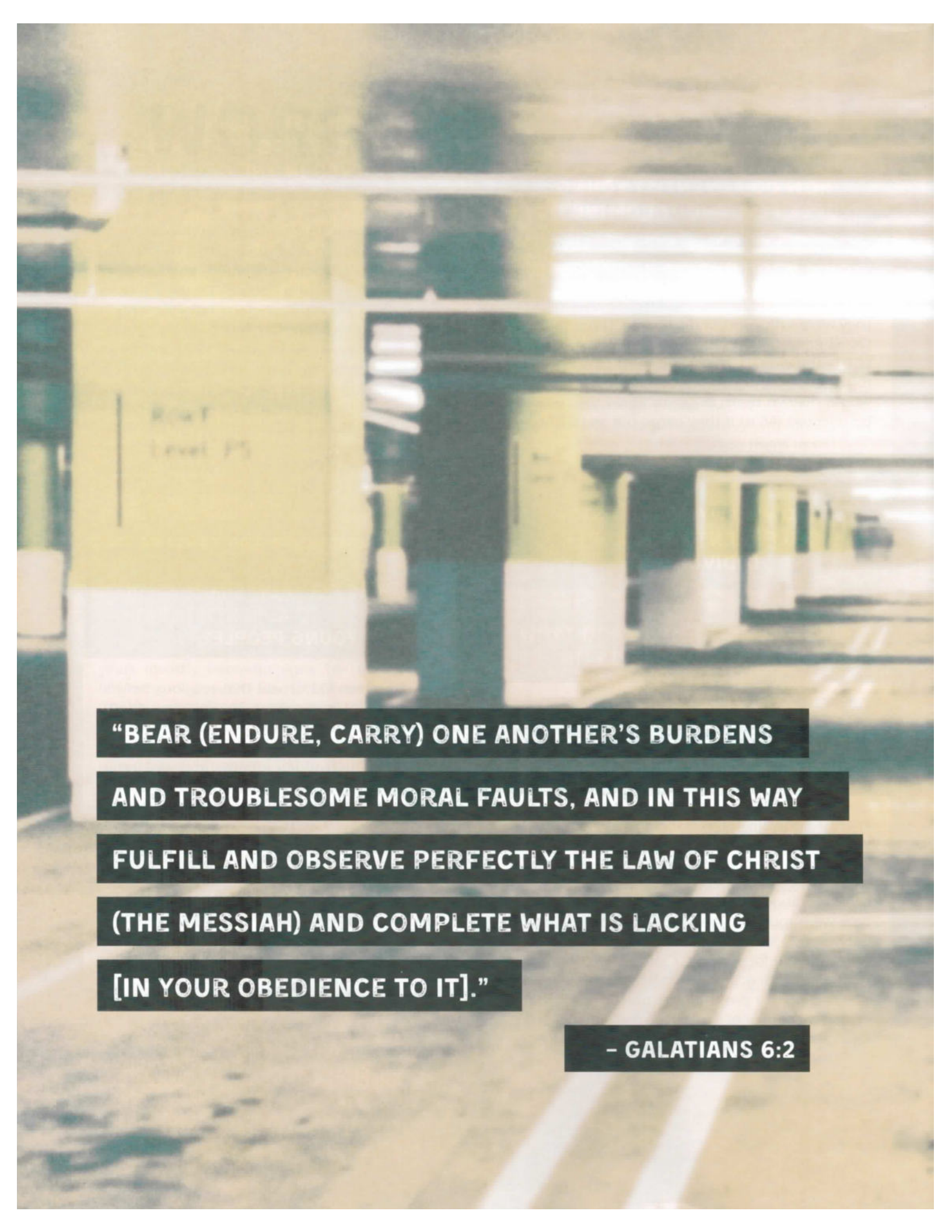
Friends generally offered the strongest support, with about two-thirds saying they have a friend who cares about their feelings, who is around when they are in need, and with whom they can talk about their problems. Family members were much less available and helpful, with between 21% and 42% believing their family was available for support. Clergy and congregations were not considered to be supportive, with 12% saying, "I have a clergy person who is an important source of support to me" and only 9% saying the same of their congregation.

DO ADVENTIST YOUNG PEOPLE WHO COME OUT AS LGBT+ REMAIN INVOLVED IN THE CHURCH?

Currently, of the 18-35-year-olds who responded, 42% identify as Adventist, with a third (33%) claiming no religious affiliation and another fourth (25%) selecting "other." Despite having grown up in strongly religious families, only a third (32%) considered themselves to be religious. However, three-fourths (73%) considered themselves to be spiritual. As evidence for this claim, almost a third (31%) said they pray daily, with another one-fourth (23%) praying at least weekly. In addition, one-fourth study the Bible or other sacred text (24%) or read religious books or journals (23%) at least weekly. Finally, almost a third (30%) participate in religious services on a weekly basis.

HOW DOES RELIGION SHAPE FAMILY RESPONSES TO ADVENTIST LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE?

Eight out of ten (82%) said that religious beliefs led to difficulty in parents accepting their orientation and/or identity. Almost two-thirds (60%) of parents prayed that God would change their child's orientation and/or identity, and well more than half (57%) of parents used Scripture to try to talk their child out of their orientation and/or identity. One-fourth of parents (25%) took their child to a pastor for prayer and counseling to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In contrast, about a third (37%) of parents drew upon their religious beliefs to help them understand and support their child's sexual and/or gender journey.



**“BEAR (ENDURE, CARRY) ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS
AND TROUBLESOME MORAL FAULTS, AND IN THIS WAY
FULFILL AND OBSERVE PERFECTLY THE LAW OF CHRIST
(THE MESSIAH) AND COMPLETE WHAT IS LACKING
[IN YOUR OBEDIENCE TO IT].”**

– GALATIANS 6:2



PART 2:

DEVELOPING A CARE PLAN

DUE TO HIGHER TRAUMA FACTORS DESCRIBED ON THE PRIOR PAGES, LGBT+ YOUTH ARE OFTEN LEFT FEELING ALIENATED AND REJECTED, SUSCEPTIBLE TO BELIEVING THAT THEY WILL BE MISTREATED. SOME LOSE HOPE OF BEING LOVED OR ACCEPTED EVER AGAIN AND GIVE UP ON LIFE. MESSAGES THAT WOULD BE MOST IMPORTANT FOR A YOUNG PERSON TO HEAR DURING THIS TIME ARE:

HOW TO EXPRESS ACCEPTANCE WHILE HOLDING TO YOUR BELIEFS

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"After coming out I felt even more removed from family because I didn't fit in with them and their beliefs."



"I love you."

"I will always love you."

"You are my son (daughter), and I will always love you and be here for you."

"I am so thankful you shared this with me."

"You are very courageous."

"I am going to walk with you no matter what."

"Nothing will keep me from loving you."

"This is your home/school/church family—always."

"I am your family member/friend—always."

"I really want to hear your story."



LGBT+ YOUTH ARE 2-4X MORE VULNERABLE TO SUICIDE

THAN THEIR HETEROSEXUAL PEERS. THEY ARE 8X MORE VULNERABLE

IF FAMILY REJECTION OCCURS.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS TO ENSURE A YOUNG PERSON'S SAFETY

BEGIN BY SAYING...

"You have lived for several years with little or no support. I am so sorry I did not know and was not there for you. I would like to hear more about what it has been like for you."

1. ARE YOU FEELING OR HAVE YOU EVER FELT SUICIDAL?

2. ARE YOU BEING OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TEASED OR BULLIED?

3. HOW HAVE YOUR FRIENDS RESPONDED TO YOU?

4. HOW HAVE PEOPLE AT CHURCH RESPONDED TO YOU?

5. ARE THERE ANY OTHER DETAILS YOU WANT TO SHARE?

6. SHOULD I TELL ANYONE ELSE OR DO YOU PREFER TO MAINTAIN YOUR PRIVACY?

AVOID 2 EXTREMES:



Note to Parents: Even parents who respond in a loving manner may be **grieving** (see page 19). This **shock or sadness** can result in a **growing silence** that lowers family connection. Silence can convey to your child that you are not happy with them. A healthy parent-child connection requires genuine conversations that value your child and their experience. In moments like this, take a big breath, be open to listening, show your unconditional love, and begin this journey together. Many families have shared that things get better and less confusing, to all, with time.

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE

Many LGBT+ young people lack adequate support. A support system can include relationships with God, parents, pastors, counselors, adult mentors, and peers. Quickly correcting any relational mistakes you have made will make room for you to play a critical role in a young person's support system. Remember that trust may build slowly, so don't become discouraged if your young person doesn't immediately open themselves up to you.

FAMILIES: If your family member has been judged or mistreated by others, they may have withdrawn at home or school and given up on faith or the church. You can help them build a support system, beginning with your own offer to listen, learn, and love. Please be aware: teenage peers may not be mature enough to provide confidential support. Allow but do not encourage youth to disclose their orientation or identity to friends at this age. Monitor peer relationships for signs of teasing or bullying.

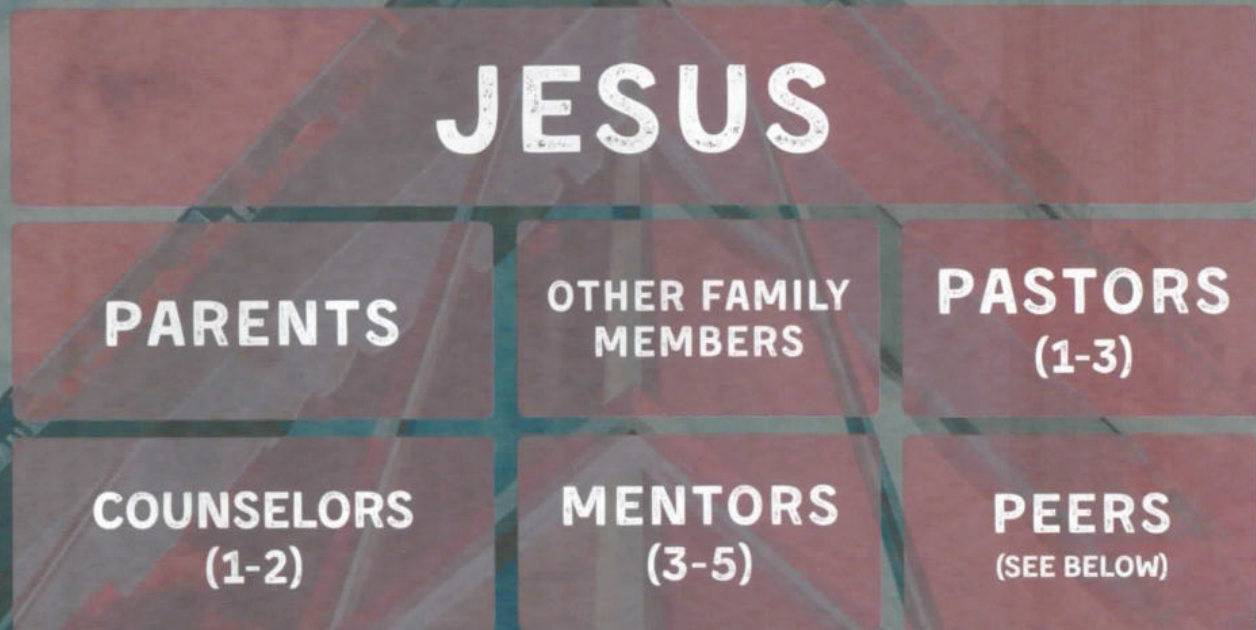
If you feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable with your family member's disclosures about their orientation or identity, choose whom you talk to about these issues with care. Careless gossip started by well-meaning friends and loved ones can easily make your young person's life more difficult. Be willing to seek help and support from a professional counselor or clergy person who is sensitive to LGBT+ issues and is good at maintaining confidentiality.

PASTORS, TEACHERS, AND ADULT MENTORS: You may be the very first person to whom a young person comes out. Be a safe person and help students access other safe adult support. If you choose to recommend the services of a Christian counselor, it should not be for the purpose of changing a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Such "change ministry" approaches carry the risk of harm and may be illegal for minors in some states. A counselor should have experience working in a nonjudgmental way with LGBT+ young people and be able to show respect for the client's religious doubts and beliefs.

FRIENDS: Peers sometimes gossip, tease, or reject their friends, potentially raising the risk of suicidal thoughts. Treat friends who come out to you with kindness, and respect their confidentiality. Don't tell others about your friend's sexual orientation and/or gender identity without their express permission.

NEVER DISCLOSE A YOUNG PERSON'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION. EVEN IF MANDATED REPORTING IS NECESSARY DUE TO A THREAT OF SELF-HARM OR HARM COMMITTED AGAINST A MINOR, SUCH REPORTING CAN BE PERFORMED WITHOUT DISCLOSING SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY.

