

God, How Should Christians Relate To Gay People?

Rich Nathan

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God, I Have a Question Series

Luke 15.1-10

There are very few issues in society about which public opinion has shifted more quickly than Americans' attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Just consider the following facts. Up until the year 2008 there was just one state in America, Massachusetts, which had legalized gay marriage which they did by court decision. Up until 2010 there were just two states that had legalized gay marriage, Massachusetts and Connecticut which also did it by court decision. From two states in 2010 there are now 37 states that have legalized gay marriage, 26 by court decision, 8 by state legislatures and 3 by popular vote.

Just 11 years ago opposition to gay marriage was so strong that it was a wedge issue in the Presidential election and was used by President Bush for his reelection campaign. A case out of Ohio was heard by the US Supreme Court and almost all legal experts believe that before this Supreme Court term is over the Court will find that our Constitution prohibits states from denying same-sex couples the right to marry. Even Roman Catholic Ireland just voted yesterday in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage.

Popular opinion has shifted tremendously in the last 10 years regarding the legitimacy of same-sex marriage. And now a majority of Americans favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry. The generational differences are really stark – 70% of millennials, those who are between 18-35 years old support gay marriage compared to just 37% of those who are over the age of 70.

Much of the way that we feel about different experiences in our lives is the result of a mental picture that we have in our heads that help us to interpret our experience. To put it more philosophically, there are no bare facts. All facts are interpreted within a conceptual framework.

Let me explain. Someone yells, "Hey, it's raining outside." How you feel about this announcement of rain depends upon a much larger conceptual framework, a much larger set of facts. For example, if you live in California where they've been experiencing an extreme drought, or you live in Sub-Saharan African where there has been an extreme drought, the announcement of rain is greeted by a celebration. Finally, God has heard our prayers and has sent rain. This is good news!

On the other hand, if you are planning a wedding outside, or a family picnic outside, the announcement of rain is experienced as bad news. Oh no...this is going to ruin our plans.

So concerning the speed of change around the acceptance of things like same-sex marriage, the first picture that comes into my mind is the picture of changing street signs.

The 1st picture: Changing street signs

Imagine if you lived in the Columbus community for 30-40 years and you know your way around Columbus really well. Suddenly there is a decision by the Columbus City Council to change the names of the streets. High Street is renamed Broad Street. Broad Street is renamed High Street. All of the street signs are different. How would you feel as you drove around the city? You might feel disoriented or lost. You would feel like you don't know how to navigate the city anymore. You might get angry and frustrated. "I knew how to drive on the streets before, but I don't know how to drive on these renamed streets."

That's the situation that many of us find ourselves in with the speed of cultural change. "I knew my way around before, but I don't know how to navigate this new cultural landscape."

I've been doing a series following Easter titled "God, I Have A Question." I've been trying to tackle some of the really tough cultural questions that all of us have, but most churches avoid talking about. Last week I did a message titled "God, What Do You Think of Divorce?" We had a message titled "God, How Do Christians Relate to Muslims?" I did a message on whether a Christian my go to war. In two weeks my message will ask the question whether God still works miracles today. Today, my message is simply titled "God, How Should Christians Relate to Gay People?" Let's pray.

Luke 15:1–10 (NIV)

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.
2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: **4** "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? **5** And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders **6** and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' **7** I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. **8** "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? **9** And

when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

I need to state up front that the Vineyard is a church-planting movement that’s founded on a very high view of scripture as a global family of 2500 churches that are located in about 85 different countries around the world. Our global church family has decided that there is tremendous local church freedom regarding how individual Vineyard churches relate to gay people in their communities. But our understanding of scripture is that a local Vineyard church may not perform a marriage between two people of the same-sex, and we may not ordain someone to pastoral ministry, who is having sex outside of heterosexual marriage. That is the position of our global church family, and that is the position of Vineyard Columbus.

If you want to read more about how we’ve understood the scriptures regarding same-sex relationships and why we arrived at the position we did, you can pick up my book that’s titled Both-And. There is a chapter in the book on this subject.

