

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:11-16)

The Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) is a network of networks, bringing evangelicals in the Church of England together for the sake of the gospel. Its National Director is Bishop Keith Sinclair and its President is Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn. Lis Goddard and Ed Shaw are Co-Chairs of the Council. In addition to elected individuals from dioceses and representatives of evangelical theological colleges and evangelical bishops, the networks formally represented on the Council are

- Anglican Evangelical Junior Clergy Conference
- Anglican Mainstream
- Anglican Mission in England
- CMS
- Church Pastoral Aid Society
- Church Society
- Crosslinks
- Evangelical Group on General Synod (EGGS)
- Fellowship of Word and Spirit
- Fulcrum
- Latimer Trust
- New Wine
- Reform
- The Junia Network (formerly Awesome)

CEEC is encouraging evangelicals to participate in the Living in Love and Faith process and offer this resource as part of this commitment. For further resources from CEEC in this and other areas please visit our website at www.ceec.info

If you are involved in using LLF materials please do make sure you give feedback through the LLF website by **completing the survey** or offering a **creative response** by the end of 2021.

We at CEEC would also be interested in any feedback you have either on your engagement with LLF or on these resources and other ways we may be able to resource involvement with LLF. Please contact us through <http://www.ceec.info/contact.html>.

CEEC

Church of England Evangelical Council

Engaging with

LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

Guidance For Course Participants

Introduction

Why should I do the course?

CEEC has encouraged evangelicals to engage with the LLF process and the course is one of the main ways of doing this. You can also read the book, listen to podcasts (available on main podcast providers) and explore the LLF Learning Hub. Participating in the course offers the following opportunities:

- Meeting together and learning with and from other followers of Jesus you might otherwise have not met and, praying, discussing, and discerning together even when you disagree with each other.
- Explaining and commending the Bible's teaching and an evangelical approach to matters of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.
- Providing feedback into the church's discernment process on the basis of your learning and experience of the course. This feedback will help the bishops making significant decisions in 2022.

What can I expect from the course?

You need to find out about how the course you are attending is being run as there will be quite a bit of variety. Some will be based on using the course booklet (PDF free on LLF hub) but most will use the set of 5 films (about 25-30 mins each) within the LLF Learning Hub. Some will be structured to have a wide range of views present in the group, others may bring together people who are expected to share broadly the same outlook.

Whatever form it takes, the course will likely be different from other courses you have done in various ways. For example,

- It will introduce a range of different views for you to consider and discuss and evaluate for yourself rather than presenting one viewpoint.
- Groups are encouraged to be diverse to enable a range of perspectives and stories to be shared within them.
- Each session contains a mix of teaching sessions, Bible study, group discussion, and films telling personal stories.

This material has been produced by the CEEC to help evangelicals participating in the LLF Course. It draws on the feedback of 20 people who recently participated in courses run by CEEC for Council members. It is offered from the perspective of commitment to the CEEC's Basis of Faith and additional declarations and the current teaching of the Church of England and Anglican Communion on sexuality.

Possible Questions to Consider

- Where within the 3 forms of disagreement should we place the areas of disagreement identified within LLF? These disagreements include whether aspects of our identity are part of creation to be celebrated or a consequence of the Fall to be redeemed, "which patterns of life, which ways of being the Church, are good, and which are in some sense fractured or distorted" (54) the authority of Scripture, and "what behaviour, what forms of relationship, what patterns of obedience and community life reflect God's character and love?" (54).
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the 3 different approaches described as possible ways of responding to the diversity of views in the church and which do people prefer?

Further Resources

CEEC has produced a number of papers relating to the areas discussed in this session – "Guarding the Deposit" and "Gospel, Church & Marriage: Preserving Apostolic Faith and Life".

Some of the key ideas in these papers are summed up in Chapters 8-11 of The Beautiful Story.

Sam Allberry has written a short blog article on "Why Can't Christians Agree to Differ?" and Martin Davie has a short 4 page article on "Can We Agree to Disagree?".

Andrew Goddard explores some of the questions about living together with our differences in dialogue with an article by Bishop David Atkinson in "Evangelical and affirming: pastoral accommodation?"

This Bible Study takes a different form from the others. Rather than discussion it uses *lectio divina* in which people listen together to the passage and share key words or phrases in it that particularly struck them. Some, especially if unfamiliar with it, find this approach strange and perhaps frustrating but it can also help people hear God speak in new ways through their own listening to the text and through hearing and weighing what others hear.

One key relevant theme arising from the prayer is how it holds together concerns for unity, truth, holiness and obedience to Jesus and the apostles. This raises the question of what that means for us as a church today.

