



Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life

Ed Shaw

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When Christians have same-sex attraction, how should the church respond? Pastor Ed Shaw experiences same-sex attraction, and yet he is committed to Scripture and the church's traditional position of fidelity in heterosexual marriage and celibacy in singleness. In this honest book, he shares his pain in dealing with these issues, but at the same time shows us that obedience to Jesus is ultimately the only way to experience life to the full. He shows that the Bible's teaching seems unreasonable not because of its difficulties, but because of missteps that the church has often taken in its understanding of the Christian life. We have been shaped by the world around us and urgently need to re-examine the values that drive our discipleship. Only by doing this in the light of the Bible can we make sense of its call on the lives of those who are attracted to their own sex.

Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life **Details**

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Jacob says

A Vital Work for the Church

What an incredibly insightful, encouraging, and useful book for the church. There is so much to ponder within this pages, and the author's commitment to Scripture and holiness cannot be overlooked or misunderstood. More believers need to read this work and proclaim the Gospel with grace and mercy. God will save his people, even out of practicing homosexuality.

Chris Woznicki says

Its actually a plausibility problem...

What the bible teaches about same sex relationships sounds implausible to most people nowadays. It sounds totally implausible to ask people to turn their backs on same sex relationships and live a lonely life as a perpetually single person. Not only does it sound implausible, it sounds unhealthy. Listen to what Melinda Selmys, a Roman Catholic who experiences same sex attraction says:

“Though shall not,” has consistently failed to persuade the postmodern world because it is madness.

She’s right, it in our world the idea that someone should say yes to the single life is absolute madness. And this is exactly where the problem lies, the church has unintentionally perpetuated the implausibility of a same-sex, single, celibate Christian life through a number of misteps. Ed Shaw, a pastor and the author of Same-Sex Attraction and the Church, seeks to address this plausibility problem by making what the Bible clearly commands seem plausible again.

Shaw’s thesis is that,

The reason that the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality sounds so unreasonable is because of a whole number of misteps that the church ahs taken over the years; a whole host of ways in which evangelicals have become too shaped by the world around us. (22)

What Shaw does throughout the book is highlight 9 misteps that the church has made, unwittingly making the same sex celibate life implausible. He begins the book with a very personal chapter, describing what life has been like pursuing a life of sexual holiness as a pastor who has same sex attractions. This is an important chapter because the plausibility problem is a deeply personal and emotional issue for him, not only as a pastor but as a same-sex attracted Christian. This chapter really sets the context.

So what are the missteps? Here are the 9 incorrect beliefs that the church has adopted, thus perpetuating the implausibility of a single-celibate same-sex life:

1. Your identity is your sexuality
2. A family is Mom, Dad and 2.4 children

3. If you're born gay, it can't be wrong to be gay
4. If it makes you happy, it must be right
5. Sex is where true intimacy is found
6. Men and women are equal and interchangeable
7. Godliness is heterosexuality
8. Celibacy is bad for you
9. Suffering is to be avoided

Although these 9 topics have certainly influenced how the church processes issues of same sex attraction in the church, they have wide ranging implications. Personally, I have an ax to grind against belief 4 and 9. Even apart from issues of sexuality, the beliefs that "if it makes you happy, it must be right" and "suffering is to be avoided" have done so much to harm the mission of the church. Because the church has imbibed these values (especially the American church) people are slow to sacrifice for the sake of God's mission. And perhaps even worse, students tend to abandon their faith in college precisely because they have bought into "happiness" as the goal of life, and hence their faith as well. I've seen it time and time again, people following Jesus because of the "happiness" and "blessings" he has to offer them instead of simply following him because he is the Messiah. It's a consumeristic view of faith. All this to say, the issues Shaw addresses have major implications even beyond the topic of same-sex attraction.

I highly recommend this book to those in ministry. I wish all my pastor friends would take the time to read it simply because I know that some of them unknowingly are perpetuating these harmful beliefs in their churches (2 and 5 seem to be especially common in the circles I find myself in.) This would also be a helpful book for all sorts of leaders in Christian ministry to read. We would really benefit from being more careful about how we address issues of family life and relationships, as elevating certain topics in sermons or bible studies can unwittingly alienate a large segment of our Christian brothers and sisters.

Even though you may not agree with the details of Shaw's proposal, this is an invaluable resource for those seeking to disciple their flock in the areas of sexuality and beyond.

NOTE: I received this book from IVP in exchange for an impartial review.

Bruce Stopher says

Celibate Christianity is a Viable Option

I know of no other book that tackles how a Christian living with same-sex attraction can live through the conflict between biblical teaching and the emotional rollercoaster of inner desires. Very well written with very personal examples (not just theological statements) and a clear viable (plausible) option for today. Bravo!

Matthew Mitchell says

Definitely one of the best books on this topic in print (and I've read a good number of them).

The subtitle says so much, "The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life."

Shaw speaks from personal experience and biblical conviction. He examines nine common missteps and myths with clarity, compassion, and persuasiveness and then also lays out a positive case for the biblical position.

Several times as I read I said out loud, "Aha." and "Right. That's the way to say that."

I will be giving it away to many others.

Dan Glover says

This was a very good book written by a same-sex attracted, celibate pastor who takes the Bible's instructions against same-sex sexual relationships as standing for all time. Shaw calls those in the church who are same-sex attracted to a life of celibate obedience to Christ, and he calls the rest of the church to a sensitive and Christian love for and intimacy in spiritual friendship with those who struggle with same-sex attraction. This is a sensitive and uncompromising work of pastoral theology and council which I hope is widely read by not only church leadership but by Christians of all walks. At the same as speaking specifically to same-sex attracted believers, Shaw also calls all Christians to find their identity in who they are in Christ rather than in their sexuality - something the church in the midst of our sex-focused culture needs to hear.

