

“As you read this book, you will find both conviction and compassion, thoughtfulness and gentleness—traits all too rare in our world right now.”

RUSSELL MOORE, Editor in Chief,
Christianity Today

“Sam’s personal experience of same-sex attraction, long engagement in compassionate and respectful listening with hundreds of people, and deep commitment to the trustworthiness of Scripture and the Lord whose word it is combine to ensure that this updated guide will continue to provide gracious and faithful wisdom and help for many years to come.”

KANISHKA RAFFEL, Archbishop of Sydney

“What I love about this book is also what I love about my brother, Sam Allberry: Jesus is its central theme. Christian sexual ethics make no sense without Jesus at their heart. As Sam helps us see, with Jesus’ love for us as the animating center, all other kinds of love click into place. Don’t read this book if you don’t want to know how much the Son of God loves you, and how much more his love is worth than any other merely human love.”

REBECCA McLAUGHLIN, Author, *Confronting Christianity and The Secular Creed*

“Sam’s excellent book has already profoundly helped tens of thousands in its first edition. I’m sure this updated version will wonderfully increase its positive impact for the long term.”

ED SHAW, Pastor, Emmanuel City Centre, Bristol,
UK; Ministry Director, livingout.org

“A great resource for the church on how to understand the relationship between homosexuality and God’s word. This book is winsome, compassionate, clear, and succinct. Every Christian would benefit from Sam’s measured approach to this thorny subject.”

BECKET COOK, Author, *A Change of Affection*;
Host, *The Becket Cook Show*

“This is one of the best things I can pass on to my friends who are struggling in this area. It is biblical, positive, pastorally sensitive, and immensely helpful. This new edition is even better than the first. It answers the questions my friends are asking all the time, in a way that is wonderfully accessible. There is a clarity and compassion in Sam’s writing that arises from his own experience with this struggle but, more importantly, also from his understanding of God and the gospel. I highly recommend this book.”

MARK D. THOMPSON, Principal, Moore
Theological College, Sydney

“I know of no more trustworthy resource on the fraught questions around same-sex intimacy than this book. Whether it is Sam’s thoughtful commentary about key biblical terms or whether Jesus mentioned LGBTQ issues, or his generous pastoral response to difficult questions, his writing is marked by intelligence, clarity, and the warmth of a friend rather than the tone of an activist. Recommended for believers and doubters.”

JOHN DICKSON, Jean Kvamme Distinguished
Professor, Wheaton College;
Host, the *Undeceptions* podcast

“Here is wisdom shaped by personal experience, but also shaped by things that are even more important: love of God, love for people, and a rich, street-level understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I can think of no other book that speaks so lovingly, clearly, practically, and helpfully to this significant issue of our day.”

PAUL DAVID TRIPP, Author, *New Morning Mercies*

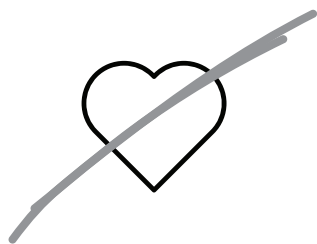
“This is a plain, sensible, biblical, and therefore necessary little book on sexuality that anybody can understand and everybody can benefit from. Sexuality can be a messy subject, and, as Sam Allberry always does, he makes the messy stuff make a whole lotta sense.”

JACKIE HILL PERRY, Author, *Gay Girl, Good God*
and *Holier Than Thou*

“This book is the best short introduction to its subject that you will find anywhere. With sensitivity and clarity, courage and wisdom, Sam Allberry walks us through a host of challenging questions and provides compelling and gracious answers.”

ANDREW WILSON, Teaching Pastor, King’s Church
London; Author, *God of All Things*

IS GOD ANTI-GAY?



SAM ALLBERRY


the goodbook
COMPANY

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FOREWORD

When I began writing my book *The Reason for God*, I based it in part on a survey that a woman in my church in New York City had done with non-Christian friends and associates in the summer of 2003. She asked each of them what their main difficulties with the Christian faith were. Those answering the survey were young adults who lived and worked in Manhattan, most of whom had recently graduated from an Ivy League school. The resulting list of “greatest objections” served as the outline of the chapters in the first half of the book. It is notable that in that survey virtually no one mentioned the traditional Christian teaching about sexuality as a concern.

But in 2008, by the time *The Reason for God* was published, I knew that things were changing—and changing fast. One of the early authors to respond to objections concerning sexuality in an accessible way, on the basis of historical and biblical Christian teaching, was Sam Allberry. His brief book *Is God Anti-Gay?* was

published by The Good Book Company in 2013, ten years ago. Sam wrote as both a trained Bible teacher and a same-sex-attracted man, giving the volume both intellectual weight and personal authenticity.

