

Identity, Fear and Faith: Case Study

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Claire Case Study

Claire comes to you in a state of real distress. “I feel like I’m being torn in two”.

She tells you that her younger son, Ed, in his first year at University has let her know that he is in a relationship with one of his male housemates. She recalls that some years earlier he had shared with her about ‘a struggle’ with same sex attraction, but she had no idea that he was in a place where he would enter a same sex romantic relationship.

Claire is a single mother. She has been at the local church since before she was married, and she and the boys continued to go there until they left for University. They have already been through some tough times as a family; at 9 years old, Ed sustained serious injuries to his leg and pelvis after being knocked off his bike and spent several painful months having surgeries and extended rehabilitation. He made a fair recovery but had been unable to get back to the sports he used to love, and was pretty low as well as physically limited during his teens. Claire’s husband used to coach Ed’s football team. He was initially engaged after the accident but struggled with anger at what had happened, which seemed to push him away from others. He also lost his job in the year following the accident and eventually took a job in another area when nothing else was available locally. After several months away he told Claire that he did not want to come back. They are now divorced.

Claire reports that the church family were really supportive during this whole painful period; that despite the awful situation, they felt sustained by much prayer, friendship and practical help. Many in the church looked out for and encouraged the boys over the years and both boys had professed a faith.

Claire and Ed were very close. He had discussed his struggle with attraction to boys on and off since his mid-teens. He had never wanted to share this with his dad, his older brother, or his youth leaders, but he and Claire had worked through some good books together that made the case for the biblical sexual ethic based on Genesis 2, Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Corinthians 6-7. Ed seemed to find them helpful. There had been a discussion of the subject in the youth group in the last year, but Ed confided that an insensitive comment made by one of the leaders (“Homos”) stopped him from opening up about the struggle. In retrospect, Claire feels this may have been a turning point for Ed in looking for a different ‘tribe’ at University. She is very frustrated about that.

Speaking about Ed she says, “it’s so sad, so unfair! He’s been through so much more already than any boy should have to go through. He sounds so happy and really wants me to meet his partner. All his flat mates are completely accepting of

their relationship. I can't bear for a wedge to be driven between us, and yet how can I pretend that I'm happy for him? *Should* I be happy for him?"

Now, when I hear conversations at church implying that that being gay is something unacceptable to God, I feel angry and defensive, like they're attacking my child, even though they know nothing about it. Meanwhile my work friends are just happy for him.

Questions:

1. What are some of the contours of Claire's suffering?
2. What emotions might clue you in to the landscape of her reality map? (Her view of God, of herself, of the situation, of others)
3. Consider Claire's struggle with doubt; Where do you see evidence of her bringing her doubts to the Lord? What indications are there that she may be going down the road of the 'doubt of judgment'?
4. Assuming your conversations are ongoing over a period of time, how might you approach a retelling of her story with the hope of helping to re-orientate some aspect of her view of God, herself and what he might be up to in her situation?