

Good morning.

We're continuing our series on *Biblical Sexuality*.

It's a PG-13 series, so if you have kids with you, you may wish to make adjustments in light of the subject matter.

Today, we're going to explore what the Bible says regarding *same-sex sexuality*. Because it's such a complex and sensitive topic, this needs to be a longer message. We've trimmed down other elements of the service to allow for this.

I know that many of you have been anticipating not only this series, but this message in particular. I would humbly ask that you would be quietly praying in your spirit during this teaching time, not only for me, but for everyone listening, that we may all keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Amen?

My prayer is that we can engage in this conversation with both **kindness and clarity**.

Too often, the church has approached same-sex sexuality as a culture war to be waged, a debate to be won, a problem to be fixed, or an awkward topic to be avoided. But by the very life he modelled, the Lord Jesus would exhort us never to forget that first and foremost it's about people to be loved. In fact, that's the title of this message— *People to Be Loved*.

My assumption is that most of us have gay friends and family members— people we love dearly— and as followers of Jesus it is essential for us to treat and to speak about them with kindness and respect. If you are with us as someone who is LGBTQ+, I'm honoured that you're here. I pray that you will find Cornerstone an increasingly welcoming and safe place to journey honestly with others on the path of following Jesus.

As a church family, we also need to be kind to each other, and not only because people can have such strong views and feelings about same-sex sexuality. Historically, the church has done a poor job of loving LGBTQ people as Jesus loves them, often causing them tremendous harm. Some LGBTQ people who are with us today are coming from church and family backgrounds where they've endured the pain of everything from well-meaning but highly insensitive comments to flat-out rejection. No wonder some of you have shared that you're feeling especially vulnerable when it comes to today's message.

In light of all this, who here today will commit before Jesus to being kind and humble when discussing this, knowing that we're all on a journey together of learning how to better love like Jesus loves? If you commit to that, please raise your hand.

As a vital aspect of speaking with kindness, we also want to speak with clarity when it comes to what Cornerstone believes the Bible teaches about same-sex sexuality. Actually, in recent years, many in the gay community have been asking churches, "Please have the courage to be clear and straightforward with us about what you believe. It can be confusing and hurtful when you disguise or gloss over your convictions, so if you want to be kind, you also need to be clear." Indeed, many consider church clarity along these lines to be so important that there's even a website dedicated to it called churchclarity.org.

In moving toward clarity, it might be helpful to introduce some terms that are often used to describe a church's viewpoint on this matter.

Progressive/Affirming

Same-sex marriage can be holy.

Historic/Non-Affirming

God has designed marriage to take place between two sexually different people— a man and a woman.

Progressive or affirming churches believe that marriage between two people of the same sex can be holy.

Historic or non-affirming churches believe that God has designed marriage to take place exclusively between two people of the opposite sex— a man and a woman.

Churches on both sides believe that extramarital sex and promiscuity fall short of God's standard.

Where progressive or affirming churches differ from historic or non-affirming churches is on the question of marriage. Can a biblical case be made for marriage as a lifelong, consensual union of *any two adults*? Or, does the Bible teach that marriage is a lifelong, one-flesh union between two sexually opposite persons?

Cornerstone holds to a historic view of Christian sexuality. That is to say, our conviction is that God has designed sex to take place within the context of a marriage covenant between a man and a woman.

Notice that I used the term "historic" rather than "non-affirming." While the language of affirming versus non-affirming is most common among churches today, I find it to be less than helpful. That's because as a pastor who holds to the so-called "non-affirming" view, I nevertheless believe there is so very much to affirm about our gay friends and family members: the blessing of their presence and impact, the love and joy they bring into our lives, their gifts and strengths, not to mention their infinite worth and dignity as people who have been made in God's image, and who are so loved by God that Jesus died for them, just as he has for everyone.

That's why I prefer to speak of "progressive or historic" churches as opposed to using the "affirming or non-affirming" terminology.

The historic view is called "historic" because for most of its 2000-year existence, the multiethnic, global, cross-denominational church has agreed that *male-female sex-difference* is intrinsic to what marriage is, according to the Bible. By extension, those who hold to the historically Christian view believe that any sexual relationships that take place outside of a marriage covenant between a man and a woman— whether those relationships are heterosexual or homosexual— are not in alignment with God's will.

