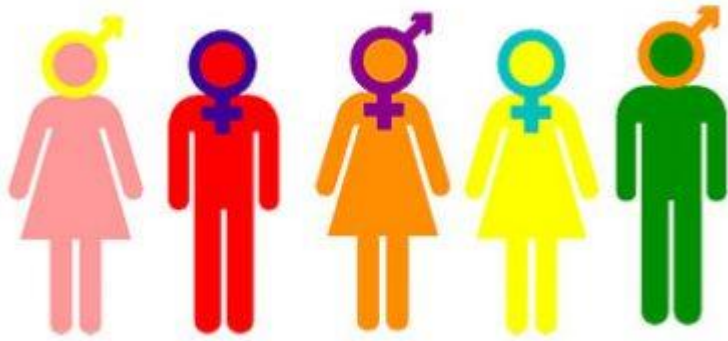


Gender & Sexuality by the Book

*A Bible study on God's Plan and Design
for our Gender and Sexuality*



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*Unless noted otherwise, this Bible study is referencing the
New Living Translation (2nd Edition) of the Bible.*

Introduction

We live in a day and age when the concepts of gender and sexuality are being redefined in unprecedented ways. Some feel this is a liberating progression in the evolution of humanity and culture, whereas others believe this is a dangerous social experiment that could have harmful repercussions for many years to come.

This Bible study is not meant to engage in a personal, emotional, or political debate on the issue. Rather it is meant to help any sincere seeker discover what the ancient, unchanging Judeo-Christian scriptures (the Bible or “The Book”) have always said about the issues of gender and sexuality. The trend in culture today is to rely more on our feelings than facts when it comes to the issues of gender and sexuality, yet our feelings tend to change whereas historical truths do not. Therefore, this study is intended to take an honest, humble, and helpful look at what the Bible teaches about these issues, and how we can use its timeless truths and principles to navigate the constantly changing waters of cultural perspectives.

Both inside and outside the church, the issues of gender and sexuality are being discussed everywhere you turn. Most people though, are too intimidated or too emotional to talk about these vital issues from a rational, objective, historical, scientific, or scriptural perspective. As a result, those who are questioning their gender or sexual identity are sifting through more questions and arguments than answers and facts.

Whether or not you are religious, whether or not you believe the Bible is God’s word, or whether you identify as male, female, non-binary, transgender, heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual, or any other sexuality or gender, it is our sincere hope that you will find this Bible study to be helpful in finding the answers you are looking for about gender and/or sexuality.

Thank you for taking this journey of discovery with us!

Bret & Jorie Holman

Lesson 1: What does the Bible say about gender?

God has always had a plan and purpose for the genders of humanity from the very beginning, which we can see clearly in the first book of the Bible – Genesis. The Hebrew word for Genesis, “Bereshit,” means “in the beginning.”

In Chapter 1 of Genesis, we see the chronological account of God creating the universe as we know it. On the fifth day of creation, he began the process of creating his highest of all creation - human beings - to steward and enjoy his creation. Let’s see what we can learn from this account about the origin of human beings and the purpose and plan for the male and female genders.

1. What does the Bible say about God’s creation of human beings?
Genesis 1:27

Notice that it says, “male and female he created them.” This implies that both genders were part of his original plan, and that he distinguishes between the two genders of his singular creation – humans. Jesus affirms this in Mark 10:6-7.

2. What did God say about everything he created? Genesis 1:31

Notice that God declared everything he made as “very good,” and there appear to be no mistakes or regrets in his design. This includes his creation of people, both male and female. His design of man and woman was not just good, it was “very good” (which means “exceedingly fit for its purpose” in the Hebrew).

As Chapter 2 of Genesis gives us a more detailed account of certain parts of the creation process, it describes God creating the first human being, Adam, as a man.

3. What did God say about this single, male person he had created?
Genesis 2:18

The first person God created to be a “helper... just right” for the man was a woman – Eve. This is not a minor detail or coincidence. God knew that a man and woman so complemented each other that their needs could not be fully met without the other. Not even the animal kingdom God created to keep Adam company, in verses 19-20, was enough to satisfy the unique needs of God’s highest, and most complex, creation – the human being he made “in His image.” Only the woman could complement the man and be the creation “just right” for him.

The male and female sexes are so intricately bound to one another, that God used a piece of the first man (his rib) to create the first “wo-man” (Verse 23). The Hebrew word for woman is “issa,” which means the “opposite of man” in a complimentary, inter-dependent, and unique way.

4. What did Adam say about the person God created from him?
Genesis 2:23

Then, to bind a man and woman together even more inextricably, God introduces the concept of marriage.

