

Do Ask, Do Tell, Let's Talk:
Why and How Christians Should Have Gay Friends
by Brad Hambrick

Question: Why did I write this book and what did I hope to accomplish?

Implication: What are the reasonable takeaways we can expect from reading this book?

- Prompt -
- Audience -
- Objectives -

A Quick Summary of the Six Chapters

1. *Getting Beyond the Us-Them Divide*
 - Provides helpful vocabulary and defines the problem of silence – why “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” doesn’t work
2. *Becoming Comfortable Being Uncomfortable*
 - Debunks a key point of inaccurate theology and identifies personal obstacles to friendship
3. *Learning about the Experience of Same Sex Attraction (SSA)*
 - Discusses 3 big ideas: (a) the experience of secret, (b) the myth of choice, and (c) it’s not all about sex
4. *Getting to Know a Christian Experience of SSA*
 - Identifies 5 frequent markers on someone’s personal journey and advises how to engage each conversationally
5. *Getting to Know a Non-Christian Experience of SSA*
 - Differentiates winning an argument vs. influencing a friend; (big idea: don’t get ahead of your friend’s faith journey)
6. *Navigating Difficult Conversations*
 - An annotated conversation provides an opportunity to think before you speak; the worst-best chapter of the book

Chapter One

Getting Beyond the Us-Them Divide

Same-Sex Attraction (SSA) – This is simply the experience of realizing that you find members of the same gender attractive to the point that you are aroused and romantically captivated. This experience is usually not chosen. Think about it: if you experience opposite-sex attraction, when did you “choose” this preference?

For this reason, I believe that the best theological category for the experience of unwanted SSA is suffering—something for which we should not feel a perpetual sense of condemnation, because it is primarily the result of living in a broken world which adversely impacts our lives. True suffering is not sin.¹ In response to suffering God offers comfort, not forgiveness. At the same time, suffering is always a context for temptation, and we are responsible for our response to suffering.

The primary benefit of the suffering category is that it gives the person who experiences unwanted SSA the grace to recognize that Romans 8:1 (“There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”) can be true for him or her. It allows for the possibility of stewarding temptation in a way that pleases God, rather than feeling like a perpetual abomination. Indeed, the “abomination passages” (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) refer to homosexual behaviors, not people struggling against temptation. The SSA, GI, and HB distinctions help us reconcile the fact that God is indeed the holy judge of sin yet still desires to be the loving redeemer of people who struggle with sin until we reach heaven.

Gay Identity (GI) – GI occurs when an individual who experiences SSA travels down a path that leads him or her to an “I am” statement. Where SSA is about “what I feel,” GI is about “who I am.” This transition is where much of our cultural conversation breaks down. In any other area of life, if one aspect of personhood (such as ethnicity, financial status, gender, etc.) is believed to necessarily define a person, we call that belief prejudicial. But with sexuality, there is a cultural push to call it virtuous.

¹ You may wonder if this view is an expression of the Pelagian heresy. I do not believe it is, but I can understand the concern. There are many dispositional struggles resulting from the fall, such as dyslexia or Asperger’s, which Christians agree are suffering rather than sin. This is not to equate SSA with a disability. Rather, it is to illustrate that unchosen dispositional struggles which hamper living according to God’s design for human flourishing can become a source of many temptations, yet these are commonly recognized as not being sinful in themselves. As you read, I hope you come to appreciate that not all our personal experiences resulting from the fall need to be classified as sin, and some of the ways God cares for us in these experiences of suffering.

It is not necessary to turn verbs into nouns. Not everyone who “runs” is a “runner.” Not everyone who “fails” is a “failure.” Not everyone who experiences SSA has to identify as gay. Identity is a choice, one that should be made based on more factors than the persistence of a particular attraction.

Homosexual Behavior (HB) – This is the choice to engage in sexual practices with or stimulated by a member of the same gender. Like assuming a gay identity, homosexual behaviors are a matter of choice and, therefore, the moral responsibility of the chooser.

A different kind of stigma enters the conversation here. We must realize that looking at gay porn is not “dirtier” than straight porn, and far less consequential than looking at child porn. Extra-marital sex is equally wrong regardless of the gender-pairing.