However, I'm well aware that nowadays, the historically Christian view is seen by many in mainstream culture to be archaic, perhaps even bigoted or hurtful. Some people ask, "How can the large majority of Christians around the globe still hold to such a belief in 2024?" It's an understandable question.

And so, for the remainder of the message, I'd like to explore that question from various angles— at least to the degree it's possible in the next 40 minutes or so. And that will only be enough time to *begin* what will surely be an *ongoing journey* of learning and growing and loving for all of us.

Today's teaching will be framed in three main sections.

First, we will consider the influence of culture. Second, we will look at the teaching of Jesus and some other biblical texts. And thirdly, we will talk about the absolute necessity of loving like Jesus loves.

1. The influence of culture
2. The teachings of Jesus and other biblical texts
3. Loving like Jesus loves

First, let's consider:

1. **The influence of culture.**

Although I fully believe it is our sacred responsibility as pastors to teach on biblical sexuality, I'll admit that I've experienced occasional pangs of anxiety over the past several months as I've prepared for this series, and for this message in particular—especially in light of the cultural moment we're all living in. I've wondered:

- Will my words inadvertently cause anyone harm, or (God forbid) drive anyone away from Jesus?
- Will this message lead to any relational fallout in the church, or in our families?
- Will I end up taking flak? Will some accuse me of being archaic, bigoted and hurtful, while others complain that I'm being "soft on sin"?

With these concerns in mind, I've been highly motivated to prepare as well as I possibly can for this message. In fact, I've been studying for the better part of a year to get ready for this (not to suggest that doing so by any means makes me an expert). As importantly, our pastoral team has been preparing for this series by dialoguing with various people in the Cornerstone family. Especially helpful have been the conversations we've had and the input we've received from individuals who either are same-sex attracted themselves, or who have close loved ones who are. Some of them have even reviewed this message and given me valuable feedback, for which I'm very grateful.

All of that said, it is prayer— conversation with Jesus himself— that has helped prepare my heart and mind for this message the most. One morning a couple months ago, I was having a prayer time on my back patio, and I felt a spike of anxiety as I anticipated having to teach this message. So, I pulled up an empty patio chair directly across from me— a chair for Jesus, as it were. And I asked him, "Lord, what do you have to say to me as I prepare for this message?" Immediately, I sensed his Spirit whisper to my spirit:

My people must not conform to the pattern of culture.

In saying this, the Spirit of Jesus was pointing me to scripture— to Romans 12:2 in particular, which says:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. ¹

¹ Romans 12:2 (NIV)

After I heard this whisper from Jesus, the very next thing I did was open a Bible commentary that I'd been reading on the book of Revelation. The first words my eyes fell upon in that moment were about how Revelation was written as a critique of the prevailing culture, and *also* as a critique of the church, for the various ways it was conforming to the pattern of culture.

In light of what I so powerfully sensed the Lord saying about culture that morning, I think it's fitting for us to consider the influence of culture on how most of us view sexuality—whether we're gay or straight; progressive or historic. I'd also like for us to reflect on how the church has not always done the best job in responding to the influence of culture along these lines.

It's important to understand that mainstream culture's view of how you can be happy is radically different from scripture's view of how you can be happy.

Mainstream culture's view has everything to do with self-expression and self-fulfillment. This view says that in order to be happy, you have to find yourself, and express yourself. Philosophers and sociologists call this "expressive individualism." It's a view that has gradually gained influence in recent centuries, to the point that now, it's the cultural water we swim in.

What does this have to do with sexuality? *A lot.*

If the narrative so many people live by is, "I need to find and express myself so I can be happy," how will that affect the way you see sexuality? It will cause you to see sexuality as a tool to find and express yourself so you can be self-fulfilled.

As a result of this thinking, mainstream culture has turned sexual identity and expression into an *ultimate thing*— an *idol*— as if our sexuality is *the* most important thing about us. This cultural philosophy profoundly influences most of us, whether gay or straight, religious or non-religious. It is this sense of *ultimacy* that culture assigns to sexuality that makes it such a tricky and emotionally-charged subject to talk about.