I say “intellectual weight” even though Sam wears his learning lightly, giving us what is still perhaps the most accessible and readable book on the subject. Sam’s argument was and is that the Bible’s prohibitions against same-sex intimacy are not motivated by animosity toward anyone (and thus are not “anti-gay”), but rather they are ways to protect and promote God’s wonderful purposes for sexuality—purposes that vastly exceed those promoted by our own allegedly “sex-positive” culture.

First, marriage is designed to reflect how God’s saving grace unites two deeply different beings—Christ and his people—who otherwise would remain separate. Marriage was made by God to also unite the different—male and female. Men and women each have distinct and non-interchangeable glories. We need each other, and marriage is a premier place (though not the only place) where those glories are blended and where we can be profoundly enriched. It is the first, but not the only, instance of God’s love of diversity.

Second, sex between male and female is the only kind that God has blessed with the astonishing capacity to generate new human persons. While not every couple can have children, not only is heterosexual sex alone

capable of creating life, but heterosexual marriage provides children with the close, lifelong exposure to both male and female humanity that they need.

Finally, the purpose of sex is to enable whole-life covenant bonding. God made sex to be a commitment-deepener—a way to say to someone else, “I belong completely to you.” Therefore it is only for use inside marriage, where it is designed to operate as a way to constantly renew, remake and re-energize your covenant with love and joy so it does not grow old or cold.

I’m delighted that on the 10th anniversary of its publication, Sam has given us a new edition. This volume does not only address the foundational biblical teaching about marriage and sex. It also tackles the main objection today—“How can Christianity be good news for gay people?”

That can only be answered by drawing attention not just to ethical principles but to Jesus himself. Sam wisely calls people to go to Jesus first and look at the extraordinary claims and promises surrounding his person, and then to look at the costs and rewards for anyone who is his disciple. Is Jesus who he says he is? Did he rise from the dead? Is it true that seeing his face brings fullness of joy and endless pleasures (Psalm 16 v 11)? Is it true that while following Jesus and denying oneself many things can feel like a “death,” the result is an infinitely fuller life and a discovering of your identity (Matthew 10 v 39; 16 v 25; Luke 9 v 23-25)? If these

things are true, despite the difficulties of discipleship, Christianity is good news for gay people.

I've heard a few people complain to me that they feel Sam's book is too short. Perhaps in a digital age, short is good. This unadorned volume gets you to the main issues quickly and lays them out clearly. At a time in which it is not just non-believers but also Christians who are confused about these matters, here is a contribution we can't do without.

Timothy Keller
Founding Pastor, Redeemer
Presbyterian Church, New York City
November 2022

INTRODUCTION

I first began to properly understand something of my sexuality around the same time that I began to understand Jesus Christ.

I was in my final weeks of high school. Exams were coming to an end, and we were all looking forward to the prospect of a long, study-free summer. It had been a hectic final few months.

A couple of unsettling home truths were sinking in. The first was that it is quite hard to prepare for exams when you haven't paid much attention in class. Revising is much harder when you haven't done much "vising."

The second home truth was even more significant. I had always been someone who formed close friendships, but I was now beginning to realize that there was something a bit more than that going on. Though I'd had a couple of girlfriends, I'd never felt the same kind of bond with any of them as I had with one or two of my close male friends. As the long summer began and there was less going on to distract me, the

truth started to hit home. The words began to form in my mind: *I think I'm gay.*

This was not a straightforward development. It was the early 90s, and there was little (if any) cultural praise for being gay. I wanted to be like everyone else, and to have feelings for girls like my friends had. And yet, instead of having feelings for girls like my friends, I was finding myself having feelings for one or two of my *friends*.

It was during this same period that I got to know some Christians for the first time. I was working on Saturday afternoons in a local Christian-run coffee shop, and this was the first time I'd ever really got to know believers of my own age. They became good friends, and when, after exams were over and I had nothing else to do, they invited me to their church youth group, I decided to go along. I liked these guys and was interested to know more about what they believed.

The message of Jesus, it turned out, was quite different from what I had imagined.

The Message I Heard

When Jesus began his public ministry, he made the following announcement, and it takes us right to the heart of his message:

“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God

has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1 v 14-15)

Jesus said the kingdom of God had come near. Whatever God had planned to do to put right the wrongs of this world, right then was when he was doing it. It was all about to kick off.

And the response Jesus was, and is, looking for was *repentance* and *faith*. *Repentance* means turning around, to change course. The implication is pretty clear and a little uncomfortable: *we're not heading in the right direction*. We're like the elderly man I read about recently in our local newspaper: in a moment of confusion in the middle of the night, he'd ended up driving a mile or so on the wrong side of the highway. Thankfully, at that hour there was hardly anything coming the other way; if it had happened when all the commuters were up, it would have been a very different story.

Jesus says that we're heading in the wrong direction, and that the “rush hour” of God's purposes is heading toward us. We need to change direction and line up with what God is doing. And that means *believing the gospel*: believing the announcement that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can be put right with God—that we are being offered a fresh start to begin to live as God always meant us to, and enjoy living with him forever. This is his message.