Cover Photo of Both-And by Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim

There is another great book by Wesley Hill, who is a New Testament scholar and also a gay Christian. Wesley Hill’s book is titled Washed and Waiting. Wes Hill works through various scriptures in a way that is consistent with the way Vineyard and many other churches hold.

Cover Photo of Washed and Waiting by Wesley Hill

To use a baseball analogy, the Vineyard has two clear foul line regarding our corporate life together. One foul line concerns marriage and the other foul line concerns licensing and ordination of pastors. But you hardly understand baseball, if you have only had communicated to you that there are two foul lines. There are lots of other questions a person would have like, “How do you play the game within those foul lines? Where do we position our players? What’s the goal of the game?”

In the same way, you don’t understand how Christians should relate to gay people by offering a couple of rules. If gay couples come to the church, or to a small group, will they be welcomed or not? What if your child, or your brother or sister, or friend comes out as gay? How should you relate to them? Knowing that someone won’t be ordained as a pastor in the church hardly answers the multitude of questions we have.

Let me be honest and say that we at the Vineyard haven’t figured everything out. Things are moving as quickly for our leaders as they are for our members. In every case,

we want to be faithful to God and God’s Word and we want to love people as best we can. We’re committed to figuring out how to do that.

Well, let’s look at the text together.

Luke 15:1–2 (NIV)

**15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.
2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

It is really important that when we read the Bible that we don’t turn groups of people into cartoon-like figures – one side wearing black hats; the other side wearing white hats. The Pharisees were utterly sincere people, who were really devoted to God and to the practice of God’s law found in the Torah. They had learned as a result of the Babylonian exile that God was really serious about having his people obey his law. And so they set out to sincerely obey God’s law and to separate themselves (that’s what the word Pharisee literally means – it means the separated ones) from everything that was inconsistent with strict obedience to God’s law and everyone who did not obey God’s law.

And it is really important that we not turn the tax collectors and sinners, who are mentioned in v. 1 into cartoon figures. The tax collectors were not these loveable figures like your son, who is 25 years old and walks on the wild side with a number of weird tattoos and body piercings, but who has a “heart of gold.” The reason why you read about tax collectors so often in the gospels as a group that was universally hated was because the way a person became a tax collector was by purchasing the office from the Roman government.

So, a wealthy person would give Rome a certain amount of money and purchase the office of tax collector. Rome was happy because it got an advance on its money; and the wealthy person would turn around and recoup the money he paid by gouging the poor. The tax collector worked on a commission basis. What he would do would be to take as much as he could from the people, keep much of the money for himself, and give the rest to Rome.

I think of all the shady businessmen who are running these check-cashing companies offering “E-Z” credit for the poor. Shady businessmen selling cheap furniture to the poor and then gouging people with exorbitant interest rates. Or the folks who repossess the poor person’s furniture and then reselling it over and over again.

So the tax collectors were hated because they put the squeeze on folks, especially the poor. And they were hated because they were complicit with an oppressive government.

The sinners weren't necessarily bad people. They were the common people, who didn't even try to follow the rules established by the Pharisees. They didn't make a sincere effort to really try like the Pharisees did, to protect God's law, the Torah.

So, what's going on in this story? The tax collectors and the sinners used to be the despised people, the people who were excluded, and now these despised and excluded people are being welcomed by Jesus, who is eating with them and teaching others to eat with them. Jesus, in another place says, that the tax collectors and sinners will get into the Kingdom of God ahead of the Pharisees. The power has shifted away from the religious, who used to be in charge and the power is now vested in the tax collectors and sinners, who used to be despised.

Why are many Christians struggling with the changes we are experiencing in our society? Let me offer you a second picture.

The 2nd picture: We used to be the home team, but now we're the away team

You know, it is one thing for the Buckeyes to play in the Ohio Stadium in front of 105,000 cheering fans; it is one thing to go to the Horseshoe wearing all your Buckeye gear and your Buckeye necklace with your huge sign saying, "Beat Michigan!" But it is quite another thing for the Buckeyes to play an away game – in the Big House at Michigan. If you decide to wear all your Buckeye gear and you are carrying your big "Beat Michigan" sign to Michigan stadium, someone might dump a cup of beer on your head.