Bible Study on John 17

Discussion Two

Notes

- The explanation of three levels of disagreement is one that the Church of England has developed over recent years and is likely to shape how we move forward so is worth getting to understand.
- “As we seek a way forward, we are called to pay attention to other churches locally and internationally” (58) needs to be stressed. The overwhelming majority of churches in the UK and globally remain committed to traditional teaching and practice on issues of identity, gender and human sexuality. If the CofE changes its view this will not only create problems internally but with many partnerships on the ground with other denominations and local congregations and especially in the Anglican Communion.
- The sketching of three options for the CofE (in part drawing on the response of other churches) is helpful (59). It highlights some of the problems with the perhaps initially attractive “via media” of allowing congregations to decide.
- Phrases such as “good disagreement”, “radical inclusion”, “mutual flourishing” are often used to describe how we should respond to our differences but it is not always clear what these mean in practice. There is a danger they justify simply accepting mutually contradictory theologies and practices under the guise of promoting unity.
- Rather than contrasting “unity” with “separation” or “division” or “leaving” or “splitting” the church, CEEC and others have used the language of “visible differentiation”. This recognises that if different views of holiness are approved and biblical teaching not followed then the seriousness of our disagreements will mean that structures of church governance and episcopal oversight will have to change as a result.

How can I best prepare for participating in the course?

LLF offers a suite of teaching and learning resources. It is important that participants in the Course, whatever their existing views and however convinced they are about them, approach the materials not simply to teach others but willing to learn new things and think afresh about the issues studied. It is important that in discussion there is a genuine desire to listen respectfully and learn from those who hold different views. Here we can follow the Golden Rule – “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you”.

You may simply wish to go into the course “cold” to respond to what you hear in the material and discussion. If, however, you wish to do some preparation, there follows some advice about each of the five sessions. These are organised around each of the three discussion times you will likely be participating in when doing the course. They offer:

- some notes highlighting material in the course or offering additional material or critique of the course that you may wish to reflect on and perhaps refer to in discussions.
- a few questions you may wish to consider or offer in the group to help open up discussion and hear from different views.
- a few further resources for each session including where the CEEC film “The Beautiful Story” might be a helpful resource.

Before these guides to each session there is some guidance about the Pastoral Principles and the story films. These are part of every session but not the focus of discussion in groups.

If you want to prepare for each session in advance you might consider doing one or more of the following:

- Praying for discernment and ability to listen and learn and grace and wisdom to know what to say in discussions.
- Reading and reflecting on the material in the LLF course booklet (this is the basis for the film course if your group is using that).
- Watching the session film on the LLF Learning Hub.
- Reading and reflecting on the Bible passage(s) used in the Bible Study session and perhaps also their wider context.
- Reading the relevant conversation in Part Five of the LLF book - (See graphic on next page). A CEEC member has commented, “The staff team here just finished the LLF Course and, as we reviewed it, a number of them commented on how the Scenes in the book are the most helpful in drawing out the range of views and articulating the areas of disagreements well”.

Course Session

LLF Book Section

Session 2

Part 5 Scene 3

Session 3

Part 5 Scene 1

Session 4

Part 5 Scene 2

Session 5

Part 5 Scene 4

Pastoral Principles

Although never the focus of discussion in the course, each session introduces one (or, in Session 1, two) of the Pastoral Principles to guide how we should discuss together. These point us to the need to address ignorance, pay attention to power, cast out fear, acknowledge prejudice, speak into silence, and admit hypocrisy. There is always a danger that individuals with very definite convictions, whether evangelical or other, can express these in ways that unintentionally hurt others in the group. It would be good to consider how you can embody these principles in your own contributions to the group discussions and to view them as an encouraging safeguard for everyone in discussions, including evangelicals. It is also important to be aware of the LLF guidance on creating braver, safer spaces for learning.

If you are nervous about expressing traditional evangelical views be encouraged that the guidance considers a situation where “A member of the group accuses another member of homophobia, transphobia, bigotry, ‘hate speech’, abuse or a transgression of safeguarding protocols, or intimidates them by their words or actions, when someone – in a *tone of genuine and respectful sharing or enquiry*” (emphasis added) does one of the following:

- expresses their view that ‘my reading of the Bible is that same-sex activity and/or gender transition are wrong’.
- states that their understanding of Scripture is that marriage is intended to be between a man and a woman, including stating that this is the current position of the Church of England.
- asks non-personal questions about sexuality and identity.
- unintentionally uses words to describe sexuality or identity that others prefer not to use or even find offensive.

The guidance is clear that “Such contributions are not homophobic. The utmost care should be taken, therefore, not to use this term in this context: to use it in this way is a form of bullying”.

Discussion One

Notes

- The importance of holiness and obedience and unity in the identity of the church (“one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” in the words of the creed) is helpfully set out in the teaching session.
- A key statement is that “Diversity has theological limits” (54). It is recognised that this means situations can arise where “we find Christians unable to recognise each other as faithful Christians, or we find different beliefs or practices leading to separation between churches” (54). Part of what we are doing through the LLF process is “facing questions about where the boundaries of acceptable diversity ought to be drawn” (55).
- Any appeal to Romans 14-15 depends on treating differences over sexuality as equivalent to those described here between Jews and Gentiles over food and this is highly contentious. In the words of Tom Wright, “Paul insists that the markers which distinguish Jew from Gentile are no longer relevant in the new, messianic dispensation; but the Jewish-style worship of the One God, and the human male/female life which reflects that creational monotheism, is radically reinforced”.