The church has all too often conformed to this pattern of culture *in its own ways*. Yes, some churches and Christians do so by lowering the high bar of sexual ethics that Jesus has set for his people. But other churches and Christians, in the name of resisting culture, unwittingly conform to culture by assigning a sense of ultimacy to people's sexual orientation— usually by singling out same-sex attracted people for especially judgmental and harsh treatment. In doing so, such churches and Christians have conformed to the angry and divisive pattern so prevalent in today's culture, in some cases driving same-sex attracted people away from church, away from Jesus, and at times even driving them to despair or suicide. Friends, *this should never be!*

Dr. Preston Sprinkle, a New Testament scholar and pastor, serves as President of the Center for Faith, Sexuality and Gender. He holds a historically Christian view of marriage and sexuality, and his primary ministry is to LGBTQ people— lots of them are his personal friends. He says:

Here's the thing: people who are attracted to the same sex don't end up leaving the church because they were told same-sex behavior is wrong. They leave because they were dehumanized, ridiculed, and treated like an "other."²

Does treating someone like an "other" sound like something Jesus would do? *It is never our heart or intention to treat anyone that way at Cornerstone*— which is not to suggest that we've always gotten it right, or will always get it right. Where we've inadvertently caused hurt, allow me to apologize on behalf of Cornerstone, and I would invite you to speak with us so we can learn and grow. As I mentioned earlier, this will be an ongoing journey of learning and growth for all of us, myself included!

Another way that some churches conform to culture is by making marriage and family the ultimate tool to find and express yourself so you can be happy. To hear some Christians, you might get the impression that singleness is a disease to be cured, which is really ironic when you think about it, because every Sunday we gather and lift our voices and hands in worship to Jesus, who was an unmarried, celibate, childless man who lived as he did in the midst of a Roman culture that was all about sexual liberation.

Not unlike Roman culture back then, today's culture tells us that repressing your sexual desires is unhealthy, even oppressive. But as pastor and author John Mark Comer asks:

If you have to follow your sexual desires in order to find freedom and fulfillment, then what does that say about Jesus? He never married or had sex, not with a woman or a man. He was single and celibate his entire life... The writer of Hebrews tells us that he was tempted in every way, just as we are—and yet he did not sin... And Jesus was anything but "oppressed." He was the freest human being to ever live. We don't have to follow our every desire to live a fully human life. We have to follow Jesus.³

Last Sunday Pastor Jeremy explained how our God-given sexuality is about so much more than physically engaging in sex. Whether you're married or single, your sexuality is meant to drive your desire for intimacy, belonging and deep relationships with both God and others. And the good news is that a person's sexuality can be expressed and channeled in healthy, wholesome God-honouring ways without having to physically engage in sex. This is how Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, could live a life of celibacy, and still flourish as a sexual being made in God's image.

Indeed, Jesus offers us a radically different viewpoint than mainstream culture does. It's counterintuitive, but Jesus says what's actually going to bring you life is not self-expression and self-fulfillment, but rather **self-denial and Christ-fulfillment**. As Jesus himself says:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."⁴

Jesus doesn't invite us to find ourselves, but rather to be found in him. He doesn't invite us to follow our own inclinations, but rather to follow him. When we do, says Jesus, that's when we receive real life. When we believe that Jesus loves us unconditionally, sacrificially, and eternally— that's when we'll look

² Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*, p. 14.

³ John Mark Comer, *Loveology: God. Love. Marriage. Sex. And the Never-Ending Story of Male and Female*, p. 224.

⁴ Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV)

at his commands— even his commands about sexuality (which can feel like he’s really getting in our business)— and realize that he always, always has our very best interests at heart.

Speaking of Jesus’ commands, let’s move on and ask what Jesus and other biblical texts teach about same-sex sexuality.

2. The teachings of Jesus and other biblical texts.

It’s important to realize that the foundational question to be considered here is *not*, “Does the Bible prohibit same-sex sexual relationships?” but rather, “*What is marriage*, according to the Bible?” In addressing this question, we need to circle back to some of the things Pastor Andrew talked about in his message on biblical marriage 2 Sundays ago.