ABLE SUPPORT SYSTEM



Whether your family member or friend is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, or another identity involving sexuality or gender, the process of self-discovery and the risk factors many LGBT+ young people face are similar. For this reason, our guidance on how family members and friends should respond is the same for all.

AVOID 2 BIG ERRORS:

ASKING YOUR FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND TO HIDE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND/OR GENDER IDENTITY.

OUTING YOUR FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND (DISCLOSING THEIR ORIENTATION AND/OR IDENTITY) WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION.

HOW TO CHECK FOR A HEALTHY SUPPORT SYSTEM

ASK: "In your view, is God for you or against you? Is He someone you can turn to?"

ASK: "Do you feel safe with coming out to your parents? Do you feel like your parents truly love and accept you?"

ASK: "Do you feel safe in your church? Do you have a church family that welcomes and includes you?"

ASK: "Do you feel safe at school? Whom can you turn to for support? How have you been treated at school by teachers and classmates?"

COMMON MISTAKES EVEN LOVING PARENTS MAKE

HAVE YOU ALREADY MADE MISTAKES?

Even loving parents, in a time of shock or grief, can respond in hurtful ways. Sometimes parents are even connected with "support" that encourages mistakes that will lead to a toxic relationship. We share these common mistakes to help other parents prevent mistakes—or identify past mistakes—that can hinder a close relationship with their child.

REJECTING

Scolding, mocking, or yelling at your family member or friend for being LGBT+. ● Threatening to reject or disown. ● Saying, "You are not the person I thought you were. I no longer trust you." ● Refusing contact or excluding from family activities. ● **ASKING YOUR CHILD TO LEAVE YOUR HOME.**

NEGLECTING

BEING UNAWARE OF HOW YOUR CHILD IS BEING TREATED BY PEERS, RELATIVES, AND OTHER ADULTS. ●

Contributing to family gossip. ● Quoting Scripture when a child is suicidal. ● Not standing up to bullies on your child's behalf. ● Communicating more about doctrine than expressing love for your child. ● Exhibiting favoritism toward your other child(ren).

FALSELY ASSURING

Telling your child that God will make them straight.

● **TELLING YOUR CHILD THEY CAN CHANGE WITH ENOUGH PRAYER OR FAITH IN GOD** ● Getting overly excited about your child's attempt at a heterosexual relationship (especially when it's unhealthy or harmful).

ACCUSING

Accusing your family member or friend of "choosing the gay lifestyle." ● Saying, "Being gay/transgender is a mental illness." ● Accusing your family member or friend of faking self-harm in order to get attention. ● Blaming a spouse or your friend's parents for causing their child to be LGBT+. ● Threatening to divorce your spouse because your child is LGBT+. ● **TELLING YOUR CHILD THEY ARE NOT AN ADVENTIST—OR A BAD ADVENTIST.** ● Trying to get your child to explain why she/he is gay. ● Saying, "It's like he (or she) is dead." ● Telling your family member things like, "This will kill your grandmother." ● Telling your child, "You broke my heart." ● Blaming your transgender child for being a homosexual (confusing gender identity with sexual orientation).

DENYING

Saying, "You just need to get over this." ● Telling your child that they are really heterosexual—or that they better be. ● **TRYING TO EXPLAIN AWAY YOUR CHILD'S SEXUALITY FOR THEM.** ● Making jokes or judgmental statements about LGBT+ people. ● Questioning your child's recollection of painful memories. ● Doubting gender dysphoria as a real experience. ● Blaming your child's gender dysphoria on culture or the "gay agenda."

CONTROLLING

Taking your family member or friend to a counselor with the intent to “fix” them.

● IMPOSING FINANCIAL PENALTIES SUCH AS WITHHOLDING COLLEGE FUNDING OR INHERITANCE.

- Preventing your family member from attending family gatherings.
- Attempting to limit what ideas or worldviews your adult child is exposed to.
- Constantly telling your child you are praying about their gender/sexuality.
- Reassuring your child with unbiblical promises (eg., “temptations will be healed”).
- Seeing your child’s wedding as your loss of control over their life.
- Expecting your child to experience orientation change by discussing and processing nurture-related wounds.
- Using “tough love” to attempt to force healing.
- Demanding that your child come back to Jesus.

PERSONALIZING

Seeing your LGBT+ child as a threat to your career or integrity.

- Fixating on whom to blame (“Who caused this?”).
- Leaning on your child to support you in your grief.

● THREATENING TO COMMIT SUICIDE BECAUSE HE OR SHE HAS COME OUT.

- Making your child’s sexuality or gender all about you (your grief, guilt, or reputation).
- Asking where you went wrong as a parent.
- Focusing on your pain and disregarding your child’s pain.
- Telling others, “It would have been easier had my child not been born.”

“UNDERSTAND [THIS], MY BELOVED BRETHREN. LET EVERY MAN BE QUICK TO HEAR [A READY LISTENER], SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO TAKE OFFENSE AND TO GET ANGRY. FOR MAN’S ANGER DOES NOT PROMOTE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD [WISHES AND REQUIRES].”

– JAMES 1:19, 20

MISCOMMUNICATING

Using unhelpful clichés like, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.”

- Asking, “How could you do this to us?”
- Asking leading or loaded questions rather than open-ended questions.
- Failing to make time and create emotionally safe space for your child to talk about sexuality or gender.

● NOT FOSTERING RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION.

- Wrestling through your own theology in front of your child (sending mixed messages).
- Not talking with your spouse after your child comes out (within a reasonable time frame).
- Making assumptions before seeking understanding.
- Assuming that what you intended to say is what was actually heard.

DOUBTING

Refusing to recognize Christ’s presence in your child’s life.

- Not leading your child spiritually by modeling a dependence on God’s promises.

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO APOLOGIZE—EVEN FOR REALLY BIG MISTAKES!

*Some youth and young adults are so hurt or angry that they cannot quickly forgive you. **Others will immediately release their hurt and be deeply touched** as they realize you are coming to understand how your response hurt them.*

WORDS MATTER

YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS IN A CONVERSATION
CAN EITHER DAMAGE OR BUILD TRUST.

EVERYTHING YOU SAY COUNTS!

BELOW ARE A FEW WORDS AND

PHRASES TO AVOID.

"DO NOT LET ANY UNWHOLESOME TALK COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTHS, BUT ONLY WHAT IS HELPFUL FOR BUILDING OTHERS UP ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS, THAT IT MAY BENEFIT THOSE WHO LISTEN."

— EPHESIANS 4:29

"HOMOSEXUAL"



LGBT+ friends and family members will interpret this word negatively, since it has often been used in the context of deviancy, mental illness, and religious judgment. Try saying "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual" or "transgender" instead.

What you may refer to as "the sin" is what many LGBT+ family members and friends think of as "my identity." Consequently, they will hear, "Although God loves me, He hates who I am." Try saying, "God loves you, and I love you, too."

**"LOVE THE SINNER,
HATE THE SIN"**



**"LOVE THE SINNER,
HATE THE SIN"**

"GRACIOUS WORDS ARE A HONEYCOMB, SWEET TO THE SOUL AND HEALING TO THE BONES."

— PROVERBS 16:24

"A GENTLE ANSWER TURNS AWAY WRATH, BUT A HARSH WORD STIRS UP ANGER."

— PROVERBS 15:1

"[T]HE TONGUE IS A SMALL PART OF THE BODY, BUT IT MAKES GREAT BOASTS. CONSIDER THAT A GREAT FOREST IS SET ON FIRE BY A SMALL SPARK."

— JAMES 3:5

**"A TRANSGENDER"
"A TRANS"
"TRANSGENDERISM"
"TRANSGENDERING"
"TRANNNY"
"I REFUSE TO USE
THOSE PRONOUNS"**

Sometimes Christians use language to talk about LGBT+ people that LGBT+ people do not even use themselves. When we do this, it gives the impression that **we are not listening to them—and do not care what they have to say.** Resolve not to speak a "foreign language." If in doubt, ask what terms, names, or pronouns someone prefers.

Note: Many people use the words *homosexuality* and *transgender* interchangeably, but sexual orientation and gender identity are two distinct matters.

**"THE GAYS"
"SEXUALLY BROKEN"**



**"HOMOSEXUAL
STRUGGLER"**

"THE WORDS OF THE RECKLESS PIERCE LIKE SWORDS, BUT THE TONGUE OF THE WISE BRINGS HEALING."

— PROVERBS 12:18

"SET A GUARD OVER MY MOUTH, LORD; KEEP WATCH OVER THE DOOR OF MY LIPS."

— PSALM 141:3

"UNDERSTAND [THIS], MY BELOVED BRETHREN. LET EVERY MAN BE QUICK TO HEAR [A READY LISTENER], SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO TAKE OFFENSE AND TO GET ANGRY."

— JAMES 1:19

"THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES RELIGIOUS AND YET DO NOT KEEP A TIGHT REIN ON THEIR TONGUES DECEIVE THEMSELVES, AND THEIR RELIGION IS WORTHLESS."

— JAMES 1:26

"CHOOSING THE GAY LIFESTYLE"



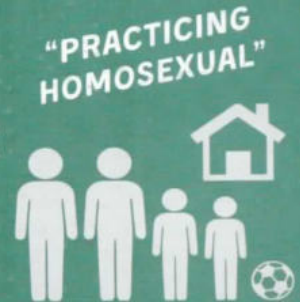
"SEXUAL PREFERENCE"

Your loved one will feel blamed for choosing a sexual orientation when, in fact, it was not their decision. People can choose their behaviors but not their identity.

Many young people are accused of living a "gay lifestyle," even when they are not dating anyone. Others, through both choice and circumstance, live long-term celibate lives. Those who do marry a same-sex partner will hear you refer to their committed relationship as a "lifestyle" and assume that you think of them as promiscuous. Indeed, there is no single "gay lifestyle," just as there is no one "straight lifestyle."

Because these phrases are demeaning, convey judgment, and demonstrate a lack of understanding, it is best not to use them at all.

"ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE"



"PRACTICING HOMOSEXUAL"

Would you say someone is a "practicing heterosexual"? Probably not. We don't think about "practicing" or "not practicing" heterosexuality—it is simply who we are. So why would you speak of same-sex oriented family and friends only in terms of whether or not they are having sex? If you must refer to someone's sexual behavior, try using the phrase "sexually active."

"GOD MADE ADAM & EVE, NOT ADAM & STEVE"

LGBT+ family and friends will not think of this as a clever line. They will sense you are ridiculing them for missing the obvious or chastising them for not conforming to God's ideal. You should refrain from ever saying this.

"THE WORDS OF A WISE MAN'S MOUTH ARE GRACIOUS AND WIN HIM FAVOR, BUT THE LIPS OF A FOOL CONSUME HIM.... THE FOOL MULTIPLIES WORDS."

— ECCLESIASTES 10:12-14

Statements like this make your LGBT+ family and friends feel excluded and judged. Many have grown up in the church and would like to continue being part of it. Even those who differ with the church's biblical teachings on human sexuality may still consider Adventists to be their "family." Be open to that sense of belonging and connection.

"THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A GAY OR TRANSGENDER ADVENTIST."



NAVIGATING RELATIONAL GAPS

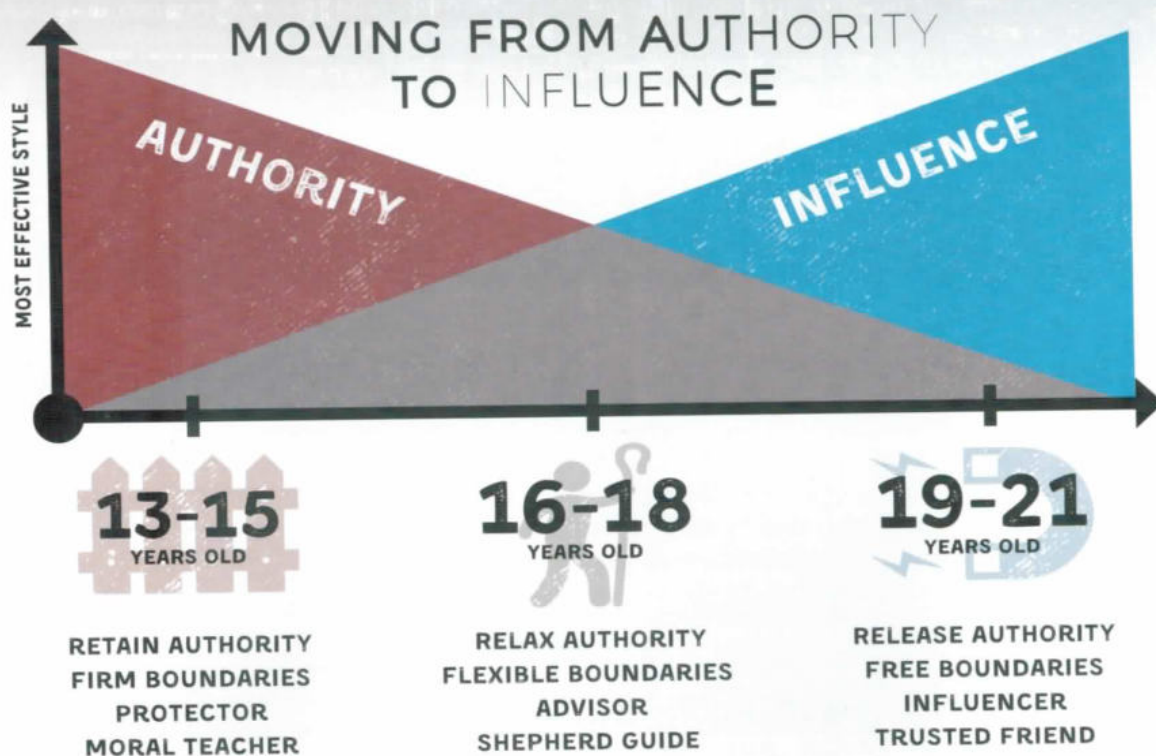
THE OBJECTIVE FOR PARENTS (and other family members) is to **grieve well** and **avoid inflicting shock, denial, anger, bargaining, or depression** upon LGBT+ loved ones. That said, no parent is perfect. As we've said, even loving parents will make mistakes on this journey. Every parent of every child makes many mistakes.