Possible Questions to Consider

- In what ways have people seen our disagreements over sexuality expressed well when we “disagree sincerely about what God wants” (54) and in what ways have they seen them revealing that “we’re all sinful and behave badly” (54)?
- How do we seek unity and also work out and set the limits of theological diversity within the church?
- What do people make of the church’s current policies in relation to clergy and laity and distinguishing between marriages and same-sex civil partnerships that have “tried to maintain unity with diversity in various ways” (55)? Why have so many people “struggled with these compromises and with the church’s attempts to find a way forward” (55)? Have we been guilty of the hypocrisy discussed at the start of this session?

SESSION FIVE Life Together

How do diversity and difference affect our life together as a church?

This final session is focussed on thinking about the differences that have been explored, their significance, and their implications for our life together. CEEC has explained in various places (see the Further Resources) why it believes these matters are so important and why any change in teaching, liturgy or law will require some form of “visible differentiation” in the church’s life. This session enables us to reflect on questions like this and hear different views about the significance and implications of our divergent understandings of God’s will.

The guidance is clear that “Such contributions are not homophobic. The utmost care should be taken, therefore, not to use this term in this context: to use it in this way is a form of bullying”.

There is a helpful discussion about the Principles between Ed Shaw (Co-Chair of CEEC) and Bishop Nicholas Chamberlain on YouTube. Martin Davie has offered a more critical review in [this blog post](#) and Iain Baker offers reflections on the Principles [here](#).

LLF has now produced a separate course on the Principles using excerpts from the LLF Course but with additional materials including Bible Studies. This can be downloaded or watched online [here](#).

Story Films

In each of Sessions 2-5 of the filmed course there are two story films in which Christians share their own stories in relation to identity, sexuality and relationships. These also are never the focus of discussion but many people find them particularly challenging. This is in part because they are so emotionally powerful and because several of them question or challenge current CofE teaching or may be understood as in tension with some of the biblical material covered in the course.

The following tips and questions may help you as you prepare and then reflect on the films:

- Watch them more to learn about the people and their understanding, journey and witness as followers of Jesus rather than to react against any views they express. Ask God to give you wisdom and discernment, grace and love, as you listen.
- As it says in the guidance on the LLF hub – “They are to be ‘received’ with openness rather than to be discussed or analysed. If you do reflect on them in the group, say only what you would say in the presence of the person in the film”
- How would you and your local congregation respond to meeting them, or someone with a similar story and perspective, in person? Would they feel loved and welcomed in your church?
- What are your emotional and intellectual responses to the story? One person responding to one film commented, “Evangelicals will struggle to interpret this powerful moment rightly if we feel like the only options are to deny the reality of the emotions felt, or to accept the validity of changing the Church’s doctrine”.
- What questions would you want to explore with them about their story and their beliefs if you could talk further with them?
- How does this story relate to other stories in the films (there are 16 LLF films on the hub), your own story, or other stories you know?

- How does this story relate to your understanding of the Bible's teaching?
- How do you think we should respond when the testimony of various people's different stories differ from our understanding of biblical teaching? One comment in relation to one session of the Course was "I think putting the Biblical text next to the contrasting story simply highlights the problem that the C of E has here!"

Pray for the people in the film and those who support them in their Christian discipleship.

A Possible Aid to Reflection

In relation to the teaching input and biblical material in each session it may be helpful to consider the following five tasks when using the material:

Find your
"Friends"

What one or two features of the material did you find helpful and encouraging and would like to highlight and explore further?

Pursue your
"Puzzles"

What in the presentation was new to you or raised questions and challenges to your current understanding or practice that you realise you need to think and pray about further?

Name your
"Negatives"

What bits of the material did you disagree with or find particularly difficult? What was so challenging about them? What can you see positively in those views? What would you like to know from those who hold these views to understand them better? How would you respond charitably and constructively to the views you disagreed with and the arguments you found unconvincing?

Define your
"Differences"

What would you highlight as the significant differences between your views and your approach to these questions and those of others?

Celebrate your
"Commonalities"

What do you think represent shared commitments and beliefs across some of our significant differences in the church?

Further Resources

Much of CEEC's film, *The Beautiful Story*, is relevant to issues covered in this session. Chpts 1 & 2 (6 mins) is more relevant for the first discussion and chpts 6-8 (8 mins) more relevant for the second discussion.

A helpful, relatively short discussion of the key biblical texts relating to same-sex relationships was written by evangelical New Testament scholar Ian Paul for the CofE's Shared Conversations and is available online [here](#) at pp. 1-22.

A similar perspective is offered by evangelical Old Testament scholar Chris Wright in his helpful [dialogue](#) about the Bible's teaching with Walter Moberly in the LLF resources hub.