Earlier, we talked about how progressive churches view marriage to be a lifelong union between *any* two consenting adults, and thus affirm that same-sex sexual intimacy can be celebrated within the context of a such a union. But historically Christian churches are of the conviction that **male-female sex-difference is intrinsic to what biblical marriage is**. Let’s go to scripture and see why.

Starting with Jesus is always a good practice— and this may surprise you— he never addressed same-sex sexuality— at least not directly. Some take this to mean that Jesus has no real concerns about it.

However, in Matthew 19, Jesus teaches with great clarity about God’s design for marriage and sexuality, and what he teaches very much informs the question of same-sex marriage, and by extension same-sex sexual relationships.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?”

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”⁵

Divorce was a hotly debated question among the Jews of Jesus’ day. In this passage, we see that Jesus sets a very high bar for divorce, precisely because he has a very high view of marriage.

Jesus doesn’t ground his response in popular Jewish religious opinion. Nor does he ground his response in the sexually permissive views of the wider Greco-Roman culture of his day. Instead, Jesus goes back to Genesis chapters 1 and 2—the very first chapters of the Bible—and grounds his response in God’s original design and intentions for marriage and sexuality.

As we saw the other week, the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1 is about *differences singing together in harmony; differences complementing each other in unity*: heaven and earth, evening and

⁵ Matthew 19:3-6 (NIV)

morning, land and sea, day and night, light and darkness. The creation of humanity at the climax of Genesis 1 also participates in this stunning display of unity amid difference:

So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. ⁶

Genesis 2 then zooms in on the details of the creation story to describe how God creates a “suitable helper” for Adam— that is, Eve. ⁷ (The word “helper,” by the way, is not meant to be condescending to women. It is the very same word used that is often used to describe how God is Israel’s helper.)

The Hebrew word for “suitable” expresses both *sameness and difference*. It’s actually a combination of two Hebrew words: *ke*, which means “like” or “similar,” and *neged*, which means “opposite.” Adam and Eve, therefore, are “like-opposites.” Both are equally human; both are differently sexed.

A few verses later, Adam and Eve join together in the first-ever marriage, and the same idea of “like-opposites” being joined together in unity looms large:

Then the man said,
“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh; [this shows the likeness they share]
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.” [this emphasizes their sexual oppositeness]
Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ⁸

This passage builds Adam and Eve’s relationship as “like-opposites” right into the very meaning of the one-flesh union. The two who become “one flesh” through sexual consummation are specifically male and female. And with the word “therefore,” this passage becomes an announcement of the Creator’s intended design for *all* marriages.

If we circle back to Matthew 19, we see that *Jesus reinforces & intensifies this understanding* by citing the creation of humans as male and female from Genesis 1, and then *tying it directly into the definition of marriage* which he cites from Genesis 2. In this way, Jesus not only affirms that sex difference is intrinsic to what biblical marriage is— he actually doubles down on it.

Furthermore, as we saw in the marriage message two weeks ago, the entire arc of the biblical story shows us that **male/female marriage points beyond itself to God’s ultimate plan of salvation in Christ.**

We talked about how in the creation account, God brings all these “like-opposites” together. Why? It’s because God is giving us a picture of how he will unfold his plan to redeem the world through Jesus.

God sent Jesus as the ultimate “like-opposite” of you and me. Jesus is like us in that he’s human, but he’s unlike us in that he’s holy, and we’re not. When we believe in Jesus, we become united with him and are

⁶ Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

⁷ Genesis 2:18, 20

⁸ Genesis 2:23-24 (ESV)

covered in his righteousness and forgiving love. Whether you're married or single— whatever your sexual orientation— you are made for union with Jesus above all else. Jesus is meant to be the ultimate Spouse of your heart!

And indeed, in scripture, marriage points beyond itself to the union of the following “like-opposites” in God’s overall plan of salvation:

- The union of Jesus and his church, which is called the “bride of Christ.” (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 19:7, 22:17)
- The union of ethnically diverse peoples together into the one family of God. (Eph. 2:11-22)
- And finally, the whole of creation is restored in the union of heaven and earth into a realm the Bible calls “the new heaven and the new earth,” where God will dwell in union with his people forever. (Rev. 21:1-5)

So, when someone asks why I hold the historic Christian belief that sex should only take place between a man and a woman in the context of marriage, what we just talked about is a big reason why.

