“A Letter to Madison Church: Same-Sex Attraction”

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Introduction: Purpose of this letter: to give biblical guidance and pastoral care to the church regarding same-sex marriage. This paper is not meant to be our church’s statement regarding same-sex attraction but rather a response to members who have been asking for more direction and clarity regarding what the pastor believes that the Bible teaches us about same-sex attraction and how we should respond to our same-sex attracted brothers and sisters in the faith.

I am quite aware that in our church there is a range of opinion on whether same-sex marriage can be a possible blessing from God. My audience for this letter is diverse in belief. Some of you are convinced that we can and should not only welcome LBGT persons but also affirm same-sex marriage. Others are just not sure and need some direction and biblical leadership. Others may not even want to think or talk about the subject because you are sick of hearing of it. Many of you personally know same-sex attracted people as your friends or family members. And, in any larger group setting, there will be a small but significant percentage of us who are same-sex attracted. My intention in this letter to speak to all of you as your pastor. Pastors are called to shepherd their people, to seek to lead in such a diverse environment with biblical teaching and pastoral sensitivity. That is my prayer. Let us pray together and God gives us grace and charity toward one another.

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1. Grace-and-Truth Church
2. Prayer of confession
3. Meditation on the big picture of the purpose sex and marriage.
4. Does Jesus speak to same-sex marriage?
5. Is This like Women in Office?
6. Advice to the church
7. Advice to same-sex attracted people
8. Closing letter to a “Leisha”

1. Grace-and-Truth Church:

Some churches, including Madison Church, have tried to balance both truth and grace, believing this to be what it means to form a ‘gospel community.’ We welcome all
people because we welcome all sinners. As the Bible says, ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ And we call all sinners to holiness, recognizing that this is a ‘long obedience in the same direction’ and takes lots of grace along the way. Just as we have become a home for those in substance abuse recovery, we likewise are becoming a home for those who are sexually broken. We believe that all human beings are created in the image of God. We are all likewise sinners. It is unbiblical and hurtful to pick one of those sins and stigmatize it above others. For too long and too often in the church LGBT persons have experienced such sinful stigmatization. For that we repent. We are also part of a denomination that continues to profess its belief that marriage is meant to be only between a man and a woman for life. We believe that our local church and our denomination must discern the new challenges of biblical studies, scientific research, and personal stories in the context of creating and maintaining a ‘gospel community’ which holds mission and holiness, grace and truth, in a healthy balance.

2. **Prayer of confession:**

*Our gracious God,*

*We have sinned against you.*

*We have not done the things we ought to have done.*

*We have not kept the promises we have made.*

*Instead of trying to become the place where persons who love you and are homosexual could find a gracious dwelling,*

*We confess we have too often continued to build walls.*

*We have avoided them.*

*We have been cruel.*

*We have called names and used insulting language.*

*We have wished that they would just go away.*

*Truly Lord, there is little health in us.*
We have wronged these children of yours; they are our brothers and sisters.

And we repent of our sins.

We are sorry for what we have done and for what we have left undone.

Lord, forgive us our sins through the blood of Jesus.

Dear Heavenly Father, we love you.

We love you for keeping your promises.

And we want to be like you.

We want to keep our promises.

Help us, Father, to do so.

Help us to love our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

Help us love with words and deeds.

Strengthen our resolve to listen to their stories

to share their pain.

to learn from others

to study the scriptures together

to walk together on life’s journey.

Lord, we have questions.

We do not know everything.

Give us the grace not to act otherwise.

Give us the humility to attend to what we do know.

To attend with faithfulness and obedience to your word.

We do know that we need your forgiveness for the past.

And your grace for the future.
As we continually struggle to be the church.

Faithful to your word.

Faithful to each other.

In Christ, Amen.

3. The Big Picture: The Purpose of Sex and Marriage:

God created us in his image, male and female, with personhood and sexual passions so that when he comes to us in this world there would be these powerful words and images to describe the promises and the pleasures of our covenant relationship with him through Christ.

God made us in his image to be gendered (male and female) and powerfully sexual so that he would be more deeply knowable. We were given the power to know each other sexually in such a way that the Bible calls the sexual union between a husband and wife ‘one flesh’ so that we might have some hint of what it will be like to know Christ supremely.

Therefore, all misuses of our sexuality (adultery, fornication, illicit fantasies, pornography, same-sex intercourse, incest, and so on) distort the true knowledge of God. God means for human sexual life to be a pointer and foretaste of our relationship with him.

