

Hi. I am a Christian. I was saved before the age of 10. I am an MK. My parents are missionaries. Because of that, I grew up in a country I did not call my own. I speak other languages. I have friends in multiple countries, on multiple continents. I went to a Christian high school and a Christian college. I've been in church for the entirety of my life. I'm currently a leader at my church. I'm also attracted to the same sex. I guess that means you could call me a homosexual.

According to the definition of the word, I can be described as such, but it's not an identifier I would personally use. I'm not offended by the term or the label, though. Over many years I've come to understand that it's a correct description of my feelings, but not of my identity.

I don't attribute who or what I am to a homosexual. I don't live my life based on stereotypical homosexual choices, agendas, or ideals. I choose to value the identity of a child of God higher than that of my feelings. Regardless of my beliefs about the origin of my homosexuality (is it genetic, environmental, learned, etc.?) and how I am emotionally, physically, and sexually attracted to the same sex, I believe I do have a choice. It's not a choice of whether or not to have homosexual feelings; It's a choice of whether or not to act on those feelings.

Even though I don't act on my homosexual feelings, I wonder how it makes you feel. Does it make you uncomfortable that I have the feelings? Is it unsettling if I tell you that I've acted on my feelings before? What if I told you that I'm also attracted to the opposite sex? Does that qualify me as bisexual? Would that make you more or less comfortable with me? I really, truly want you to consider it. Pause your reading to take stock of your internal emotions. What bells are ringing within you? What strings are being pulled? Anything? Nothing?

Your emotional response to the paragraphs and questions above are important because I would venture to guess that they take many Christians outside of their normal comfort zone. Based on what I just shared, can I still be a Christian and have homosexual feelings? Or, one step further: can I still be a Christian, have homosexual feelings, and - oops! - act on those feelings?

Welcome to my world. They're hard questions to answer. So hard, in fact, that I was depressed for a long, long time because of them. Reconciling attractions to the same sex is hard enough for non-Christians. If you've seen anything from North American news in the past 12 months, you know that there is a lot of ridicule, hurt, pain, rejection, etc. that exists within the secular world when young or old "comes out of the closet". For an MK, it was the worst self realization I could ever have.

To put it mildly, there were problems in the home long before we were on the mission field. Communication was not a valued commodity. Neither were normal disciplinary measures. Feelings were measured in extremes and expressed through anger - it was either zero or one hundred. There was no middle ground.

Moods seemed temperamental when it came to my parents expressing how they felt.

One of the first things I learned as a child was how to be an accurate meteorologist of the familial weather patterns. After school, when I walked through the doors of our house, I would trepidatiously take readings of the emotional barometric pressure of my elders. I could pretty accurately predict if our family was experiencing clear skies for the night or if we were in for a week-long tropical storm. Needless to say, it was mentally and emotionally draining... for 18 years.

It sounds ridiculous, but you have to walk with me on this. My parents are missionaries. I'm pretty sure that being a sparkling example of a Christian family is written somewhere in the signed paperwork. Add to that the instability behind the Missionary façade, and I could royally mess things up with if I started expressing how I had homosexual feelings.

Repeatedly, I had seen my parents show disgust for homosexual people behind closed doors. I heard cliché phrases parroted to me, like "hate the sin; love the sinner" or "love the person; hate the sin". That's all well and good, but the demeanor and actions I witnessed were teaching me something completely different - my parents did not approve of gay people. I wasn't taught the blatancy of hate, though. I was taught the subtlety of discrimination and division: two deadly forces I learned to turn inward as time went on.

During years in the States, I was sheltered and "protected" from gay people. I couldn't go to schools I desired in my town because some were known for having a higher population of homosexuals. My parents didn't want me to be around gays or influenced by them. So I had to go to another school. I couldn't perform activities that were dominated by the opposite sex, either, because my grandfather wouldn't "have a queer in his family." After I graduated from high school, I was encouraged not to move to different cities because of the gay population that existed within or nearby.

By proxy, I saw how the distaste of my parents for homosexuals could very easily carry over to me, if I ever chose to share my secret with them. Because of what I had seen and heard, I never felt safe enough to open up to them. I felt trapped and hated in my own home and in my own family. Nobody in the family had to blatantly point the finger at me. They were doing it by pointing the finger at others. It didn't feel unsafe inside the family walls only. I learned the hard way that it was unsafe externally, too.