5. What does God say happens to a man and woman when they enter the covenant of marriage together? Gen. 2:24, Mark 10:6-9

Historical texts - including the Bible - are full of men and women abusing power and manipulating each other to get what they want. This tension between the sexes though, was not part of God’s

original plan. Instead, it began with the curse that God, in his justice, put upon humanity after Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed him.

6. What did God say about the tension that would forever exist between men and women as a result of the curse? Genesis 3:16b

This tension, which came into being after God’s created order was corrupted in Genesis 3, has resulted in “gender wars” throughout time and cultures. The truth is that men and women were not created to be in competition, nor is one sex more inherently valuable to God or humanity than the other. Men and women have always needed each other and always will.

Also, the Bible never states, nor even implies, that men and women would be born in the wrong bodies as a result of creation’s fall. What did come about as part of the corruption of God’s created order though, was confusion about, or rebellion against, God’s created order, which we will examine further in the subsequent lessons of this study.

In summary, the Bible teaches, from Genesis through Revelation, that men and women are...

- Unique but interdependent
- Different by design yet equally valuable
- Part of the same human race
- God’s highest of all creation
- Created to be male and female (before and after the fall)

Personal Application

Q. What did you learn from this lesson that is different than what you have believed about men, women, and their unique differences?

Feel free to write out any other insights or prayers you may have.

Lesson 2: What does the Bible say about sexuality?

For the sake of this study the term “sexuality” refers to everything to do with the vast subject of sex, including God’s plan for sexual behaviors and his design for sexual attractions or orientations. “Sex” is not a new topic in the world. In fact, like gender and relationships, sex is addressed from the very beginning of the Bible (as are gender and relationships). Let’s dig in together and see what “The Book” has to say about sexuality.

1. What did God tell Adam and Eve to do from the very beginning?
Genesis 1:28

In case you did not catch it, “be fruitful and multiply” means to populate the world with children (procreate). And God’s plan for procreation was through the most intimate physical act a man and woman can engage in – sexual intercourse.

As God did with so many other creatures, he could have designed humans to reproduce in an asexual, non-intimate manner. For example, they could have produced offspring by impersonally laying eggs and then fertilizing them as many animals do. This was not God’s plan though. Instead, he anatomically created men and women to be capable of engaging in intimate sexual intercourse and becoming “united as one” in the process (Genesis 2:24).

As the Bible describes throughout the Old and New Testaments, and as other books and Bible studies explain in greater detail, sexual intercourse between a man and woman has a much broader purpose than just procreation. Therefore, any attempt to distort or compromise God’s plan for sexuality defiles something God intended to be beautiful, sacred, and powerful.

2. What does the Bible teach us about the joy of sex between two loving partners? Song of Songs 7:6-12, Proverbs 5:15-19

Sexual intercourse is a unique, beautiful, and purposeful act that God created as a way for his creation to procreate and experience intimacy together. He is not a “prude” who is afraid to think, talk or hear about sex, nor is he offended by sexual activity when it is practiced according to his original purpose and plan.

This is often hard for us to realize because we tend to think about God and sex in the same context that we do our parents. We know that sexual intercourse happens, but we are too embarrassed or uncomfortable to talk about it.

The irony is that almost every culture throughout history has been obsessed with sex and sexual topics. It is as if sex is the “forbidden fruit” that becomes more desirable the more we try to resist or ignore it. But like the original forbidden fruit tree in the Garden of Eden, God only forbids us from compromising or distorting sexuality by pursuing it outside of his perfect plan and design. The hyper sexualization of our culture is why we are uncomfortable thinking of God and sex in the same sentence.

Now that we have established God is pro-sex when it is practiced according to his plan and design, let’s look at what his plan and design for sex has been from the beginning.

3. What does it say about Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:25?

The reason that Adam and Eve felt comfortable being completely naked in front of each other was because they were still innocent, like two small children who bathe together. When we become corrupted with shame and sexual lusts, as all of us have through the effects of our sinful nature, then we tend to corrupt everything else we experience.

4. What does the Bible say about being innocent and pure? Titus 1:15

There is no shame when a committed, married couple engages in healthy, loving sexual activity, because they know it is blessed and ordained by God himself. As with any kind of “forbidden fruit” though, it lacks the lustful appeal of something wrong. The problem with lust is that it’s never satisfied. Its addictive nature leaves you only needing more and still empty afterward.

Another problem with sex outside of God’s design is that sexual intercourse bonds two people together in way that nothing else does. Besides the emotional bond that often takes place from sexual intimacy, recent scientific studies have found that certain biological chemicals such as oxytocin are exchanged between partners who have sexual intercourse, providing a chemical “bond” between the two.¹ This bond is either with a partner in a committed, monogamous, love relationship or with a temporary partner (or partners) you simply leave a piece of yourself with.

