

4 Steps to Protect Your Child's Faith in a Culture That Promotes the Gay Lifestyle

*With the changing landscape of how our world defines healthy sexuality, parents need to be ready to have some important discussions to help their kids navigate some key issues. Today we present a guest post from Tom Gilson, author of *Critical Conversations: A Christian Parents' Guide to Discussing Homosexuality With Teens*. You may not perfectly agree with everything he says, but he gives Christian families a great start towards framing the talks that we need to be having at home.*

"Hey Mom and Dad—is it true what they say about Christians hating gays?"

Are your kids asking that question? They sure are! Are you ready to answer it? You need to be—and you can be.

They may not be asking about gays and Christianity out loud, but there's no doubt they're wondering about it. How could they help it? Every day, through film, TV, social media and even in the classroom, they're bombarded with the message that gay is great, and that there's something morally wrong with Christianity for disagreeing.

No church and no family is exempt. Terms like "hate" and "tolerance" have been turned upside-down, so no matter how loving and grace-filled your church may be—or even your home—in the back of their minds young people are asking, "But isn't this 'hate' anyway? Why can't we get along with what LGBTQ people want?"

It's almost certain that your own children are asking that question. They're listening to all the conversations around them, too. And make no mistake: If young people think those hateful things are true about Christianity, they're also wondering how they could possibly decide to follow Jesus Christ.

The numbers on this aren't encouraging. The great majority of young people support homosexuality and gay marriage. The younger the person, the more likely he or she is to think traditional Christian teaching is wrong. Seventy percent of millennials (born in 1981 or later) agree with gay marriage, compared to 56 percent of Gen-Xers (born 1965 to 1980) and 46 percent of Baby Boomers. Evangelicals of all ages are less likely to take that position, but those numbers aren't strong enough to overcome the youth effect. Somewhere between 50 and 80 percent of young people raised in good churches—which also means good church families—leave the faith once they leave home. Pro-gay messaging is becoming one of the main reasons. Your kids are definitely vulnerable. They're bound to be confused.

So you've got to get into the conversation with them, or they just might come to all the wrong conclusions about the faith, for all the wrong reasons. They might reject it in the end.

Mom and Dad, this is your job. Your church may be carrying the ball on this, too, but you're responsible regardless. Here are four steps toward protecting your kids' faith in a day of gay confusion.

1. Know what the Bible says.

Too many Christians know that the Bible is against homosexual practices and gay marriage, without knowing *what* it actually says or *where* it says it. Key passages on homosexuality are Lev. 18:22, Lev. 20:13, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Tim. 1:9-10, and especially Rom. 1:26-32.

Key passages on marriage are harder to name—there are so many of them! But you could start with Jesus’ teaching in Matt. 19:1-10, and also 1 Cor. 7:1-16, Heb. 13:4, and of course Eph. 5:21-33.

2. Be able to explain why the Bible’s teaching is *good*.

It isn’t enough these days to say, “The Bible says ... ” Many young people are so indoctrinated by the culture, their unspoken response to that is likely to be, *then there must be something wrong with the Bible!* They’re not just questioning whether Bible is *true*, they’re doubting that it’s *good*.

So we need to be able to explain how marriage as God created it is *really* good for *real* people in *real* relationships—which it is! We need to be able to explain any other form of “marriage” leads to bad results in the end. The same goes for general issues of sexual immorality.

Did you know, for example, that there is tons of research showing that being married as husband and wife is really good for kids? That it’s the best way to prevent poverty? That it leads to longer lives and better emotional health? And more!

There’s much more that could be said. The point is, we need to be able to explain not just *what the Bible says*, but *why it’s good it says it*.

3. Make your conversations *natural*.

These conversations don’t have to feel like “the talk.” They doesn’t need to be awkward. Once you’re prepared with the background information mentioned above, you can ease into the topic with surprising ease. You might be in the car driving to soccer practice, for example, when you casually ask your child, “What do your friends think about gay marriage?” Kids

will usually appreciate your asking a serious question like that, and they'll answer honestly, as long as you let them know it's safe to be open with you.

On the way home from practice (or another day), you could raise the stakes by asking, "So I've heard what your friends think about this. How about you?" Again you'll need them to know it's safe to answer honestly. The more you know about the issue the easier it will be for you to respond rather than react, and keep the conversation open.

Those questions are for teenage kids; with younger children you'll need to be more indirect: "What do think: Is the difference between a man and a woman important if they're married?" "What do your teachers (or friends) say about that?" ... and so on.

4. Think through ways to *disarm the charges*.

Your child has been primed with several specific charges against Christianity: "You're haters!" "You're on the wrong side of history." Kids need to know how easily these charges can be disarmed. It's simple to show, for example, that "hate" is constantly misused and mis-defined by gay activists. It's simple, that is, with a few minutes' thought and conversation. Kids aren't likely to figure it out on their own—they need your help.

These are crucial conversations. Yes, they'll require some homework on your part, but there's no way around it: if you care about your kids' spiritual futures, you need to get yourself up to speed.

I've done a lot of that homework for you in my book *Critical Conversations: A Christian Parents' Guide to Discussing Homosexuality With Teens*. Actually it's helpful for guiding

kids *at any age* – and you can read it in just an evening. With it you really can get equipped for these critical conversations.

Whatever you do, you've got to get the conversations rolling. If not, someone else surely will, with a message very unfriendly to their Christian faith. There's a lot of misinformation out there, and a lot of confusion among kids in the church. Your children need you to connect with them through these very critical conversations, so you can guide them through to clear, faith-affirming, positive answers.

*Adapted from , a ministry founded by **Barrett and Jenifer Johnson**. After serving in the local church for 25 years, Barrett and Jenifer launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. Barrett served for 15 years in youth ministry before serving for eight years as the Family Minister at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the South. He has degrees from Texas A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, but he and Jenifer have received their best education through the no-holds-barred nature of everyday family life.*