The Christian view of sex is that it is a bonding act that is meant to give all of you to just one person for a life-time. Thus it means “I hold nothing back, I will not share this part of me with anyone else, I am not going to compare myself and our intimacy with anyone else because I belong only to you.” It also is a way for us to ‘mimic’ God’s husband love toward us. We are his bride. He does not wish for us to share our worship with any other ‘god’ and thus he speaks of himself as being ‘jealous’ toward us. The marriage act of intercourse is meant to remind us and get us to think of God’s delight in his bride. Thus reserving sexual intercourse between a man and a woman for life is not just a ‘rule’ for Christians; it is part of the way the universe works, the way of God with his own ‘bride’ the church.

It is not that God has sex with his people, after all God is spirit. But sexual intercourse is meant to be a pointer or sign toward who God is and what is he like and how he relates to his own bride.
Jesus speaks about marriage in Matthew 19 and his words come from a backdrop that assumes and celebrates the picture of marriage as a major metaphor of Scripture—a metaphor that leads to Christ.

Marriage doesn’t just make an appearance here and there in Scripture and Christian theology. Marriage is a central portrait of God’s love which helps to make sense of the gospel. The Scriptures begin with the creation of human beings as ‘male and female’ as creatures made in the image of God and the Bible also teaches that because they were created male and female “a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” Also, the Bible speaks of marriage as an embodied and two-gendered mystery that manifests the gospel of Christ (Eph. 5:31-32). Finally, at the close of history, we will celebrate the ‘marriage feast of the lamb’ when the church as bride will be united with her husband as Bridegroom.

In summary, in scripture, marriage often portrays our relationship to God as a covenanted relationship specifically using ‘bridegroom’ and ‘bride’ language and the roles are not interchangeable. Rather, marriage is a covenanted, gendered relationship which God planned ‘from the beginning’ between male and female and is a major metaphor in scripture to illumine our relationship as Christ and the church. The setting forth of that metaphor as male and female does not seem to be incidental in the biblical portrait of marriage.

4. Does Jesus speak about same-sex marriage?

I even hesitate to state the concern this way, as if the parts of the Bible that quote Jesus are somehow more authoritative than the rest of the Bible. In recent years people have attempted to set Jesus against Paul as if we are ‘red-letter’ Christians who hold the quotations from Jesus to be a sort of ‘trump card’ in any debate about what scripture teaches. But that is NOT our view of scripture because scripture teaches us that ‘all scripture is God-breathed’ (2 Timothy 3:15) and thus is authoritative in our lives and conduct.

However, some state that Jesus never mentions homosexuality or same-sex marriage; therefore, he must be for it. But this is an argument from silence and presents a set of troubling conclusions. Specifically, that whatever Jesus didn’t explicitly address, he must endorse.

If we accept this logic, Jesus may also support human trafficking or incest because he never spoke out against it. Failing to withstand thoughtful scrutiny, we know such an argument does not hold up and may even be harmful.

Consider the marriage passage in Matthew 19. In verses 4-6, Jesus speaks to the content, duration, and purpose of marriage. In this episode, Jesus responds to a question about divorce by asking “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and
hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no one separate.”

In this one passage, Jesus affirms the creation account of marriage. By stating that it is man and woman who enter a marriage, Jesus affirms that marriage is intentionally designed by God to be between one man and one woman for life.

By going back to the beginning of God’s creation and stating that marriage is between one man and one woman, not one man and two women, or between two men or between two women, Jesus affirms the exclusivity and complementarity of marriage where one man and one woman are to be marital partners and to be sexually bound and exclusive to one another.

When Jesus insists that marriage is for life, he affirms the duration of marriage, which is permanent unless it is destroyed by ‘sexual immorality’ (Greek: porneia)—more on that below) or by spousal desertion (I Cor. 7).

Also, by echoing the “one flesh” union of Genesis 2 Jesus is putting the purpose of marriage on full display: That men and women would unite comprehensively together in marriage through a physical, spiritual, and emotional bond that is oriented to and fulfilled by the creation and rearing of children.

Complementarity; exclusivity; permanency; orientation towards children—these are the contours of marriage that see a man and woman come together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their union produces. Each feature comes from Jesus himself and confirms that if marriage is to be based on principle, it must conform to the demands of sound logic. If you remove the complementarity of the sexes in marriage, the entire structure that gives marriage its shape collapses with it. If marriage is no longer based on the complementarity of the sexes, what principle limits marriage to two? Why not three?