5. What does the Bible say happens between a man and woman who have sex? Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:18

Many people who have engaged in other, more deviant, forms of sexual behavior - bestiality, multiple partners, incest, pedophilia, sadomasochism, necrophilia, and so on - have often started with lesser forms of sexual immorality only to eventually need more.²

6. What does the Bible say about bestiality? Leviticus 20:15-16, Exodus 22:19

7. What does the Bible say about incest (sex with a close relative)? Leviticus 18:11-17

8. What does the Bible say about sex outside of marriage? Deuteronomy 22:20-24, Exodus 20:14, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

9. What did Jesus say about those who cause children to stumble/sin, including a pedophile who seduces or forces a child to participate in sexual activity? Mark 9:42

These are just some of the scriptural warnings against sexual deviancy, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. Not every form of sexual deviancy that sinful people come up with can be addressed through specific scriptural warnings, rather the Bible commands us to treat sexuality with honor and purity.

Not many people would argue that the aforementioned behaviors are immoral, but in today’s culture, what was once thought of as sexually wrong, or “deviant,” has gone from disdained to tolerated to celebrated to promoted. This would include what we commonly refer to as LGBTQ+ identities and lifestyles. In Lesson 3 we will look at culture’s evolving perspective on these sexual orientations and identities, how we got here, and how they compare to what the Bible teaches. Before then, let’s look at some direct references to LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, etc.) ...

10. What does the Bible say about same-sex sexuality, whether Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual? Romans 1:24-27, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13

Most people focus on what the Bible says about same-sex attraction and sexual activity, while ignoring the second issue of violating fidelity to one partner. The Bible warns strongly against both.

Regarding the issue of transgenderism, the term “transgender” is referring primarily to a gender identity rather than the lifestyle of transexual behavior and desires. The issue of gender identity will be covered more in Lesson 4. “Queer” is an ever-evolving term that is meant to include those who do not fit the other descriptions neatly. Suffice it to say that the same Scriptural warnings against same-sex

behavior could be applied to transexual desires and behavior as well as other forms of non-conforming, “queer” desires and behavior.

In summary, the Bible teaches us the following about sexuality...

- Sexual intercourse is a unique, beautiful, and purposeful act that God created as a way for his creation to procreate and nurture intimacy together.
- Engaging in sex uniquely brings two people together as one. It is a powerful act that engages people on a physical, emotional, mental, and even spiritual level. (I Cor. 6:15-20)
- Sexual intercourse is something uniquely designed for a man and a woman to do together, and to do so within the emotionally secure bonds of a life-long, marriage covenant.
- God is not keeping us from something good by forbidding sexual activity outside of his plan. Rather, he is trying to protect us from the harm that comes from it.
- Sex has been corrupted and compromised from the beginning of mankind, but this does not change God’s original and beautiful purpose for sexual relations.
- Distortion of God’s design for sexual desires and behaviors is a symptom of the fallen, sinful nature of mankind.

Personal Application

Q. What did you learn about God’s design for human sexuality from this lesson that you may not have known or understood before?

Feel free to write out any other insights you received from this lesson, as well as any prayers you may have.

Footnotes:

1. *Medical News Today*, “Link Between Love & Oxytocin” Sep. 4, 2017

2. *Web MD*, “Signs of A Sex Addict,” December 2, 2020

Lesson 3: How does the Bible compare to culture?

For the sake of this study, we will use the word “culture” to refer to the society you are currently living in and what is considered normal and appropriate for most people in that society. Whether we are talking about a western culture, an eastern culture, an ancient culture, a modern culture, or something else, a culture rarely reflects the norms of Scriptural teaching and morality. This is because every culture is comprised of sinful, fallen human beings. As such, the question is more how close, or far, your culture is from the moral worldview of Scripture.

For the sake of this Bible study, we will focus primarily on what is considered appropriate in “western” culture in the rapidly evolving 21st century. As referenced in the last lesson, what were once considered “abnormal” sexual and gender identities have gone from forbidden to accepted to celebrated to promoted in today’s culture. Much of these identities could be summed up in the popular acronym LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and more).

One problem with the acronym LGBTQ+, as well as the letters that continue being added to it in an effort to be as inclusive as possible, is that it includes and conflates sexual orientations and gender identities, but these are separate issues. In lesson 1 we covered God’s unchanging plan and design for genders, and in Lesson 2 we covered his plan for sexuality. In this lesson, we will compare the two (sexuality and gender) side-by-side to help us learn what God’s timeless, unchanging perspectives are on these issues.