One of the outstanding insights of this book is the way Shaw treats the genetic argument for same-sex attraction. He says that the church has wasted too much time arguing that homosexual orientation is not genetic but rather a choice of the will. Shaw admits that, acting on same-sex attraction is certainly an act of the will, whether or not there is a genetically driven and therefore natural basis for same-sex orientation. But Shaw draws on the insights of a robust doctrine of original sin to argue that, even if same-sex attraction is a result of genetics, it makes no difference to its sinfulness if acted upon, since creation is fallen, humanity is fallen, and it should not surprise us if the curse has affected our genetics. In this way, heterosexuals have a perfectly "natural" orientation toward committing adultery or having pre-marital sex, but that does not mean such acts are not sinful - they are, because God says they are in his Word.

Highly recommended for all Christians but especially for pastors.

Amy Morgan says

Really great resource for both the same-sex attracted and pastors who want to minister well to this group. Ed's grasp of Scripture is excellent, and his arguments engage the cultural narrative of same-sex attraction on its own terms. I would even share this book with someone who wondered why the SBC rejects homosexuality as a sin.

Panda Incognito says

Thoroughly grounded in a big-picture understanding of Scripture and God's redemptive purpose, this book

addresses a sensitive topic with grace and truth. To make a plausibility argument for celibacy, the author articulated evangelical missteps that have diluted the church's stance on sexual ethics or made it difficult for same-sex attracted individuals to find community in the church. In our modern cultural and evangelical climate, it seems like cruelty to tell someone that they should deny an ever-present desire, but understanding the purpose of life according to the gospel transforms our approach to self-denial and makes it seem plausible and worthwhile to give up sin. Also, even though marriage and children are blessings from God and accomplish some of His purposes, they are not the be all and end all of life. Churches need to make room for single people as integral parts of the community, rather than promoting marriage as a mark of holiness or the sole means of leading a fulfilling life and accomplishing the work of God on earth. This book should be convicting and personally engaging to all Christians, regardless of their sexual orientation or life experiences, because it makes a convincing case against cultural mantras that the church has weakened to or accepted, addresses evangelical overreactions that idolize the nuclear family, and provides a push for each of us to reexamine our lives in the framework of taking up our cross and following Jesus.

James Wethington says

This was a helpful and insightful book. This is a hot topic today within the Protestant church. I believe all Christians should give it a chance and learn what it like for someone who struggles with SSA. It is real and it is a sensitive subject for individuals.

Joshua Reichard says

A surprising gem of a book on homosexuality! I was greatly encouraging and helped in my understanding of this particular topic. Ed Shaw is clear and almost too honest for comfort which in the end was the best part of the book. I love seeing a believer understand his sin and then be honest about it. Homosexuality isn't one of those issues that is a hot topic right now and is easily misunderstood and take too far to the right or left. However, Ed helps bring it down to earth and helps his readers feel compassion and love. He helps the church focus on how to be loving and honest with those who have homosexual tendencies.

“We’ve chosen to ignore the fact that Jesus is here calling his disciples to make a conscious and costly decision to sacrifice ourselves, to say no to things we might want, even deserve or need, because that’s what it means to follow his example.”

Sandi Luckins says

The book is written by a man who I would seriously question his devotion to Jesus over his devotion to his homosexuality.

“So, if we fail to keep obeying God’s word, it will be your fault as well as ours. We will share the responsibility for that failure unless you help the church to change in various ways....”

Homosexuality is not the only sin the church needs to deal with and help people with. This gentleman has made himself clear in referring to himself as a same-sex attracted Christian that his sin is more important than his Christianity. He has confessed that he fantasizes about the immorality – it’s self a sin and seems to

have no remorse that it is one of his sins. He seems to think of it from Jesus when Jesus is not the source of our sin and came to cleanse us of the sin that this man seems so attached to. Give up your sin and move in instead of asking the church to cater to it.

I regret reading the book and literally had to force my way through it.

Rev says

I really appreciated Shaw's approach to the celibate life for same-sex attracted people (and others who are single) from a plausibility framework. He does a great job highlighting both the attractiveness of such a life as well as the real challenges and struggles that accompany it.

Jason Pittman says

One of the best resources I've come across to help us understand SSA and the Biblical response to it. Also, much to think about as a church leader and how we have missed the mark in pastoring our people.

Nathan Wesson says

Best book on sam-sex attraction I have read!

This book shares in an honest way the challenge of same-sex attracted persons, through the lens of a celibate same-sex attracted minister. It speaks to both same-sex attracted people and the church. It honors the infallibility of God's word concerning same-sex sexual expression, yet challenges the church to do a better job loving those who are same-sex attracted by being a family to them, making honoring Christ in their struggle more plausible, and not focusing so heavily on marriage as the ultimate thing for everyone.

K.A. Thederahn says

This book is incredibly important. I regret that I let it sit on my shelf for close to a year before I read it. Brother Shaw is very open and humble sharing his struggles with same sex attraction, while providing biblical ways of not only loving fellow Christians who struggle with this issue, but also reaching out to others in the gay community to explain a truly biblical life. This is honestly one of the best and most useful books I've ever read. As a Christian who knows others who struggle in this way I can't wait to put these practices in place

Samuel Kassing says

Not a huge fan of the cover or the title but the contents of this book are great! This book is challenging, pastoral, biblical and wise. The best book I've read on these pastoral realities yet.