After I graduated from high school, I moved out and went to college. Throughout the years following, I shared with trusted relationships and leaders in the church about my struggle. I think most people meant well, but the responses I received tend to fall into one of three categories: ignorant but well-meaning, downright unpleasant, or informed, accepting, and restorative. Unfortunately, the smallest

grouping falls into the last category while the largest seems to fall into the first two.

It is overwhelmingly heartbreaking to me when I think back on the negative responses I received from pastors, elders, and counselors under the Christian umbrella. I have been blatantly told that I was going to hell, that I wasn't a real Christian, and that I didn't truly believe when I asked for salvation. The sad thing is that I had been so negatively influenced about myself that I feared all those things were true.

On other occasions, I was told that I should pray more, that I should read the bible more, that I needed to serve less in the church and listen more to the sermon, that I needed to serve more in the church and not only listen to the sermon. The list continues.

Through it all, I've tried to pray homosexuality away, I've tried to bargain it away, I've tried to beg it away, I've tried to cry it away, I've tried to sulk it away, I've tried to serve it away, I've even tried to get rid of it by walking away from church. None of it changed any of my feelings. They're still there. As much as I don't want them, they exist. And, I still believe there's a God who loved me enough to send His son to die for me. I believe He loved me then and continues to love and accept me now.

I have pages of information I want to write and lists of verses I want to cite. It just doesn't seem like the time to do that, though.

Ultimately, if I could have you take anything away from this, it would boil down to one simple statement: be thoughtful. Be thoughtful about what you're portraying and conveying within the four walls of your own home. What if the very thing with which your child is struggling is the thing against which you're speaking the harshest? Really evaluate the level of deep, honest communication that's happening. Can you receive and correctly respond to feedback the way you want your child to receive and respond? If not, my guess would be that s/he perceives that and is building or breaking down walls accordingly.

It's unfortunate for me to say that I have yet to share my struggle with my parents. Naturally, I'm concerned about their response from a basic level, but also from a point of view that has many years of experience with their irrationally reactionary responses to challenging information. The day is soon coming, though, when I'll have a discussion with them about my struggle. I hesitate on their behalf, but know that it is a necessity to move any deeper in our relationship.

Lastly, I want to write to those who may be struggling with the same thing I do. As I mentioned before: don't let your identity be wrapped up in your feelings; find your identity in Christ.

“How,” you may ask. The solution is simple. The discipline to execute it is difficult. I’ll include some steps for you below.

1. Make a quality decision to move forward, to become more self aware, and to get to the roots of your insecurities (therapy). You can’t do anything without a decision. (Jeremiah 6:16)
2. Read the Word. Do it for the love of it, not the obligation of it. If you don’t have a desire to read, be honest with God. Tell him (it’s not like He’s unaware). Pray for the desire. (John 8:31-32; Romans 15:4)
3. Pray for yourself. If you believe that prayer is good for anyone, believe that it’s also good for you. (Matthew 7:7)
4. Take every thought captive that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). How is that done? By opening your mouth and speaking out loud (#5). Try counting in your head and spelling a word out loud. Which one wins? Exactly. When a thought comes in your mind that goes against what you know to be true, speak something contrary to it out loud (e.g., thought: “I worthless”; confession: “I am valuable to God according to Luke 12:6-7”)
5. Speak positive things that line up with the Word of God over your life - out loud. The Bible says the tongue is powerful. Use it. (James 3:3-4).
6. Honestly evaluate what you’re allowing through the gates of your ears and your eyes. Let God lead you in what may need to be adjusted. (Psalm 119:37; Proverbs 5:1)
7. Find a friend or counselor you can trust - one who listens well and does not judge swiftly. (Proverbs 11:14)

By doing 1 - 7, you’re protecting your heart and the springs of life that flow from it (Proverbs 4:23). It doesn’t mean that the desires will go away (they may; they may not). But, it does mean that you’ll be submitting yourself to God and have the strength to resist the devil, which causes him to flee (James 4:7).