Many of us as Christians find ourselves in a cultural situation where we're constantly playing an away game. We're not doing life in front of a friendly crowd any longer. The cultural supports that we used to depend on to cheer us on are gone. But there is not only an absence of cultural support, sometimes there is hostility. And we wonder why we occasionally get a cup of beer dumped on our heads. It is because we are not playing in front of a home crowd any more.

Many in the Christian community feel harassed. We see some of that pressure coming against Christian small business owners like wedding photographers or Christian florists, or Christian bakers who are facing civil rights violations for not being willing to offer their services for a same-sex wedding. Many of these Christians say, "I have no problem offering my services to a gay person to do their birthday party, or their child's bar mitzvah, or to cater their retirement party, I just don't want to do their wedding." But they are being portrayed as bigots and haters.

We are seeing some of the same pressure in the withdrawal of contracts from Roman Catholic adoption agencies. So Catholic Charities of Boston, Washington DC, Chicago and New York have been, after a century of providing adoption services and foster care, forced to shut down their programs because they wouldn't place children in the homes

of same-sex couples. Christian organizations have been de-recognized at various colleges because they require their leaders to agree to a moral code that there would be no sex outside of heterosexual marriage.

So these conflicts are growing in our society. How should Christians respond to this particular cultural moment where we often find ourselves playing the game of life as the away team?

I did a series a few years ago from the New Testament book 1 Peter. It was titled “Living as Resident Aliens.” If you find yourself under pressure, you may want to go back and reread 1 Peter. You might even want to listen to the messages that are available at

www.vineyardcolumbus.org

But this is not the first time in history that Christians felt under pressure from the larger society. The whole New Testament was written by Christians who were living continually as the away team where the larger society tried to bring Christians around through shaming, through name calling, through economic pressures, and through boycotts. Peter gives at least 10 specific strategies to help Christians, who feel under pressures. One of the lessons that Peter gives is to remember who you are. In 1 Peter 2:9-10 we read this:

1 Peter 2:9–10 (NIV)

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

One of the pastoral strategies Peter gives when you are playing an away game all the time, when you are under pressure from the larger society, from your office, from your school, from your family is remembering who you are. Remind yourself that you are not a nobody. You are not some ignorant believer in some ancient ridiculous faith. You are part of God’s chosen people. You are part of a royal priesthood, a holy nation. You are part of a people who belong to God. You are God’s children. You are his beloved.

In any and every situation where you are under pressure, remember who you are. Don’t let other folks define you. Allow God to define who you are.

Let me shift gears for a moment. The fact is that most of the gay people I know are not coming to Vineyard, or indeed to any church, with some big political agenda. It is not that that couldn’t happen, but it mostly doesn’t happen. Gay people are coming to the Vineyard for the same reason that heterosexuals come to the Vineyard – to worship God, to listen to the Bible being taught intelligently, I hope, to take communion, and to

receive prayer. In fact, it is amazing to me, given the perceived hostility that a gay person believes they will encounter in a Christian church that any gay person would show up. Most gay people I know don't have this major gay rights agenda as they approach the church trying to pressure Christians to do anything.

Let me show you a video. Julie Rodgers works at Wheaton College, one of America's premier evangelical institutions. She is their Outreach Coordinator in the Chaplain's Office to gay students at their campus. Listen to Julie's story.

VIDEO – Julie Rodgers, Outreach Coordinator, Wheaton College

More and more celibate gay Christians, like Julie, are offering a third way through the tug of war between the two sides in the culture war. There is a third picture.

The 3rd picture: A third way in the culture wars: celibate gay Christians

These folks offering a third way are saying, "Hey, we're gay. We didn't choose our attractions. In fact, we prayed to God hundreds of times for these attractions to go away." Some like Julie went to therapy for years. But these people are saying, "God, has not changed who we're attracted to. We are Christians. We are as Christian as you are. We trusted in Christ to save us. We believe that he died as our substitute on the cross and that his blood was shed for us. We believe that Christ rose from the dead and is alive today. And we've received the Holy Spirit into our hearts. And we are celibate. We gay Christians are convinced by scripture that sexual activity belongs within a marriage between a man and a woman. So we're not sexually active."