A helpful guide from two gay Christians is this [video from BIOLA University in the US](#). It opens (to 19mins) with a welcome and then summary of their own paper on the subject which reaches traditional, conservative conclusions (it [can be read here](#)). It is then followed by two gay Christians and authors of important books on the subject – Wes Hill and Justin Lee – introducing themselves (roughly to 29 mins) before they respond to the paper for about 10 mins each (Hill, from a conservative view until 41 mins and Lee until 52 mins). There follows interaction between them which is well worth watching if you have time both for its substance and style.

Martin Davie's *Glorify God in Your Body*, Chpt 8 discusses sex outside marriage, including cohabitation and same-sex sexual relationships.

In relation to what any alternative to the current teaching has to consider see Andrew Goddard, "'Equal marriage': Is There A New Christian Ethic for Sex and Marriage?"

- It is important not to be intimidated by claims concerning “increasing numbers of Christians” rejecting this or “ongoing scholarly discussions” and “different conclusions”. There are a number of other points that can be made in addition to those summarised above and mentioned in the teaching session. These include:
 - the historic teaching of the church on sexual immorality has only very recently begun to be questioned and there is no consensus about an alternative sexual ethic
 - the Bible's bigger picture on sex and marriage (as set out in The Beautiful Story) also helps explain the few specific texts which speak negatively about homosexual behaviour.
 - the “alternative readings” (49) mentioned in the teaching session are very different in their approach to Scripture. The first says we have misread what are really narrow prohibitions (although most scholars accept that the biblical authors rejected all homosexual practice). The second claims we now know better than Scripture. The third appeals to love to over-ride the specific texts.
 - although homosexuality in the ancient world commonly involved an older man and a younger boy (known as pederasty), there are examples of committed, loving same-sex relationships as well.
 - what is often presented as only a conservative/evangelical position is the current position of the Church of England, has been the position of Christians for 2,000 years, and is believed by the vast majority of Christians

Possible Questions to Consider

- How, given the church's teaching, should we respond to the practice of heterosexual cohabitation which is much more common than same-sex unions and marriage?
- How does our response to heterosexual cohabitation relate to how we respond as a church to committed, cohabiting, same-sex couples?
- What problems do people have with the church's current teaching as summarised here especially given it has such a strong claim to be based on Scripture and tradition?
- What alternative sexual ethic is being offered to replace current teaching and is it accepted that this is different from the Bible's teaching?

Further Resources

The guides which follow for each of the sessions highlight a few resources specifically related to that session. More generally the following sites provide a mixture of articles, podcasts and videos on a range of areas related to LLF from an evangelical perspective:

Living Out

True Freedom Trust

The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender

If you are interested in finding out more about evangelical responses to LLF as a whole there are the following materials:

CEEC has **reflections** from four evangelicals (Jason Roach, Elaine Storkey, Andrew Goddard, and Ed Shaw) who were involved in LLF or the Pastoral Advisory Group. Their thoughts on their experience and lessons learned may help you prepare for involvement in the course.

Martin Davie's "Living in Love and Faith: A Biblical Response" (Dictum Press) is a detailed critique of LLF, focussed on the book, and is online as a free **PDF here**.

Church Society has various responses and resources online **here**

Ian Paul's blog has a number of articles on LLF by him and by Andrew Goddard which can be accessed **here**. Ian has also written a short guide to it for **Evangelicals Now** while Andrew on the launch of LLF answered 10 FAQs on **Fulcrum** in "LLF For Dummies". He has also discussed the book on a **podcast** for The Living Church.

Bishop Rod Thomas' site has an **article** responding to LLF from Simon Austen entitled "When anecdote trumps analysis".

SESSION ONE

Learning Together

What does it mean to learn together as followers of Jesus Christ?

This session helps set out some of the basic guidance on how we should approach learning together across our differences. The notes that follow highlight some key areas and questions it may be worth considering as you prepare, reflect and discuss in groups.

Discussion Two

Notes

- It is worth highlighting the short summary of what the church has taught and that it has done so for 2000 years – “sex is one of God’s good gifts to be expressed only within marriage as part of the ordering of love in creation, and for the flourishing of individuals and society. It has called for sexual abstinence of all who are not married and, following Jesus (Matthew 19) and Paul (1 Corinthians 7), commended celibacy as a sign of the new creation” (48). It is also stated that this teaching is found in Scripture which “speaks only about marriage between men and women...[and]...calls for unmarried people to remain celibate” (48). This shows how well current teaching is based on Scripture and tradition.
- Although much attention here in this session and in the church is focussed on same-sex relationships, it is important to recognise that “one challenge this teaching faces today is how the church responds to the many committed but unmarried heterosexual couples who live together and have a sexual relationship” (48).
- In relation to the texts on same-sex behaviour a number of good points
 - these are all “negative about the sexual behaviour they describe”,
 - they “have traditionally been seen as providing a consistent biblical witness against same-sex sexual activity”,
 - this “has been understood as rooted in God’s good purposes in creation and applicable in all cultures” and
 - “many Anglicans around the world believe that to move away from teaching this would be a departure from Scripture”.

