

Wonderfully Made

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT TRUTHS ABOUT THE BODY, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER

Sermon Series Resource: Wonderfully Made

Life Group Listening Guide

Engaging with those holding different viewpoints can be challenging, especially on sensitive topics like gender and sexuality. However, consider this: true faith thrives in an environment of open dialogue and genuine connection. By listening to others' experiences and perspectives, we gain a deeper understanding of the world and potentially even encounter new facets of God's love and creation.

Remember, the core of your faith likely revolves around love and striving to live a Christ-like life. Approaching conversations with the intent to understand, even when encountering conflicting viewpoints, aligns with these core values. This doesn't mean compromising your beliefs, but rather demonstrating a willingness to see the world through another's lens, fostering empathy, and potentially revealing areas where your faith can lead with even greater compassion and understanding.

Here are 5 points to guide an open and respectful conversation with individuals holding differing viewpoints on gender and sexuality:

- 1. Practice Active Listening:**
 - Pay close attention to the speaker's words and emotions without interrupting.
 - Briefly summarize what you understand to ensure you've grasped their perspective.
- 2. Seek Clarification:**
 - Ask open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of their views.
 - Phrases like "Can you elaborate on..." or "What do you mean by..." encourage them to share their reasoning.
- 3. Acknowledge Shared Values:**
 - Identify common ground, such as a shared desire for strong families or a commitment to helping others.

- This highlights common goals despite differing viewpoints.
- 4. **Express Your Views with Respect:**
 - Clearly articulate your beliefs while avoiding judgmental language or dismissive attitudes.
 - Focus on explaining your perspective rather than attacking theirs.
- 5. **Maintain a Spirit of Humility:**
 - Recognize the possibility that your understanding might be incomplete.
 - Be open to learning from the conversation and acknowledging areas where you might have misconceptions.
 - Each person's experiences are unique and valid, and attempting to compare them can minimize or invalidate the other person's feelings or perspectives. Instead, focus on understanding their point of view, validating their emotions, and offering support or empathy if appropriate.

Additional Tips:

- Focus on being compassionate towards the stories of others beyond just the theological convictions that you or others may hold to.
- Be prepared to agree to disagree while still maintaining mutual respect.
- Remember, fostering genuine dialogue requires patience, empathy, and a willingness to listen with an open mind.

Life Group Study Guide

Group Practice: The Church's Role

- Address the importance of creating a safe and welcoming environment for individuals of all sexual orientations within the church.
- Encourage participants to explore relevant scripture passages related to God's love, forgiveness, and the importance of living a Christ-centered life.
- Note: Avoid solely focusing on verses traditionally used to condemn homosexuality. God has a grand vision of our bodies, gender, and sexuality that we want to highlight.
- Discuss practical ways the church can offer pastoral care and support for those navigating their sexuality in the context of their faith.

Scripture Passages:

1. **John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." How does this verse demonstrate the immense love God has for humanity?
2. **Ephesians 1:7** - "In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." What does this verse teach us about the possibility of forgiveness for our mistakes?

3. **Matthew 22:37-39** - "And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." How do these verses relate to how you live an ethic of love in your daily life?

Group Discussion Guide: Sexuality and Christian Identity [Article](#)

Introduction:

- Encourage open and honest communication within the group while respecting diverse viewpoints.
- Acknowledge the complexity of the issue and the importance of seeking guidance from religious texts and trusted spiritual leaders.
- Emphasize the message of God's love and acceptance for all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation.
- Acknowledge the challenges faced by Christians navigating their sexuality.

Discussion Points:

1. **Internal vs. External Identity:**

- Explain the concepts of internal and external identity formation.
- Discuss the limitations of basing identity solely on feelings and desires.
- Provide examples of how internal desires can be inconsistent and ever-changing.

2. **Critique of Societal View:**

- Highlight the cultural emphasis on equating sexuality with core identity.
- Discuss the pressure to conform to societal expectations regarding sexual orientation.