And it's his message for all people. When Jesus burst onto the scene, he didn't subdivide humanity into

categories and give each one a separate message. One for the introverts; another for the extroverts. One (with logical charts and bullet points) for left-brain types, and one (with different colors and ambient music) for the right-brain folk. God's message is the same for everyone, irrespective of our sexuality: *repent and believe*. It is the same invitation to find fullness of life in God—the same offer of forgiveness and deep, wonderful, life-changing love.

Sexuality and Identity

It was this message that I first heard at my friends' church, and it's this message that I have tried to live in the light of in the years since. Through it all, as someone who lives with such feelings, I have found biblical Christianity to be a wonderful source of comfort and joy. God's word to me on this issue at times feels confusing and difficult. But it is, nevertheless, deeply and profoundly good. The gospel of Jesus is wonderful news for someone who experiences same-sex attraction.

I used the term "same-sex attraction" just then because an immediate challenge is how I describe myself. In Western culture today, the obvious term for someone with these attractions is "gay." But in my experience, this often refers to far more than the shape of someone's attractions. It has come to describe a core and defining identity. When someone says they're gay—or, for that matter, lesbian or bisexual—

they normally mean that, as well as being attracted to people of the same sex, their sexual preference is a fundamental way in which they see themselves. And it's for this reason that I tend to avoid using the term. It sounds clunky to describe myself as "someone who experiences same-sex attraction." But describing myself like this is a way for me to recognize that the kind of sexual attractions I experience are not fundamental to my identity. They are part of *what I feel* but are not *who I am* in a fundamental sense. I believe I am far more than my sexuality.

Take another kind of appetite. Despite having been a vegetarian in my youth, I enjoy meat. But enjoying meat does not mean I would want someone to think that "carnivore" was the primary category through which to understand me. It is part of the picture but does not get to the heart of who I am. So I prefer to talk in terms of being someone who experiences same-sex attraction (SSA for short in what follows). I know the language of "same-sex attraction" is not everyone's preference, but it best gets at what I want to describe in my own life.

And as someone in this situation, what Jesus calls me, to do is exactly what he calls anyone to do. Take another well-known saying of Jesus:

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" (Mark 8 v 34)

It is the same for us all—“whoever.” I am to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow him. Every follower of Jesus is called to costly sacrifice. Denying yourself does not mean tweaking your behavior here and there. It involves saying “no” to your deepest sense of who you are, for the sake of Christ. To take up a cross is to lay down your life, for the very reason that your life, it turns out, is not yours at all. It belongs to Jesus. He made it. And through his death he has bought it.

Ever since I have been open about my own experiences of SSA, a number of Christians have said something like this: “*The gospel must be harder for you than it is for me,*” as though I have more to give up than they do. But the fact is that the gospel demands *everything* of *all of us*. If someone thinks the gospel has somehow slotted into their life quite easily, without causing any major adjustments to their lifestyle or aspirations, it is likely that they have not really started following Jesus at all.

And just as the cost is the same for all of us, so too are the blessings. Over the past few years of thinking through this issue, this has become one of my favorite sayings of Jesus:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and
burdened, and I will give you rest.”

(Matthew 11 v 28)

This is a wonderful promise. Jesus knows that left to ourselves, we are weighed down. Life out of sync

with God does that to us. But as we come to Jesus, we find rest. Not rest just in the sense of a lazy weekend afternoon or a long sleep-in on a day off. Jesus means something far deeper: rest in the sense of things with God being the way they're meant to be. Rest in the sense of going with the grain of who we really are and how God wants us to live. Rest in the sense of being able truly to flourish as the people God made us to be.

Is God anti-gay? *No*, not as if this one matter exercises him more than all the others.

But he is against who *all* of us are by nature, as those living apart from him and for ourselves. He's anti *that* guy, whatever that guy looks like in each of our lives. But because he is bigger than us, better than us, and able to do these things in ways we would struggle to, God loves that guy too. Loves him or her enough to carry their burden, take their place, clean them up, make them whole, and unite them forever to himself.

Being a Christian and living as a Christian with SSA raises all sorts of questions—questions I hope we can cover in this book. My own experiences do not mean that I can speak for everyone for whom this is a personal issue. Over the years I have got to know many people for whom this is not an abstract issue. Men and women; young and old; some with a faith; some who are hostile to Christianity; those who have shared with me in strictest confidence and those who publicly and proudly self-identify as gay. Every one of

those conversations has been a privilege. Some have shared stories of painful rejection (in one case, of being spat at by his peers), others of surprising acceptance. In some cases there have been strong similarities with my own experiences and feelings, and in other cases it has been very different. So I am not presuming to speak for others. My aim instead is to try to take each question and to see what the Bible has to say.

And the more I look at the Bible, the more convinced I am that what it says about sexuality makes most sense in light of what it says in general about sex and marriage, so that is where we'll begin.