Notes

Bible Study on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

- It is important to consider these 9 verses in their wider context. In advance it would be good to read 1 Cor 5-7 which contains much teaching relating to the concerns of LLF and drawing attention to this may help make more sense of the set verses.
- 1 Cor 6.9-11 which immediately precedes this reading is also important. These verses list various sins, including some sexual sins, which Paul warns can exclude people from the kingdom of God. Two of the terms in these lists are the focus of much debate in relation to same-sex relationships and are translated as “male prostitutes, sodomites” in NRSV, “men who have sex with men” in NIV, and “men who practise homosexuality” in ESV. The second discussion group will focus more on this and similar verses so discussion may be best left until then but it is good to be aware of this which is not obvious from the course material.
- It is sometimes said that our world is very different from that of the Bible, not least in relation to matters of sex. While there are differences, there are also, as the commentary notes, many parallels between our world and that of ancient Corinth in terms of patterns of sexual behaviour and attitudes to sex e.g. a focus on freedom. It's important not to lose sight of the statement that, “Like Jesus, Paul was not afraid to urge a lifestyle for Christians that differed in some ways from the surrounding culture” (47).
- Paul does not just set out rules. He helps the Christians in Corinth think about sexual behaviour as part of understanding God's work in our lives and puts great stress on the importance of our bodies, calling us to glorify God in our bodies.

Possible Questions to Consider

- What can we learn from Paul's approach to the problems in Corinth relating to sex for how we teach and learn about sex in the church today?
- In what ways are Christians today to be different from our society in relation to sex?
- What are the challenges that can arise when we live differently or when we speak about sexual immorality in church or society?

Discussion One

This is an important listening exercise which offers an opportunity to share something of your own story or your hopes and fears in relation to the course and to listen carefully to two other participants. It is worth giving some thought and prayer to what you might say when you speak.

Notes

Bible Study on Matthew 7.24-29

- This passage, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, helpfully highlights the importance of obeying Jesus' teaching and the serious consequences of not doing so (v27). It therefore reminds us at the start of the course to focus on the importance of listening to God's Word, learning from it, and obeying it in relation to contentious matters explored in later sessions.
- The Church of England's doctrine of marriage explicitly claims (in canon B30) that it is “according to our Lord's teaching”.
- The wider teaching in the Sermon on the Mount includes teaching relating to concerns of LLF e.g. on lust (Mt 5.27-30) and divorce (5.31-32). These six verses follow warnings about narrow and wide gates, easy and hard roads, and true and false prophets and claims to follow Jesus (7.13-23). These warnings raise a key question of how as followers of Jesus we discern the right path and distinguish between true and false prophets. This will be part of the second discussion group and a question which is likely to keep surfacing in the course.

Possible Questions to Consider

- How do we as individuals and a church work out what it means to obey Jesus' teaching – and the wider biblical teaching – in relation to identity, marriage, sexuality and relationships?
- If the CofE claims its current teaching on marriage is based on Jesus' teaching, what are we saying and doing if we change that teaching? In the imagery of Jesus' teaching here, is the current teaching “rock” or “sand”?
- What do we do when some Christians think a particular teaching is “rock” and others claim it is “sand”? [This sort of question is a particular focus in session 5 of the course]

Discussion Two

Notes

- The teaching session contains a lot of important material about how we listen to God. Differences over this are likely to arise throughout the course and so it is good to begin exploring them together here.
- It is important to highlight what is said about Scripture – “For followers of Jesus that true teaching is found first and foremost in the Bible. We believe that the Bible gives us the most truthful account of who God is and who we are... The Bible is central to the life of the church” (11, 12).
- Related to this is also the significant statement that “The Church of England teaches us that the Bible ‘contains all things necessary for salvation’ and that Scripture ‘uniquely reveals the faith we profess’” (12). This is a reference to Article 6 of the 39 Articles which define Church of England doctrine.
- If we take this seriously then other ways of knowing and seeking truth - such as science, history, our own stories and other people’s stories about their own experience – need to be related to what Scripture teaches us.

Possible Questions to Consider

- What do these statements about the place of Scripture mean for us in terms of how we determine what is true in the areas explored in this course?
- How, in addition to the Bible studies, can we give a high place to reading and learning from Scripture together as we go through the course?
- How do people in the group see Scripture helping them make sense of their personal stories and life situations?
- How do people in the group relate the Bible’s teaching to other ways of learning?

Discussion One

Notes

- The teaching input begins with discussion of attitudes to sex in society. This sets out a bigger picture of issues other than those on which we often focus and find we disagree as Christians. There is also a clear and helpful distinction drawn between intimacy and sex. Exploring these areas may help frame reflection on what are seen as “hot topics” by highlighting areas of agreement we can miss or forget about or by uncovering other areas of disagreement which are often ignored.