1. What does the Bible warn us to avoid in this world? Romans 12:2

2. What does the Bible say about this world? 1 John 2:15-17

As already stated, a sinful culture made up of sinful people cannot faithfully reflect the moral standards of a perfectly holy God. This does not mean we should stop trying to influence our culture for the sake of righteousness, but it means that culture, and the ever-evolving definitions of what is true or good, cannot be the standard by which we determine such things. The unchanging, timeless, cross-cultural, and morally perfect teachings of Scripture provide us a rock of truth to build our lives upon.

3. What does the Bible say about its own trustworthiness?

Psalm 19:7, Proverbs 30:5, 2 Timothy 3:16, Matthew 24:35

The Bible has survived every critic and has stood the test of time. The ten commandments that God gave us over 3,000 years ago are still indisputable, relevant, moral truths. What was considered good and right in our culture on the other hand, even just forty years ago, will likely not be considered the same today.

For example, every part of the acronym LGBTQ+ was still considered by most people in western culture as wrong and unnatural until the latter decades of the 20th century. In fact, certain state laws against sodomy weren't even overruled by the Supreme Court until 2003.³ Other than portions of Greco-Roman culture, West Africa, and possibly Imperialist China, almost every ancient society considered LGBTQ+ behavior to be immoral and abnormal. This means we are currently living in one of the greatest social experiments in the history of mankind, as we are barely one generation into normalizing, and even encouraging, LGBTQ+ lifestyles and worldviews.

As part of the movement to embrace LGBTQ+ as normal, healthy, and a sign of our moral enlightenment and evolution as humanity, the Church (Christians) has been pressured, from outside the church walls and within, to conform their beliefs to these evolving cultural norms. Clergy are intimidated to address these issues from

a clear, Scriptural perspective for fear of offending attenders, both inside and outside of the LGBTQ+ community. Non-clergy Christians lack confidence to speak to these issues from a Biblical perspective for fear of appearing unloving, intolerant, close-minded, phobic, or any other undesirable label.

Other Christians, including clergy and ministry/denominational leaders, have embraced the current teachings of culture as being a “deliverance” from the shackles of outdated theology. They have worked hard to promote scriptural essays on why the Bible supports, or at least avoids condemning, all or some of LGBTQ+ culture. The problem is that more letters continue being added to acronyms like these, and certain religious people inevitably find themselves unable to agree with all of them. Such is the dilemma with fluid, moral truth.

The driving force behind new letters, and the people they represent, being added to the LGBTQ+ acronym is a desire within our culture to exclude no one. This desire to avoid rejecting or excluding others, especially those who have been seen as outcasts before, is noble. However, it is being done at the expense of drawing any standards for what is right or wrong, good or bad, healthy or unhealthy when it comes to sexuality or gender.

The good news is that God is the founder of inclusivity and tolerance, and he has never desired to reject anybody. In fact, he gave his one and only Son for the entire world, all people, no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity.

4. Who does God desire to come to a saving knowledge of Him?

1 Timothy 2:4

The only people who have remained outside of God's family are those who have chosen to reject him. So as noble as our culture's desire for inclusivity is, we must recognize that the innate desire to include all people comes from a loving, yet just, God who is willing to forgive all sinners without excusing their sin.

As has been mentioned, many sincere Christians feel intimidated to address LGBTQ+ issues for fear of being perceived as intolerant or exclusionary. And other Christians have embraced current beliefs about LGBTQ+ issues in an effort to appeal to culture. As a result, there is very little teaching on the subject from an orthodox, historical, Biblical perspective. This Bible study was written to help address that problem by providing a clear, historical Biblical perspective in a relevant and compassionate way.

Let us look at some popular beliefs about sexuality and gender in today's world, and how they compare to what the Bible teaches.

The Bible's and Culture's Perspectives on Sexuality

5. What does the Bible say about acting upon, embracing, or practicing same-sex desires and behaviors (whether lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.)? Romans 1:26-27

This description of same-sex desires is a direct contradiction of what our culture currently teaches, which is that non-heterosexual desires are something a person is born with and are therefore no different than your ethnicity, eye color, height, or other innate biological characteristics. The problem is that the Bible says otherwise, and there has never been any valid, scientific evidence to support the claim we are biologically hardwired with same-sex desires.

Of course, you can search the internet and find "scientific" articles that support the theory of innate same-sex desires, but none of these have stood the test of time or intense scrutiny. Rather than argue this point though, as it was being argued fiercely in the late 20th century, it is important to note that culture has gone ahead and completely skipped the scientific argument anyways and decided that same-sex sexual desires are normal, acceptable, and to be explored and supported without hindrance.