3. **The Christian Perspective:**

- Introduce the concept of "divine identity" as rooted in God's creation and love.
- Emphasize the foundational identity of every human being as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).
- Discuss the additional identity for Christians as adopted children of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17).

Reflection Questions:

- How do we reconcile our feelings and desires with the teachings of the Bible?
- What are some practical ways to live out our God-given identity in daily life?
- How can the church community better support individuals struggling with reconciling their faith and sexuality?

Group Discussion Guide: Challenging Gender Stereotypes in the Church [Article](#)

Introduction:

- Encourage open and honest communication while maintaining a respectful and Christ-centered approach.
- Acknowledge the ongoing need for individual and collective efforts to dismantle harmful stereotypes within the church.
- Emphasize the message of God's love and acceptance for all individuals, regardless of their interests or characteristics.
- Acknowledge the negative impact of gender stereotypes on individuals struggling with self-acceptance.

Discussion Points:

1. Understanding Stereotypes:

- Define gender stereotypes and discuss their prevalence in society.
- Explore the origins of stereotypes, recognizing both inaccurate beliefs and potential truths.
- Emphasize the danger of generalizing stereotypes and turning them into rigid expectations.

2. Impact on Individuals:

- Discuss how individuals might feel when they don't conform to stereotypical expectations of masculinity or femininity.
- Share personal experiences (if comfortable) or hypothetical situations to illustrate the negative consequences of adhering to strict gender roles.

3. Christian Perspective:

- Highlight the importance of God-given identity as the foundation for self-worth, exceeding gender-based expectations. (Genesis 1:27-28)
- Discuss how our actions and expressions should flow from our identity as men and women created by God, not imposed stereotypes.
- Emphasize the role of scripture in guiding our behavior rather than societal norms.

4. Stereotypes in the Church:

- Analyze examples of how gender stereotypes can be perpetuated within the church (e.g., language used in sermons, and events targeted towards specific genders).
- Discuss the potential harm caused by unintentional reinforcement of stereotypes through church activities and communication.

Actionable Steps:

- Brainstorm practical ways to challenge gender stereotypes within the church community.

- Foster an environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves authentically, regardless of societal expectations.
- Consider offering events and activities that cater to diverse interests, not solely conforming to traditional gender roles.
- Encourage a conscious effort in communication (both sermons and conversations) to avoid perpetuating stereotypes.

Small Group Discussion Guide: Redefining Intimacy in Christian Relationships [Article](#)

Introduction:

- Focus on Christ-Centered Relationships: Frame the discussion within the context of Christian values, emphasizing the importance of building genuine connections rooted in love and mutual respect.
- Highlight the importance of recognizing the broader aspects of intimacy within Christian relationships.
- Navigating personal relationships requires individual effort and potentially seeking professional guidance when needed.
- Acknowledge the potential discomfort some individuals might feel when engaging in open communication about intimacy.
- Emphasize the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment within the group for sharing personal experiences and vulnerabilities.

Discussion Points:

- 1. Beyond the Physical:**
 - Discuss the cultural tendency to equate intimacy solely with sexual activity.
 - Explore the limitations of relying solely on physical touch to fulfill our need for connection and love.
- 2. Expanding the Definition:**
 - Define intimacy as the tangible experience of feeling loved and cared for by another person.
 - Brainstorm examples of non-sexual ways to express and experience intimacy in friendships and other relationships.

Benefits of Broader Intimacy:

- Discuss how experiencing healthy, non-sexual intimacy can benefit individuals, particularly single Christians seeking to live a celibate life.
- Explore how a deeper understanding of intimacy can enrich marriages by acknowledging that sex cannot solely fulfill all emotional needs within a relationship.