Furthermore, when you ask the question about whether Jesus addressed homosexuality, we need to understand the context of Jesus’ words about marriage in Matthew 19. When he says, ”I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery,” his use of the term ‘sexual immorality’ (Greek porneia) had a specific meaning. Nearly every Greek lexicon (dictionary) includes ‘sexual immorality’ as at least as an aspect of the meaning of porneia. We get our English word “pornography” from this root word. According to Greek scholars for centuries this word has a broad range of meanings and would include: adultery, incest, rape, homosexuality, sex with animals (bestiality) and pre-marital sex.¹ If porneia does include homosexuality as nearly every

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¹ For a complete list of what many biblical scholars believe Jesus was referring to, see Leviticus 18.
major Greek reference guide indicates, then there is a clear response to those who claim that Christ is silent on this matter.

We always need to be on the lookout that we don’t twist scripture and that we don’t fall for twisted teaching. And we all have our biases and prejudices. The danger of twisting scripture to fit ourselves and then to justify our behaviors is a lurking danger no matter what side you take. We can do this by singling out homosexuality as a special sin worthy of extra condemnation and then try to justify scripturally our ungracious behavior toward same-sex attracted brothers and sisters in Christ and we can also, or, on the other hand, begin to agree with theories of scripture interpretation for the relevant texts about homosexuality that are far too influenced by our current age of sexual freedom than they are by a careful study of the Bible. Being a grace-and-truth community of Jesus followers means that we preach and teach a holistic gospel from the whole of scripture which lays out the horror of sin (we are much worse off than we could know) without minimizing the power of the cross (and we are far more tenderly loved than we could hope) so that the grace and mercy of our necessary rescue wakes us up to redeem us from ourselves and awaken us to the deep satisfaction and joy that is found in our Rescuer.

5. **Is This like Women in Office?**

This question comes up often like this: “Since large parts of the church for years thought that it was against God’s will to have women in the office of Pastor, Elder and deacon and we changed our mind on that, why not this as well?”

Good question. And here is a short answer: The Bible itself has women in leadership in both the Old and New Testament (Deborah-Judges 4, Huldah-2 Kings 22, Junias-Romans 16, Priscilla-Romans 16, Pheobe-Romans 16) and, on the other hand, there are also texts in scripture which seem to limit the role and calling of women (2 Timothy 2). In other words, in scripture you can point to numerous examples of women in significant leadership roles. However, there are simply no scriptural examples of same-sex relationships which are counter examples to the strand of teaching which proscribes same-sex intercourse. Likewise, there are texts which speak of the new age as characterized by ‘neither Jew nor Greek, male and female’ but no text which then goes on to speak of ‘neither hetero-sexual nor homosexual’ in the new age.

Further, the restrictions placed on those who are homosexual are restrictions on what they do (sexual intercourse with same sex) which the church has historically viewed as sexual immorality. In contrast, the restrictions that were placed on women were placed on them because of who they are-women. Same-sex attracted persons are welcome to all leadership positions in the church. What is not allowed are sexual practices outside of a male-female marriage relationship.
And, in the argument to open all the offices to women, the overall themes of scripture with regard to women are often stated this way: God’s first word in Genesis assigns to both men and women, before the fall, the divine blessing to ‘be fruitful, increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over it…..” (Genesis 1:27-28).

God’s middle word: Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And the final word: In the book of Revelation there are ‘thrones for those who have been beheaded’ and it makes no distinction between male and female in terms of those who are called to rule in the new age.

In other words, there is a strand of teaching in the Bible that clearly seems to give to women the calling of prophecy, leadership and ruling. To be sure, there are texts which seem to pull in the direction of women being prevented from leadership positions.

However, when it comes to homosexuality, every text which mentions same-sex sexual relationships condemns such relationships. The arguments for reading the Bible as giving us room for same sex marriage are mostly arguments from silence (the Bible does not address modern, same-sex committed sexual relationships). Thus my conclusion is that the biblical argument for same-sex marriage is on much different ground than for women in leadership.

6. Advice to the church:

First, we must repent of our fears, our arrogance and our special treatment we have given this particular sin of same-sex sex. We must repent of our jokes and stories and prejudice. Our flippant talk about ‘queers’ and ‘homos’ has grieved the Holy Spirit. We have got to clean up our act when it comes to how we have treated our same-sex attracted brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul is speaking to us when he says in Romans 2:1-2 “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you do the same things.” What Paul means here is that those who think of themselves as better than others are guilty of sexual sin themselves though it may be heterosexual sin. This applies to every heterosexual who reacts in disgust at a broadcast of a gay rights demonstration or gay pride parade and then clicks to a channel to stare uncritically at adultery in drama or sex to sell soap. Are these sins more acceptable because they are sins of the majority? For surely the sins of the same-sex attracted are, in terms of quantity, specks in the eye next to the log of heterosexual sin. Neither is excusable but what seems to draw the most negative attention from Jesus is for us to look for the speck in another’s eye without noticing the log in our own. The people I know who are same-sex attracted are very much like me. They want love, respect, companionship, significance,
forgiveness and a sense that they are part of this grace-formed family of God. We are a community of faith that is called to specialize in grace for everyone.