6. What does the Bible say our perspective towards same-sex desires should be? Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

These Biblical references, as well as what we read in Romans 1, make it clear that God does not condone same-sex desires, attractions, or behavior in any way. But it has become popular for some "theologians" to build elaborate, Biblical arguments for condoning homosexuality to conform Scripture to cultural truth. You can search the internet and find dozens of them. But none of these doctrinal dissertations stand the test of trustworthy hermeneutics (interpreting scripture in the context of scripture as a whole) nor exegesis (interpreting scripture in the context of the time, place, and culture in which it was written).

7. What does the Bible teach us about our vulnerability for misinterpreting God's truth? Romans 1:18-24

The Bible's and Culture's Perspectives on Gender

Next, the issue of gender identity (the "T" and sometimes "Q" and "+" in LGBTQ+) has become as popular and important as the issue of sexuality in today's culture, so it is important for us to take a look at what the Bible says, and compare it to what culture says.

One way to sum up the current cultural perspective on gender identity, is to draw from a direct quote from a recent public-school district's proposed sexual education curriculum that was recently being updated. It said, for those who may be questioning their gender of birth, that "If your biology says you are one gender, but your feelings say another, then 'identity wins.'"³ In other words, what you "feel" about your gender is more trustworthy than your original biology.

Carl Trueman, author of “Strange New World,” explains how our concept of “truth” has evolved over the past several hundred years. This transformation, he describes, has left modern humans thinking that self-actualization is the ultimate goal of the individual. Rather than orienting ourselves outwardly toward a common good or divine being, we orient ourselves around our feelings – our “most authentic” source of truth. The result is that people are trained to accept and affirm every feeling, desire, and thought that they have as the truest thing about themselves.⁴

One of the obvious dangers of this postmodern, self-based version of “truth,” is that the average adolescent goes through a tremendous number of hormonal changes throughout puberty. During this transition, there can often be a lot of sexual confusion as well as even gender confusion about what is “normal.” One’s feelings can be less reliable at this stage of your life than at any other time. To put the pressure on the hormonally changing, emotionally anxious teenager to figure out their God-given gender and sexuality based on their myriad feelings is unfair and even harmful. Instead, they should be encouraged to turn to an objective, timeless, proven, and trustworthy source of moral truth such as found in the Scriptures.

8. What does the Bible say God created human beings to be?
Genesis 1:27

Notice that it does not imply other categories of genders or gender identities, including bigender, transgender, agender (or non-binary), gender fluid, etc. God only created the cisgender identities of “male and female” (Genesis 1:27), and the remainder of Scripture condemns any attempt to alter, redefine, or reinterpret the gender a person was born with.

A quick reference to the extremely rare case of someone born with intersex physical traits (biological elements of both sexes). In these cases, which are far less than 1% of all people, many are resolved through advanced medical procedures. For those which cannot be, or for those who do not desire them to be, a just and loving God

would never hold them accountable for physical characteristics out of their control. According to a proper Biblical worldview, there are many aberrations from God’s original design, including some we are born with, that are the result of a fallen, broken world.

When it comes to the issue of gender and gender identity, we must also look at the big picture of God’s plan for procreation.

9. What did God command his male and female creation to do?
Genesis 1:28a

How unfair, or even cruel, would it be for God, who describes himself as perfectly just, fair, and loving, to create some of us without the ability to fulfill his most basic purpose of procreation. This would disqualify God from being God if He asked us to do or be something he did not give us the ability to do or be.

In summary, the differences between “cultural truth” and Biblical truth, include...

- Culture says we are born with various sexual desires and identities, and that these are to be explored, discovered, supported, and even celebrated. The Bible, however, teaches that God created us to be sexually attracted to the opposite sex and to focus those desires towards one life-long partner.
- Culture says that we are not obligated to embrace the gender we were born with, and that what we feel about our gender, or how we “identify,” is more reliable than the God-given biology we were born with. Scripture says God made us “male and female,” and discourages any attempts to redefine or remake our gender.
- Culture says that truth is found through personal experience and feeling, and that we need to unshackle ourselves from the bondage of ancient, outdated moral teachings. The Bible refers to itself as the source of timeless, trustworthy truth that never changes. (Psalm 119:89, 91, 140, 142, 152, 160)

Personal Application

Q. What did you learn about God’s design for human sexuality from this lesson that you may not have known or understood before?

Feel free to write any other insights you received from this lesson, as well as any prayers you may have, in the space provided.

Footnotes:

3. Washoe County School District, proposed “SHARE” Sex Education Curriculum, Spring 2019

4. Book review by Pastor Steve Murrell, President of Every Nation Ministries, July 2022.

Lesson 4: How can we process sexual or gender confusion?