Possible Questions to Consider

- How can the church speak positively about non-sexual expressions of intimacy in relationships rather than be heard only to speak against sex outside marriage? What might this look like for those who are same-sex attracted, gay or lesbian?
- The teaching session ends by emphasising that “Jesus...warns us about sexual immorality...For Paul, sexual immorality is a serious matter”. Is this one reason why disagreements about sexual immorality are particularly difficult and divisive in the life of the church?
- What would it look like for us to respond like Jesus did when speaking and relating to people in relation to questions concerning sex?

SESSION FOUR

Sex

Where do our bodies and sex fit into all this?

This session helps us think about questions of sexual behaviour and different understandings of sexual holiness and sexual immorality among Christians. It is the session which gives the most attention to the Bible's teaching on (and church's response to) same-sex relationships. The notes that follow highlight some key areas and questions it may be worth considering as you prepare, reflect and discuss in groups.

Further Resources

Kirsty Birkett, Theological Consultant to Church Society, has written a short blog post on [Handling the Bible in Love and Faith](#) and Chpt 5 of Martin Davie's [critique](#) (pp. 131-67) explores Anglican teaching on Scripture and his assessment of LLF in relation to this.

Marty Ford on the [Church Society blog](#) gives more details about Article 6 of the 39 Articles (and some of its practical outworkings) which is quoted in the second teaching session.

[Part Four](#) of the LLF book is particularly focussed on how we hear God with its opening chapter ([Chpt 13](#)) looking at Scripture and some of the different views of Scripture found among Anglicans.

Helen Collins, a tutor at Trinity College, Bristol and author of *Reordering Theological Reflection: Starting with Scripture* (SCM, 2020) discusses some of the issues raised in this session and which are likely to surface throughout the course, in this 30 minute [podcast](#) on "How Does Scripture Speak Into Everyday Life?".

Secular philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, has helpful reflections on appeal to lived experience in [this online article](#).

SESSION TWO

Identity

How does our identity in Christ relate to sex and gender?

This session explores personal identity and in particular the experience of those who identify as gay, lesbian or trans. It is important to be aware that many who have done the course holding traditional views found it one of the most challenging of the sessions and a difficult place to start looking at some of our differences. The notes that follow highlight some key areas and questions it may be worth considering as you prepare, reflect and discuss in groups.

Possible Questions to Consider

- What should the church say about the proper place for sexual expression if it is something different from its current teaching that this is marriage between a man and a woman?
- Given Scripture is clear about the importance of holiness is there not a major problem with changing our long-established sexual ethic, especially when there appears to be no clear consensus on an alternative understanding of a godly pattern of sexual relationship?
- How do we as individuals and a church evaluate different ways of reading the Bible and decide between them when they are incompatible?

Further Resources

Kate Wharton's article, "[Why It Helped Me to Make a Public Commitment to Singleness](#)" (with supporting [podcast](#)) and book *Single-Minded: Being Single, Whole and Living Life to the Full* (Monarch, 2013) are helpful guides on singleness as is Sam Allberry's *7 Myths About Singleness* (Crossway, 2019).

On friendship a helpful resource is the work of Wesley Hill, a celibate same-sex attracted Christian, especially his book *Spiritual Friendship* whose themes he explores in this [longer video](#) and this [shorter video](#). He and others also write at a [blog](#) of the same name. See also Martin Davie's *Glorify God in Your Body*, Chpt 6.

On marriage and singleness, a fuller sense of the biblical teaching can be found in *The Beautiful Story*, especially Chpts 3-5 (about 10 mins long). See also Martin Davie's *Glorify God in Your Body*, especially Chpts 3 and 5.

C. S. Lewis' original radio talks on The Four Loves (together with helpful added Doodle illustrations) can be view on YouTube: [Storge or Affection](#), [Philia or Friendship](#), [Eros](#) and [Agape](#).

On singleness and friendship, the LLF film of [Jenny](#) is a powerful witness from an evangelical, alongside that of Luke shown in session 2 of the course.

Discussion Two

Notes

- The traditional Christian teaching about marriage, including the three 'goods' of marriage (faithfulness, children, and sacrament), is set out clearly in the course teaching input. Given this is rooted in Scripture, developed down through the centuries, and shared across denominations, the burden of proof lies with those who seek to change this. It has been suggested that our approach should be like the 'umpire's call' in the DRS system in cricket: the assumption is to stick with the original umpire's decision while asking if there is a good reason to overturn it.
- The link of marriage to procreation shows us that marriage is not simply about the relationship of the couple. It is also about wider society and the common good, especially the nurture and training of the next generation. Redefining marriage so that it is simply about the love between two people (who may be either same sex or opposite sex) alters this important aspect of marriage in Christian understanding.
- Although the teaching session refers to marriage as a picture of God's covenant love for Israel, the union of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5) and our future union with God (Revelation 19 and 21) it does not do justice to these central themes in Scripture. The Beautiful Story film is one way of getting a better picture of the Bible's deep and rich vision of marriage.
- The teaching input is clear that "The Church also teaches that God's gifts of sexual desire and expression find their proper place and freest space in marriage" (36). This is why the church treats all sex outside marriage as falling short of God's purposes. It also shows that the church is not "anti-LGBT" but "pro-sex-within-marriage".
- In setting out different views, the teaching session introduced them both with "Many Anglicans" (37-8). In fact, the overwhelming majority of Anglicans (and other Christians) worldwide today continue to support traditional teaching on marriage.
- The reality of "different ways to interpret the Bible" (38) does not mean that all ways are equally valid. Often the differences go further and deeper to whether or not one accepts what the Bible teaches in a specific area.