Chapter Two

Becoming Comfortable Being Uncomfortable

The misuse of Romans 1:

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” Romans 1:24-27

In the interpretation I’m referring to, this passage supposedly teaches that SSA only happens when someone persistently pursues heterosexual sex outside of marriage. In some of these cases, God then judges that person by allowing his or her sexual interests to become homosexual in nature. In brief form, the logic of this “progressive sexual depravity” model goes something like this.

- All sexual sin starts out as heterosexual. It is assumed the general effects of the Fall *cannot* distort our drive for “natural relations” into those “contrary to nature” without our escalating, willful participation in heterosexual sin over a period of time.
- Milder heterosexual sin increases in intensity, frequency, and duration in order to have the same satisfying effect.
- With time, ever more egregious sexual sins are needed to get the same “high.” The assumption here is that the goal is the rush of orgasm rather than the comfort of intimacy.
- Eventually, homosexual sins are experimented with as a new, more stimulating experience.
- What began as homosexual or bisexual experimentation becomes an orientation as God gives them over to their lusts. The belief is that apart from this pattern—this addiction model—there *can be no such thing* as SSA.

Internal Obstacles:

1. “I don’t like having conversations about problems I can’t fix.”
2. “People may think I’m gay.”
3. “If I don’t know the answer, do I have to change my views?”
4. “I might be offensive and not know it.”
5. “Doesn’t the Bible say not to associate with sinners?”

1 Corinthians 5:9-11, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

	Non-Christian	Exploring Faith	Professing Christian
Experiencing Temptation			
Succumbing to Temptation			
Repeatedly Falling to Temptation			I Corinthians 5:9-11
No longer calling the tempting action wrong			I Corinthians 5:9-11

Chapter Three

Learning about the Experience of SSA

1. *The Experience of Secrets* (Your biggest secret: _____)

For the person who experiences SSA, we must keep a tangle of factors in mind; factors that are not as neat as we would like, but accurately represent the messiness of living as broken people in a broken world. When SSA is embraced by assuming a gay identity or enacted through homosexual behavior, it becomes willful sin that calls for *post-sin repentance*. However, unwanted SSA, as a form of temptation or suffering, manifests how the fall affects our body and soul, and calls us to continual *pre-sin reliance* on God for the strength, clarity, and encouragement that we all need daily. Both sin and suffering call for our empathy, love, and friendship in ways that best represent God, based on where we or our friend are in relation to our struggles.

3. *The Experience of “It’s Not About Sex”*

I hope that you’ve begun to see that, while some aspects of the SSA experience are unique, in many ways it’s just like any other unwanted desire you or I might struggle with. SSA may get expressed differently, but some aspects of it map quite well onto everyday stories and challenges.

Do opposite-sex-attracted believers struggle with lust? Illicit thoughts? Pornography? Unmet expectations? Disappointing sexual experiences (within or outside of marriage)? Periods of sexual drought? If you’re reading this as a person who experiences OSA, surely you understand. The OSA experience, which is no more uniform than the SSA experience, is not a smooth, mutually pleasing, guilt-free endeavor. It has its own set of struggles, temptations, and prevailing weaknesses. In that sense, SSA isn’t so very different.

How can this kind of understanding lead us to deeper and more meaningful relationships with those who experience SSA? Any helpful answer to that question must include an emphasis on honest conversations. And here’s some honesty that needs to enter into the conversation sooner rather than later: *oftentimes the church, in seeking to contrast itself with the SSA experience, oversells the ease with which OSA people experience desire and intimacy*. In an effort to uphold and extol God’s original intention for sexuality, we talk about heterosexual intimacy in a way that glosses over our struggles and temptations.

When we talk with our friends who experience SSA, we shouldn’t let this false picture stand. Let’s talk in a way that reveals we all need the same thing: the grace of God to change our hearts, rearrange our expectations, and redeem our desires. Grace that meets us where we are but does not leave us as we are. Grace that realizes discipleship is a process, not an instantaneous event.

Chapter Four

Getting to Know a Christian Experience of SSA

Understanding Key Markers on an SSA Journey

1. Initial Experience of SSA
2. Behavior in Response to SSA
3. The Question of Identity
4. The Milestone of Disclosure
5. The Establishment of a Same-Sex Relationship

How to Avoid Reducing a Person to Their Struggle

In this book, as in the conversations I hope this book creates, we will have to strive continually to ensure that the subject of SSA does not become more important than the person who experiences it. With that in mind, I would like to offer three thoughts on how to avoid reducing a person to their struggle.