Second, we must speak the truth of God’s word about same-sex intercourse. It may seem out of step with our culture and you may be accused of being un-loving if you uphold the biblical truth of male-female marriage and warn against same-sex sex. But it is not un-loving to make this warning if same-sex intercourse is against God’s plan for human flourishing. We must tell the truth about sex, all sex that is outside of a covenanted marriage relationship between a man and a woman is considered by the Bible to be ‘sexual immorality.’ We must not be intimidated by voices which increasingly define this position as unloving simply because we might view same-sex sexual relationships as immoral, regardless of the acceptance and care we may express to same-sex attracted persons. Compassion in no way entails an acceptance of same-sex sex any more than it entails affirming any other sin or sinner while accepting them as part of our church family.

Third, in order to speak knowledgably on this subject, do some Bible study; read some books. The two studies that I would recommend and that uphold the historical view articulated clearly and with biblical accuracy are the Vineyard Church statement ² and a book by Pastor Kevin DeYoung entitled “What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?”³

Fourth, let’s practice what the Bible calls ‘brotherly affection.’ Most people are starved for affection and human touch. In fact, a good deal of the superficial and heart-breaking sexuality in our culture may well be the desperate attempt to find some human affection in a cold world. We all need hugs. We all need touch. We all need people around us who show-and-tell that love. That is likely to be doubly true for those who are same-sex attracted. Let’s build a community of faith which is pure and holy and also unashamedly affectionate.

Fifth, we need to show the same balanced respect that the New Testament exhibits toward both the married and the single. If we are going to call same-sex attracted persons among us to be celibate (if God does not afford them healing to become opposite-sex oriented) then we need to build a biblically accurate community of believers who will uphold and honor the life of singleness. Jesus was fully human, in fact he was the most fully human being who ever

² http://vineyardusa.org/site/files/PositionPaper-VineyardUSA-Pastoring_LGBT_Persons.pdf Note: this paper lays out both the ‘affirming’ and ‘non-affirming’ position and does so with pastoral sensitivity and good biblical scholarship.
³ http://www.amazon.com/Bible-Really-Teach-about-Homosexuality/dp/1433549379 This book is relatively short (147 pages) and does a good job laying out the historical position of marriage as between one man and one woman for life. DeYoung also knows the arguments for the other side and answers them in his writing.
lived and he was single all his life. This will mean a paradigm shift for us. For example, we recently quit calling our gathering on Wednesday night “Family Night Out” because it can be perceived as a subtle way for us to exclude our singles. It means we will not assume that if you are single you are lonely and you are in need of being set up. We also deny that in order to be truly a fulfilled human being you need to engage in genital sex and that if you are not able to have sex it must be someone’s fault. We will re-learn how to be the loving family of God where our primary ‘family’ is the church family, not our nuclear families.

7. Advice to those who are same-sex attracted:

First, I do not believe that you can follow Jesus and just give in to your same-sex attractions. I believe that the Bible is consistently clear that sexual relations outside of a husband-and-wife marriage is outside of God’s will for us. You are called to a costly obedience.

Second, do not feel guilty about your same-sex feelings or nature. Attraction in itself is not sin and temptation is common to all of us. Jesus himself was tempted in every way as we are and yet he did not sin. Come to Jesus for freedom from guilt, for grace for the burden you are carrying.

Third, you must consider abstinence. We are all called to costly obedience. In the area of sexual holiness, I know of heterosexual couples who, for reasons of brokenness in their personal lives, lie side by side each night with one of the pair ready for sexual relations and the other emotionally or physically unable. They are feeling stuck in a sexless marriage. Temptations to try to “fix” this or get out of it are strong. Many of them are staying faithful to their marriage vows in the midst of this untold suffering. And, there are many single, heterosexuals in this church. They all struggle with being faithful to God’s commands for sexual purity. They live in a culture that is saturated with heterosexual images and temptations. God calls them to be faithful. Furthermore, all married couples must discipline their hearts and minds to remain faithful to their spouse in the midst of this culture which is corrosive of faithful commitments. Although your call to obedience is difficult and unique, we are in this together.