One of the responsibilities of the Church is to help people process the questions they wrestle with in this life, even the deeply personal and difficult questions. It is not enough for a Bible-believing Christian, or Christian leader, to just tell someone they should not question their sexual orientation or gender identity, especially in a day and age of more questions than answers about these issues. Instead, it is the responsibility of those who claim to know and represent the Bible to do the hard work of helping others, as well as themselves, process through the myriad questions they may face about their gender and/or sexuality.

1. What does the Bible say we are to do for others, even those who may disagree with us? 2 Timothy 2:23-26

Every one of us has grown up in a fallen, broken, and morally confused world. No matter how ideal, or far from ideal, our upbringing was, we have all been through the stages of childhood and early adulthood (adolescence). As a result, we can relate to the many physical and emotional changes we experience as we transition from childhood to adulthood, especially in a culture designed to keep us in a sort of “purgatory” as teenagers when we are too young to be taken seriously as adults but old enough to physically have children of our own.

This is likely why the Hebrew culture of the Bible did not acknowledge a “teenage” or “adolescent” stage. Rather, a young man or woman was considered an adult by the age of 13, which likely led to far less angst and confusion for these young adults. Since most of western culture no longer lives with this Biblical worldview, and now that young adults are exposed to more sexuality, information, and opinions than ever before, it is no surprise that confusion about sexuality, gender, right versus wrong, and normal versus abnormal, is so rampant. Combine all of this

with the changes in our bodies and sexual urges we experience as we come into adulthood, and we have a recipe that leads to more questions and confusion than answers and clarity.

Even if someone has already passed through the adolescent stage of life, and is well established in their adult years, they are often dealing with a lifetime of false information, sexual trauma, brokenness, and emotional pain. It is no wonder such a person may be questioning their own sexual desires or gender identity, especially when culture encourages them to do so. This is why it is so important for us to look to a reliable, perfectly-loving source like our Creator to help us define who we are and who we are created to be.

As the authors of this study, we have personally known people, even family members, who identified as heterosexual for many years, but after engaging in a relationship with someone of the same sex they changed their sexual identity. So which sexual orientation were they born with? Such questions are difficult, if not impossible, to answer if we are approaching truth from a personal, feelings-based perspective.

2. How does the Bible say we are to pursue truth and answers for our lives? Proverbs 3:5-7, Romans 12:2

If the Bible clearly teaches that God created us to be male or female and to be sexually attracted to the opposite sex, then why do so many, even Christians, struggle with other desires or feelings about their sexuality and/or gender? This is an honest and fair question we cannot afford to ignore, and one that God is not afraid to answer.

A close friend of ours, who spent years of his life identifying as a homosexual Christian man, explained it like this. He said we live in a fallen, sinful world that is full of what he called “sexual

brokenness.” Sexual brokenness can refer to anything from a married man who relies on pornography to fulfill his sexual desires to a person who has “exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.” (Romans 1:26-27)

3. What does the Bible say about the state of our fallen world?
Genesis 6:5-7, 2 Peter 2:20, 2 Timothy 3:1-5

One of the most challenging questions we receive as Christian leaders is – “Can someone who identifies as LGBTQ+, or who fully supports those who do, still be saved and go to heaven?” Our answer often surprises people - “Of course they can!”

Not because God condones anything we believe, feel, or practice outside of his perfect will, but because our sexual and/or gender identities are sanctification (discipleship) issues not salvation issues. Of the hundreds of people we have seen come to salvation in Christ, not one of them, including ourselves, had beliefs, feelings, or lifestyles that all perfectly aligned with God and Scripture. That’s exactly why we needed to be saved! If God waited until we “figured it all out,” then not one of us would be bound for heaven.

4. What does the apostle Paul say about the way people are before they come to salvation through Christ? 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

As we help others process through their sexuality and/or gender issues, we must not let ourselves get caught in the trap of putting the proverbial “cart before the horse.” In other words, we need to focus first on whether the person we are helping is in right standing with God rather than starting with the secondary issues of their

sexual orientation or gender identity. Have they received the forgiveness of their sins, and a new heart, that only Christ can give those who are willing to repent and believe in Him? This is the first, and most important, question that must be answered. To focus on the behavior or beliefs of a person that we perceive as contrary to scripture, is to focus on the external “branches” of a person’s life rather than the “roots” of their problem first.

Once the issue of salvation is resolved, we can move on to the sanctification (discipleship) issues that follow. As we do, we must remember that our sovereign, wise God only works on one issue at a time and in the order that he sees fit. This means that if we are working with the Holy Spirit to disciple another believer, especially a new or newer believer, we must patiently wait and address only the issues we see God addressing. To do more is to run the risk of getting ahead of God and trying to change the external behavior(s) of someone without God changing their internal desires first. We have made this mistake ourselves, and it only leads to frustration on the part of both parties.