We never want to minimize the pain or mistreatment that LGBT+ young people may have experienced, and we certainly must be committed to doing everything possible to prevent mistreatment within homes, schools, neighborhoods, and churches. Without lessening this focus, let us for a moment consider all the gaps that parents are processing in the hours, days, weeks, months, and years after their child comes out.

TIME GAP #1: MATURITY GAP

Whether a teen is gay, straight, or transgender, all teens desire to exercise autonomy in decision making. The Maturity Gap captures the age distance between an **LGBT+ loved one's desire to exercise autonomy** in decision making versus a **parent's sense of responsibility to oversee such decisions**. As detailed below, authority must be incrementally released as loved ones age—but capturing the right balance can generate tension for all involved. Further, while some requests that LGBT+ youth make of their parents are very similar to other teens' requests (like permission to date), others are quite unique (like asking to take hormone blockers). Do you hold the line? Maybe; but if so, for how long?

There is a season to say "no" and a season to let our adult children make their own decisions before God. Parents who exercise an absolute "no" eventually send their young adult children into the world with no parental guidance in making personal decisions. Progressively permitting your teen to make more of their own decisions is necessary for their emotional, mental, and spiritual maturity.



EVERY PARENT OF EVERY CHILD, GAY OR STRAIGHT, MUST EVENTUALLY LET GO AND TRUST GOD.

PARENTAL POWER MUST TRANSFORM INTO TRUSTED INFLUENCE AS TEENS GROW INTO ADULTS.

TIME GAP #2: DISCLOSURE GAP



The Disclosure Gap represents the time distance between **when a teen realizes their LGBT+ experience** and **when they come out to their parents**. Oftentimes, this gap can be 2 to 8 years wide. For some, it can be 10 or more years wide. Loved ones have been self-discovering and working toward self-acceptance for years. For many parents, though, it's like an instant, unexpected breaking news headline.

GAP #3: EXPECTATION GAP

The Expectation Gap expresses the emotional distance between **the relief (or even celebration) that LGBT+ loved ones experience** and **the shock (or grief) that their parents often experience**. LGBT+ loved ones are shedding what may be a years-long repression in order to joyfully embrace self-acceptance and potentially pursue a romantic interest. Some parents, at this same point in time, could feel very angry. Other parents, even while intending to demonstrate love and acceptance, may inwardly be feeling extreme loss, sadness, and shock.

GAP #4: BELIEF GAP

The Belief Gap describes the difference between **an LGBT+ loved one's religious beliefs about marriage and sexuality** and **their parents' beliefs**. Adventist parents may have just heard their child express a biblical belief related to sexuality only weeks ago, but suddenly those beliefs are wobbly or entirely abandoned. This can add frustration to the relational mix for both LGBT+ loved ones and their families.

GAP #5: LANGUAGE GAP

The Language Gap constitutes the relational distance between an LGBT+ loved one's and their parents' **understanding of, and vocabulary related to, sexual and gender identity**. Parents may question whether sexuality and gender are even legitimate aspects of identity, while their children are operating in a world that is rapidly expanding both the categories and spectrums for sexual and gender identity. As indicated in *Words Matter* (pages 32-33), language mistakes can severely damage relational trust. *Every word counts.*

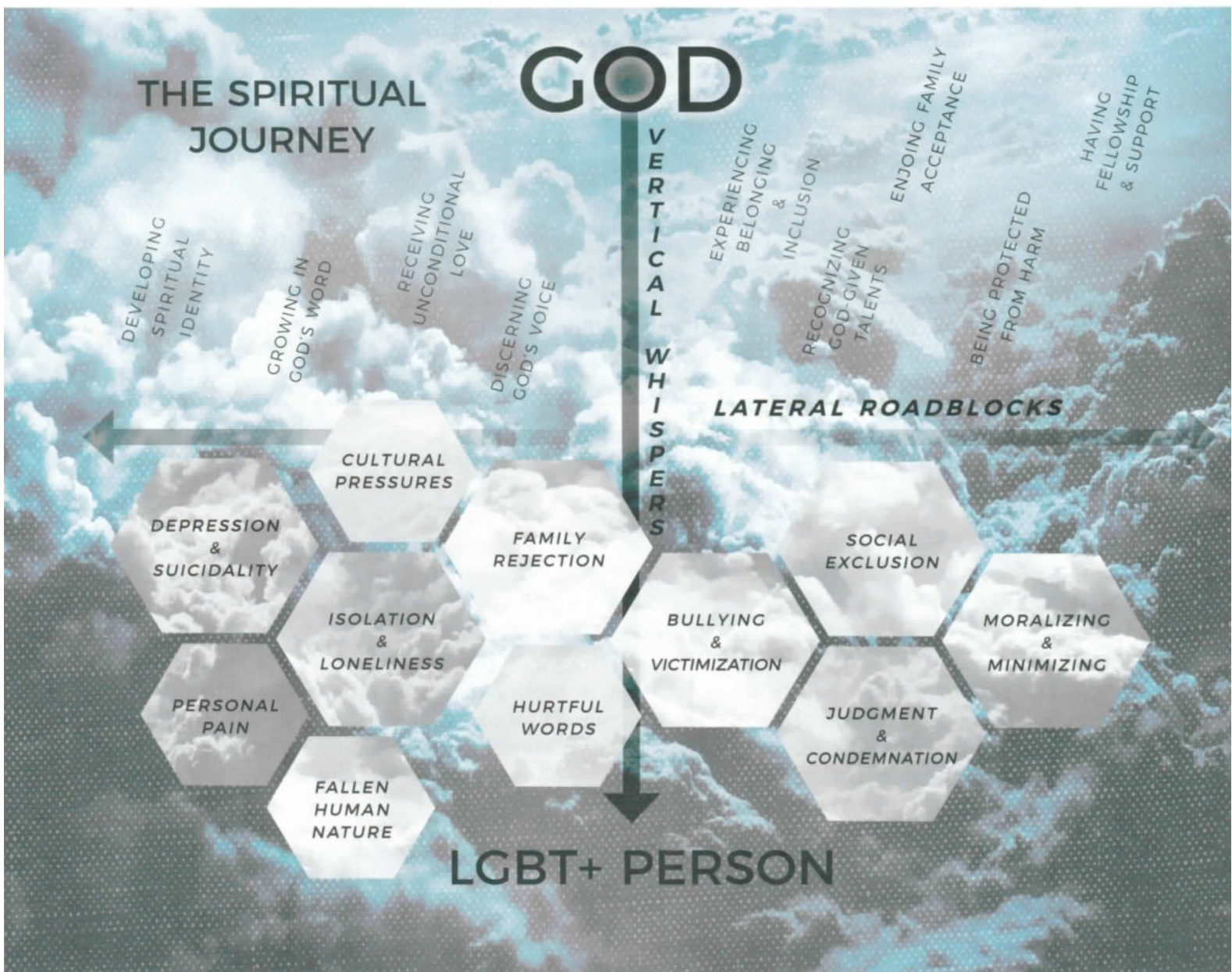
IMAGINE ALL 5 OF THESE GAPS CRASHING INTO A PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

IN A SINGLE POINT IN TIME! PARENTS AND TEENS ARE BOUND TO MAKE

MISTAKES. MUTUAL FORGIVENESS IS A NECESSITY.

REDUCING LATERAL ROADBLOCKS

The arc of God's redemptive activity is long, and His leading in a person's life may not always be visible. According to the apostle Paul, the journey that leads a person to turn fully toward God is the result of His "kindness and tolerance and patience" (Romans 2:1-4, NASB). We can either clear the way for God to work in the lives of family members and friends or we can allow (or even cause) the path to be obscured by injustice, mistreatment, shame, loneliness, and fear. **Removing roadblocks, healing wounds, and generously offering time and space give faith identity a chance to grow.**



HOW TO RESET THE RELATIONSHIP

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"Even when my mom was struggling to accept it, [my parents] never once suggested or even implied that I should move out or that they didn't love me anymore. At one point, I asked Mom if she still loved me. She hugged me tight and told me that there was nothing I could do to make her stop loving me."

Specifically confess every mistake you know you have made.

Ask your family member or friend if they have been hurt in ways you don't recognize.

Apologize and ask forgiveness for anything you've done to hurt your family member or friend.

Ask to start again—and reset your attitude, tone, and language.

Invite dialogue without letting differences take over every conversation.

Declare that you accept and love your family member or friend.

Admit that this is all new, but you are willing to listen and learn.

Immediately take any "threats" off the table.

Pay back any financial penalties or withholding of college tuition.

Tell your child how valuable they are to you.

If your adult family member has a partner, find ways to welcome and include that person.





PART 3:

BELIEFS & IMPORTANT FAMILY MATTERS



“CHRIST’S METHOD ALONE

WILL GIVE TRUE SUCCESS IN REACHING THE PEOPLE.

THE SAVIOUR MINGLED WITH PEOPLE [MEN]

AS ONE WHO DESIRED THEIR GOOD.

HE SHOWED HIS SYMPATHY FOR THEM,

MINISTRED TO THEIR NEEDS,

AND WON THEIR CONFIDENCE.”

— ELLEN G. WHITE, *THE MINISTRY OF HEALING*, 143

WE WILL NOW ADDRESS A NUMBER of delicate matters. We start by offering answers to some of the most common questions parents face when a child comes out. Many Christians have *strong* but *uninformed* views on the toughest questions. It can lead to unfruitful arguments and unnecessary fractures in relationships.

For example, **Christians (of all stripes) sometimes think any inborn cause of same-gender attraction necessarily suggests that God “makes” people gay.** It is important to remember that although God’s design for human beings was perfect, sin has resulted in every individual being born into a world that is not what He originally intended. We are all made in His image and should strive to love as Jesus loves.

As another example, **Christians (of all stripes) routinely think that a conversation about biblical beliefs only honors God’s character if “I” win the debate.**

This sets up a dividing wall and fuels a combative or condemning spirit. It is not actually

so easy to change another person’s deeply held beliefs. Reducing the gospel to “convincing others to agree with me” is unhealthy. We are not called to “win” a debate; we are called to love and honor God and to love and serve one another.

We have no power to convince others to change their views. It works both ways: our beliefs are deeply held. No one can simply flip a switch to change our beliefs.

We have no power to control people, and we have no interest in judging people. Rather, we strive to follow Jesus in laying down our lives to care for vulnerable people. Along the way, we have found that answering distant, complex, and controversial questions with accessible, simple, and accurate answers is a bridge to building trust across differences. When relationships are safe, love can transcend differences.

“You have to reach people where they are, because you can’t reach them where they’re not” (David R. Osborn, D. Min).

We invite you to enter into Part 3 with humility, respect, and sensitivity. You never know what you might discover along the way. Learning about complex topics does not mean your beliefs have to shift. It does mean you are growing in understanding. The more you understand, the better you can reflect Jesus Christ.

COMMON QUESTIONS

WHY DO PEOPLE SAY THEY ARE BORN GAY OR IN THE WRONG BODY?

People usually experience a same-gender orientation and/or gender dysphoria through no choice of their own. Many have sensed from an early age that something is different about them. If you had never made a choice to be gay or transgender, and if you knew nothing but an orientation to persons of the same gender or a deep sense of belonging to another gender, wouldn't you conclude you were born that way?