So, if you are same-sex attracted, then your accommodation may well be abstinence. Jesus and Paul both showed us how to live as single persons with dignity and grace. Lewis Smedes is helpful here. He says, “Two articles in the creed of personal fulfillment that are crucially
false are: a) every person has an undeniable right to private fulfillment, and if she doesn’t get it someone must be at fault, and b) sexual fulfillment is the key to human fulfillment.”

He goes on to say, “I believe that sex is one of God’s better inventions; I also believe that more people than we suppose find deep fulfillment without a voluptuous sex life. And I believe too that while personal fulfillment is a most human longing, it escapes precisely those who make it their ultimate concern.”

I would also urge you to engage the growing on-line community which supports and encourages those who affirm the belief that you ought to practice abstinence in order to honor God’s call on your life. This on-line community includes as one of its founders Wesley Hill who writes a beautiful autobiographical account of his own ‘coming-out’ while being raised in an evangelical Christian home. I highly recommend his two books.

Fifth, please do not give up on the church. We are being challenged by the changes in society to respond with love and compassion to same-sex attracted persons. We need to find a way to speak the truth in love with each other. We cannot do that effectively if only heterosexual Christians are doing all the talking. If you can stay and hang in there, then I cannot simply turn this into a debate about theories of right and wrong when I must likewise love my brother or sister who is gay. I ask you to continue to take your disappointment, your bitterness and your loneliness to Jesus and seek healing by him. I also urge that you help teach us how to form the loving and holy community that Jesus calls us to form. And then try to stay with us. We need you. You need us.

8. Closing Letter:

I will close with a letter addressed to a young women I will call “Leisha.” I don’t know any Leisha. However, the following letter could be written to a number of people I have known over the years as a pastor. “Leisha” is a sort of composite of several people I have met who are Christians, both men and women, with same-sex desires. The feelings in this letter are quite real. I write to her as if we are in worship together, as if she has just heard me preach regarding sexual holiness and we are about to invite people to the Lord’s Table.

Dear Leisha,


4 Lewis Smedes “Sex For Christians”
5 http://spiritualfriendship.org/
6 “Washed and Waiting” and “Spiritual Friendship”
I am writing this letter to you at the close of this sermon because I have seen the suffering in your beautiful eyes and because I can guess at the courage it takes for you to even attend church where you sometimes feel out of place and completely alone. I am also writing this letter to you because in just a few moments we are going to share a most powerful and holy meal, a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. We are going to come to the table of the Lord—all of us broken, every one of us riddled with lust, all carrying burdensome sexual secrets. Broken people, receiving from broken people the broken body and poured out blood of a wounded Healer, our Lord—that we might receive healing.

Leisha, I preached this sermon primarily to encourage deeper and better thought on the part of people on both sides of this moral debate. But a person like you, whose heart is entwined and sometimes choked with this concern, needs much more than arguments and sermons. You need to know that people care about you, that I would like to stand with you today with my arm draped affectionately around you as a symbol of our union in Christ.

Leisha, know that you are loved and supported in prayer, whatever you do sexually and whatever you desire to do. I can empathize at least a bit. The greatest common ground for us is the deeper nature of our pain. I don’t need a therapist to tell me that all the beautiful women in the world—even my lovely wife—can’t provide for my deepest need. Neither do I need a therapist to tell me what I really want or how I can to want it or how it is deeper than sexual fulfillment. I know all that. Leisha, pain can be a great equalizer, especially if we apply a little imagination and trust in order to bring out what we share rather than what may divide us.

There is a great example of this in one of Paul’s letters. The Christians in Corinth got involved in some heresy and snubbed him, but later they responded to the emissary he sent from the province of Asia and they turned back to him as their pastor. Now rather than lecturing, rather than patronizing, Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by likening their pain (shame over rejecting him unfairly) to his pain (longing for their good). I quote him at length because there is much here that strikes me as relevant:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (II Cor. 1:3-7)
Leisha, you know what I want for you, the healing power of the gospel. What you may not know is that along with a message of conviction and power and hope, I also offer you need. Leisha, it is we, not you alone, who need God’s forgiveness and help to transform our sexuality. Let’s help each other. Let’s kneel together before a forgiving Jesus. Let’s limp up to the table of our Lord together. Let’s run this grace race as a team. Let’s cross the finish line together.

Grace in abundance to you Leisha.

Pastor David Beelen

Note: I welcome communication and dialogue on this letter. You can reach me at: dbeelen@madisonsquarechurch.org