There is this growing movement friends of gay Christians who are walking out this third way path. They are forming communities in local churches to support each other. If you want to find out more about these folks – you may be gay and you wonder how do you live this life of being gay and being a Christian – let me put a few names on the screen and you can google them and read their stuff. Some of these folks will actually interact with you by email. There is a Catholic woman named

Eve Tushnet

...who was raised as a secular Jew in Washington. As a teenager she came out as gay and as a sophomore at Yale, she found Christ in a Catholic Church. She is a prolific writer and blogs on a website called

www.spiritualfriendship.org

Of course, there is Julie Rodgers.

Julie Rodgers

She is the first staffer charged with serving the gay and lesbian community in the Chaplain's Office at Wheaton College.

There is Wesley Hill.

Wesley Hill

...who got his doctorate in New Testament at the University of Durham. He is the Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Pennsylvania.

One more gay Christian celibate man, who is one of my favorite spiritual writers and a Catholic priest,

Henri Nouwen

...wrote one of the best books ever on the Prodigal Son.

Cover Photo – Return of the Prodigal by Henri Nouwen

Here is how amazing our God is. I believe that our God is using gay celibate Christians to bear witness to the larger church concerning how to live a sexually abstinent life in a radically sexualized culture. See, the issue of sexual abstinence is a massive issue in the church today and has been neglected by virtually every church in America and in the Western world.

Let me speak an affectionate word to you, as your pastor. Listen, 45% of the people who attend Vineyard Columbus every week are single. The vast, vast majority of you are heterosexual. The issue of living an abstinent life is massive. So somehow, we've got to recover this message of abstinence as single people in the Vineyard, if we want to live faithfully to the Lord's commands to love him by obeying him. And I think that some of these gay celibate Christians are going to help us as they walk alongside of single straight people. How do we live this really hard road in our sexualized society?

Now, the biggest issue for gay people is not sex. The biggest issue for gays that I've spoken with is loneliness. The biggest fear facing many gay Christian men and women is not abstaining from sex. It is being alone. It is coming home every night to an empty apartment. It is the fact that no one worries that you are back home late. Or no one is calling when your plane is delayed in another city, or if your car is broken down on the highway. There is this great fear of being 60 or 70 years old, not having a spouse or kids, and not having anyone to support you in society in which all community has broken down.

So, how should Christians relate to gay people – whether they are Christian gays or non-Christian gays? Let me show you a slide from the author, Mark Yarhouse, who is a psychologist and therapist, who has worked in the area of sexuality for the last 25 years.

Mark Yarhouse Yes/No SLIDE

Here is the problem of someone who experiences same-sex attraction and wants to connect with the local church. Imagine a young person who is attracted to their own sex. They're trying to figure out who they are. Maybe they've been raised in a Christian family. They go to the gay community and the gay community says, "Yes. You are gay." The gay community offers community, "There's a welcome here, come hang with us." The gay community offers intimacy. It offers status. It has resources to answer this gay young person's questions.

And then that person turns to the church.

What does that person hear from the church? No to your identity. No to community. There is really no place for someone who is attracted to their own sex. No to intimacy. No to status. You're really dirty; your sin is different than our sins.

So, let me offer you a fourth picture of how Christians should relate to gay people.

The 4th picture: A meal together

Luke 15:2 (NIV)

2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

For those who feel that we should exclude gay people especially those who have committed sexual sins, can we have a show of hands for any of you here who have never sinned sexually?

Come on...let's be honest about what's breaking down the traditional family in America right now. It is not the 2-3% of the population who identifies as gay. What is breaking down the traditional family in America is the epidemic of divorce that I talked about last week. That's happening in every church in America. It is the fact that tens of millions of us don't do things in the proper order. We don't go to school, get a degree, get a job, meet someone, get married, and then have a child. We totally flip the order. We meet someone, we have a child, and then we may or may not stay with that person.

Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. If he was living today, he would eat with gay men and women, those who are celibate and those who are not celibate. Jesus didn't require that people clean up their lives before he ate with them. That's why the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and he eats

with them.” We need to understand that eating together was a serious matter in Jesus’ day. It remains so in the Middle East today. To invite someone to a meal was an honor. It was an offer to that person of relationship and trust. It is an offer of brotherhood and forgiveness.