Discussion One

Notes

- After explaining the different elements that shape our stories of who we are, we are told that "we all have our own stories to tell, but, as followers of Jesus, we know that we're part of a much, much bigger story" (20). This question of how stories we tell about ourselves or others tell us about themselves (such as in the story films) are related to that bigger story is a really important one in this course. It might be good in considering your own sense of identity to think about how you understand who you are in the light of that bigger biblical story and the gospel and to try to hear how others do this.
- A key point made is that our disagreements about sexuality and gender are often linked to the fact that biblically "some of the differences between human beings are not matters to celebrate, however, but are fractures or distortions" (20) and "what some see as God-given diversity, others may see as forms of brokenness" (20). This is one of the most difficult areas to talk about because for many people it uses negative language for something they see as central to their identity. It can be heard as denying the important truth that "every human person is created in the image of God and is the object of God's care and love" (20). It is therefore important to be careful not to personalise such language and be clear that "fractures", "distortions" and "brokenness" describe the situation of all of us as a result of sin. These terms apply in various ways to every area of all our lives.

Possible Questions to Consider

- What does it mean that "our deepest identity is to be found 'in Christ' (2 Cor 5:17)" (20) and how does this relate to our gender identity and identities focused on sexuality?
- How do we decide between different understandings of what is good diversity to be celebrated and what is brokenness needing redemption? For evangelicals, the witness of Scripture is central in making these discernments and the opening chapters of Genesis, as quoted by Jesus and considered next in the Bible Study, have been particularly important as a guide.
- What do we do when as Christians we have such fundamentally different assessments in relation to "what to affirm and celebrate, and what needs healing and repentance" (21)?

Notes

Bible Study on Genesis 1:27 & Galatians 3:28

- This Bible study is different from the others and more difficult because it is focussed just on two verses, one from the OT and one from the NT. It may be helpful to draw attention to the wider context of each of these. In particular, as highlighted by the earlier discussion of identity, it is important to recognise that we cannot read Gen 1 and 2 without reference to Gen 3 and the Fall.
- The LLF teaching input on Genesis 1.27 offers two contrasting views without comment. It gives some time to “different readings” that question or reject the long-held view of “our God-given human identity as involving a clear differentiation between male and female” (22). It is important to be aware that these alternative readings are very recent and have not convinced most biblical scholars.
- The reference to “dawn and dusk” may provoke discussion as it brings in other aspects of creation not referred to in the text in order to claim the text has space for categories other than “male and female”. The differences are worth noting eg dawn and dusk arise in many contexts because day turns into night and vice versa as an ordered natural pattern within creation but there is no similar regular, ordered natural movement between male and female in humans.
- As noted in the teaching, Gal 3.28 is focussed on our identity in Christ and the unity that this brings across a range of differences and inequalities. There is nothing here or elsewhere in the NT that suggests the created distinction between male and female has been erased by the coming of Christ. Elsewhere, Paul, addresses Christians as male and female and teaches about how they relate as men and women.

Possible Questions to Consider

- Given the importance of obeying Jesus' teaching, as discussed in session 1, is it not significant that Mt 19 (and Mk 10) refers to Jesus quoting Gen 1.27 about being created male and female (especially as quoting Gen 2.24 would be sufficient to respond on the question of divorce)?
- Does the fact that the account of creation refers to “male and female” give biblical support to the view that the gender identity of trans people is better viewed as one example of the various forms of “brokenness” and “distortions” we all experience due to the Fall rather than part of the diversity of God's good creation?

Notes

Bible Study on Matthew 19:1-12

- This passage – and the passages in Genesis it quotes (Gen 1.27 and 2.24) – is central to the Christian understanding of marriage. Jesus could have responded by just quoting Gen 2.24 but he combines this with 1.27. This shows that he connects the social reality of marriage between a man and a woman to how God made us as humans: male and female.
- In seeking to speak into the controversial question of his day concerning divorce and remarriage Jesus turns to the Scriptures as the authoritative witness to God's will. The Scriptures here challenge the common practice of God's people in the time of Jesus which was much more permissive in relation to divorce.
- Jesus appeals to God's intention in creation as taking priority over the experience of the fallen world and even over how God's Law sought to regulate that experience. He talks about Moses allowing divorce due to sin (the “hardness of your hearts”).
- The passage — by commending “eunuchs” and describing those who “make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven” — also commends the life of celibate singleness.