DOES GOD MAKE PEOPLE GAY OR TRANSGENDER?

Although God's design for human beings was perfect, sin now results in every person being born into a condition that is not what God originally intended. However, this does not change the fact that each person is made in the image of God—with dignity, value, and purpose. Nor does it lessen the immense love God has for each of His children, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. Even though we all suffer from the results of sin and struggle with its inclinations, we can say with the psalmist, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13, 14).

ISN'T ACCEPTANCE REALLY A FORM OF APPROVAL?

Acceptance means that God loves us just as we are, even when we do things that do not meet with His approval. When we accept others as God does, we love and care for family members, classmates, and fellow believers even when we disagree with them or disapprove of their behavior. We can fully honor God and His Word in our own personal beliefs and behaviors and still—simultaneously and fully—love a friend or family member when they may differ or depart from those.

DOES REPARATIVE THERAPY WORK?

Sexual orientation change efforts, including "reparative" or "conversion" therapy, have been shown to be largely unsuccessful and psychologically damaging. Adults making an informed and voluntary decision to pursue change efforts should not be ridiculed. Parents, however, should never encourage or force their child to be involved in such therapy. In several states, conversion therapy on minors is illegal. While some adults who have participated in these efforts report varying levels of desired change, the results are often less than hoped for or prove to be unsustainable. Others report no change and, at times, harmful effects.

DID MY PARENTING CAUSE MY CHILD'S SAME-SEX ORIENTATION OR GENDER DYSPHORIA?

We encourage families to focus on relationship rather than causation. Experts believe the factors leading to same-gender orientation and gender dysphoria entail complex "nature" (biological) and "nurture" (environmental) inputs, but the exact causes remain unknown. No parent should feel—or be made to feel—guilty for causing their child's sexual orientation. If you know you have made mistakes in parenting, then—unrelated to your child's sexual orientation or gender identity—confess, apologize, and improve how you love them, just as they are.

WHAT ABOUT ADVENTIST STANDARDS? ARE THERE THINGS I SHOULD NOT ALLOW IN MY HOME, CHURCH, OR SCHOOL?

It's appropriate for homes, churches, and schools to establish boundaries. How groups relate to these varies. Parents establish firm boundaries for their children while they are young, but become more flexible and free with those as their children mature (see page 34). Conversely, churches may freely welcome all who wish to fellowship with them but hold higher standards for individuals as they grow into membership and leadership. How parents, pastors, and teachers respond to young people whose conduct falls short of expectations is critical. While at times loving correction may be necessary, shaming, threatening, or excluding LGBT+ young people is detrimental to their well-being and should never happen.

CAN GAY PEOPLE CHANGE?

Most people do not experience material change in their orientation over a lifetime, even when religious or therapeutic efforts have been made to do so. When young people do change, it often represents sexual experimentation occurring as part of a questioning stage of development or resulting from prior molestation (which may increase the likelihood of sexual encounters with persons of both genders). While such scenarios can complicate the process of developing a sexual identity, they should not be seen as the cause of a person's ultimate sexual orientation.

SHOULD MY LGBT+ FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND BE INCLUDED IN CHURCH YOUTH GROUPS?

Absolutely. Why exclude youth when we should be nourishing their faith identity? All young people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, need an opportunity to grow in Christ. Acts of exclusion on the part of the faith community can have a devastating effect on a young person's spiritual life. We should include LGBT+ youth, reduce their vulnerability to bullying, and recognize their gifts and calling. We should also be careful not worry anymore about these youth acting in sexually inappropriate ways than we might with heterosexual youth. Setting proper and consistent boundaries and rules for all young people is the best way to manage any concerns that may arise.

"DO NOT JUDGE AND CRITICIZE AND CONDEMN [OTHERS

UNFAIRLY WITH AN ATTITUDE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUS SUPERIORITY AS THOUGH

ASSUMING THE OFFICE OF A JUDGE], SO THAT YOU WILL NOT BE JUDGED [UNFAIRLY]. FOR JUST AS YOU [HYPOCRITICALLY] JUDGE

OTHERS [WHEN YOU ARE SINFUL AND UNREPENTANT], SO WILL YOU BE JUDGED; AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR STANDARD OF

MEASURE [USED TO PASS OUT JUDGMENT], JUDGMENT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU." -MATTHEW 7:1, 2. AMP (JESUS)

HOW DO I DISCUSS BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY?

Before beginning this conversation, it is important to note that while many young people have conflictual feelings about their church and may no longer identify with the religious beliefs of their earlier youth, the strong majority describe themselves as spiritual. Even though they may not currently attend church, many continue to have an active belief in God and even engage in spiritual practices. At the early stages of any conversation it is better to focus on the broader themes of God's love and His salvation for all people rather than discussing particular doctrines or church guidelines.

- We caution against focusing on theology. While there is a place for biblical discussion, when youth and young adults are hurting, safety and social connection must be the top priorities.
- Please understand, your LGBT+ family and friends are not sinners because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but for the same reason we are all sinners—we were born into sin.
- **Avoid positioning God against** anyone's sexual orientation or gender identity. Remember, many LGBT+ young people anticipate condemnation due to past emotional and sometimes physical **trauma**.
- Unintentionally, many Christians have so strongly judged LGBT+ young people that it has actually dismantled their faith identity.
- Remind your family member or friend from Scripture of God's love and constant care. **Nourish a faith identity** that encompasses their questions and doubts and seeks to uphold or rebuild their trust in God.
- At an appropriate time, you can humbly and thoughtfully ask your family member or friend about their beliefs (see questions on the next page).
- **Regardless of their response, prove that dialogue can be safe.** Do not shame them or show disapproval if they no longer share your beliefs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A HEALTHY FAITH AND SEXUALITY CONVERSATION

- 1** Support the Adventist identity of your family member or friend (if present).
- 2** Suggest dialogue, but do not force it.
- 3** Ask thoughtful questions and listen well.
- 4** Avoid hurtful labels or accusations.
- 5** Respond to belief differences with respect.
- 6** Foster a holistic conversation about faith—one that goes beyond biblical teachings on human sexuality.

HONORING QUESTIONS

YOU CAN ASK ABOUT BELIEFS

We stress that the following questions are intended for emotionally and mentally healthy persons. **If your loved one or friend has a recent history of victimization, suicidality, or emotional distress, you should put on hold any questions about biblical beliefs.** The safety of loved ones is a top priority. The following questions are suggested open-ended ones to help you think about and discuss together what is going on with your loved one. These questions should not be used in a leading way, however, to insert your own beliefs or agenda.

What does your sexual orientation or gender identity mean to you?

How would you describe your **faith identity**? What does your faith mean to you?

How does your sexual or gender identity **intersect** with your faith identity?

Have you ever experienced **conflict** between your sexual or gender identity and your biblical beliefs?

Do you have any spiritual conflicts or doubts that still bother you?

If so, how are you working through those with God?

Have you turned to others for spiritual support?

If not, how did you find **peace**? How did God help you to come to terms with your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?

Who helped you develop or clarify your beliefs?

Are you planning to stay connected with an Adventist congregation?

Are you open to talking with a pastor about **what you believe**?

"LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER.... NEVER OVERESTIMATE YOURSELF
OR BE WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS.... IF POSSIBLE, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS
ON YOU, LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE." - ROMANS 12:16,18

YOUR LOVED ONE'S PARTNER

IF YOUR ADULT LGBT+ FAMILY MEMBER HAS A PARTNER, GOD HAS GIVEN YOU THE PRIVILEGE OF SHARING THE LOVE OF CHRIST WITH YET ANOTHER PERSON!

If you attempt to **segregate** your child's partner from your family, you will **damage trust** with your own child.



If you **honor** your child's partner and **generously welcome** them into your family, then you have an opportunity to **gain relational trust** with your child—and their partner.



REMEMBER:

The goal is to love and respect the person who is significant in the life of your adult family member, even if you disagree with their decision to date or marry someone of the same gender. It is likely that your biblical position on human sexuality is already known. What may not be apparent is your posture of love and hospitality toward those who do not share your position.

HOLIDAYS: Invite your child and partner home for all family holiday gatherings.

EVERYDAY LIFE: If they live nearby, invite them to dinner and accept invitations they may extend to you. If they are married, treat them as you would any other married couple in your family.

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"My parents discouraged me from ever coming out publicly or to too many people for fear that I would miss out on job opportunities in the Adventist education system. They also discouraged me from coming out knowing it would reduce my opportunities to share my spiritual gifts in local churches."

"THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT: THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER [JUST] AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. NO ONE HAS GREATER LOVE [NO ONE HAS SHOWN STRONGER AFFECTION] THAN TO LAY DOWN (GIVE UP) HIS OWN LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU KEEP ON DOING THE THINGS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TO DO." - JOHN 15:12-14

WEDDINGS

While Adventist pastors may not officiate same-sex wedding ceremonies, the church views ceremony attendance by its members as a matter of personal discretion.

If you decide against attending a gay family member's wedding, no one should judge your effort to honor your religious convictions. However, you should count the cost. A decision not to be present on the most special day of a loved one's life can (and often does) yield deep and lasting relational damage.

Being "right" for one day can limit your opportunity to be present in the life of your loved one for months and years to come. Acts of rejection—no matter how

sincere your motives—may so damage trust that you no longer have a meaningful relationship when it matters most.

For that reason, we encourage you to prayerfully weigh your decision. In some cases, it may be possible to miss a wedding without damaging the relationship. In many cases, though, failing to attend can seriously compromise and even end a close family relationship.

HEALTHY ORTHODOXY IS NOTHING LESS THAN ABIDING IN CHRIST:

- + MY POSITION
- + MY PERSONAL PRACTICES
- + MY TREATMENT OF OTHERS
- + MY BRINGING CHRIST'S PRESENCE TO PEOPLE

I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE
THE BRANCHES. THE ONE
WHO REMAINS IN ME AND
I IN HIM BEARS MUCH FRUIT,
FOR [OTHERWISE] APART
FROM ME [THAT IS,
CUT OFF FROM VITAL
UNION WITH ME]
YOU CAN DO NOTHING.

- JOHN 15:5

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

1. BELIEFS THAT HONOR GOD
2. BEHAVIORS IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD
3. CHRISTLIKE TREATMENT OF OTHERS (WHETHER THEY ARE CHRISTIAN OR NOT)
4. COMPASSIONATE CONCERN FOR HURTING, VULNERABLE, OR MARGINALIZED PEOPLE
5. JOYFUL, WILLING, AND COMMITTED HEART TO LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR OTHERS
6. HOLISTIC (NOT TARGETED) USE OF SCRIPTURE TO PLANT GOD'S WORD IN HUMAN HEARTS
7. ACTIVE PRAYER LIFE, EXPRESSED IN FAITH, BELIEVING IN GOD'S PROMISES FOR MY FAMILY

*Jesus constantly confronts our tendency to have a **religious "blind spot"**—which we can define as critical elements of biblical truth that we are missing. **What am I missing?***



"FEAR NOT

[THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR],

FOR I AM WITH YOU;

DO NOT LOOK AROUND YOU

IN TERROR AND BE DISMAYED,

FOR I AM YOUR GOD.

I WILL STRENGTHEN AND

HARDEN YOU TO DIFFICULTIES,

YES, I WILL HELP YOU;

YES, I WILL HOLD YOU UP

AND RETAIN YOU WITH MY

[VICTORIOUS] RIGHT HAND

OF RIGHTNESS AND JUSTICE."

- ISAIAH 41:10

A sunset over the ocean with a person swimming. The sky is a gradient of orange and pink, and the water is a deep blue with ripples. A person's head and arms are visible in the water in the lower-left quadrant.

PART 4:

BEYOND LGB

BEYOND LGB

TRANSGENDER ^{AND} “PLUS” IDENTITIES



WHETHER YOUR CHILD IS...

LESBIAN

Same-gender loving females

QUEER

Non-conforming orientation/identity

ANDROGYNOUS

(Non-binary or Genderqueer)
Expressing male and female traits

GAY

Same-gender loving males

QUESTIONING

Uncertain orientation/identity

PANSEXUAL

Love/sex not based on gender

BISEXUAL

Attraction to both genders

INTERSEX

Ambiguous/both genitalia

SSA

Unwanted same-sex attraction

TTRANSGENDER

Sense of identity does not conform with birth sex

ASEXUAL

No/limited sexual orientation



Any other binary or non-binary identity or inclination involving sexuality or gender



...THE PROCESS OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND THE RISK

FACTORS MANY YOUTH FACE REMAIN THE SAME.

FOR THIS REASON, OUR GUIDANCE ON HOW

PASTORS AND PARENTS SHOULD RESPOND

REMAINS THE SAME.