5. What did Paul say about the struggle we must go through in the sanctification process? Romans 7:14-25

A good example of this process played out is found in an opportunity we had to lead a particular young man to faith in Christ and disciple him going forward. He was a professional dancer in a big show on the Las Vegas strip, and like many of his peers he identified as a gay man. When he first visited our church it was clear that he was sincerely seeking Christ, and this was affirmed when he surrendered his life to Christ soon afterwards.

As we were in the early stages of the “establishing” stage of his discipleship process, we covered the Biblical mandate to be water baptized as a public profession of his faith. He was so excited to get baptized that he invited dozens of his friends, including

members and/or supporters of the LGBTQ+ community, to attend his baptism. As we stood next to him in the swimming pool, we could tell everyone was wondering if we knew he identified as a gay man. We broke the ice by acknowledging it right away and explaining that we had asked him if he had any known, revealed sin in his life that he was unwilling to repent of before being baptized. We told them that he said, “Absolutely not!” Therefore, we had no problem baptizing him just as we had baptized many people others who had unresolved sanctification issues in their lives as new believers.

We continued to honestly address the issue of his sexual orientation as the discipleship process continued. He was sincere in his commitment as a Christ follower, and was adamantly committed to the Biblical mandates of abstinence before marriage and pursuing a monogamous relationship with whomever God called him to marry. However, we wrestled with passages such as Romans 1:24-27, and we did not always agree on God’s will for his sexual orientation. But he always thanked us for being completely honest with him and for challenging him to face the truth with an open heart.

Personal Application

Q. What did you learn about how to process questions or confusion about sexuality or gender issues from this lesson?

Feel free to write out any other insights you received from this lesson, as well as any prayers you may have.

Lesson 5: WWJD (What Would Jesus Do)?

What would Jesus do if he lived in our day and age? Did Jesus welcome people of alternate sexualities or genders among his followers? What would Jesus say to a person who was questioning their gender or sexual orientation? These and many questions like them are important and helpful to answer.

In today's divisive environment found on social media and in our changing culture, it is easy to dig our heels into our personal opinions, hide within the comfort of our personal "echo chambers," and refuse to be open to what the Bible says about our personal beliefs and worldview. But to do so is to run the risk of missing eternal truths that can set us free. (John 8:32) At the same time, to condemn, reject, or exclude anyone who disagrees with what the Bible teaches, risks driving them further from God and missing the opportunity to lead them gently, lovingly, and honestly to salvation through Christ and deliverance from their sinful nature.

One of the most common complaints about Jesus of Nazareth, especially from those in the religious community, was that he welcomed and associated with "sinners" and even "scum." Was this because Jesus was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, the sin of their lives? Obviously not, because he regularly preached against all forms of sin and commanded people to repent. (Matthew 4:17)

1. What did Jesus say about those he welcomed and associated with?
Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:14-17, Luke 5:27-32
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Jesus never compromised the truth or tolerated sin in order to accommodate those he was ministering to. In fact, he was not afraid to confront sin head on. Sometimes it was gently, as with the humble Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Other times it was more severely as with the arrogant and prideful religious elite (Matthew 23). In every case though, he addressed sinful attitudes

and lifestyles with complete honesty and Biblical integrity. This gives us some helpful insight regarding how we should be like Christ as we engage the both the humble and the hostile of our day.

First and foremost, we must learn to speak the truth boldly and honestly but always in love as Jesus did. Whenever Jesus encountered a sinner whom he detected was sincerely seeking the truth, he was never harsh in his tone or approach.

Take for example the woman at the well in John 4. This woman was already an ethnic outcast as a Samaritan, as well as a social outcast because of her multiple marriages and divorces. Rather than heap more condemnation upon her situation though, Jesus told her how she could be forgiven, restored, and set free from her sin.

2. What did Jesus say to the woman who was caught in the act of adultery ? John 8:3-11
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Notice that he did not say "It's ok, we all make mistakes" or "It's fine, adultery isn't that big of a deal anyways." No, instead he said, "Go and sin no more." He used the situation to expose the hypocrisy and trickery of those who were accusing her, as well to give her a chance for redemption. This is what Christ does, yet he never excuses, ignores, or condones our sin.

This Christlike approach has personally helped us with the many opportunities we have had to minister to those who hold alternative, non-Biblical sexual or gender beliefs. One of our own family members, who at the time identified as a lesbian despite coming to Christ, once asked us if we rejected her because she identified as lesbian. We told her "Absolutely not!" because our love for her was unconditional. We made it clear though, that we did not agree with the sexual orientation she had chosen to embrace, but that it had no bearing on our love for her. She ended up dying prematurely, but we believe she is in heaven because we know she was truly saved in spite of any beliefs or views she had that were contrary to scripture. Like us, she was "work(ing) out (her) own salvation!" (Phil. 2:12).