Practical Application:

- **Question Prompt:** "How can we better express love and care towards our friends and family in ways that demonstrate genuine intimacy?"
- Create a personal list of ways you want to receive non-sexual acts of intimacy that you can share with others in your life. Consider acts of service, offering support, engaging in deep conversations, and offering genuine affection as ways to foster intimacy.
- Encourage sharing personal experiences (while maintaining confidentiality) of fostering deeper connections through non-sexual means.
- Discuss healthy boundaries and the importance of maintaining appropriate conduct within friendships to avoid emotional or physical entanglements.

Group Discussion Guide: Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church

Introduction:

- Encourage open and honest communication within the group while maintaining respect for diverse viewpoints and a commitment to the authority of scripture.
- Acknowledge the complexity of the issue and the importance of seeking guidance from religious texts and trusted spiritual leaders.
- Emphasize the message of God's love and acceptance for all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation.
- Acknowledge the existence of varying interpretations within the conservative theological framework.

Review & Summary

Traditional View (Wesley Hill & Stephen Holmes):

- **Scriptural Basis:** Emphasizes passages like Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27, condemning same-sex relations as inherently sinful.
- **Focus on God's Design:** Marriage and procreation are seen as the divinely ordained purpose for sexuality, with heterosexual unions being the only God-approved form.
- **Importance of Christian Tradition:** Centuries of church teachings are considered, upholding traditional marriage and sexual ethics.

Affirming View (William Loader & Megan DeFranza):

- **Contextual Interpretation:** Questions the direct application of ancient condemnations to modern contexts, arguing for a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural factors influencing those passages.
- **Focus on Love & Commitment:** Love, commitment, and mutuality within a same-sex relationship are seen as compatible with Christian principles.

- Evolving Theological Landscape: Acknowledges a shift in societal understanding of sexuality and openness to reevaluating interpretations based on contemporary knowledge.

Discussion

1. Discuss the concept of sexual ethics within the broader context of God's design and creation.
2. Engaging with the Text: (Focus on the "traditional" perspective initially then repeat for the "affirming" perspective)
 - Analyze the interpretation of scriptures used to condemn homosexuality (e.g., "arsenokoitai" translation in Greek).
 - Consider the historical and cultural context in which these scriptures were written.
3. The Church's Role:
 - Explore how the church can navigate inclusivity while upholding its core theological beliefs.
 - Discuss the importance of offering pastoral care and support to individuals with same-sex attraction within the boundaries of scripture.

Small Group Discussion Guide: Girl Meets God

Introduction

- Maintain respectful dialogue, acknowledging differing viewpoints within the Christian community.
- Focus on analyzing Perry's arguments and scriptural interpretations.
- Encourage open and honest communication while recognizing the sensitivity of the topic.
- Acknowledge the ongoing discussions within the Christian community regarding homosexuality.
- Discuss the importance of distinguishing between attraction and action.
- Explore resources and perspectives from various Christian denominations on this topic.

Summary

In "Girl Meets God," Jackie Hill Perry narrates her personal journey from a troubled youth grappling with gender confusion and same-sex attraction to finding faith and experiencing a transformation through her Christian beliefs. She emphasizes a personal encounter with God leading her away from homosexuality and towards a heterosexual relationship.

Discussion:

1. Perry's Testimony: Briefly outline Perry's personal journey and her claim of overcoming same-sex attraction through faith.
 - Consider: How does Perry's experience inform her stance on homosexuality?
 - Discuss: Can Perry's experience be universally applied to all individuals experiencing same-sex attraction?
2. Focus on Sin and Redemption: Perry emphasizes overcoming homosexuality as a form of sin through faith.
 - Discuss: Does this perspective adequately address the inherent nature of sexual orientation for some individuals?
 - Consider: How can the message of grace and forgiveness coexist with the belief that homosexuality is sinful?
3. Church Care and Support:
 - Question: How can churches offer support and guidance to those struggling with their sexuality within the boundaries of traditional beliefs?
 - Explore: What resources or approaches can be implemented to foster a loving and inclusive Christian environment?