PRACTICAL TIPS

FOR GUIDING TRANSGENDER YOUTH

Make presence and togetherness a priority. ● Demonstrate high levels of acceptance, unconditional love, and affection. ● Allot reasonable time for talking about life. ● Set age-appropriate boundaries and flexibilities in allowing certain realms of gender expression. ● **HELP BUILD AN ADEQUATE SUPPORT NETWORK FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES, INCLUDING CONSISTENT COUNSELOR CARE.** ● Take your more desperate pleadings to God rather than laying impossible demands on an already anxious teen. ● Avoid phrases or words that trigger misunderstanding or reveal underlying bias or judgment. ● Avoid us-and-them language toward LGBT+ people. ● Bless your child with special treats. (eg., "Quinn, it's Friday. You did awesome in school this week. Can I treat you to ice cream?") ● As your child gets older, allow them increased autonomy about "who knows." ● **LOVE NO MATTER WHAT. DECIDE TO "WALK WITH" NO MATTER WHAT.** ● Don't shut down their coming out or be ashamed when they come out. ● If you feel embarrassment or fear, call someone in your own support network to process those feelings. ● **WHEN "THE BRIDGE DOES NOT CROSS" AND DISAGREEMENTS REMAIN, PRAY.**

Realize that whatever the origin, however permanent or temporary, regardless of whether it is clinical-level dysphoria or general gender discomfort—this journey must play out organically with as much love and acceptance as possible.

For the roughly 80% of youth who eventually "outgrow" gender dysphoria (or see it lessen),¹ this process can best occur when family, home, church, and school are safe for them. This process can be delayed by actions, attitudes, and words that reject young people and deny or minimize their experience. For 0.6% of the general population, dysphoria is a lifelong experience.² Avoid any temptation to use a statistic relating to the 80% as an unrealistic expectation for the 0.6%.

During the teenage years, we as parents cannot know which story is at play in our child's life. We can offer unconditional love, earn relational trust, help build adequate support, depend upon God in prayer, and surrender to Jesus all that we cannot fix or control.

¹Yarhouse, M. A. (2015). *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. InterVarsity Press.

²Flores, A. R., Herman J.L., Gates, G. J. & Brown, T. N. T. (2016). *How Many Adults Identify as Transgender in the United States?* Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

JOURNEYING WITH TRANSGENDER FAMILY AND FRIENDS

If you have a family member or friend who identifies as transgender, it is important not to react based on what you may have read in the headlines or seen on social media. This is a complex reality and every situation is unique. The

most important thing a family member or friend can do is to suspend judgment, begin listening to their loved one, and learn more about that person's experience.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

New studies reveal that the American population of transgender people is double what researchers previously thought, a difference due in part to improved sampling and better reporting conditions. Roughly 0.6% of the general population identifies as transgender, equating to approximately 1.4 million people (Williams Institute, 2016).

Parents, in particular, should seek out trusted support following the self-disclosure of a transgender child. Sadly, not every family member, friend, pastor, teacher, or physician will understand your situation. You will need knowledgeable and empathetic people who are committed to walking with you and your loved one, no matter what.

INSIGHTS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

MOVE BEYOND CAUSATION & ACCUSATION

The discomfort or distress (*dysphoria*) many transgender persons feel is real and stems from the fact that their gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. Some transgender persons conform to gender norms associated with their biological sex, while others—often out of an inner necessity—do not. Some identify with the opposite gender, while others may view their gender as neither male nor female, as both male and female, or somewhere on a spectrum between the two.

Differently from transgender persons, those with intersex conditions are born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, and/or chromosomal patterns that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female but are, in fact, ambiguous. This means it can be difficult to tell the actual sex of the child just by looking at sexual characteristics.

Despite all of the attention and debates surrounding transgender issues, the factors that cause someone to be transgender are still largely unknown and likely to be diverse. Since causation is not fully understood, even by scientific and medical experts, family members and church leaders should focus **on offering compassion and care for transgender individuals and their families** as they work through a number of difficult unknowns.

BEING TRANSGENDER IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING GAY

Do not equate gender identity with sexual orientation. Many transgender persons are heterosexual. But gender identity is not about those to whom one is romantically or sexually attracted. **Most who identify as transgender are seeking relief from dysphoric frustration, anxiety, and anguish.** Under such heavy stress, **they are longing for internal peace**—a state of being whole that helps them feel that their body matches the way they internally identify their gender.

**NO MATTER WHAT, DO NOT LOSE
FOCUS ON NOURISHING A DEEP SENSE
THAT GOD WILL BE A REFUGE AND
SHELTER FOR YOUR FAMILY.**

UNHELPFUL COMPARISONS DAMAGE TRUST

When talking to (or about) a transgender person, we may attempt to draw comparisons with the familiar. One common comparison goes like this: "Just because a woman who is anorexic thinks of herself as overweight does not mean we should go along with her harmful perception. Likewise, I am not going to pretend my son is female just because he thinks of himself that way." **Such statements hurt our transgender family members and friends, leave them feeling misunderstood, and severely damage trust.** We may try to reduce complexity in order to make ourselves feel comfortable, but often our comparisons are neither fair nor accurate.

FOSTER SAFETY AND INCLUSION

We may not be able to fully understand the experience of a transgender person, but that should not prevent us from loving them. In a world that often mistreats transgender people, we should do everything possible to make our homes, schools, and churches hospitable places. Safety increases when we surround transgender family members and friends with care, include them in our activities, and allow them to share their stories. How tragic it would be if our loved ones were suffering such deep anxiety and pain, yet we allowed them to remain isolated, alone, and anxious.

CHILDHOOD ISSUES

Cross-gender identification and behavior can appear very early in childhood, raising concerns on the part of parents. Just because a boy says he wants to be a girl or a girl complains about wearing dresses does not make them transgender. Only consistent and persistent feelings of being the wrong gender are characteristic of transgender children. For a majority of children in this category, these experiences will not persist into adulthood. This prompts the question as to whether parents should take a "wait and see" approach or opt for early medical intervention. While pastors and teachers should not attempt to answer such questions, **they can offer spiritual and emotional support to families having to make complex decisions with their care providers.**

ADVENTIST LGBT+ VOICES

"Since coming out as transgender to my mother at the age of 15, we have become closer and more honest with each other."

TRANSITIONING

Transitioning refers to changes transgender persons make personally and relationally in order to align with their gender identity. For some, this involves coming out to family and friends, changing their name and preferred pronouns, or dressing and grooming in a different way. For others, it involves hormone therapy or undergoing surgical procedures. Not every transgender person transitions. Nor does every person have to transition to the same extent in order to gain relief from gender dysphoria. There are nonsurgical options that help some people. Others may conclude the only way to escape life-crippling pain is to pursue surgical alternatives. You can prayerfully support individuals and families as they seek out medical opinions, weigh treatment options, and make important decisions. It is possible that your adult transgender loved one may make choices with which you do not agree. **Continue to love, include, and accept—no matter what.**

IDENTITY & PRONOUNS

As indicated earlier, a transgender young person may adopt a name matching their gender identity. If they are a minor, this should be done in consultation with their parents. If they are an adult, we recommend that family and friends refer to them consistent with how they self-identify, as a matter of respect. This may include the use of preferred pronouns, such as he/him, she/her, or they/them. Reach out to your transgender family member or friend on their terms rather than based on your idea of who they are.

INVEST IN THEIR FAITH JOURNEY

Finally, **don't let outward appearances detract from the legitimacy of a transgender person's faith experience.** If your transgender family member or friend identifies as an Adventist, then mutually share your faith with them. If not, be open to their spiritual interests or questions. Rid your heart of judgment, nurture your family member or friend's faith identity, and posture yourself to learn from their walk with God.

*I WAITED PATIENTLY AND EXPECTANTLY FOR THE LORD; AND HE
INCLINED TO ME AND HEARD MY CRY.*

*HE DREW ME UP OUT OF A HORRIBLE PIT [A PIT OF TUMULT AND
OF DESTRUCTION], OUT OF THE MIRY CLAY (FROTH AND SLIME),
AND SET MY FEET UPON A ROCK, STEADYING MY STEPS AND
ESTABLISHING MY GOINGS.*

*AND HE HAS PUT A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH, A SONG OF PRAISE
TO OUR GOD. MANY SHALL SEE AND FEAR (REVERE AND WORSHIP)
AND PUT THEIR TRUST AND CONFIDENT RELIANCE IN THE LORD.*

- PSALM 40:1-3

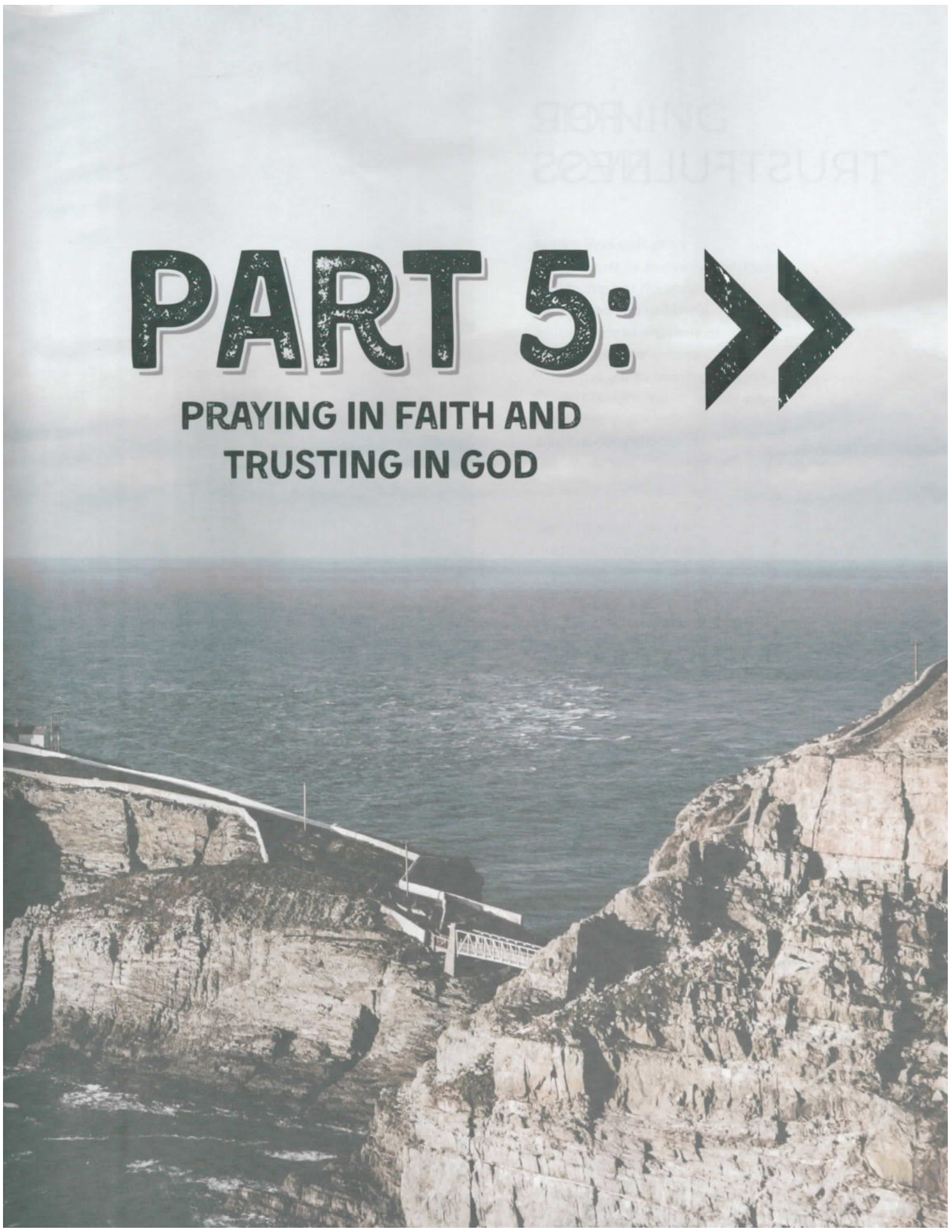


TRUSTFULNESS
GAINING

PART 5:



PRAYING IN FAITH AND
TRUSTING IN GOD



FOR TRUSTFULNESS

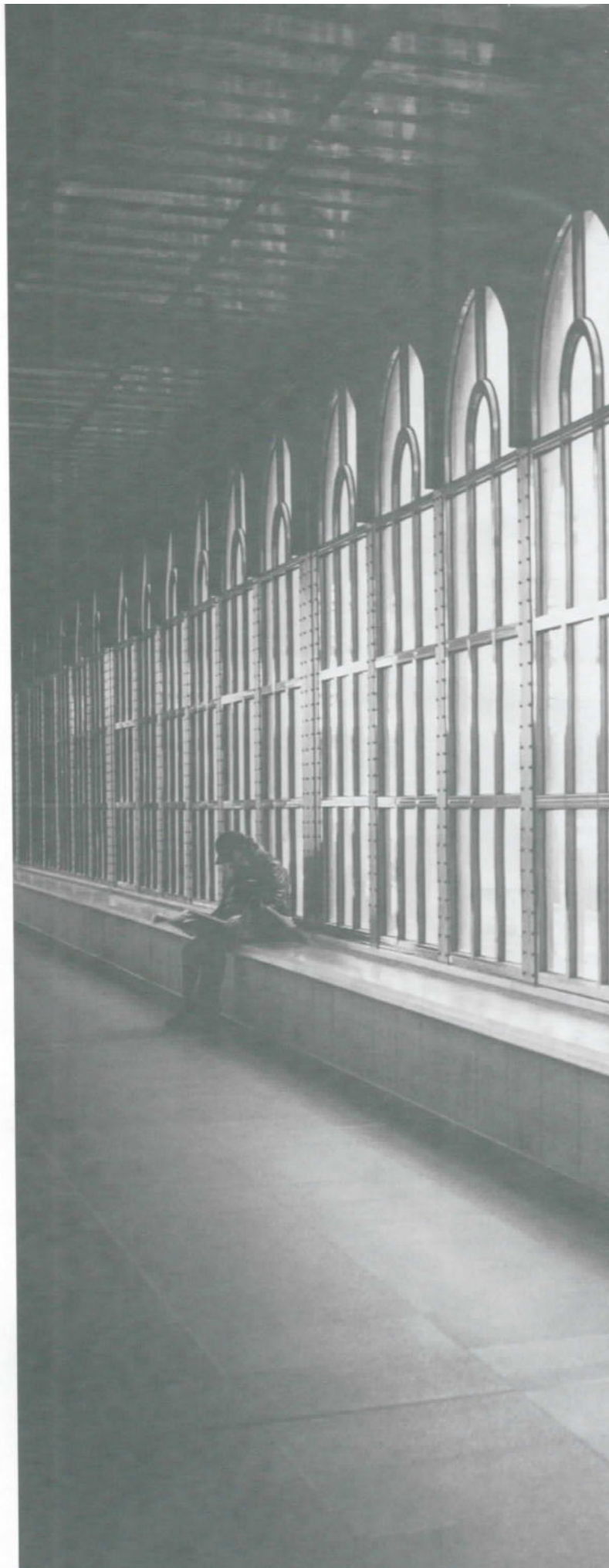
O Heavenly Father,
thou understandest all thy children;
through thy gift of faith
we bring our perplexities
to the light of thy wisdom,
and receive the blessed
encouragement of thy sympathy,
and a clearer knowledge of thy will.

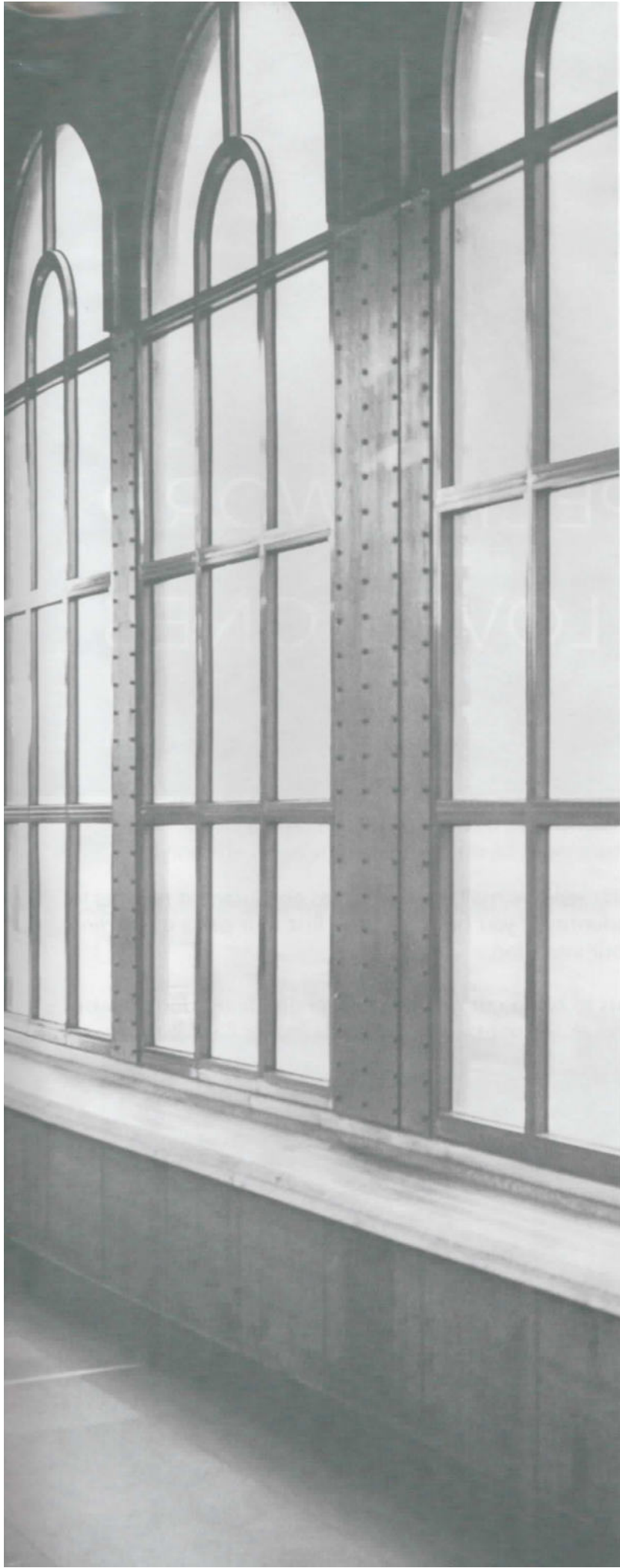
Glory be to thee
for all thy gracious gifts.
Amen.¹

FOR QUIET CONFIDENCE

O GOD of peace,
who hast taught us
that in returning and rest
we shall be saved,
in quietness and in confidence
shall be our strength;
By the might of thy Spirit
lift us, we pray thee,
to thy presence,
where we may be still and know
that thou art God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.¹

¹Church of England. (1960). *The Book of common prayer with the additions and deviations proposed in 1928*. Cambridge: University Press.





SHINING LOVE

by Roberta C. Raftery

Believer, what do you express
As you look at another?
Do your eyes show love
To your sister and brother?

Or do they show disdain
For the one you see
For they are not at all
What you want them to be?

For you measure a man
Only by what you see
And not by what God
Can cause him to be.

Yet Jesus desires
To give you
His loving heart
And His eternal view;

For He looks at men
As those for whom He died
For He had seen their needs
And heard how they had cried;

And He desires today
That others may see
His love shining forth
Through you and through me,

That men might know
That they have worth
And how God longs to give them
A spiritual new birth.

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A SPECIAL WORD FOR LGBT+ LOVED ONES

IN MENTIONING PRAYER, there is a risk that some LGBT+ readers may interpret us as encouraging parents to “pray away” a child’s sexual orientation or gender identity. If you have read the first four parts of *Guiding Families*, it is our prayer that you know this is not our intention.

By suggesting prayer, our purpose is to invite *all of us* to bring our greatest challenges, fears, doubts, worries, anxieties, and questions into the presence of God. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites each one of us:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavily burdened [by religious rituals that provide no peace], and I will give you rest [refreshing your souls with salvation]. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me [following Me as My disciple], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest (renewal, blessed quiet) for your souls. For My yoke is easy [to bear] and My burden is light.”

You might be an LGBT+ teen with a history of bullying. For you, Jesus might be inviting you to bring your trauma to Him and receive His healing touch and comfort. You are made in His image. He is your Heavenly Father. He never intended for you to experience mistreatment. He deeply loves you.

Or maybe you are an LGBT+ adult whose parents or extended family reject your partner. *Anyone* (gay, straight, or transgender) who deeply loves their partner or spouse would be hurt by conditional acceptance—or even worse, overt exclusion. Maybe Jesus is inviting you to bring your hurt into His presence—or even to offer forgiveness for wrongs done to you.

For a parent who has made mistakes, maybe you already offered an apology and sought your child's forgiveness. Your child, though, may not be ready to let go of the hurt they have experienced. Maybe Jesus is inviting you to keep the faith and cast your dependence upon Him to help you restore the relationship with your child.

Or possibly you have been loving and accepting throughout your child's journey, but your child is demanding that you shift your beliefs before they will have any meaningful relationship with you. Maybe Jesus is inviting you to bring your hurt and surrender it fully at the Cross.

We all need God. We find Him most deeply when we bring *our everything* to Him. Whatever our need, we experience peace when we surrender our lives into His presence. In 1 Peter 5:6, 7, His Spirit invites us:

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God [set aside self-righteous pride], so that He may exalt you [to a place of honor in His service] at the appropriate time, casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully]."

But can God be trusted? *Only if we trust Him.* He desires relationship with us. He hungers to be *our everything*. For our ultimate security and rest, God promises refuge in Psalm 91:1, 2.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will remain secure and rest in the shadow of the Almighty [whose power no enemy can withstand]. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust [with great confidence, and on whom I rely]!"

Prayer is not about an attempt to *fix* or *change* or *judge* or *dismiss* any reader of *Guiding Families*. To the contrary: you are a prized possession. You are a child of the King of kings, who says:

"[I have] plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you" (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

God promises that as we seek Him, we *will* find Him.

On the following pages, may you find encouragement, comfort, protection, or whatever you most need.





THE GOD OF ALL

C O M F O R T

The following is a part of a letter the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth to bring them to the one he calls “the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3-11, International Standard Version).

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

God’s compassion and comfort are readily available during our most troubling times. Jesus invites us: “Come to Me all who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest for your soul” (Matthew 11:28). He knows every way that we may hurt over our family and friends. He offers us His presence and desires to comfort us.

No situation is beyond the reach of God’s comfort. David writes: “The one who lives in the shelter of the Most High, who rests in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, “You are my refuge, my fortress, and my God in whom I trust” (Psalm 91:1, 2)! Some of us have faced impossible situations and experienced God’s faithfulness. He walked with us every step of the way. We have been comforted by God, and now we can encourage others to fully place their trust in God. If you are in an early stage of grief—or are continuing to hurt from family rejection—this promise may seem far away. In due time, God will prove faithful: you will be comforted. One day, you will be the comforter of others. God rebuilds our hope even when we have lost all hope.

⁵For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

⁶If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

⁷And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.

⁹Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

¹¹as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

From the sufferings of Christ, our comfort is secured. This comfort, though, came at a great cost to God. As a Father, He endured the excruciating loss of His only Son. In a similar way, we suffer when it feels like we are losing—or being forsaken by—those we love. To begin the process of receiving God's comfort, we first have to sacrifice our attempts to change reality or control our loved ones. We must let go and place our trust in God. Trusting God, though, requires that we act in faith. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, we can pray, "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console."

As we accept reality and surrender control, we lose everything! At this point of surrender, we likely will feel utter despair—a helplessness that leaves us no other option but to cry out to God. In crying out to God, we can be filled with His presence and gain the comfort of Christ. Abiding in Jesus, we can then practice the patient endurance needed for the journey ahead. Our goal is not to escape suffering, but to suffer well—to suffer in the comforting presence of God. It is in this secret place that our hope in God's power can be firm and secure: fears turned into hope; doubts transformed into faith; anxieties replaced with peace; and depression lifted into joy. He will do this for us. Believe.

When the sufferings set before you seem like "deadly peril," it is critical to redirect your thinking to the power of God. Most of us have previously faced threatening situations. God has previously been faithful to rescue, deliver, help, recover, and protect. For our loved ones, God will be equally faithful. We must surround our family with supportive prayer from trusted Christians who are committed to walk with us no matter what. Through prayer, God's "gracious favor" will shower over your life.

DECLARING A DECREE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

When God's people need guidance and rescue, we can personalize the promises of His Word, confess them aloud, and trust His desire to help our family.

WE HIDE IN THE LORD AND DECLARE OUR RELIANCE UPON HIS LOVE AND POWER:

The Lord will defend us and even fight for our family as we hold our peace and remain at rest (Ex. 14:14*).

Resting in God, **the Lord will save us**: a quiet, trusting confidence in Him shall be our strength (Is. 30:15).

The Lord will ordain peace for our family. He keeps us every moment, lest anyone harm us (Is. 26:12, 27:3).

He is our hiding place; **The Lord will protect us** from trouble and surround us with songs of deliverance (Ps. 32:7).

The Lord will keep and save our family from harm. We can trust Him to hide us. He is our refuge (Ps. 16:1, 2).