Possible Questions to Consider

- How do those who support same-sex marriage understand themselves to be faithful to Jesus' teaching and his appeal to Genesis 1 and 2 here?
- What can we learn from this passage about seeking God's best but also recognising the impact of sin in our lives and relationships?
- How can the church give a positive vision for the single life and support those who are single?

Discussion One

Notes

- The centrality of love in all good relationships is emphasised along with the recognition that “love is expressed differently in different relationships” (32). This reminds us that genuine love may be present but also expressed in ways that are not right in a particular relationship. It also shows us that even when we consider certain relationships wrong (eg sexual relationships outside marriage) we can recognise they may be marked by patterns of love.
- The teaching session talked about agape love as central in Christian teaching about love but there are other ancient words for love. C. S. Lewis spoke about four loves. In addition to *agape* love there is also *storge* love for familial love, *philia* love for friendship love, and *eros* for erotic and sexual love.

Possible Questions to Consider

- How can we recognise and speak about different patterns of love and see them at work in our various relationships?
- How can we as a church better recognise, encourage and celebrate committed friendships, including patterns of godly same-sex love and intimacy, while also upholding that sexual expressions of love are only right between a man and a woman committed in marriage?

Discussion Two

Notes

- It is important to distinguish clearly between those who are trans (where there is not known biological ambiguity about whether they are male or female) and those who have differences of sex development (DSD), sometimes referred to as an intersex condition. (For those wanting to hear the story of a Christian born with intersex traits, the LLF film of [Sara](#) is helpful). There is also a wide diversity within each of these groups of people such that Mark Yarhouse, an evangelical psychologist and therapist with expertise in this area, stresses that “when you have met one trans person, you have met one trans person”.
- The teaching input acknowledges that language in this area is controversial, that there is much we do not know about gender identity, that society is divided in how to understand these areas, and that there are “reports of some who speak about regretting their transition”.
- The acknowledgment that some prefer the language of “same-sex attracted” to “gay” may be worth exploring. “Same-sex attracted” is generally used by those committed to traditional teaching (see [this online piece](#) by Sam Allberry) and reflects a concern about making sexual attractions too central in our identity, especially if we are Christians. The language is sometimes objected to by those who identify as gay or lesbian.

Possible Questions to Consider

- The distinction between biological sex and gender is explained but it is claimed that “it’s impossible to draw a neat line between the two” (24). How do people distinguish between these two categories and is the biological male/female distinction the most important given the biblical material discussed earlier?
- Given how much controversy there is in relation to gender identity and transition and the fact it is not directly addressed in Scripture, how can we learn more about these areas and understand better the experience and self-understanding of those who identify as trans?
- How, as Christians and local congregations, should we respond to people, including fellow Christians, who identify as trans or who have differences of sex development?

Further Resources

Tim and Kathy Keller's [talks](#) at the Living Out Conference on Identity in Christ help explore Culture and Identity, Christ and Identity and Church and Identity.

To explore areas relating to sexuality more you may want to look at the various resources on the [Living Out](#) website which include story films with stories similar to those of Luke shown in this session and various articles and podcasts. Within the LLF story films, that of [Graham](#) is another similar to those on the Living Out site while those of [Anton](#) and of [Bill, Jayne and Luke](#) offer different perspectives.

[This short online article](#) by Mark Yarhouse offers a helpful guide in relation to transgender identities and you can also find various talks by him on YouTube as well.

Another helpful guide is Preston Sprinkle in his recent book "Embodied" and various resources, including podcasts talking with transgender Christians, are to be found on his [Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender](#) website.

The Evangelical Alliance has a [page](#) which includes its recent short resource [Transformed: A Brief Biblical and Pastoral Introduction to Understanding Transgender in a Changing Culture](#) and some short films with personal testimonies. Pete Lynas, author of the resource, has a discussion with transgender Christian, Jenny-Anne Bishop, in this 2019 edition of the [Unbelievable? With Justin Brierley](#) podcast.

In relation to sexuality and questions of identity see Ed Shaw's short article "[What is Sexuality For?](#)" or his book [Purposeful Sexuality: A Short Christian Introduction](#) (IVP, 2021).

Martin Davie's [Glorify God in Your Body](#), Chpt 7 offers an evangelical understanding of intersex conditions and transgender identities.

SESSION THREE

Relationships

What kinds of relationships does God call us to?

This session explores different patterns of relationship – particularly friendship and marriage – and the centrality of love. As we consider “whether the church’s pastoral practice or teaching in relation to marriage should change, and if so how” (38) it points out that the church has clear teaching on marriage and that this is understood to come from Scripture and Jesus’ own teaching. The notes that follow highlight some key areas and questions it may be worth considering as you prepare, reflect and discuss in groups.