First, have fun together. Mutual enjoyment is a good indicator that a friendship is not devolving into a project relationship.

Second, go broad, not narrow. If SSA is the majority topic of conversation, your relationship will become more therapeutic or polemical than friendly. So spend the majority of your time talking about subjects other than SSA.

Third, allow your friend to speak into your life as well. The most effective way to gain the right to be heard is to listen. Particularly if your friend is a Christian, they have something to offer you.

Chapter Five

Getting to Know a Non-Christian Experience of SSA

1. Facts – What is true about the situation?
2. Definitions – How should the key concepts be defined or labeled?
3. Values – How should we weigh the importance of key factors that are in conflict?
4. Action Steps – What should we do or believe?

First, be willing to engage at whatever level your friend wants to talk.

Second, don't try to gain a deeper theological commitment than where your friend currently is.

Third, speak in third-person plural (i.e., we, us) wherever possible.

1. Facts - Do we believe God is our creator and the designer of all things, including sexuality?
2. Definitions – Do we believe God's definition of "good" for something is often different from our natural preferences?
3. Values – Are we willing to trust that God will care for us on our journey in following him?
4. Action Steps - Are you willing to place your faith in God and trust him with your life?

A final point of clarification should be made. As Christians, we must honor the right of our friend to take a break or walk away from these conversations—whether a particular conversation or the dialogue as a whole. If we press a conversation longer than our friend willingly participates, we are not just perceived as offensive; we are being offensive. The closer the relationship, the more difficult this juncture may be. For example, honoring disengagement from a conversation by a son or daughter is much harder than when it's a classmate or colleague.

Remember, it is never our role to change anybody—not their sexual orientation, not their personal beliefs. However noble or sincere we may believe our motives to be, it is wrong to try to do this. You and I cannot change anyone, and we must not act or pretend otherwise. Our role is as ambassadors of a message. We want to share and embody the gospel while showing genuine interest in a friendship...and then honor the freedom of the other individual to respond as they see fit.

This reiterates one of my central points: *this book is not a strategy manual*. Rather, it's intended to give you a base of understanding you can apply in a wide variety of situations. After all, you don't know what role God may have you play in any individual's life. Perhaps you are their first exposure to an understanding Christian. Perhaps you plant the first seed explaining the gospel. Maybe you see them come to faith, or walk with them for an important leg in their journey. Maybe you'll be a meaningful memory; someone they recall as a caring person who helped draw them back to considering Christianity. Or maybe you'll be a lifelong friend who walks with them through so many of life's ups and downs.

Be content to be a good ambassador-friend. Fill that role for as long as they allow. Trust God with how he chooses to use your influence in their life, and learn as much from the entire experience as you can. That is the difference between winning a debate and influencing a friend.

Chapter Six

Navigating Difficult Conversations

How do I actually start the conversation? If you picked up this book because you already have a friend confiding their experience of SSA, this question is not a problem. But if you started reading this book out of a general desire to see the church more effectively engage its gay neighbors as well as its members who experience SSA, admittedly this may be the most difficult part.

- **Don't "out" the person.** It is unwise to put someone on the spot with a question like, "Are you gay?" Even if you think you know, respect this person's right to disclose the information on their timetable. Nobody wants to live with a secret. If you prove yourself to be a safe person, they will want to talk sooner rather than later.
- **Speak sympathetically to the struggle of SSA.** Humble statements can go a long way. "I can only imagine how hard it would be to experience unwanted same-sex attraction and feel caught in so many cultural debates. Trying to figure out who to talk to might be as hard as anything else. That would be incredibly lonely." A statement like this in social contexts where homosexuality is being discussed raises a flag of peace to be seen by those looking for a safe friend.
- **Study this book with your small group.** It may work best to first equip existing friends within your church. A small group that has learned to be a safe place for SSA conversations is an excellent beginning for a church, and an ideal place to invite someone who may experience SSA. It can give your friend a chance to see that your church may actually offer real community.