WE RENOUNCE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND LEAN SOLELY UPON GOD FOR RESCUE AND HELP:

We have no power to face this trial. We do not know what to do! We have no choice but to fix our eyes on God. Listen! **The Lord will uphold us** as we place all our faith in Him (2 Ch. 20:12; 20:20).

The Lord will preserve us even when we are the utter contempt of neighbors. We are strong and courageous as we wait for, hope for, expect the Lord (Ps. 31:11, 24)!

Enemies too strong for us may hate us, but **the Lord will be our stay and our support** (Ps. 18:17, 18).

The Lord will battle for us against strong enemies: with Him on our side, we shall do valiantly (Ps. 108:12, 13)!

Let us boldly approach the throne of God's unmerited favor to us sinners—to receive mercy and find grace! **The Lord will guide us** in good time (Heb. 4:16).

Our hope and expectation are only and earnestly in God! **The Lord will deliver us** from all our transgressions and protect us from becoming the scorn of others. Let those who seek our life be confounded. The Lord is our help (Ps. 38:15; 39:7, 8; 40:14,17)!

The Lord will revoke sentence for His people and relent for our sake when He sees that our power is gone and none remains. Let us surrender what we cannot control and not pretend to have false power over others' lives (Dt. 32:36).

WE DECLARE THAT GOD IS MERCIFUL REGARDING OUR SINS AND MISTAKES:

We have become a reproach to everyone around us. **The Lord will listen to our prayer**: let each member of our family pray to Him because He is merciful, not because we have done right (Dan. 9:1-18).

The Lord will give mercy and loving-kindness when we cry out to Him. He can even cause us to find sympathy among those who harass and ostracize us (Ps. 106:43-48).

We feel sorrow and confess our sins. Our enemies and those who wrongfully hate us are multiplied, but **the Lord will not forsake our family** (Ps. 38:16-22).

The Lord will blot out our transgressions according to the multitude of His tender mercy and loving-kindness. He will wash us and give us a clean heart (Ps. 51).

God forgives iniquity and passes over our transgressions. He subdues and treads underfoot our iniquities. **The Lord will cast our sins away** into the deep sea (Mic. 7:18, 19).

Let us rend our hearts and return to God who is merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. **The Lord will revoke our sentence** (Joel 2).

The Lord will wipe away our transgressions for His sake. He will not remember our sins (Is. 43:25).

God is gracious, slow to anger and full of mercy and loving-kindness. **The Lord will not always accuse us**, neither will He keep His anger forever. He will not treat us as our sins deserve. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord loves and pities those who fear him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust (Ps. 103).

**"THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THOSE
WHO ARE OF A BROKEN HEART
AND SAVES SUCH AS ARE CRUSHED
WITH SORROW FOR SIN AND ARE
HUMBLY AND THOROUGHLY PENITENT."**

- PSALM 34:18

*Scripture paraphrases and personalized statements regarding God's promises are based on the AMPC Version.

WE DECLARE OUR TRUST THAT THE LORD LISTENS TO US AND PROVIDES FOR US:

No matter what we face, God expectantly waits and earnestly longs to be gracious to our family. **The Lord will surely be gracious to us** at the sound of our cry; when He hears it, He will answer us (Is. 30:18, 19).

The Lord will guard our family and give each one of us perfect peace as we lean on and confidently hope in Him (Is. 26:3).

In our most hopeless moments, **the Lord will hear our desperate cries** for His help! Our protection will be found in His presence (Ps. 17:1, 2).

The Lord will move mountains to answer our prayers when we ask in faith for His help (Mt. 21:18-22).

"Lord, we believe! Help us with our unbelief!" **The Lord will help us believe** when we struggle with doubt and fear (See Mk. 9:17-29).

WE DECLARE THAT THE LORD'S HELP IS HERE:

According to God's abundant mercy, **the Lord will send rescuers** to save us from our enemies (Neh. 9:26).

When we cry out to the Lord, He will bring us out of our deepest darkness and break our bonds. Even in trouble, give thanks to God for His lovingkindness for **the Lord will rescue us!** He can break gates of bronze and cut bars of iron (See Ps. 107).

Many question whether God will save our family, but He is our shield, the lifter of our head and hope. We will sleep in peace trusting God, for **the Lord will sustain us** (Ps. 3:2-5).

Will not God defend and protect our family when we cry out to Him day and night? Will He defer and delay helping us? We believe **the Lord will defend and protect us** speedily (Lk 18:7-8).

God is our helper, ally, and upholder. He is also with others whom He uses to protect us. We can thank God right now because **the Lord will help us through every troubling situation** (Ps. 54).

Our hope in God's promise for salvation is based entirely upon faith alone. We do not deserve it. We can never earn it. **The Lord will give and secure salvation** to all who believe. He is our God, who gives life to the dead and speaks of nonexistent things that as if they already exist (Rom. 4:16-17).

Elijah prayed and trusted God for rain. His servant reported that there was no rain, but Elijah told him seven times, "Go and look again." When his servant spotted a cloud as small as a fist, Elijah took radical action believing with certainty that God was bringing rain. We believe that **the Lord will 'rain' blessings upon our family** (See 1 Kgs. 18).

WE DECLARE THAT GOD WILL PROTECT US:

The Lord will remember our family in times of distress and need. He will not wipe out our good deeds and kindnesses done for Him. He will spare us according to His great mercy and lovingkindness (Neh. 13:14,22).

While people (even some friends) may gossip and imagine the worst for us, we trust that God favors and delights in us. Enemies will not harm us, because **the Lord will preserve our integrity** and set us in His presence forever (Ps. 41).

If we are destroyed, will our dust praise God? Will our destruction proclaim His faithfulness? For this reason, in faith, we trust God to help us! **The Lord will turn our wailing into dancing.** He will remove our shame and clothe us with joy. Our hearts will sing thanks to Him forever (See Ps. 30)!

God will never let us be put to shame or let our hope be disappointed. **The Lord will keep us from harm** (Ps. 25:1, 2).

The Lord will be faithful. He says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

No weapon shall prosper against us. Every tongue that speaks against us in judgment shall be cut down. **The Lord will give us peace** (righteousness, security, and triumph over opposition) as part of our heritage in Him (Is. 54:17).

Faith is the assurance of requests we ask of God, the hope for answers we cannot yet see, and the conviction that **the Lord will answer our prayers** (Heb. 11:1).

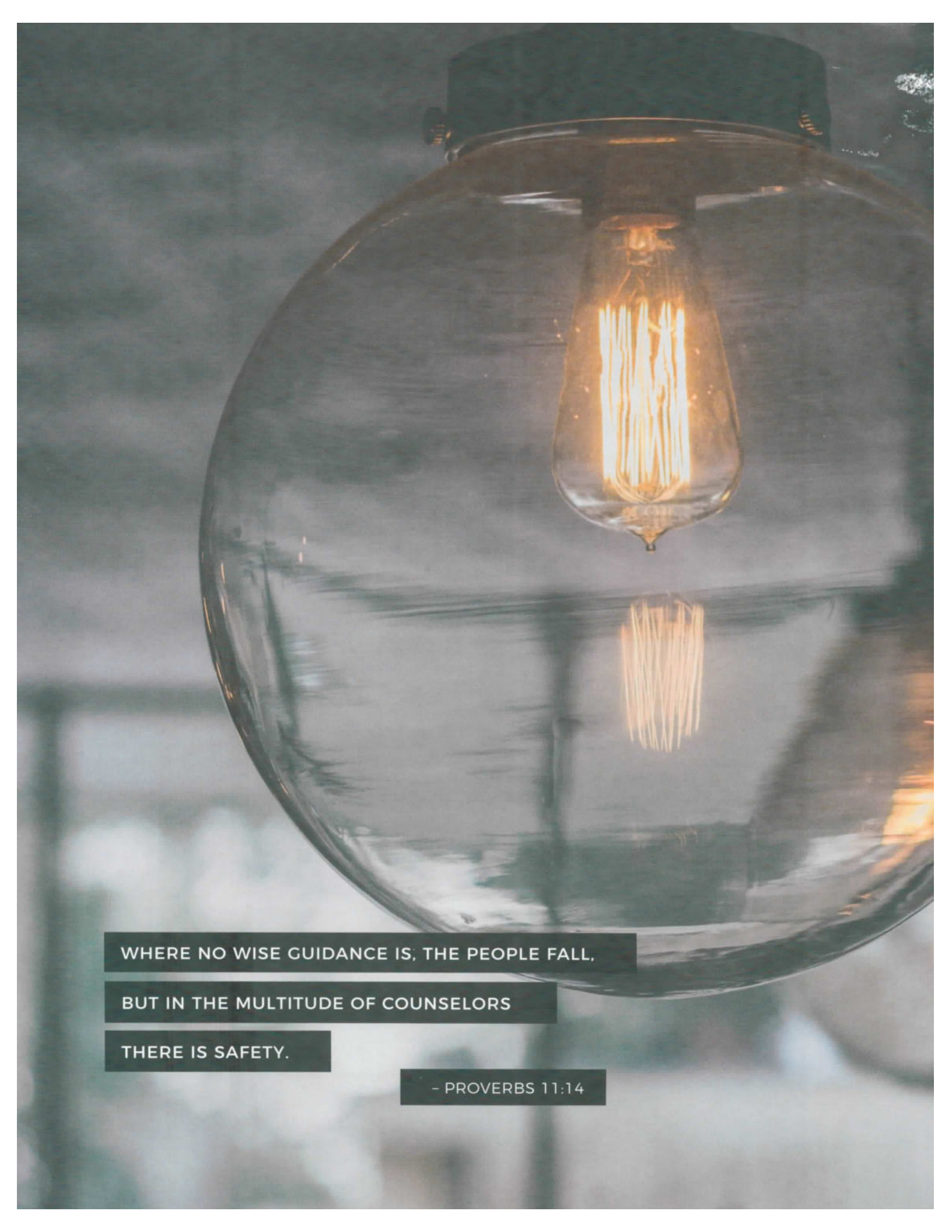
For every member of our family, God invites us to "come to Him." When we are exhausted and beaten down, **the Lord will give us rest for our soul** (see Mt. 11:28-30).

May our family dwell in the shelter of the Most High. In doing so, we will find protection, provision, and rest. **The Lord will be our refuge and fortress!** On Him we lean, rely, and confidently trust! God will command His angels to guard and preserve us in all our ways (see Ps. 91).

On the day God delivers us, **the Lord will be proven faithful.** We shall say: "Behold our God, upon whom we waited and hoped expectantly that He might save us! We waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Is. 25:9).

**"FOR I CONSIDER [FROM THE
STANDPOINT OF FAITH] THAT THE
SUFFERINGS OF THE PRESENT LIFE
ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED
WITH THE GLORY THAT IS ABOUT TO BE
REVEALED TO US AND IN US!"**

- ROMANS 8:18



WHERE NO WISE GUIDANCE IS; THE PEOPLE FALL,

BUT IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS

THERE IS SAFETY.

- PROVERBS 11:14

PART 6:

GUIDANCE FOR ALL WHO CARE

32 TIPS

FOR

RELATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- 1. Be Sensitive.** Those who have been hurt or judged may easily anticipate condemnation.
- 2. Five-Minute Rule.** There is a brief, initial window in which to demonstrate that you are a safe person.
- 3. Build Trust.** Develop relationships in order to cultivate spiritual interest and growth.
- 4. No Agendas.** Never bait and switch the topic or the purpose of getting together.
- 5. No Biases.** Don't prejudge. Engage others as unique and whole persons.
- 6. No Triggers.** Avoid words or phrases that stereotype or reflect a judgmental attitude.
- 7. No Hammers.** Do not use doctrine to position God against others or their relationships.
- 8. No Hang-ups.** Let go of any hang-ups that hold you back. (What if _____ is attracted to me?)
- 9. Surrender Disgust.** If differences in sexuality or gender identity disgust you, you will not be effective in offering relational care.
- 10. Listen Well.** Make direct eye contact, smile warmly, and genuinely listen to what others share.
- 11. Answer by Asking.** You do not have to carry the weight of every question. You can ask a question back.
- 12. Engage Like Jesus.** Look. Love. Pause. Ask. Listen. Pause. Ask. Listen. Pause. Love. Touch.
- 13. Be Curious.** Be sincere and curious enough to elicit another person's story in their own words.
- 14. Offer Safe Space.** People who are given space to self-disclose can more freely discover God's will for their life.
- 15. Ask About Their Partner.** The best way to honor a friend or family member is to inquire about those who are important to them.
- 16. Lose False Power.** You do not have the ability to condone or convict by either offering or withholding your love and acceptance.
- 17. Be Authentic.** Name-dropping all of the gay people you know will not make you more relatable.
- 18. Walk Humbly.** Remain open to what God wants to teach you from the lives of others.
- 19. Do Justice.** If protection is needed, be the first person to defend against harm.
- 20. Love Mercy.** See beyond wrongdoing to express acceptance, love, and compassion.
- 21. Level the Playing Field.** If the topic of repentance surfaces, refer to it in the context of your own life.
- 22. No Sin Comparisons.** Comparisons with stealing, alcoholism, etc. ultimately break down and become unfair. Don't use them.
- 23. Recognizing Gifting.** Be perceptive and generous in identifying positive qualities, traits, gifts, and talents.
- 24. Nourish Faith.** Commit to nourishing rather than chopping at the roots of faith identity.
- 25. Refuse to Judge.** There is absolutely no room for judgment (Jesus: "With the measure you use ...").
- 26. Practice Patience.** Trust God's timing and ability to work in the lives of others.
- 27. Recall your own salvation.** Did you achieve it? No. Without the Holy Spirit convicting you, you would never have turned toward God.
- 28. Invite Them.** Ask them to be with you by sharing a meal or joining you for an activity.
- 29. Include Them.** A gospel that excludes has no power to reach already banished persons.
- 30. Reveal Jesus.** Always reveal the presence of Jesus within you in both words and actions.
- 31. Share Scripture.** Find ways to experience Scripture together.
- 32. Show Affection.** Within your comfort zone (and that of others), offer affection both physically and verbally.

