

Same-Sex Attraction— Confusion to Clarity

with Vicki Tiede

For many wives, the discovery of a husband's same-sex attraction raises urgent questions: *Was our marriage real? Can I trust him? What does this mean going forward?* These questions deserve careful, grounded answers—not assumptions or labels that collapse everything into one category. This handout offers a simple framework to distinguish between internal experiences and external choices. Understanding these differences helps wives locate responsibility accurately, advocate for their own needs, and discern whether trust, integrity, and commitment are being lived out in real and observable ways.

1. Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)

What it is: An experience of attraction toward someone of the same sex. This can be emotional, relational, aesthetic, or romantic, and it may or may not include sexual components.

Key point: Attraction is experienced, not chosen. It can be fleeting or persistent.

Example: “I feel drawn to or connected with someone of the same sex.”

2. Arousal

What it is: A physiological or neurological response—sexual excitement that can occur automatically, sometimes without conscious intent or desire.

Key point: Arousal does not equal consent, desire, or moral intent. Bodies can respond even when a person does not want to act.

Example: “I notice a physical sexual response, even though I didn't choose it.”

3. Desire

What it is: An internal inclination or wish toward something—sexual, emotional, or relational—that involves the will more than attraction or arousal.

Key point: Desire reflects what a person wants or is tempted toward, but wanting is still distinct from acting.

Example: “I want closeness or sexual connection with someone of the same sex.”

4. Behavior

What it is: Chosen actions—what a person actually does.

Key point: Behavior involves agency and decision-making. This is where moral, ethical, and relational responsibility is most clearly located.

Example: “I engage in sexual or romantic behaviors with someone of the same sex.”

5. Identity

What it is: The meaning framework a person uses to describe who they are—how they label, interpret, and integrate their experiences into their sense of self.

Key point: Identity is not the same as experience. It is a narrative and commitment, often shaped by culture, community, and worldview.

Example: “I identify as gay,” or conversely, “I experience same-sex attraction but do not define myself by it.”



Putting It All Together (Simple Comparison)

Category - Is this Chosen?

Attraction - No

Arousal - No

Desire - Partially

Behavior - Yes

Identity - Yes

What It Refers To

Felt pull or interest

Physical response

What one wants or longs for

What one does

How one defines oneself

Why This Distinction Matters

- It prevents **over-pathologizing experiences** that are not chosen.
- It allows for **moral agency without shame**.
- It creates space for people to **align identity and behavior with deeply held values**, even when attractions persist.
- Clinically and pastorally, it helps people move from *confusion* to *clarity*.