The most famous scripture of the Bible, John 3:16, says that “God so loved the (sinful, corrupted, and confused) world, that he gave his only Son for it, so that whoever (including his enemies) believed in his Son should not perish (be eternally separated from God in hell) but have eternal life (friendship and reconciliation with the very God they once rejected).⁵ If God only loved us when we deserved it, then we would all be damned!

3. What did Jesus say we must be to have eternal life? (John 3:3)

Even if it were true that some of us are born with attractions to the same sex, or with the wrong biological gender, Jesus said we must all be “born again.” Now some may say he was speaking of a spiritual rebirth, not a physical rebirth. That is true, but the spiritual rebirth he was referring to is more fundamental than a physical rebirth. It is a complete change of our entire nature as sinful people who have desires contrary to God’s design.

4. What does the Bible say happens to us when we are born again?
2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Peter 1:3-4, Colossians 2:11

As we said in Lesson 4, our sexual orientation or gender identity is not a salvation issue but a sanctification issue. A transgender college student once asked us if our goal was to “convert” her to being cisgender before she could be accepted at our church. We said, “No, instead our goal is for you to hear the good news of the gospel, respond to it with repentance and saving faith, and then allow God to address any sexual, gender, or other issues in your life as you walk out your faith in Him.” This person was very pleased with this answer because it was the first time she had ever heard that God was more concerned with her eternal state than her sexual orientation or gender identity.

5. What does the Bible say God does as we walk out our salvation?
Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13

While obsessing and arguing over the moral implications of alternative sexual orientations or gender identities, we have made the mistake of making either of them THE issue rather than AN issue. In our churches we have people who have been divorced or sexually promiscuous, who have lied, cheated, stolen, gossiped, or committed a variety of sins. The gospel is the good news because ALL of us are sinners when we come to Christ, but he lived the life we could not live and died the death we deserved to die so that we could be transformed into entirely “new creations!”

Jesus did not get stuck on the issue of adultery, promiscuity, greed, betrayal, or any other sin he encountered. Rather he knew that all people need a savior and that is why he came (Luke 19:10). It is time for us, whether we identify as LGBTQ+ or not, to stop getting stuck on, intimidated by, or distracted with the issues of sexual orientation and gender identities. Instead, we must ask “What would Jesus do (WWJD)?” The answer is that he would seek and save us all with the good news of the gospel and transform us in the process!

May God bless you as you seek him regarding sexuality issues, gender issues, or any other issues that concern you.

Personal Application

Q. What did you learn about God’s design for human sexuality from this lesson that you may not have known or understood before?

Feel free to write any other insights you received from this lesson, as well as any prayers you may have, on the back of this page.

⁵ (Elaboration) ours

What others are saying about this Bible study...

“Gender and sexuality will always be difficult issues to discuss with believers and nonbelievers alike, particularly with Millennials and the younger generations. This Bible study is great for anyone honestly seeking God’s will regarding gender and sexuality, as well as for believers who want the confidence to speak with God’s authority in humility and love. We especially agree with the point that these topics are sanctification issues, and that salvation should always be the greater priority. We cannot expect God to transform us when we have yet to submit ourselves to His authority, repent of our transgressions, and receive His mercy.”

- Matt & Sarah K.

“After doing this Bible study, I realized that the most helpful thing was to make the gender identity a discipleship issue, not a salvation issue. Once we are truly saved, God steadily transforms our thoughts and beliefs into conformity with His truth”

- Aaron (AJ) C.

“This Bible study not only tackles the biggest misconceptions about Jesus and gender/sexuality issues, but also scores by challenging our current thought processes regarding these issues. It also brings comfort by acknowledging that gender/sexuality is not a salvation matter, rather it is a sanctification matter. This Bible study is so good throughout!”

- Isabella D..

Meet the Authors:

Bret and Jorie Holman have been working with people of all ages and cultures for over 30 years, originally as campus ministers and now as church pastors. They have also raised four adult children of their own in their rapidly-changing western culture.

Throughout their journey they have had the privilege of ministering to many people both inside and outside of the LGBTQ+ community. It has been a humbling and helpful process for them to learn how the gospel relates to all people in all cultures, and they have a passion to share the eternal truth with those who agree and with those who do not.

They continue pastoring All People Christian Church in Reno, Nevada, a church that reaches “all people” with the loving truth of the gospel on the college campus and in the community. For more information about the church go to www.allpeoplecc.com. All People Christian Church is also a proud member of Every Nation family of Churches and Ministries.

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