Because from a biblical point of view, sex is about infinitely more than sex, and marriage is about infinitely more than marriage. Together, they point to the ultimate reality of us becoming one with Jesus, and of God’s plan of salvation for the entire world.⁹

This, combined with the textual evidence itself, leads me to believe that a historically Christian understanding of marriage and sexuality is well-supported by scripture.

Also— and I am sensitive to the fact that this will be hard to hear for some — but scholars on both sides of this debate agree that:

Whenever same-sex sexual relationships are mentioned in scripture, they are prohibited.

- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13
- Romans 1:26-27
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10

We don’t always see the same kind of uniformity in scripture when it comes to other important issues. For example, a number of things that are prohibited in the Old Testament are permitted in the New. But whenever same-sex sexual behaviour is mentioned in both Old and New Testaments, it is not affirmed.

That said, there are only a small handful of passages in the Bible that specifically mention same-sex sexual relationships. Five, actually.

Due to time limitations, I’ll zero in on just one— the Romans chapter 1 passage. It’s often considered the most significant text among the five. For context, I’m going to start reading a few verses prior to the verses that mention same-sex sexual relationships, and I’ll end a few verses after.

⁹ Ephesians 1:10

Heads up— this passage is strongly worded. It will surely be the toughest passage we read today. It may even make some of you want to tune out or shut down. But I encourage you to try to stay with it for three reasons:

- First, I'll share a couple of important qualifiers after the reading that will soften how it may initially come across (although this won't change the fact that the text is incredibly challenging).
- Second, if we truly believe that the Bible is God's divinely inspired Word, should we not have the courage to open our hearts and minds to it— even the hard-to-hear parts?
- Third, let's not forget that this message is not just about an issue— it is about *people to be loved*. Indeed, the next point in the message is about the absolute necessity of loving like Jesus loved. Keep that firmly fixed in your mind and spirit as you listen to this hard passage.

Speaking of how a fallen human race has rejected God, Paul goes on to say:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.¹⁰

Ouch! As I mentioned, that passage is strongly-worded. It hits hard, and I'm compassionate toward those of you who are feeling the effects of that right now. As such, in breaking this passage down, it helps to begin by getting clear on what it's *not* saying:

- First of all, **this passage is not singling out gay people**. Some have used this passage to do so, which is a tragic misuse of the text. Yes, the text mentions same-sex sexual sin, but it also speaks of "sexual impurity" in verse 24, a *general* term that applies to *everyone*, because as fallen human beings, we *all* experience brokenness in our sexuality in various ways. And notice that the passage goes on to list all kinds of non-sexual sins that are committed by both gay and straight people all the time— *greed, envy, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, boastfulness*, and so on. The main point of this passage is not to single out gay people, but to emphasize the moral brokenness of *all* human beings, so that *all of us* might come to recognize our need for Jesus. If you're straight, this passage gives you zero room to get up on some moral high horse, and it gives you zero room to stand in judgment over anyone who experiences same-sex attraction.
- Second, **this passage addresses lustful desires and behaviours, not involuntary attractions**. The church hasn't always done the best job of distinguishing between same-sex *attraction* and same-

¹⁰ Romans 1:24-31 (NIV)

sex sex. Most gay people will tell you they didn't choose their sexual orientation. They will tell you that they have always been attracted to the same sex, just like most straight people have always been attracted to the opposite sex. Even though our attractions can be profoundly affected by the fact that we live in a fallen world, God doesn't hold anyone morally responsible for experiencing involuntary attractions. We are, however, responsible for *what we do with our attractions*. This passage addresses *lustful* desires and behaviours, not involuntary attractions. By the way, when someone in the church acknowledges they are same-sex attracted, don't automatically assume they are *acting* on those attractions. They may well be choosing *not* to act on their attractions out of devotion to Jesus, and to hear fellow church people assume otherwise can be very hurtful.

With those things said, it's important to understand that Paul pens his words about same-sex sexual relations in this passage with an eye on God's original design for creation in Genesis 1-2. There are lots of textual clues that demonstrate this. Paul refers to same-sex sexual relationships as "against nature", which in context simply means that such relationships are a departure from the Creator's intended design for marriage and sexuality that we talked about earlier in this message.