Jesus’ meals with people were an expression of his mission. He came to include the least and the last and the lost into the community of the redeemed. He is opening the door of the Kingdom and he is inviting everyone in. It might be that Jesus was serving as the host in one of the homes of his followers. Typically, in Jesus’ day, there would be a round of compliments by the host there the host would complement the guest and tell them that he was honored by his guest’s presence. They, in turn, would respond by asking God’s blessing on the host and on his house and affirm that they have received honor by being in the host’s presence.

And so as a host, Jesus is actually involved in an amazing statement. He is saying to these people, who the religious people of his day, the Orthodox, condemned as the scum of the earth. He is saying to this motely group of prostitutes and tax collectors, “I receive honor by your presence in my home.” In Jesus’ ministry there is such an absence of speaking from a privileged place like those old churches where because of the acoustics in the building, the pulpit is 12’ above the people and the pastor is speaking down to them. God comes to us in the form of a man and comes to us at eye-level and eats with us.

So much of the issue of the way Christians ought to relate to gay people has to do with the tone we use in our conversations. When we are talking, or having a meal with a real human being who is gay, so much of what’s going to work or not work has to do with our tone. Are we welcoming? Are we warm? Are we humble? Are we gracious? Are we kind?

I think we have a great contemporary example of the way forward in our post-Christian world in Pope Francis. Pope Francis hasn’t changed the content of Roman Catholic teaching concerning sexuality or marriage, or ordination. But he has changed the tone. And what makes Pope Francis such a transformational leader is his incredible humility. His humble tone is not just found in what he says, but in what he does.

One of the first acts of Pope Francis’ papacy was to wash the feet of a young Muslim female prisoner. Then he spontaneously kissed the head of a severely disfigured man. He handles his own dry cleaning, for goodness sake.

So, just having a meal with someone, getting to know a gay man or woman, I find that my own prejudice breaks down when I get to know people. I listen to folks’ stories. Not every gay man has had a horrible relationship with their dad; not every straight guy had a great relationship with his dad. Not every lesbian was molested as a child. And many

teenagers, who experience strong same-sex attractions don't hate God. They hate the image they see when they look in the mirror every day.

When you get to know someone, you will find that this other person's life can't be reduced down to who they're attracted to. We hear ignorant prejudice from someone and you have a gay friend, you think what this person is saying about gays is not true of my friend, Brad, or my friend, Heather. They are so much more than who they are attracted to. This gay person loves novels. They love Italian cooking. They love dogs. They love the Buckeyes. They're smart and funny. We're not talking about an issue, we're talking about a person, a person that I've had lunch with on multiple occasions. A person I've invited into my home and we've had dinner together. This is my colleague at work. This is a student in my dorm. This is a teammate on my team. This is someone I care about. They can't be reduced to who they are attracted to.

Which leads us to a fifth picture.

The 5th picture: A valued friend

There are many celibate gay Christians who are saying that the single biggest issue facing Christians in our relationship to gay people is centered on the subject of friendship. We have lots of models of friendship between devoted Christ-followers and gay people. My favorite Christian author in the world is CS Lewis. His great childhood friend was a boy named Arthur Greaves. Lewis and Greaves continued to be great friends as adults. Lewis wrote more letters to him than he did anyone else. Finally, Arthur came out to Lewis and told him about his attractions. Lewis' response was

You are still my friend.

In fact, at the end of Lewis' life, he planned to travel with his lifelong gay friend, Arthur Greaves. But then Lewis' health declined and he died and was never able to travel with his friend.

A valued friend. This text from Luke that we read tells me that God values people no matter how many rules they've broken. In the first story we read, God values one lost sheep out of a hundred. In the second story, this woman values one lost coin out of ten. Here is what we read in v. 8:

8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"

Why does the woman value the coin she's looking for so much? Why do I say that God values people no matter how many rules they've broken?

When you think about a coin, first of all, the coin has an image on it. The coin has the likeness of a person. If the coin fell in ancient Palestine, the floors were made of dirt. If the coin rolled in some dirt, or fell into a crack on the floor and got full of dust, the image on the coin would still be retained.