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS AND TEACHERS

1. INCLUDE

Many Adventist youth and young adults who identify as LGBT+ love God and want to be part of His church. Never try to convince a young person they are not really an Adventist because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Be open to their spiritual interests and nurture their faith identity. Intentionally include them in church and school activities. If you have conduct standards, such as those related to sexual behavior, clearly state and equally apply those with all young people, regardless of their orientation or identity.

2. LISTEN

It takes courage for LGBT+ young people to come out. They risk potential rejection or judgment. Your first reaction is critical. Maintain eye contact and thank them for trusting you with their story. Tell them, "I really want to hear about your experience." Following this kind of disclosure, it is important to make time to immediately listen to whatever they may want to share.

Ask honoring questions that demonstrate understanding and sensitivity. This will allow you to learn about potentially harmful risk factors (bullying, teasing, exclusion, or family rejection).

Refrain from asking questions just because you are curious about that person's life or you are attempting to get to the bottom of what "caused" them to be LGBT+. Research has consistently shown that there is no single cause for same-sex attraction, such as a distant father, controlling mother, or child abuse. Genetics, prenatal hormones, and a variety of environmental factors all combine to create someone's sexual identity, and searching for a "cause" is likely to cause feelings of humiliation, anger, and confusion.

3. PROTECT

No gay jokes. By now, it should be apparent how important it is to treat LGBT+ people with respect and care. Why risk deeply hurting a young person just for a laugh?

No micro-aggressions. Beware of making insensitive remarks. This includes phrases like "that's so gay," telling a young person to "man up" or "be more feminine," or comparing LGBT+ persons to addicts or sexual predators.

No bullying. Teasing, name calling, anti-gay statements, "outing" someone, social media harassment, threatening words, and hitting or pushing are all acts of bullying. Bullying is not acceptable under any circumstance. It can even be a crime. Bullying hurts and kills both gay and straight young people. Protecting LGBT+ youth must be a top priority. Creating safe spaces in a home, church, or school requires advance planning and standard protocols.

Report immediately. Educate and empower staff, lay leaders, and students to protect and report bullying when LGBT+ youth are being mistreated.

4. INVEST

Words are important, but justice requires personal investment and action. Offer to host or join students in bullying prevention programs. Share stories of youth who were harmed or lost their lives due to bullying. For LGBT+ young adults 18 years of age or older, allow them the opportunity to share their stories and educate others (if they wish to do so).

Encourage student leaders to be attentive to their peers, especially those who appear to be isolated or subject to mistreatment and exclusion. Advise them: "Don't just invite that student into your social group. Discover what he or she likes to do, and join with them in that activity."

Identify the God-given gifts and talents of LGBT+ young people and utilize them in the church and community (mission trips, worship teams, service projects, etc.). Help them connect these experiences to God's calling and purpose for their lives.

It is not uncommon for Adventist parents to wonder how they should relate to their child's LGBT+ friends. In the past, many parents were anxious about the influence of LGBT+ peers on their children. Today, many are genuinely asking, "What can we do to help? How can we positively engage our child's LGBT+ friends?"

WELCOMING YOUR CHILD'S LGBT+ FRIENDS

10 GUIDING INSIGHTS

FOR PARENTS WHO AIM TO EXPRESS ACCEPTANCE FOR LGBT+ YOUTH

- 1** Assure your child that all of their friends—gay, straight, questioning, or transgender—are welcome in your family's home.
- 2** Assess how LGBT+ people have been discussed in your home over the years. Has your rhetoric reflected views that demonstrate love for LGBT+ people?
- 3** Reach out to the parents of your child's LGBT+ friends. Take the opportunity to be friendly and hospitable.
- 4** Avoid guessing that your child's friend must be gay due to external appearance (dress, stature, mannerisms, features, talents, or interests).
- 5** Do not shy away from engaging an LGBT+ youth after they disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Convey that your family is safe and welcoming space.
- 6** Recognize that Christians have a reputation of not treating LGBT+ people well. Make certain your actions, attitude, and words are genuine and thoughtful.
- 7** Be natural, and keep it simple. If you try too hard to think of a unique way to talk with LGBT+ people, there is a greater chance of offending someone.
- 8** Reject the notion or fear that an older child's LGBT+ friend might be a negative influence on your younger children. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not socially transmitted.
- 9** Exchange talking for listening. By asking honoring questions (below), you will learn a lot and gradually build trust and influence.
- 10** Be a safe parent or lay leader for LGBT+ youth at your church. In Adventist church settings, LGBT+ youth likely still hear unthoughtful statements about gay and transgender people. Build safe rapport with LGBT+ youth, so that they know you are always available to protect them.

Let's learn how to keep LGBT+ youth in our churches and growing in their faith. When we lose one along the way, let's make a concerted effort to contact them and learn what happened. Based on what you discover, make amends for any mistakes and warmly invite this young person back to church. Let's do whatever we can to ensure that we don't lose even one LGBT+ youth.

GREAT QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CHILD'S LGBT+ FRIENDS

1. "How was your week? What topic did you select for your history project?"
2. "Does your family have any fun summer vacation plans?"
3. "What have you been doing to prepare for the upcoming SAT exam?"
4. "I will contact your mom about dinner at our place. Is your family in town next weekend?"
5. "Thank you so much for honoring us with your story. What is it like to identify as genderqueer?"
6. "I am so sorry that you experienced bullying. What can parents like us do to protect LGBT+ kids?"
7. "Can you make it to youth group if you have a ride home? We're always available to drive you."
8. "We are so grateful to have you on this mission team. How is the mission trip going for you so far?"
9. "Thanks for joining our family night. What board games do you and your family most enjoy?"
10. "You said you identify as pansexual. Tell me more. I am curious what that's like for you."

WHY LOVE AND ACCEPT?

As we come to the end of this guide, it may be helpful to ask again, “Why is it important for Adventists to love and accept their LGBT+ family members and friends?” We believe the data on Adventist LGBT+ rejection makes a strong case for relational care and inclusion. Yet some readers may still fear that love and acceptance will result in biblical compromise. This need not be the case. In fact, we believe that sharing God’s love and acceptance is a necessary condition of being faithful to the Bible. Here is why.

LOVE EXPRESSES THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD.

Above all, the essence of God’s character is love. His holiness, His righteousness, and His justice are never expressed apart from His love. God’s love and acceptance are not dependent upon any one of us being sinless or making the right decisions. They are there for us even when we wander far from home.

LOVE IS COMMANDED BY JESUS.

Jesus gave only one “new” commandment to His disciples—love one another. As we examine the life and ministry of Jesus, we see this commandment consistently lived out in the way He treated others. Quite apart from compromising the Scriptures, Jesus brought them to life by crossing boundaries and showing compassion and care for the despised and marginalized persons of His day.

LOVE PROTECTS.

The regard Jesus had for Scripture never led Him to neglect or harm one of His creatures. When legal experts accused Jesus of breaking the law by healing people on the Sabbath, He asked which of them would leave their child or ox stranded at the bottom of a well during the Sabbath. To do so would be absurd. Likewise, as Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, He did so in a way that cared for the well-being of His children.

LOVE MAKES US AVAILABLE.

When we show love and care for LGBT+ family and friends, even those with whom we may disagree, we make ourselves available to them. In moments of crisis, they will need someone they can trust to listen and love, no matter what. If we cut ourselves off from our LGBT+ loved ones, we cannot be God’s hands and feet for them when they need it most.

LOVE IS PATIENT. LOVE IS KIND.

These well-known lines from Paul’s “love chapter” (1 Cor. 13) express the essence of how God treats all of us as fallen human beings. He knows how we are formed and lovingly works with us as we grapple with who we are and who He is. If any one of us turns toward God, it is only because of His patience and kindness toward us. By offering LGBT+ friends and family our patience, kindness, and unconditional love, we are giving them the same gift God has given us.

In summary, our faith should never become an obstacle to loving and accepting others but a powerful reason for doing so. Love is the highest expression of our faith. As one Adventist young adult said of her LGBT+ friends, “I love them because of my faith, not in spite of it.” May God give us all the kind of faith that loves others well.

“Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God’s love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening].” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

A person wearing a dark hoodie and light-colored pants is leaning against a brick wall. The wall is made of red and grey bricks. The person is looking down and to the side. The background is a dark, out-of-focus building.

EPILOGUE:

WRITING A NEW CHAPTER

This must not continue. With prayerful effort, we can end the rejection of LGBT+ family and friends. We can learn to love and care for each of God's children, just as Jesus did.

To uphold the Bible's sexual ethic, we must live it out in our own lives and then treat others with kindness. A lack of personal integrity and compassion for others undermines the reliability of biblical truth.

When we mistreat people in the name of God, those around us rightly call out our injustice. If we continue to do so, some may see no choice but to reject the biblical teachings we profess, in favor of the kind and fair treatment of others.

Many young Adventists have grown up with LGBT+ family and friends. They want to accept and include those who are different from themselves and see it as an important part of living out the gospel. We trust that God is equipping these young people with the gifts, insights, and skills necessary for such a time as this.

Looking back, many of us with a history in the church are saddened by the ways in which we have hurt LGBT+ people. Our role in advancing biblical truth begins with repentance for the mistakes we have made and a commitment to radically love those we have wounded and ostracized.

Looking forward, the young people who will shape the church for years to come have their own part to play. They will need to navigate the changing cultural and scientific understandings related to sexuality and gender in ways that remain faithful to Scripture.

Let's work together to write a new chapter in the Adventist Church: one in which our faithfulness to God and His Word is marked by unconditional love for our LGBT+ family, friends, and neighbors.

Sincerely,

NAD Commission on Human Sexuality

At the North American Division, we believe the time has come for Seventh-day Adventists to write a new chapter in our relationship with LGBT+ persons. We envision a church whose members are (1) committed to honoring God and His Word and (2) willing to lay down their lives for LGBT+ family and friends.

This does not call for a change in our biblical position on marriage and sexuality, but it does require a posture shift. Shifting our posture means adjusting our actions, attitudes, and words to more accurately reflect Jesus to those around us.

To write a new chapter, we must come to terms with our past. Adventists have always sought to be faithful to Scripture. Yet, all too often, we have been complicit in the mistreatment of LGBT+ people. Some of us have been judgmental. Others of us have failed to notice or respond when LGBT+ persons suffered from bullying, family rejection, suicidality, discrimination, and homelessness.



ADVENTIST BELIEF ON MARRIAGE *AND* THE FAMILY

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE, MALE AND FEMALE, WE ARE DESIGNED TO LIVE IN RELATIONSHIPS. MARRIAGE IS GOD'S IDEAL TO LIVE IN HARMONY, AND FOR CHILDREN TO GROW UP IN SECURITY AND LOVE.

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving, tender, and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons. (Gen. 2:18-25; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

When LGBT+ loved ones come out, parents can experience shock. Fear and grief can disable their initial reaction. Emotions erupt. Hurtful words spill. Trust is damaged. Relationships become disconnected. Meanwhile, in the church, LGBT+ people may encounter impossible hurdles and suspicion about their faith. One courageous disclosure can be met with a response that communicates, "I don't understand you."

**Guiding Families offers a relationally honoring,
biblically sound path forward.**

In these pages, learn how to:

- Respond well when LGBT+ people come out.
- Protect gay youth against bullying and suicide.
- Avoid unintentionally offensive words and phrases.
- Build a support team for LGBT+ loved ones and their families.
- Engage LGBT+ individuals in a trusting relationship over the long-term.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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