Some progressive scholars argue that Paul wasn't prohibiting sex in the context of committed gay unions. They say he was only prohibiting deviant homosexual behaviours that happened to be common in Greco-Roman society. They interpret Paul's language to be referring to things like homosexual prostitution or pederasty (which was sex between an older man and an adolescent boy). Progressive scholars say that it was only those kinds of obviously-wrong behaviours that Paul was condemning. Some also suggest that in Paul's day, loving, mutual, lifelong homosexual unions were virtually unheard of, and that if Paul *had* known about such relationships, he would never have prohibited them.

However, according to N.T. Wright, one of the world's foremost New Testament scholars and historians, this is "easily refuted by the evidence, both literary and archaeological."¹¹ There were a number of examples of long-term, committed same-sex relationships in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, including same-sex marriages. Paul would have been well-aware of this. Even Caesar Nero, who was Roman emperor around the time Paul wrote Romans, married a man named Pythagoras. Add to this Paul's mention of same-sex relationships between women in Romans 1. Historical evidence from that time period shows us that lesbian relationships were not abusive like some homosexual relationships between men were. Nevertheless, Paul states that sexual relationships between women are not aligned with God's will.

This evidence combines to make it highly likely that in Romans 1 and similar New Testament texts, Paul is prohibiting same-sex sex *in general*, not just specific variations of it.

And even if we could set aside the 5 passages of scripture that speak against same-sex sexual relationships, we are still left with the narrative arc of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, that holds up God's vision for marriage as the union of two "like-opposites"— a man and a woman. And as we saw, this is a vision that Jesus himself reinforced as the boundary within which sexual intimacy is to take place. But please don't take my word for it. Go read, study, probe, dig, argue – do your homework. In a few minutes I'll point out some resources that can help you get started with that.

¹¹ As quoted in David Bennett, *A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus*, p. 243. Original source is Andrew Wilson, "Tom Wright on Homosexuality" in *Think* (July 14, 2014) https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/tom_wright_on_homosexuality.

At this time, I'd like to move into the final section of this message, which is all about the absolute necessity of:

3. Loving like Jesus loves.

Here, we do well to remember that the Bible mentions same sex-sexuality 5 times, 6 at the most. But the call to love reverberates throughout the scriptures, hundreds of times.

And most importantly, we must remember that the Bible doesn't point to itself. The whole point of the Bible is to point us to *Jesus*.

For example, we just looked at Romans chapter 1, which is part of a section of Romans where Paul makes the case that *all of us*—whether Jew or Gentile, gay or straight— are sinners in need of a Saviour. He says so explicitly in Romans 3:

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ¹²

But look what Paul says in the very next verse:

Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ¹³

Who is Paul pointing us to? *Jesus*. And from there, he continues to do so, increasingly, throughout the next several chapters of Romans, leading to a great crescendo in chapter 8, where he says:

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹⁴

David Bennett was an atheist gay activist whose life was transformed by Jesus. He now lives as a single, celibate Christian theologian with a powerful teaching ministry. Bennett tells his compelling story in his book *A War of Loves*, explaining that reading passages like Romans 1 can be incredibly hard for anyone who is same-sex attracted. But then he quotes New Testament scholar Wesley Hill, who explains that:

One of the most striking things about the New Testament teaching on homosexuality is that, right on the heels of the passages that [speak against] homosexual activity, there are, *without exception*, resounding affirmations of God's extravagant mercy and redemption. ¹⁵

Bennett himself goes on to write of his own experience with such Bible passages:

¹² Romans 3:23 (NLT)

¹³ Romans 3:24 (NLT)

¹⁴ Romans 8:37-39 (NIV)

¹⁵ Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, 62 (as quoted in David Bennett, *A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus*, 248, emphasis added).

These very passages that once made me feel the weight of condemnation have now become reminders of God’s love and grace. In Romans 8:38–39, Paul reminds us that “... [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Certainly, that includes homosexuality. And in that boundless, never-separating love, I was able to find what God wanted to say to me by his Word all along. ¹⁶

Bennett’s life-changing discovery, in his own words, was that:

My desires could not condemn me. This was radical, beautiful grace. Suddenly my identity no longer centered on what I desired sexually; it centered on Jesus Christ and his costly and abundant grace. ¹⁷

Again, the whole point of the Bible is to point us to Jesus!

