

Bible Study for The Story of God and Us – LGBTQ+ Inclusion

1. *Why do you think FCC decided to be an LGBTQ+ affirming church?*

It's not because we have many LGBTQ members and it was the convenient thing to do.
It's because we believe our God is for inclusion of ALL.

It's important for us as a church to know *why* we believe our God is for inclusion of all.

Four Reasons Why We Believe Our God Is For Inclusion of All:

- A. Because loving our neighbour means ALL neighbours (no ifs, no buts)
- B. Because LGBTQ+ people are also made in the image of God
- C. Because it's what Jesus would have done
- D. Because the arc of Scripture points towards inclusion, not exclusion

- A. Because loving our neighbour means ALL neighbours (no ifs, no buts)
The most fundamental aspect of the Christian faith is love – loving God with all your heart, soul and mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself. And we saw that love means experiencing God's grace in understanding our worthiness in God's eyes. And in the same way, love means helping others to understand their worthiness too – that they are equally beloved in God's eyes, no matter who they are or what labels society puts on them.

2. *Who is the neighbour we are supposed to love as ourselves?*

When Jesus was asked by the expert in religious law, "And who is my neighbour?" he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He spoke about a Samaritan, one of the Jews' hated enemies, showing love and compassion to a Jewish man who was attacked by robbers and left for dead. And then instead of answering the question posed to him by the expert in religious law, he turned the question around and asked, "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?"

The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy."

Then Jesus said, "Yes, then go and do the same."

The challenge Jesus is issuing to us is for us to *BE* the neighbour to everyone. It's not about us figuring out who to be kind to; it's about us showing love and kindness to everyone who is in need of love and kindness.

- B. Because LGBTQ+ people are also made in the image of God

Genesis 1:27: So God created human beings in God's own image, in the image of God, God created humans; male and female God created them.

Psalms 8:3-5: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what are they that you are mindful of them, and mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

Every single human being should be treated with equal dignity as persons created in God's image. Whatever your gender identity -- whether you are cisgender or transgender or somewhere along the spectrum; whatever your sexual orientation – whether you are drawn towards people of the same or opposite sex, you are a human being created in God's own image, loved and cared for tenderly by the Creator. So we are to treat every person with

equal dignity and love them as God does. As Christ's followers, we seek to uplift and celebrate the worth and integrity of all people as created in God's very image and likeness.

C. Because it's what Jesus would have done

Jesus was revolutionary in the way he welcomed and embraced those who were deemed "sinners" in his time. In fact, the lengths he would go to show compassion to and embrace those labelled by society as those rejected by God placed him at odds with the religious authorities of that time to the extent that they labelled him "possessed by the Devil".

3. *What labels have been placed on you because you chose to embrace those society deems as "rejected by God"?*

There is a spectrum of views towards LGBTQ+ acceptance in the Christian world today:

- LGBTQ Welcoming = you're welcome BUT.....
- LGBTQ Accepting = we accept you BUT.....
- LGBTQ Affirming = we love you FULL STOP.

Most churches would say they are LGBTQ welcoming. But there is a big difference between welcoming and affirming.

4. *What do you think is the difference between "welcoming" and "affirming"?*

Christians who stand with being "welcoming but not affirming" don't realize the hurt that this stance carries. It is like saying, "You are very welcome here but we don't support your relationship with your long-time partner"; or "You are welcome here but we believe your current lifestyle is sinful and you need to prayerfully consider what is pleasing to God"; or "We don't practise conversion therapy but we strongly recommend that you stay celibate for the rest of your life".

This theological tension has led some pastors to express the view that the current exclusive positions of many churches are untenable and unjust. One pastor summed up the "welcoming but not affirming" position in this way: "It's almost like with one hand you're shaking them by the hand, and with the other hand you're slapping them in the face."

"Welcoming and affirming" is the common language that we in FCC use to demonstrate that we not only recognize that LGBTQ people deserve respect, but also the affirmation that they are equally loved by God, regardless of who they love or how they identify with their gender.

That said, we need to recognize that Christians have the capacity to change their minds and their positions regarding the acceptance and affirmation of LGBTQ people within the Church, and many have over time. Often, the shift happens because they realize it's what Jesus would have done. And as followers of Christ, we all need to be open to changing our minds and re-examining our positions.

*Read: *Like the Wideness of the Sea*, Lewis B. Smedes

<http://www.archives.soulforce.org/1998/01/01/like-the-wideness-of-the-sea/>

5. *What led Smedes to change his mind regarding the Christian stance towards homosexuality?*

Jack Rogers, the author of *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality (2009)* made a biblical case for equal rights for LGBTQ people. Throughout history, he observes, Christianity has moved towards ever greater openness and inclusiveness. Today's church is led by many of those who were once excluded: people of color, women, and divorced and remarried people. He argued that when we interpret the Bible through the lens of Jesus' redemptive life and ministry, we see that the church is called to grant equal rights to all people.

“The best methods of interpretation, from the Reformation on down through today, call upon us to interpret the Scripture from the lens of Jesus Christ’s life and ministry. Using this method, we see clearly that Jesus and the Bible, properly understood, do not condemn people who are homosexual. In fact...the Bible contains an extravagant welcome for sexual minorities.” -Jack Rogers

D. Because the arc of Scripture points towards inclusion, not exclusion

In the Old Testament, those who were sexually different—like eunuchs and barren women—were barred from entering the assembly of the Lord (see Deuteronomy 23:1). But within the text of Scripture, we see greater inclusion of gender and sexual minorities. In Isaiah (54:1) and later in Acts (8:26-39), we see the trajectory towards greater inclusion of barren women and eunuchs, and they were fully embraced in the community of believers.

Throughout history, there have been many examples of Christians reconsidering their interpretation of Scripture due to their experiences.

6. *What examples can you think of in history where Christians have reconsidered their interpretation of Scripture due to their experiences?*

- The early Christians chose to include Gentiles in the church without requiring them to be circumcised and obey the Old Testament law—and they made this decision based on their experience. Peter declared of early Gentile believers, “God, who knows the heart, showed that God accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as God did to us... (Acts 15:8, 10)
- In the 19th century, Christians reconsidered longstanding interpretation of Scripture that supported slavery. William Wilberforce and many other Christian abolitionists appealed to the horrific reality of slavery to urge other Christians to change their understanding of Scripture on the topic.

"You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know." — *William Wilberforce*

We live in times where many Christians remain non-affirming regarding the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the Church. The mandate falls on us – FCC as a community -- to learn how to be bridge builders and how to be effective advocates for LGBTQ inclusion in our society today.