So it is with us human beings. God has stamped his image on us. He stamped his likeness on us so that no matter how much dust and dirt a person has on them, no matter how many rules we've broken, God values people because we bear his image.

But I think there is a second thing in this story of the lost coin that perhaps you don't realize.

You see, the woman's ten coins had a special meaning in Jesus' day. They weren't just 10 coins thrown in a purse. On her wedding day a bride would be given a headdress, a dowry, with ten coins placed on a string. She would wear those ten coins on her head as a headdress at her wedding. The 10 coins symbolized her marriage to her husband.

But if a wife was ever unfaithful, a husband would break that string of coins and they would go rolling on the ground. It was like taking away someone's wedding ring or putting a scarlet A on her forehead. Understand a woman's horror if she woke up one day and discovered that despite her faithfulness and fidelity to her husband, somehow the string of ten coins had gotten broken and one of those coins had rolled away into the dirt somewhere. In panic, she begins to think, "What are my friends going to say? What are the neighbors going to think? They will think that I have been unfaithful. They will think that I haven't loved my husband." Her honor is at stake. Her reputation is at risk.

Do you know that God values people, gay people and straight people, because he sees in us the image of God? God also goes after everyone because the honor of God, the reputation of God, just like that woman's, is at stake. If we remain lost, you say how is the reputation of God at stake? Isn't it the case that many people accuse God, saying that God doesn't want to have a relationship with people. That God is the kind of God who likes to condemn people, or he stands over us with a stick in his hand waiting for us to mess up.

And if a sheep is valued by the shepherd and if a coin is valued by a woman, how much more, Jesus is trying to communicate, do people matter to God? Friends, it doesn't matter to God that he has 99 sheep saved in the church. As if that balances out the one that is not yet in the church. God doesn't care that the church is already big. He cares about the one sheep that is not yet in, the one person. If we are to gain the heart of the Father, then we've got to completely repent of the idea that the church is too big already. In the heart of God, there is always room for one more. As Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision prayed:

Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.

It is a radical concept to live as if people matter above everything else. It is radical to have your heart broken for people who may be far from God or who don't feel welcome in the church. We have so many substitutes in our life for people, don't we? We substitute computer games and preoccupation with fixing up and decorating our homes. Studying, cars, trying to advance in business and all of that. God has a primary value: people. People matter. Wealthy people matter to God. Poor people matter to God. One older person stuck in a nursing home matters to God. A gay man matters to God. A lesbian couple matter to God. Your boss matters to God. Your professor matters to God. Down and outers matter to God. Up and outers matter to God. Lost people matter to God. That's what these stories are about.

So, how should we relate to gay people? Mark Yarhouse, the Christian psychologist and therapist I mentioned before, said that we need a different approach in the church.

Mark Yarhouse "Yes/No" Slide

Instead of the church being known as saying "no," we need to say yes. Friends, invite people to church whether they're gay or straight. Invite people to church. Invite people, gay and straight, to your small group. Invite people, gay and straight, to have a meal with you.

Someone comes up to you and asks, "What does your church teach about gay people?" You say, "My church teaches that every person matters to God and everyone is welcome at the Vineyard."

Let me close with this thought. There is a key word that Jesus used twice in these stories that jumps off the page at me every time I read these stories. It is the word "until." Look at v. 4 with me.

Luke 15:4 (NIV)

4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Look at v. 8 with me.

Luke 15:8 (NIV)

8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"

I want to speak to any of you who have a gay child, a gay son or daughter, a gay sister, a gay brother, a gay grandchild, someone in your family who is gay, a close friend who is

gay. Never give up on anyone. God doesn't give up on people. He searches for folks until he finds them and brings them in. Don't give up praying. Don't give up loving. Don't give up going to birthday parties and dinners. You are allowed to have rules in your home. If in your home you say, "You know what, I don't want to have my son or daughter sleeping with their same-sex partner in our home," it's your home. Say grace before meals. Live out your faith in front of this person, but do it in love.

And, oh, as a church that we would pray Bob Pierce's prayer together:

Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.

Let's pray.

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Rich Nathan
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God, I Have a Question Series
Luke 15.1-10

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