And what did Jesus do? He always led with love. He was always hanging out with and loving all of the so-called “wrong people”— much to the consternation of the religious authorities. Jesus would always accept people where they were, and love them into the truth.

As the Bible says in Romans, it is God’s *kindness* that leads us to repentance. ¹⁸ Christians have not always been known for their kindness to same-sex attracted people. But as New Testament scholar Preston Sprinkle reminds us:

The grace-and-truth way of Jesus has a very high standard of obedience, but excessively loves those who fall short of that standard— especially those who have been marginalized and ostracized by religion today. ¹⁹

If as a church and as Christians we do not excessively love those who have been marginalized and ostracized by religion today, we cannot claim to be following the way of Jesus. And as we talked about earlier, few groups have been more marginalized and ostracized by religion than LGBTQ+ people.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul essentially tells us that *if we don’t get love right, there’s nothing else worth getting right.* ²⁰

Remember, same-sex sexuality is not about an issue. It’s about people— *people to be loved*. It’s about our sons and daughters, our friends, family, neighbours and co-workers— and it’s about many of our siblings in Christ right here in this church family. It’s about people that we are called to love as Jesus loves.

To start this journey of learning as a church how to better love like Jesus loves, let me close with a few practical takeaways:

Know that you are welcome to journey at Cornerstone!

¹⁶ Bennett, *A War of Loves*, 248.

¹⁷ Bennett, *A War of Loves*, 114.

¹⁸ Romans 2:4

¹⁹ Preston Sprinkle, *Digital Leaders Forum Handbook & Notes* (The Center for Faith, Sexuality and Gender) p. 6.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 13

First, if you're here as someone who is LGBTQ, you are so welcome to journey with us here at Cornerstone. You don't have to have your whole life together to do so, because none of us has our whole life together, including me. We're *all* works in progress. We're *all* broken in different ways, we're *all* being put back together by Jesus, and our stories are not finished yet.

If you're wrestling with or uncertain about things that have been said in this message, that's fair. You are still more than welcome to worship and journey with us— we want you here.

We want to make space for Jesus by making space for you, wherever you're at. We want Cornerstone to be a place where you know you are loved by Jesus and by your church family. We can't promise we will always do and say things perfectly, and the journey might be messy at times, but as a congregation we want to be committed to get better at loving like Jesus loves, as we all follow him together on the narrow path of discipleship.

Allow one of the pastors or ministry staff the privilege of hearing your story!

Second, if you are LGBTQ+ or have a close loved one who is, I or any of the pastors or ministry staff would be so honoured to grab a coffee with you and just hear your heart and your story to whatever extent you are ready and willing to share it. I appreciate that it may feel risky, but we promise to listen without judgment. It would be our privilege to get to know you.

Build relational bridges with LGBTQ people

And in the same spirit, a challenge to many of you in this congregation would be to reach out and build relational bridges with LGBTQ people, both Christian and non-Christian. Jesus would, so why not you? Hang out together. Seek to listen deeply to and understand their stories as they're ready and willing to share— and not only in terms of their experience with sexuality— get to know them *as people*. You may well end up making a really dear and valued friend.

Keep learning!

Finally, keep learning. For those of you who want to explore this subject further, please check out our [Christian Sexuality Resource and Support Guide](#). It includes a number of recommended books, websites and other resources related to this subject. The QR code for that is on the screen, and you can also pick up one of these green little cards in the lobby that tells you how you can access the resource and support guide.

If I had to recommend one book, it would be [A War of Loves](#) by David Bennett.

For those who want to dig deeper into the differing views that churches hold on this subject, a good place to start would be a book called [Two Views on the Bible, Homosexuality and the Church](#). You'll find these books, and many others, in the resource and support guide.

That's all the time we have, and again, this is just the beginning of a journey for Cornerstone. There is so much more that I couldn't cover today— so much more to learn and discuss, as Jesus continues to shape us together in God's love.

But for now, may we pray?