

Effective Evangelism: JAE365

## WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOUR GAY FRIEND SAYS, 'I WAS BORN THIS WAY'

by David White

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"I've always felt this way. I've done everything imaginable to change or make my desires go away—therapy, religion...you name it, I've tried it." I was in my twenties, sitting in a gay bar at the invitation of a co-worker after our shift at a restaurant. Dan continued, "I don't want to be this way. If there was a pill to make me 'straight,' I'd take it...but it doesn't exist." Even though I was an unbelieving, promiscuous college student with a drinking problem, his statement struck me. I remember thinking, "These guys aren't happy! The media says this is normal and healthy, but they *want* to change."

There are two reasons why this vignette matters:

1. We need to realize gay people wrestle with their desires long before they "come out" to friends and family. Often they've tried "every-thing" to change, finally surrendering and embracing a gay identity. As such, our approach should be characterized by great gentleness and sensitivity.
2. It is crucial to see that the gay life—like any attempt to live apart from God—simply doesn't *work*. This should engender deep compassion, not religious superiority. But at the same time, it also enables us to move toward our friends with confidence. This is God's world, and it only works His way. No matter what tale the media spins, living apart from Him leads to discontentment and eventually despair. That's why Proverbs 14:13 teaches, "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief." We are designed for a relationship with our Creator, and anything less makes for a subhuman existence.

Keeping these truths in mind, how do we respond to a gay friend who says, "I was born this way"? When should we "speak truth in love" as a Christian? Most Christians' first response is to run immediately to the Old Testament prohibitions (e.g. Lev. 18:22), or worse, the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. But they are often confounded by the pro-gay rebuttals, especially those who don't know the Bible well. Put back on their heels because they are wearing a poly-cotton blend (Lev. 19:19), ate crab cakes last week at a restaurant (Lev. 11:10–12), love bacon and like throwing

around a football on an autumn day (Lev. 11:7–8), their argument evaporates. But there is a better way to engage your gay friends!

**Sin Is Sin.** Do we really need to say anything? Many Christians feel obligated to tell gay people that God opposes what happens in their bedroom. However, they often don't feel the same necessity about their co-worker living with his girlfriend. In most of our interactions, we are aware of the dramatic morality shift in our culture and have learned that insisting unbelievers adhere to biblical morality outside of Christ is unhelpful. But for some reason with this issue, we feel it necessary to clearly label their behavior *sin*. Usually the wisest approach is to live peaceably with our friends and neighbors. We demonstrate the authenticity of our faith and our love for God by loving them and our families well—always ready to have an answer for the hope that we have.

**Sharing Faith through Friendship.** As we move forward in relationship, and our faith is known, inevitably a question will arise about homosexuality or the declaration that it is “inborn and unchangeable.” Be aware that sexual orientation is the most strongly defended aspect of their person. They have anguished over its existence, tried to pray it away, endured bullying and other types of oppression. Most gay people thought long and hard before embracing this identity, and thought even longer before they announced it to the world.

Start by asking some questions. Why do they say they were born gay? When did they first realize they were gay? What was that experience like? Have they experienced ridicule because of their orientation? Have they read scientific studies demonstrating conclusive evidence of genetic or physiological origins? How did their family respond to their “coming out”? If their background is in the church, ask them about the message they heard regarding homosexuality growing up and how this affected them as their own sexuality emerged.

There are two main goals to this approach. First, you want to know your friend! It is easy for us to drop people into convenient categories (“homosexual sinner”), completely missing the particular creation of this “image-bearer” of God. The essence of relationship is to be *known*. Don't assume you understand someone's experience because of books you've read. I've ministered to the gay community for more than thirteen years, and although there are similarities, every person is unique. Each story has its own profound contours, some glorious and some tragic. Further, your friend will feel loved if you genuinely demonstrate care. It is only when someone knows you truly love him or her that you can speak and be heard, especially with such deep, personal issues. Loving your gay friends is not the means to the end of finally getting to the “real” work of evangelizing them. Loving them for the sake of Christ is the ultimate end goal of your relationship and the most profound way you can preach the gospel!

**It's Only Natural.** Secondly, once you have established a firm foundation of love in the relationship, you can begin to discuss faith and sexuality. An important theme to pursue is that homosexuality is “natural” for your friend. Here's the rub: the starting

point for all pro-gay arguments is the inherent goodness of man. The assumption follows that whatever comes naturally is right, even God-given. Even if they acknowledge a Creator, they deny the fall. Thus their understanding of humanity is completely at odds with the Bible's teaching. This is a far better starting point for evangelistic exploration because directly discussing sexuality leads to automatic defensiveness.

You can talk in the abstract about the reality of the 6 o'clock news and the atrocities perpetrated throughout world history. Discuss the universal reality that little children will hit to get a coveted toy, even without those behaviors being modeled. They are "naturally" selfish and must be taught to share. More poignantly, you can share of your own inability to love others well, to rein in your temper or your pride. There is one Bible passage that rings true in every person's experience: Romans 7:15–19. There is good we want to do, but we repeatedly fail; behaviors we want to curb, but we instead perpetuate. Demonstrating humility and honesty about your own *current* struggles and need for God's forgiveness and intervention will sound very different than the self-righteous messages they've likely received from other Christians.

Asking God for wisdom about the timing, you can apply this reality to sexuality. Because of the fall, none of us are wired right sexually! As mentioned, I was extremely promiscuous apart from Christ. I cheated on every woman who had the misfortune of being in relationship with me. Chronic infidelity is "natural" for me. The point is that *all* of humanity needs a radical supernatural intervention in this area of life. Too often the church has labeled homosexuality as broken, as if heterosexuals are not in need of change. Consider Leviticus 18: there is one verse condemning homosexual behavior, but there are more than a dozen verses reining in broken heterosexuality (for example, forbidding sex with your grandchildren!). Leviticus 18 reveals that sexual brokenness is universal. All of us need sexual redemption.

Realize that this is a process. It can take years to build trust. The crucial question is whether you will stay in relationship, agreeing to disagree, even if they never embrace Christ and abandon the gay life.

Finally, pro-gay proponents regularly point to homosexual behavior in nature to justify their own. In tragic irony, this actually mirrors Romans 1:18–27. Far from traditional interpretations describing homosexuality as the bottom of the sin barrel, Paul articulates the destruction of abandoning worship of God for idolatry. The biblical worldview declares God as Creator, ruling over all. He designed humans to rule over the Earth as His representatives. Yet here's what happens with idolatry: humanity subjects itself to the created order it was intended to rule over, and God is completely discarded from the picture. Idolatry turns the universe on its head. Everything is completely disordered— including sexuality. The Bible explains we become like what we worship. Making sexuality primary, humans defend their behavior because it is practiced by chimpanzees and fruit flies, as if there is no distinction between humanity and animals. This is a profound diminishing of what it means to be human and made in the image of God.

This is where you ultimately want to take your friend. What does it mean to be human? To have an identity not based on the things of this world—knowledge, money, power, or your preferred sexual partner—but on a relationship outside this world and beyond time. Love that will exist for eternity. There is One who knows the depth of their heart, the pain of their experiences, and the areas of guilt and shame. There is One who has wept over their heartache, promises to set things right, and, in love, personally suffered to cover their guilt and shame. There is One who understands the insatiability of our sexual appetites and promises to sate our desires. One who knows our burdens and invites, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”  
—*David White*

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